



FOURTH SESSION - TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Don Toth
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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 Premier — Hon. Brad Wall
 Leader of the Opposition — Dwain Lingenfelter

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Belanger, Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornerud, Hon. Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
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Bradshaw, Fred	SP	Carrot River Valley
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
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Junor, Judy	NDP	Saskatoon Eastview
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Wall, Hon. Brad	SP	Swift Current
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Wilson, Nadine	SP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Wotherspoon, Trent	NDP	Regina Rosemont
Wyant, Gordon	SP	Saskatoon Northwest
Yates, Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney

[The Assembly resumed at 19:00.]

EVENING SITTING

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

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

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

The Deputy Speaker: — The time being 7, the House is now back in session on budget debate. I recognize the Minister of Environment.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to join back in the debate after our break for supper. Mr. Speaker, I briefly began my remarks with thanking my staff and my family and, Mr. Speaker, I won't go over that again.

But I do want to move into the budget, Mr. Speaker. And first, I guess, adding my voice of congratulations to the Finance minister, Mr. Speaker, but also to the members of the Treasury Board and members of this government caucus who I think we work very well together. And, Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that I'm certainly very proud to be a part of, to support and take back home to my constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy and say that this is a very good budget, a great budget for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that when you look at what's going on and you put it in the context of other provinces and other jurisdictions that are now slowly coming out of the recession, Mr. Speaker, I think, probably for the first time, Mr. Speaker, to quote my good friend the member from Carrot River Valley, Mr. Speaker, I think this is the best budget in all of Canada, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at a budget that does a couple of things, Mr. Speaker . . . It does a lot of things, but really I think the hallmark of *The Saskatchewan Advantage* builds upon the work that we've done already as a government in that, Mr. Speaker, one, we're cutting taxes for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Two hundred million dollars in tax cuts in this budget, Mr. Speaker, to help people around this province, to help businesses to be able to continue to invest in their businesses, Mr. Speaker.

And when you look at the changes that we've made, Mr. Speaker, one thing that I think we can take a great deal of pride in is the fact that with the changes another 22,000 people will be coming off the provincial tax rolls, meaning that 114,000 people will no longer pay provincial income taxes in the province of Saskatchewan because of the changes that we've made.

We've seen a bit of . . . really the differences of where this party stands on this issue and where the opposition stands, Mr. Speaker. We've had some members from the opposition that are really, I don't think very supportive or encouraged by the fact that this many people — over 100,000 people in the province — will no longer pay provincial income taxes by the changes that we made and really in a lot of ways belittling the number and belittling the amount of money that people will save, Mr. Speaker.

And I think that shows a clear division between this side and that side because, Mr. Speaker, I believe and I think my colleagues believe that whether it's \$1 or \$10 or \$2,447 that, for example, a family of four that earns \$50,000 in combined income, that they will save. Mr. Speaker, whether it's \$1 or \$10 that people will save or \$2,000 or more, Mr. Speaker, I think whenever there is an opportunity, if the choice is between allowing the people to keep that money or pay that money in taxes, Mr. Speaker, I think the best thing to do is allow people to keep that money, Mr. Speaker.

And so I think that, Mr. Speaker, I think that this is a very positive development. And we'll probably hear more from members opposite to say, well you know, at the upper ends of the threshold it's, you know, people are only saving \$30 a month extra or \$100 a month extra. Mr. Speaker, I will side, however long my time in this House is, I will side with people keeping their hard-earned money in their pockets to decide how they choose to spend it, Mr. Speaker, rather than it going into the government coffers, Mr. Speaker. And I think that's a clear division between this side and that side, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, with the changes that have been made, basic and spousal exemptions have been increased, Mr. Speaker. The small business rate has been reduced, saving \$80 million per year, Mr. Speaker, for people to be able to invest back into their province. And, Mr. Speaker, one thing — and I'll probably touch on this a little bit later, Mr. Speaker — is the education property tax reductions that we have instituted in this province, Mr. Speaker, over the four-year term of government. For example, on agricultural land, over 80 per cent reduction in the amount of education property tax paid by producers and landowners across the province.

And, Mr. Speaker, a continuation of paying down the provincial debt, Mr. Speaker. \$325 million this year will be paid off on the provincial debt, bringing the debt down to less than \$4 billion — \$3.81 billion, the lowest level since 1987, Mr. Speaker. And I think that is very positive. That's something that I hear all across my constituency, people that are supportive of the debt repayment by this government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, some of the things that were in this budget are things that are no surprise because this is a government and a party that made commitments to the people of Saskatchewan. And we are keeping those commitments, whether that be on one full percentage point of the PST [provincial sales tax] being paid to municipalities for revenue sharing, Mr. Speaker, that has been done in this budget. It was a promise made and a promise kept.

Mr. Speaker, that's going to have significant benefits for all the

municipalities across this province, including as well as municipalities in my constituency. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can see that the change for the city of Weyburn alone, Mr. Speaker, will be an additional \$1 million this year alone, compared to back when the NDP [New Democratic Party] were the Government of Saskatchewan and their last budget, Mr. Speaker. And I know that the city of Weyburn has been very appreciative of this. The deputy mayor, Andrew Broccolo, spoke on budget day on behalf of the city and had some very good comments.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the city and our council, Mayor Button and the council for the work that they've been doing, investing back into our city into the services into our city and focusing, Mr. Speaker, on some of the issues — and I'll maybe speak about these later — but really being aggressive on retaining and recruiting new businesses to the city and to the area, Mr. Speaker, and also on addressing housing issues, Mr. Speaker.

The city has been very proactive, and I think the plans that were announced by the Minister for Social Services are an area that our city will be very interested in because we know that the city and all parts of the constituency cannot continue to grow like they have without dealing with some of the challenges. Mr. Speaker, for many years Weyburn, where I live, had a very stagnant population base, didn't change for many, many years. And I think this last year alone, the city of Weyburn grew by about 14 per cent population, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, we are seeing new developments all across the city and all across the constituency. Not just in the city of Weyburn, but if you look at communities around the constituency, they're all doing a great job of attracting people. And we're seeing that all across the province with new people coming to the province.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also speak on, touch briefly on health care. This is an area, Mr. Speaker, and I'll say right off, Mr. Speaker, that one of the announcements that was made before the budget but takes place or is going forward beyond this budget is the change in the funding formula for capital projects, particularly long-term care or hospitals, Mr. Speaker. That's an issue that is being very . . . lots of interest in our constituency, whether you talk right along the border between Weyburn-Big Muddy and Estevan.

And I'm looking forward to being with my colleague and my friend from Estevan on Saturday night in Radville at a fundraising event and a community event, Mr. Speaker. And I know that the news of the 80/20, the new funding formula, has been very well received. I'm not sure if the Health critic for the NDP has been to Radville lately, Mr. Speaker, but I think the doom and gloom that she likes to perpetuate all across this Chamber and this province, Mr. Speaker, is quite different from the reality when you actually get out into the country, Mr. Speaker, around the province.

This also something we're also very interested in Weyburn, of looking at building a new hospital, Mr. Speaker. And I know that fundraising activities have been well under way long before the change of the funding formula. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to publicly commend the Mainil family of Weyburn who, along

with a lot of people that have done a lot of fundraising, have recently announced that they are giving an investment portfolio, one of their investment portfolios over to the health foundation. And its current value is at about \$800,000, and so it shows the generosity of many people in our area, in our constituency that want to work with their local foundations. In fact PGA [Professional Golfers' Association] tour golfer Graham Delaet from Weyburn is actually coming back to host a fundraising tournament this summer, Mr. Speaker, and I'm looking forward to being part of that.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I want to, I want to offer my thanks and congratulations to the Health minister for all the hard work on this file. I also want to thank the member from Melfort and the work that he's done on the STARS [shock trauma air rescue service] project. You know we heard even earlier today, Mr. Speaker, comments from members of the opposition that are really not favourable towards the STARS program, Mr. Speaker, and telling people, don't get your hopes up, Mr. Speaker, that this . . . And I don't really understand the rationale, Mr. Speaker.

When you go out around my constituency, whether it's Minton or Coronach or Bengough or even in the oil industry further east of Weyburn, Mr. Speaker, this is something that has been well supported — the concept of it — including, Mr. Speaker, companies like Crescent Point that have a sizeable presence in Weyburn, Mr. Speaker, and in the Weyburn area. And they have generously committed to being a financial donor to the project, Mr. Speaker. And I think that that is something that constituents are looking forward to, having that service provided in the province of Saskatchewan. So congratulations and well done and keep up the good work to the member for Melfort who has done a superb job on this.

Mr. Speaker, I also do want to congratulate the region, our health region, Mr. Speaker. I was recently at an event in Bengough where we celebrated the beginnings of the Rural West Primary Health Team, Mr. Speaker. Bengough is going to be working with a great doctor, Dr. Oberholzer in Radville, with a nurse practitioner in the community of Bengough to provide doctor services, Mr. Speaker. It was a great event, maybe one where I think maybe the health region doesn't get enough credit, Mr. Speaker. But this is one where they've worked collaboratively with many communities in the area, Mr. Speaker, and one where the entire, it seemed like all of Bengough and Pangman and surrounding communities were in attendance, and it was a great event, Mr. Speaker. And so congratulations to them.

Mr. Speaker, there's a number of other areas that I could speak on. One I need to talk about is agriculture. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, the Weyburn-Big Muddy constituency is blessed with good farm land, productive farm land, also productive ranchland. Mr. Speaker, agriculture is at the heart of our constituency and the people that I have the good fortune to represent, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I dare say that this Agriculture minister is going to break a bit of a streak that tends to stay with Agriculture ministers in the province, Mr. Speaker, because for many years we've had a record, Mr. Speaker, where Agriculture ministers was a bit of a career limiting move. It was a bit of a trying time

for Agriculture ministers to get re-elected in the province. And I think the Saskatchewan Party Ag minister, who's been the Ag minister, has been for the entire term of this government so far, Mr. Speaker, and I think that he's certainly going to break that record.

He's been a great Ag minister to work with, Mr. Speaker, and one only has to look at the budget, Mr. Speaker. We are fully funding programs that we've signed on to as a province, which happened sometimes under the former government but not always on budget day. They weren't always fully funded, Mr. Speaker.

Of course we know the importance of the changes on agricultural land for education property taxes that I and many members have spoken on already, Mr. Speaker. And extension offices are being reopened, Mr. Speaker, after a number of them were closed prior . . . under the former administration. And, Mr. Speaker, I think this is the second highest agriculture budget in the history of the province of Saskatchewan. And I think the only one that beats this was just, I believe, two years ago under the same Ag minister. So my compliments to the Ag minister. I know he's well respected across this province and, Mr. Speaker, I can say that he is in the Weyburn-Big Muddy constituency. He has a good reputation in our constituency, and I want to thank him for his leadership.

And, Mr. Speaker, just from some local comments . . . I know we've had members that have talked a little bit about reaction to the budget, Mr. Speaker. And certainly that has been the case in my constituency, Mr. Speaker.

[19:15]

Mr. Speaker, the time seems to go quite quickly as always so I need to talk just briefly. I should mention, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased with our environment budget for this year, Mr. Speaker. We're going to be doing a number of very good things with this budget. I'm very pleased that my colleagues have saw fit to increase the operating grant for Sarcen, Mr. Speaker, combined with a capital grant that will be going to Sarcen to help projects all across this province, Mr. Speaker. We're back to the level of over \$22 million, which will equate to what we believe is the environmental handling charges that are collected from recyclable containers that Sarcen deals with, Mr. Speaker. So I'm very pleased with that, and I look forward to working with Sarcen going forward, Mr. Speaker, over this coming year.

Mr. Speaker, we're also, I've spoke a little bit about a couple of plans that will be coming forward, Mr. Speaker, including a boreal water management strategy that will be coming forward to make that announcement, Mr. Speaker, that's going to see a more vigorous testing of our northern, particularly our northern lakes, Mr. Speaker. We know that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that there are concerns with how industry may be impacting, Mr. Speaker. And for many, many years I think there was inadequate work done on this file, Mr. Speaker, and we are going to be correcting those deficiencies and as I've said, Mr. Speaker, working with industry in other jurisdictions and the federal government on this very important work.

Mr. Speaker, we're also going to be significantly enhancing the areas in our forest services branch, Mr. Speaker, to deal with

some issues that are of concern. When you look at the health of a healthy forest, Mr. Speaker, we know the damage that insects and pests like the mountain pine beetle have caused in British Columbia. And it's moving its way east, Mr. Speaker. And so we are going to be enhancing the work that we do around that and also spruce budworm. And that money was I think over a 200 per cent increase dealing with those areas, Mr. Speaker.

And so I believe I've probably exceeded my time for this evening. There's so much more that I would like to say on this budget, Mr. Speaker, that I haven't had the chance to. We're doing some exciting things in our constituency around education, Mr. Speaker, with renewals at the high school and the regional college and some of the elementary schools, Mr. Speaker. In fact the Education minister's going to be in Weyburn in the coming days, and I look forward to having the opportunity to, maybe have the opportunity to show her some of the work that's being done. And we're all looking forward to that.

Mr. Speaker, with that I believe my time is at an end. And so with all that to say, Mr. Speaker, there is so much more I could say, but with that, I will not be supporting the amendment and I will be very pleased to support the budget.

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

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today to put a few of my comments on the budget. Before I do that, I'd just like to thank the people of Saskatoon Fairview for their support over the years that I have been their MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly]. We continue growth in our part of the city with the new Blairmore Suburban Centre, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The city is planning seven new neighbourhoods out there, and things are growing in Saskatoon Fairview.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the comments I want to make after listening to the member from Weyburn are around the budget and the deficit. It's sort of the good story that they put out and talk about all the things that they have done in this budget. But what is central and what is missing here is a total vision for the province. They have thrown, put some money in places that are needed, but what is missing, because as some people have said, there is another Saskatchewan here that is feeling some pain. And nothing is being done, and it's being missed.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when they talk about the budget, not one person from that, not one of those members have talked about the public debt increasing, what is happening to the increase in public debt, in the debt of the Crown corporations. All of these things are going in the wrong direction, Mr. Speaker, even in the public debt and in general revenue. And the projected debt is going to rise to more than what it was in 2008. So those are just some of the general comments about this budget and the things that are lacking and that have not been said or talked about from the members opposite.

But again one of the things they have talked about on various occasions is that in the royalty that we have . . . And they have acknowledged that it was the NDP royalty regime or plan that brought in the expansion of the potash mines. Oftentimes we

hear the things of . . . The Minister of Advanced Education talks about population figures, and that was our program, the nominee program that we put in. And they're bringing that in. Mr. Speaker, we have brought those things in.

And it has been . . . really in terms of addressing some of the concerns that the people of Saskatoon have, I could very easily say that for the last three and a half years, they have done nothing, and nothing to address these problems in terms of Saskatoon is a growing city. Population is growing. We have a lot of immigrants coming to the city, and nothing has occurred. In fact in Saskatoon, where the population is growing, Saskatoon has had to come up with its own housing initiative, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And they have been struggling with that program with no help from the provincial government.

So now what has occurred is that the provincial government has determined that the municipalities have to get into their own programs around housing. And so as we have seen in the rural areas where many times in a number of areas where municipalities have had to put levies on their residents, on the people in those . . . to build doctors' offices, to recruit doctors. And this again is a downloading.

But at the last minute . . . And before maybe I get into that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the last number of years we have had renters in my constituency who have had — and perhaps maybe in the constituencies around — who've had to move not once, but twice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and sometimes three times because the rents have gone up. And there have been calls and calls to this government, and they turned a deaf ear on those things. And it was the city that had to step in and start something so to address these concerns of residents of Saskatoon.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we went to meetings with tenants who had moved once and were getting another rent increase, and a number were moving out and didn't have anywhere to go. So there were two problems: there were people that were, rents were increasing 2, 3, and \$400. And these were people on fixed incomes. They were seniors, whether they were students or people working on minimum wage. Now I'll be talking about the minimum wage a little later on. But this issue around people not having a place to live, we have to . . . Something very central for people. And nothing was being done.

Now the other day the minister rose and talked about a housing program that they have introduced. And they have put in 250, \$230 million into housing and are trumpeting that as some sort of success that is going to deal with this problem. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they're putting in \$200 million into, as they say, to make available interest-free loans so people can get into starter homes. Now these homes will be in the range of 180,000 to \$300,000, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Who is it in, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in that they are giving these loans to contractors to build homes, but who is going to use these homes?

In Hampton Village, we have Hampton Village is an expanding — which is right next to my constituency — is an expanding suburb. And there are, when I went on the MLS [Multiple Listing Service], there are about 50 homes in this price range of about 250 to \$260,000. What is the impact of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of putting those homes on the market? Now those

people can now afford the mortgage to get into that. So what is the impact on this? What is the impact of renters who have moved because they can afford the homes in this price range in Hampton Village? They move in and now the government is going to say to contractors, why don't you build houses of \$250,000 and we'll put those on the market along with the other 50 in Hampton Village? Now what is the rationale of spending \$200 million on a program like that? Who is this serving, and what does it do to address the issues of the people I was talking about, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people who have moved not once, not twice, but three times and are looking for some rental relief in the city of Saskatoon, in the city of Saskatoon?

Now they're not very happy about this, and the mayor is not very happy about that they have to do that. Now they will say . . . and take all the money that they can from the government to assist them in that, but this is downloading, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is downloading a responsibility from the provincial government onto the municipal government, and it is serving no purpose, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The only thing that it might do is after there are . . . And I'd, if we could go back to those 50 MLS listings in this area, in Hampton Village, if those young people that bought those homes will now see an extra 50 houses on there, and what will that do? What will that really do to the prices? What will it do for the prices of those young people who have put money into their homes who thought, who thought that maybe in a couple of years or five years they could sell that home and move on? That is not . . . There is no need for those houses.

We have money that should go into rental homes, and they are throwing money away, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And where did this money come from? Well it came through the federal government, and now, now they're guaranteeing that. So for example, if the economy went bad, if the economy went bad . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. The chatter is getting a little loud in here. I'm having a hard time hearing the speaker. I would recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, somebody's benefiting from this. Somebody's benefiting and it's not the people who are moving from one rental unit to another rental unit. It is not those people who are benefiting. And that's where people two years ago, in fact maybe three years ago were asking for some relief, and there's nothing in here. This is shameful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the people in this province . . . and that they can stand day after day and say what a great budget this is, how they're taking care of people in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, so who is it that is getting the \$200 million? And what is happening? This program was around before on the 200 million, but it wasn't guaranteed. But now it's going to be guaranteed. So let's think if for example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the housing market turned, the province will be on the hook for the \$200 million now. It'll be on the hook for the \$200 million and people will be able to walk away, I imagine — the contractors — from this deal.

We have not heard anything, anything why, where this works. I would want to know. I see the . . . Earlier in the day I asked the

member from Kindersley, what about the rental units in Kindersley? Because every time we go there, that's what people talk about — housing. No place to live. No rents. No rental places in Kindersley. His answer to me was, in Kindersley we build our own homes. That's what his answer, that's what his answer was to the people who are renting and trying to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to deal with this.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's the same, the same when it comes to, this is the same tune that they're saying when it comes to minimum wage. They increased the minimum wage. There was the former minister of Labour from Greystone who said, I'm working on indexation. Now we have, now we have his buddy there from Southeast and he's working on indexation too. They're all working on it and studying it. Meanwhile people have no place to live. People are suffering because their rents, and on fixed incomes those rents that have gone on 3 and \$400, they come to my office. They come to the constituency office and, Mr. Speaker, we can't, there's not much we can tell them. Because the rent, there's no rent, no place for them to rent. And that's why the city of Saskatoon put on their own program where they give, per unit, \$5,000. They do that.

Now which other community have they contacted? I would like to know from the minister which other community. Because it isn't Kindersley, because they build their own homes. I don't think it's North Battleford. And the member from Weyburn didn't seem to talk about any rental things that were happening there. I wonder which communities are on board with this.

Who is on board with this? What was their consultations? Because obviously they didn't consult in this because they don't consult on anything else. But who is on board with this? Which communities does this benefit? Where is this \$200 million going? Where are these houses that are 180,000 now up to 300,000, where are they being built? I want to know. Maybe they're in Northwest. I don't know. Maybe they're in Saskatoon Northwest. I don't know if they have any there. Maybe they're in Biggar. I don't know if Biggar town is willing to put up \$5,000 for that. Maybe they're there. I don't know. Where are they? Where are these homes?

[19:30]

I wonder if they'll go to Wakaw where they just shut down the hospital. I wonder if they'll go to Kindersley. Kindersley's had 10 physicians. They were down to five and now they're leaving. On the front page of the *Kindersley Clarion* was they're leaving for Swift Current.

Now where is that money? They have \$200 million for this kind of plan. Where is the money for health care? Where is the money for those long-term care facilities? Where is the announcement on that? Where is it, Mr. Deputy Speaker? That's what's important in Saskatchewan as a place that we want to be proud of, that people have a house and people have enough food to put on their table — not rising cost, not increasing gas prices, not increasing utilities, and not having to move every second month because the rent's going up. And where is their plan? Where is the long-term vision? No long-term vision. They won't talk about rent control when most of the other provinces in Canada have it. They don't want to talk about that because they don't care.

Today in North Battleford, well we're looking at a homeless . . . Because they couldn't do that. A shelter that everybody were helping. Now a society is known by how it treats its less fortunate people, and this is shameful what is happening here. This is shameful what this \$200 million — and who's this \$200 million going to? Where's this \$200 million going to? I wonder, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where's the \$200 million going to? So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and in no time in all of this, whether it be the minimum wage that they're dealing with or the costs of utilities, all of these things seem to be of no consequence, seem to be of no consequence.

So they read the budget, and member after member over there stands up and talks about how it is good that somebody is saving \$100 or something. They would take that any time. They would take that any time. Well that's shameful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because there are certain people that come into my office and come into those members' offices, and they don't have a place to live. They don't have a place to live and nor do they take very much comfort in the rising that they've gotten in those increases.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another thing they talk about is all the people they've taken off the tax rolls. They took off a bunch of people last time off the tax rolls. They don't pay any taxes, but you know what? A lot of those people are low-income and they have had no increase and everything else has been increasing. So this does them no good to say, we have some more people who are going to save \$10 here or \$5 there or \$8 there, because they have no place to live. They have no place to . . . If you've been paying \$800 as rent and now you have to pay \$1,100, a \$300 increase and you were living on \$1,600, what is that going to be for you, Mr. Deputy Speaker? What is that going to be for you?

I wonder with that kind of vision, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where we're going. And you know, they'll laugh about the royalty structures and why we shouldn't be looking at that and don't, you know, don't get excited because everybody's going to leave. Well I'll tell you what the miners in those mines say when they say about royalty structures. They say yes, it's fair, and don't ever let anybody tell you that those companies are going to leave or there's going to be job loss. That's the people who work in the mines; they say that. Go and talk to them, because that's what they'll tell them about the royalty review and why Saskatchewan shouldn't get, the people of Saskatchewan shouldn't get their fair share. When we go, when I go up and down my streets and visit my constituents, they talk about that. They have no problem with saying that we should get . . . that it's our potash. They understand that this is our potash and that they should be getting their fair share from it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They should be getting their fair share.

And in terms of the, in terms of the rental program, I suppose we still have to see. And why is it that it's three and a half years later that we are now considering that rent is an important issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, rent is an important issue? Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's many people have spoken out on this issue, and many groups are disappointed who deal with low-income people. And it seems that these folks have just simply turned a blind eye to this.

The terms in the budget as we go and where we don't see

anything happening in terms of the education sector, we've got the teachers bargaining, but they've taken away, when they took away the rights of the school boards to tax, they definitely . . . and put in the budget this year, what about the support staff? What about the education assistants that are in there? What about the people who work in dietary? What about the maintenance workers? What about the support staff in our education system? They have left that to the local school boards to negotiate those people.

And there's a certain sense of disrespect felt right across, that being whether it was in the health care sector with the provider groups or now in the education sector where they don't, where they aren't. And I think earlier, or was it yesterday, the member from Saskatoon Eastview talked about this sort of feeling of disrespect and way of dealing with people that causes this feeling throughout Saskatchewan so that people feel that they, that what they do is not respected. And so you hear from that, we hear from that from . . . I've received emails from PAIRS, the Professional Association of Internes and Residents of Saskatchewan, when we brought that issue up here in the legislature, saying that they also feel that way. We've talked to the medical students and who have to face this. And the medical students . . . It was interesting, because they came and said, we need an agreement. We need an agreement when it comes to health care because we have to feel the confidence as we move forward. So even they understood in their first two years when all they're concerned about is trying to . . . that they have gotten into the medical school and are concerned about trying to build a career. Even they have concern about what the PAIRS is happening.

And what about the SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] workers, health sciences members are out there? These things have been dragging on. They have been, these negotiations have been dragging on for two years or more, two years or more, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And everyone in Saskatchewan is watching, and I'm sure the members feel that they have, with their election budget is out there and feeling more than, more than happy that they have resolved and satisfied everybody.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's an undercurrent here that these people are not listening to. They're not listening to and they've growing out of touch in terms of what is happening. Because they, I know they scoffed at when we said that we went around the province and that people said that they were not in these facilities. So I can imagine that they obviously haven't heard from a lot of these people because many of them would not allow these people to meet with them in their offices. So of course you want to hear from one side, you want to see one side, then that's what you're going to, that's what you're going to get. But there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's . . . When you continue to treat people this way, perhaps it's one day you'll have to look at those people and have to answer. And for these people, that day will be coming.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the things, and which is a topic that is perhaps not that easy to talk about, and that is the fatalities in the province, the fatalities in the workplace. And this issue, which we all agree is serious and we all agree that something should be done, but to have this continue at the rate that we're doing . . . And for example, in 2008 the number is

22. We have 2009 is 24. A total we have in 2010, we're up to 21 as of September, I believe. These are alarming, alarming statistics.

Yet in this budget, in this budget in terms of a total vision for the province and in terms of for those people who don't think that it is a, it is a dangerous occupation in those potash mines where a worker a year has died in over the last, I believe, 54 years, that is a serious issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we saw nothing in the budget, nothing in the budget regarding what we're going to do to prevent further not only injuries, but fatalities in this province. And to those people and the damage that we do to the families and that in not dealing with this is an issue I don't think has been looked at properly here, nor has it been addressed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps what we could have done, perhaps what we could have done . . . We've done the whole gamut. We've run our Mission: Zero. We've run the buses, we've put the ads on the buses. We've run ads. We've had stick people. We've run ads that in fact, some of the ads . . . And I'm actually glad I'm not seeing any more of them where the worker was in some ways, in some of them, you could read into where people actually . . . Perhaps that's why they pulled them because people were complaining that it appeared that it was the worker's fault.

We have to have, we have to have the government, we have to take responsibility and look at this issue seriously. We either are serious about this or we are not serious about this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The last time I had an opportunity was to go to the Esterhazy mine when there was a death there, and it's traumatic for the people there. I went and met with the workers and talked about it. We didn't really . . . There was not a lot of blame, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In those kind of situations, people are . . . It's hard to understand for them as to what happens, but we have built a culture where we do not, we do not take these things seriously.

So I would wish, I would wish on behalf of all of us that there would have been something more, something in this budget, some initiative because I think on a daily basis, every time there is a budget, we should be looking at this issue and saying, here's what we're going to do. And this time there is just simply . . . We haven't heard very much on this issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with that, I have more, more to say on the housing issue. I see, I see the member from Silver Springs, I see the member from Silver Springs will be taking that discussion up further because I can't see how he isn't, you know, mentioning this, and he didn't mention it in his speech. He didn't mention it in his speech. I was disappointed with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But with that, I will not be supporting the budget but I will be supporting the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a real pleasure to rise in the House this evening and enter into this budget debate. I want to start from the very beginning

by stating that I will be supporting this motion and I will be voting against the amendment. I have a feeling there may be a discussion across the floor as we, as I have my speech tonight, so I want to get it on the record that I am very supportive of the work that's been done by our Finance minister to make sure we bring forward a budget that is supported by so many people in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to start by thanking people that are really important in my life and in my world as an elected member. I want to start with my constituency. Linda Griffith has worked in my office now for 16 years, since June the 15th, 1995 when I was elected the first time, and she has been with me and working hard, and I appreciate her work.

I have another lady who has been with me a couple of years. Her name is Rhonda, and I want to say hello to her but I especially want to say hello to her dad. I'm not sure of his exact age, but I know that it's more than eight decades. And he's dedicated to politics in this province. In fact, he's dedicated to politics from the people who are on this side of the floor. And he watches with interest daily to make sure that we are bringing forward the word that he wants us to bring forward, that I represent him. And I want to say hello to him.

In my office here in Regina I have Kelly and Kim and Theo and Amanda and Sherry and Shelley who work very, very hard every day. I know that they have the interest not only of the minister at heart but of the people of the province. And I'm very proud of the work that they do, and I thank them. I also have staff as people who work with me in the Public Service Commission and the Ministry of Social Services, the DMs [deputy minister] and the ADMs [assistant deputy minister] and every one of the people that come to work on a daily basis and do their very best for the people of the province, and I want to thank them and congratulate them.

I know that everyone is aware that it takes a team effort and dedication and hard work to put a budget together. And all of these people, the Minister of Finance, all of my colleagues on Treasury Board, we worked very hard. The staff at Finance, all of them have worked hard to make sure that we brought a budget forward that makes a difference to the people of the province, and I want to congratulate the minister.

And finally and very, very importantly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank my family. We cannot do the job without the support of the people that we love and that love us. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 16 years ago, my oldest grandchild was a baby. I now have six more grandchildren, and they watch their grandmother at work, and I am sure at times they wonder what I am really doing. But I know that they are proud of the fact that they live in a province where there is initiative and ideas for going forward.

Mr. Speaker, overall this budget is going to ensure that people in Saskatchewan continue to be economic leaders in Canada. There is a growing advantage to living in our beautiful province. Our population is at all all-time high. There are more people working in this province than ever before, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There's unprecedented economic growth and it's given our government the capacity to invest in areas that are important to the citizens.

This budget, whether the members opposite realize it or not, shows that we have \$250 million more for regional health authorities. We lowered the taxes. We now have 114,000 people who no longer pay taxes in our province. We've invested \$2.2 billion over four years in infrastructure, infrastructure that was left by the members opposite . . . [inaudible] . . . it was left in a state of just about disrepair, and we worked very hard to make sure that the infrastructure's available for the people of our province.

[19:45]

And, Mr. Speaker, the number of people that spoke to me over the weekend about our budget, one of the things that they were very impressed about was the lowering the debt another \$325 million, which means the debt is 45 per cent lower now than it was in 2007 when we came in office. And I think that that shows that there is a dedication and a commitment to the future.

Mr. Speaker, what the Finance minister presented last week is going to help sustain our economic momentum. This budget provides our province with a strong foundation for the Saskatchewan advantage to continue long into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I represent the area of Kelvington-Wadena, and I'm proud to stand up here and know that I am the voice of the 19,000 people in that area who have lived through a lot of harder times as a farming community lately. There's been excessive moisture and droughts and frost that my farmers have had to deal with the last number of years. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that most of the colleagues on my side of the House and most of my friends know that I'm actually a very tall person, and I want to measure people . . . I want people to know that last year with the 40 inches of rain we had and the 30 inches of snow, we have moisture that is just about 5 feet in our constituency.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture and the Premier came out to my constituency last year to meet with farmers and to visit the area to determine what needed to be done. What they did last year and what was responded to in the budget this year is record crop insurance coverage and funding to ensure that our farming sector can continue to operate in the face of weather-related disasters.

I've stood in the House many times and spoke about the innovation of the business people in my constituency. And one of the companies is Milligan Bio-Tech crushing and biodiesel facility at Foam Lake. Over the years, Milligan Bio worked with the federal government and the provincial government and the Saskatchewan Research Council on many successful pilot projects, and proved that canola is a top feedstock for biodiesel for use in cold weather.

This is one of the many companies and the agricultural producers who will benefit from this government's launch of the renewable diesel program, which has the mandate to include 2 per cent renewable content in the average annual diesel fuel pool in Saskatchewan for fuel distributors beginning in July 2012, and will provide a 13 cent per litre grant to eligible renewable diesel producers for the next five years. This mandate will also help Saskatchewan meet its climate change targets.

Mr. Speaker, our government has believed in the economic prosperity of the province and its potential for growth. Our government recognizes that prosperity is dependent on maintaining a viable infrastructure. Unfortunately, the previous government let our roads and highways deteriorate at an alarming rate. The budget that we have presented is going to invest \$556.2 million in our transportation system, bringing our total to 2.2 billion. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that our transportation system will ensure that Saskatchewan will continue to prosper. Rural Saskatchewan is dependent on roads and highways as the residents have to travel distances for basic services. Our services, our resources are situated in rural areas and it's incumbent upon government to ensure that the transportation system is there to continue so businesses can develop and to grow. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has a huge land base and one of the largest transportation systems in this country. It's always a challenge to ensure that our roads and highways are maintained and improved upon, but I know this budget will continue to ensure that these challenges are addressed.

Small businesses are the backbone of our province and that's why this budget puts Saskatchewan businesses in a much more competitive position by cutting the tax rate from 4.5 per cent to 2 per cent. We've lived up to our commitment to reduce the education portion of property tax by 17 per cent. We recognize these reductions in taxes will allow business owners to invest the money and put it back into businesses. Mr. Speaker, the farmers in my constituency also know that by keeping our commitment to the education portion of property tax, they'll be paying 80 per cent less education property tax this year than they did four years ago. That's a promise that we made, and a promise that we kept.

Mr. Speaker, every little town in Saskatchewan has a hotel that sells off-sale. These business owners will not only benefit from the tax reductions but also from the increase in beer discount to off-sale retailers. I know the hotel owners in my constituency are delighted by these changes and I'd like to congratulate the Minister of CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan] for working with this issue.

Mr. Speaker, education is the hope for the future. A school is four walls that houses tomorrow. We know that every dollar that is spent on education at an early age is going to save society \$7 in future costs in health care, justice, or social programs. We must spend our money and utilize our human resources correctly to ensure our children are getting life skills and basic education. Mr. Speaker, this budget did not forget about children who have disabilities and learning difficulties, and we've allocated funds for enhanced intensive support for these students.

Our population is growing and births are increasing. As my family has grown and become young adults and then parents, one of the concerns they've expressed to me and I continue to hear as an MLA is a shortage of daycare spaces. Our society has moved towards a necessity of all parents working after maternity leave has expired, and many parents found it a challenge to find daycare. They want the best possible care for their children while they're working. The budget that we are presented continues to build on past commitments from the government, and we have an announcement of an additional

500 new child care spaces, which will increase licensed spaces by 4.1 per cent to 12,700 spaces.

Health care demands continue to grow as our population grows and ages. This is one of the areas that my constituency receives calls on, and I'm very pleased that our government's commitment to health care in this budget has committed an additional 6.2 per cent increase to health care.

And I firmly believe that municipal government is one of the most responsible and effective form of government that people in Saskatchewan have. The previous government reduced finances to this level of government. Our government appreciates and acknowledges the work that this level of government undertakes and meets our budget commitment to provide them with one full point of provincial sales tax.

Mr. Speaker, the areas that I have responsibility for as a minister are important to every citizen in this province, and I'd like to start by talking about housing. I'd like to start by spending a few minutes on what our housing plan is versus what's being proposed by the opposition. First of all, I want to start with the opposition's plan and give you a few of the reasons why none of their ideas are reflected in the budget that we just brought forward. First of all, their plan has two parts. They plan to impose a job-killing resource tax that could possibly solve the housing problem because it's going to send all the citizens back to Alberta for jobs just as they did under the previous government. Mr. Speaker, the potash royalty tax that they would impose if they were government would kill jobs in this province. It would send people out of the province, and we would not have the need for housing because people would be gone again. Then they want to impose rent control so that anyone remaining would absolutely have no incentive to invest in low-income housing.

As usual, the NDP's only plan is to manage decline. I spent 10 or more years in opposition listening to the members opposite when they were on this side of the House, talking about managing the decline, knowing that the last one here should turn off the lights, and if there was a few people left here, there would be more revenues for the ones that were left. Mr. Speaker, it was a strange way to govern; it was a strange way to manage the resources in this province; and it's the reason why people of the province were very tired of them and after the last election decided they should sit on the other side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, rent control may sound good politically but it simply doesn't work. Just like tax hikes on potash, rent control hurts the very people it's supposedly designed to help. It's like the NDP's potash position. It takes us back to the 1970s where everybody talked about disco balls and platform shoes. But even a left wing economist, Paul Krugman, called rent controls, and I want to quote, "a textbook case of economic stupidity."

A survey quoted in *The StarPhoenix* yesterday noted that, the other day noted that 93 per cent of economists agreed that a ceiling on rents reduces the quantity and the quality of houses available. That's a fancy way of saying that rent control hurts poor people. It's not the Opposition Leader that has to live in a dilapidated housing unit in Winnipeg that suffered from years of neglect because of rent controls.

As one Swedish economist said, “In many cases, rent control appears to be the most effective technique presently known to destroy a city except for bombing [it].” Forgive me if I’m worried about this issue, but that’s exactly what the NDP seems intent on doing. The NDP wants more affordable housing while at the same time handcuffing the private sector who’s trying to build it.

They hold up Manitoba as a model, but they ignore the fact that that province has an ever-shrinking vacancy rate. The member for Saskatoon Centre cited a report from the University of Calgary, but even the authors of the report are split on rent control. Here’s an example of a quote from that report: “The major disadvantage of any kind of rent control is its . . . negative effect on the investors’ willingness to invest in multi-unit rental housing.” That factor outweighs, in the view of one of the authors, any possible favourable effects of any sort of rent controls.

Presumably the author of this report supported rent controls as part of the 7 per cent of the economists who would do that. Not surprisingly, the NDP has thrown in their lot with the fringe economists as well. They’re willing to take a risk with the livelihoods of vulnerable people, but we are not. We’re going to side with the 93 per cent of economists who know that rent control does not work.

And we’re not joining the NDP on the campaign to demonstrate the private sector on rent controls or on any other issue. We know that it’s going to take the private sector to build the houses that are needed for the people that are waiting for homes and are waiting for rental spaces and waiting for the opportunity to call Saskatchewan home because they have a roof over their head.

Our allegiance is to do what works. On this issue, what works is providing more affordable spaces and putting more money back into people’s pockets. That’s why we’ve removed 114,000 people from the tax roll. With more money in their bank accounts, people in Saskatchewan are better able to afford their rents. They’re better able to put food on their table and buy the necessities they need for their children. But what also works is the supply. That’s why I was very proud, Mr. Deputy Speaker, yesterday, to announce that we were going to spend \$252 million in total investments to create 4,600 new homeowner and rental units, 4,600 units. That is going to make a huge difference to the people of the province, and supply homes for many people.

I think the members opposite read the article in *The StarPhoenix* today that talked about the idea of our five-point plan. They like the idea and they had a few thoughts on what the NDP was saying, and I’m sure that they aren’t reading those out loud today either.

[20:00]

Mr. Speaker, Headstart on a Home is an opportunity for people to actually have some home ownership. It’s the opportunity to be able to call a place their own. This is an opportunity that there has not been in the last number of years when it comes to being able to find a space that they can raise their family. And I am very proud to be working with a government who

understands the importance of that.

Mr. Speaker, this is building on the significant investment we’ve made over the last three years. We’ve completed 860 affordable units. There’s 1,100 more currently in development. And then the private market rental starts have tripled and housing starts are up 115 per cent. The result is an increasing vacancy rate in our province. When the NDP left office, the vacancy rate was 1.2 per cent. Today it’s 2.5 per cent and it’s rising. And according to RBC [Royal Bank of Canada], Saskatchewan has hit the sweet spot in 2010, a strong yet affordable housing market. And despite all the noise about housing prices, home ownership costs in Saskatchewan remain below the national average.

And the most basic thing that allows people to afford a home or to pay their rent is a job, and that’s why we talk about growth, not because it’s the ultimate goal but because growth is the means to a better future. And that’s why I’m proud of our record. There are 7,400 more people working in Saskatchewan than a year ago. Our unemployment rate is the second lowest in Canada. The average weekly earnings increased by 5.1 per cent in 2010. That’s the highest percentage increase in all of Canada. We have a momentum. The RBC predicts Saskatchewan will lead the country in growth in 2011 and in 2012. It’s estimated that our economy will grow by tens of thousands of jobs in the next two years, and this budget will continue the momentum.

With lower taxes and investment in infrastructure and significant debt relief, this budget not only helps to bolster our current economic prosperity but it’ll help to give future generations a strong foundation for growth.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister Responsible for Housing, Habitat for Humanity is an important part of the work that we’re doing and we have the opportunity this year to have the first ever women’s-built house in Habitat for Humanity here in Regina.

We have a number of colleagues that are working on this issue, and I am very pleased that this year, I believe in the first week in April, we’re going to have the basement dug for this women’s-built house. We have a young family, a young man with four children who will be moving into this house. This house is going to be built by women. There will be a lot of support from men.

I’m proud of the initiative and I believe that Regina citizens are pleased with the fact that they’re involved with Habitat for Humanity, and I would like to thank them for their support, and look forward to them helping me pound nails and paint walls this summer as we show that women can be not just vulnerable, but women can be professionals and working with their colleagues to mentor other women. I’m very pleased with this, proud of this project.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk a little bit about the money in the budget for the government’s child and youth agenda. Just like housing, I’d like to compare what the opposition is proposing versus what we are doing.

Last Thursday, the member from Saskatoon Centre, the critic for Social Services, made this statement. He said he wanted to touch on the child welfare thing. He wanted to touch on the

child welfare thing, is his exact quote. He said, called it a thing like it was a creature out of the blue lagoon or something, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's not a child welfare thing; it is an opportunity for us to deal with children that are vulnerable, as government, to make sure that we change their lives.

Maybe he didn't know what to call it because the NDP never paid attention to the child welfare issue. The problem of overcrowding foster homes was identified as early as 1986. In the year 2000, the Children's Advocate identified it as a serious gap and a major disconnect in the child welfare, yet the NDP allowed caseloads in child welfare to grow by 53 per cent between 2000 and 2007. The number of children that were not at home, in their own home or with extended family members, increased by 53 per cent and, Mr. Speaker, that's not something the members opposite or anybody should be proud of.

On December the 6th of last year, when asked by a reporter why the NDP didn't have the political will to confront problems in the child welfare system, the member from Saskatoon Centre replied, many initiatives were started, but unfortunately they weren't sustained, and he said clearly more needed to be done.

When asked by Geoff Leo why the NDP never followed through on the child welfare, here is the response from the member from the member from Saskatoon Centre. He said, that's . . . hmm, I think when you look back over the last 20 years that we need to take . . . hmm, you know, we're looking forward. That's where we feel really optimistic.

He felt optimistic when the issue of the child welfare issue was in our hands, not in the hands of the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, that's one area where we agree. We're looking forward with optimism as well. We're looking forward with optimism in child welfare because we've laid the foundation for fundamental change by making significant investments. We've had the opportunity to work with Vice-chief Lerat and president of the Métis Nation, Robert Doucette, who is pleased and willing to work with us when we make this significant and fundamental change in the child welfare system that is very much needed.

With this budget, we've increased the child and family services by 124 per cent since November of 2007, and they've been smart investments and they've yielded significant results. Children in direct care of the ministry is declining for the first time in over a decade. It's down 10 per cent since March of 2009. And then the number of children placed permanently with extended family has increased 44 per cent since March of 2007. We've cut the number of overcrowded foster homes by 48 per cent since November 2007. We've cut the number of children who live in overcrowded foster homes by 51 per cent. Mr. Speaker, the NDP had homes with 21 children living in them. We have also created 308 out-of-home care spaces for children in need since 2007.

So with this budget, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are presented with a clear choice on children in care. The member from Saskatoon Centre presented their single plan last Thursday. He said, we've called for an all-party committee. So the choice between the NDP's call for a committee or our choice of spending \$34 million that we've committed in this

budget to bring action on a child and youth agenda is clear. We also have a . . . Our approach includes \$15.3 million to address the long-standing issues that were identified by the panel. It includes more money for residential care spaces and help to place children with their extended family.

In addition, we are addressing the over-representation of First Nations and Métis people in the system. We know we have to address the gaps in First Nations and Métis education and employment. That's why we've invested \$17.1 million in this budget to address the gaps.

Mr. Speaker, also as part of this child and youth agenda, we've set aside \$1.6 million for the autism strategy and the FASD [fetal alcohol spectrum disorder] strategy. Mr. Speaker, I know that the members opposite are well aware that I have a passion for the FASD issue, that there is a . . . We know that this is a preventable condition. We know that we have to do more to not only educate but to work with the young people who have this condition. And I was disappointed when I looked at the platform that was presented by the members opposite and they didn't even have the word FASD in their platform.

Mr. Speaker, the investments that we're talking about is just a start. We know that more needs to be done. We know that this is just the first phase of our approach, but we're working with the First Nations and Métis partners on the next step. But the question is going to be in this fall: who should be trusted with the next step? Who should be entrusted with addressing the needs of our children in the welfare system? Should the people across the way who watched this problem develop or should it be the people on this side of the House who are addressing the issue? Mr. Speaker, should it be the party that admitted that many initiatives are started but just weren't sustained, or should it be the people on this side of the House who've addressed the overcrowded foster homes and reduced the number of children in care for the first time in over a decade?

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to just spend a minute talking about the other area of my responsibility, and that's the Public Service Commission. In particular I want to highlight the progress that's being made under the direction of the Public Service Commission under the lean initiative. For those people who aren't familiar with lean, lean is the methodology used to improve workplace efficiency, outcomes, and customer experience.

We started work on the lean across the entire public service in June of 2010. The first phase is completed and we're proud of our accomplishments. Lead training was provided to approximately 250 managers. There is 36 teams of front-line staff and managers who were brought together to map out processes and identify solutions and common sense ways to improve how their work gets done. The projected benefits to date equate to \$4 million return — \$4 million return on \$1 million worth of investment. In terms of lean training sessions, the employees are telling us about how pleased they are to be involved in it.

One of the SLGA [Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority] employees who had taken the lean training said, I've been here for 28 years and no one has ever asked me for my ideas on how we could make things better. Another efficiency

training session said, there's so many things that we just do because we've always done it that way. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's an opportunity to do things differently. They aren't top-down efficiency measures. We're following the lead of our employees, the people that are on the ground, and we're listening to them. It's the public employees that are driving the lean and they are asking, can we do it better? Can we do it more quickly? Can we reduce the number of times an application gets handled?

I'm proud of the lean initiatives within Social Services. They've reduced the number of forms required in caregiver payments process from 45 down to 7. Not only does that save employees' time; the process helps reduce paperwork and simplifies the process for the clients of the ministry.

Mr. Speaker, *The Saskatchewan Advantage* is more than just a title on our budget; it's our government's philosophy. It's a reminder to keep us continually asking ourselves, what do we need to do to improve economic momentum? What do we need to do to preserve our prosperity for the future? What do we need to do to continue making life better for our citizens? Last Wednesday with this budget, the Finance minister gave us a template for sustaining this advantage, and we're taking his lead by asking, what more can we do?

What we're doing is, when we admit that we're doing more, is doing what we admit by spending \$34 million on our budget for child and youth agenda of just one step. In the long term we know we've built on the results we have in the child welfare reforms since November 2007. We've engaged First Nations; we've made a change in the welfare system; but most importantly, we're capitalizing on the eagerness of our government to make life better. This budget provides political leadership from investments in housing to lower taxes on infrastructure investment, and we're working hard to sustain our economic momentum.

Mr. Speaker, growth is not means to an end. More people means more people able to put food on the table. More people getting higher wages means more people to pay rent. More families earning stable income sends more kids to school on a full stomach and helps people, parents feel optimistic about the future. So growth isn't trivial; it's essential. That's why we're working hard to maintain the Saskatchewan advantage. It was John Kotter who said:

Leaders establish the vision for the future and set the strategy for getting there; they cause change. They motivate and inspire others to go in the right direction and they, along with everyone else, sacrifice to get there.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very thankful for all the leaders across this great province, and particularly those in the Kelvington-Wadena constituency who have motivated me to serve as their MLA. I'm very pleased to have had the opportunity to be part of the budget process led by the Minister of Finance that truly reflects the priorities of the people of this province. It's the Saskatchewan advantage. Lower taxes, improved quality of life, a lower debt — it doesn't get any better than that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I will be supporting this budget.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina

Qu'Appelle. Why is the member on her feet?

Hon. Ms. Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I request leave to introduce guests.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member has asked leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you, a very good friend of ours, Pam Schwann, and her husband, Russ Hodgins, and their children Kellen and Lauren.

Pam has been working along with myself and the Minister of Social Services on the wonderful project of the Women Build for Habitat for Humanity. So she was in for a meeting today — wonderful opportunity for her to come sit in her House of Legislative Assembly and be able to experience some of this evening. And she has brought her family with her. They're residents of Regina Qu'Appelle Valley, so I'm so pleased to be able to introduce this fine family to the Legislative Assembly this evening. Thank you very much.

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

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

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I've spent 25 years in the legislature, and this will be my last response to a budget.

[Applause]

Ms. Atkinson: — And I'm glad that the members opposite are applauding me.

Mr. Speaker, I think what I want to do tonight is there's a couple of issues I want to talk about. But one of the issues that I think is important to remind ourselves is that in 1991, when the NDP came to government, upon coming to government we immediately struck the Saskatchewan Financial Management Review Commission, which was headed by Donald Gass. And, Mr. Speaker, this is an important document because what this document did was pave the way for how an NDP government was going to deal with a very, very dire fiscal situation in 1991. And I want to review some of the contents of this report because I think it is appropriate today in terms of what is

contained in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, the Donald Gass report indicated at the time that the former Devine government in one year, from March of 1991 until October 31st of 1991, had a deficit of over 1.3 . . . or \$1.2 billion. Mr. Speaker, in those days, revenues were about \$2.3 billion and expenses were 3.5. So there was a deficit, a deficit . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh, and he says, what was a loaf of bread? Well I can tell the member that in those days Saskatchewan had the second highest debt to GDP [gross domestic product] in Canada. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we were broke.

[20:15]

Now I know the members opposite don't want to hear this, but this was the reality. And one of the things that Donald Gass reported to the public was that on March 31st, 1990, the Government of Saskatchewan had issued guarantees for point nine six two billion, and a year later, the guarantees had increased by almost 40 per cent to 1.329 billion. And according to his schedule, the province's guaranteed debt on September 30th to October 31st, 1991 was \$1.693 billion. Now why do I raise this? You know, Mr. Speaker, every member of the legislature should have to read this report because it talks about what happened and what we needed to do in order to go forward.

Now I just listened to the Minister of Social Services talk about her highways initiative, and I want to make this observation. Mr. Speaker, contained in the provincial budget is a decision by the members opposite to now guarantee the Immigrant Investor Fund. And according to their housing program, over the next five years \$200 million of the Immigrant Investor Fund is going to be guaranteed by the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, in 1999 when the federal government changed the rules and said to the provinces you now have to guarantee these funds, the NDP government at the time made the decision that we were going to withdraw from the program because we thought, and it's even reported . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh, they're saying it's a missed opportunity.

But you know what, Mr. Speaker? In the last report of the Saskatchewan GGF [Government Growth Fund] Management Corporation, 2008, under their government, what does the last report say? And I quote from page 2:

Saskatchewan participated in the IIP from 1989 to 1999 to avail itself of this source of investor capital to support employment creation in the province. However, in 1999 the Federal government modified the terms of the IIP such that SGGF MC [which is the growth fund] would be required to guarantee the return of principal to the investors. Because of the risk involved with this guarantee, the Province withdrew from the program and began the process of "winding-up" SGGF MC.

My point is this: that what the minister announced yesterday is a 200-and-some-odd million dollar housing initiative. But \$200 million is backstopped by the province, Mr. Speaker, when in their own annual report it was indicated that the risk was too high to the province to do this kind of loan guarantee.

Now, Mr. Speaker, who are they . . . You know, let's be honest. We are going to add over \$230 million according to their order in council of loan guarantees, which is added to the debt of the province of Saskatchewan. And that is exactly how we got in trouble in the 1980s and the early 1990s, Mr. Speaker.

The difficulty here is, Mr. Speaker, according to the minister's document and one of the issues that is, one of the holes in this budget is how they're going to deal with not only affordable housing but low-income housing. Here is what they're doing. Loans with this loan guarantee to the immigrant investors will be provided to developers for projects approved by municipalities. And, Mr. Speaker, you know, what we had was we had Capital One corporation, which was determining which projects would be financed by the Immigrant Investor Fund, and they're leaving it up to the municipalities.

Loans will be available for 90 per cent — 90 per cent — of construction cost including land costs, at 4 per cent interest rate which could be adjusted over time. Now, Mr. Speaker, if you look at what the minister says, apparently all of the people who are going to get into this housing are going to have to be able to go to the bank or the credit union and be eligible for a mortgage, Mr. Speaker.

So my question is this: why is the province of Saskatchewan loan guaranteeing \$200 million to the Immigrant Investor Fund when in 1999 we decided to withdraw from it because it was too big a risk to backstop developers to build houses for people who have to be eligible at the local credit union or the CIBC [Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce] or the Royal Bank for a mortgage? How is this going to get people into new housing stock? The minister has not been clear on that.

And the number one issue, Mr. Speaker, in the province are all of these people whose incomes have not gone up to meet the cost of escalating rent in the province of Saskatchewan. But particularly, I can speak in my own constituency where rents have gone from \$450 for a one-bedroom apartment to over \$815 for an apartment. And, Mr. Speaker, what's happened when that is going up over 400 or close to \$400 a month in the last four years, Mr. Speaker, their incomes have not increased in order to meet the escalating cost of rent. And I understand from our critic, the member from Saskatoon Centre, that there are literally thousands of people waiting to get into low-income housing.

And, Mr. Speaker, I see nothing in the minister's announcement of yesterday that is going to help the single woman who is 63 years of age whose rent is now \$815. She is not going to be able to go out and buy a house when she's on a fixed income or income support because she doesn't have the money for a down payment, and she wouldn't be eligible for a mortgage at the bank. So, Mr. Speaker, it's a concern.

We see for the first time, for the first time — and there may be other deals that are going on — but for the first time we see the government doing something that is very risky and adding to the long-term debt of the province, over \$200 million by loan guaranteeing the Immigrant Investor Fund. And I know, Mr. Speaker, that up until November of 2010, Saskatchewan wasn't into this. It got into it apparently. But one of the provinces that has not gone down this path is the province of Alberta, which

the members opposite like to trumpet weekly in the Assembly.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a problem. And we're going back to the past, and I see, Mr. Speaker, that we are going down a road of loan guarantees when it's entirely inappropriate, entirely inappropriate because there is . . . It is not about, it is not about some independent organization determining what is a good investment. And one of the things that Don Gass talked about in his report in 1991 which is important is the government decided to loan guarantee groups that couldn't go to the banks, and it was far too risky, Mr. Speaker. And so this is entirely, entirely inappropriate.

And there is no, there is nothing in the minister's announcement about low-income housing for people who are facing escalating rents. And they aren't getting escalating income increases, and they're sitting on wait-lists for low-income housing, Mr. Speaker. And there is nothing in their housing strategy for those people, and this is an issue.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I used to work for the Office of the Rentalsman a long time ago. And the members opposite say it was the NDP that got rid of rent control. Actually it was Grant Devine and his government that got rid of rent control and went to rent review. And the onus was on the tenant to go to the Office of the Rentalsman in order to have their rent reviewed, and if it was too high relative to the costs that the landlord had incurred, it could be rolled back.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that 80 per cent of Canadians that rent have access to some sort of rent review in this country. And, Mr. Speaker, I think you will see, before the election, the NDP indicate how this review would work, Mr. Speaker. Because there is no question that because of . . . not developers but speculators coming in, we've seen a significant increase in the cost of rent. And I don't think the loan guarantee to the Immigrant Investor Fund which gives money, lends money to home developers is going to get us any more people into the housing market because, as the minister said, all of these families are going to have to go to the bank and be eligible for a mortgage.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue that I want to talk about, which is important and was not really addressed in this budget, is the whole issue of child daycare. Now this government has said on numerous occasions that they've increased child daycare spaces in the province of Saskatchewan. Well, Mr. Speaker, when I look at the Minister of Education's plan for 2011-12, she has some measurements that she reports on. And, Mr. Speaker, last year the minister of Education — not this Minister of Education, but the present Minister of Finance — indicated that we were going to have 11,650 child daycare spaces in the province. Well there's a lot of child daycare that's going to have to be built because according to the minister's baseline, there were 10,848 spaces.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the minister of Education, who was the minister . . . or is the Minister of Finance, he indicated to us last year that there were going to be 235 additional child care spaces and at the end of this fiscal year we'd have 11,650 spaces. And then what do we get in this budget? This is where the conservative math just doesn't quite add up. Because in this budget they say that they're going to have an additional 500

new child care spaces for a total of 12,700. Well last year it was 11,650. This year it is 12,700. I don't quite understand the math, and maybe someone can explain it to me.

But here's what I know: Saskatchewan has the highest labour force attachment of women with children five years of age and younger. Saskatchewan has the poorest record when it comes to child daycare. And, Mr. Speaker, I take some responsibility for that because I was part of a government that did not put a lot of new resources into child daycare. But there was a whole policy that was developed when the Martin government was going to put \$150 million into child daycare in this province.

I still have the policy document. You can probably get Wynne Young to dust it off and you might want to use it, because it made sense. And let me tell you why it made sense. There was going to be a significant increase in child daycare spaces in the province of Saskatchewan because we had the highest labour force attachment of women with children five years of age and younger. And I have to say that with our population growth, with our birth growth, we need to do much more than 500 new child daycare spaces, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that if we were really innovative . . . And I note the minister went off to Russia. Because Saskatchewan is the only province that has early learning and care in Education. It took us some years to get it moved out of Social Services, but it was moved over to Education I believe in 2005. And what we need to do is have early learning and care centres in every elementary school in the province so that parents aren't running their children to daycare, then trying to get them over to pre-K [pre-kindergarten]. And then maybe they're not in pre-K but they're in child daycare. They have to get them over to kindergarten and so on and so forth.

I'm pleased that we're now going to start putting early learning and care centres in any new elementary schools, but I think there's an opportunity for us to start to do much more when it comes to early learning and care in the province of Saskatchewan. And that is the other significant hole in this budget.

[20:30]

Mr. Speaker, the final point I want to make is this, if I can find my papers. When this conservative government came to office in 2011 . . . or 2007 I should say, they were lucky, and I mean lucky. Let me tell you why they were lucky. They were lucky because the prices for our commodities, our resources — oil, gas, potash, uranium, you name it — was beginning to increase, and increase substantially, Mr. Speaker. If you look at the last NDP budget in the province of Saskatchewan it was about \$7.8 billion. Today, Mr. Speaker, with this budget we have seen some significant increases in expenditures and revenues . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Pardon me? Say it. You know, we've got all these people over there that are, you know, so brilliant, so brilliant, so brilliant, but there's some things that they haven't quite gotten right, Mr. Speaker. So brilliant that they're adding \$200 million in long-term debt and not telling anyone, and they're supporting developers to build houses that . . . which is not going to do anything to get people into a new home because they still have to go down to the bank and be

eligible, Mr. Speaker.

But let me tell you what I was going to go say. Here's what this government has done. In 2007-08 the budget was in terms of expenses was going to be about \$7.8 billion. What is it today, Mr. Speaker? What is it today? Well over \$10 billion. What were the actual revenues in those days some four years ago? About \$8 billion, Mr. Speaker. What are they today? Well, Mr. Speaker, if you look at what the conservatives have had in the last several years, let me give you an example. In . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well the Sask Party, all of you are, basically all of you are conservatives. Let's call a spade a spade — or is it a shovel, Mr. Speaker? They are conservatives and most of them support the Steven Harper Conservatives even though they don't want us to know they are conservatives. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? They're not fiscal conservatives. They're not fiscal conservatives. They spend money like there's no tomorrow.

And we've just started to see the beginnings of loan guarantees. Well you knew about it last spring with Amicus, the \$27 million nursing home loan guarantee. And now we've got another one, a \$230 million loan guarantee. And so that gets us up to \$250 million in loan guarantees when Donald Gass told us not to do it. But they wouldn't know the Donald Gass report because none of them have read it, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, let me just talk about the conservatives. Let's talk about the conservatives. In 2007-08 the budget was 7.7 in terms of expenditures. What is it this year? Well, Mr. Speaker, it's well over 10 billion.

It was the reality of revenues. It was the reality of revenues. And what do we have now, Mr. Speaker, in terms of what they're planning on spending? They've increased spending in this province by over 38 per cent. You know, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the revenue they've had, they had over \$10 billion in additional revenue, and we left them with \$2.2 billion. And the most disgusting thing, the most disgusting thing, Mr. Speaker, is that they have stripped the Crowns bare. They've taken \$1.7 billion out of the Crowns. And they say, oh they're reducing the debt.

Well, Mr. Speaker, they've got a great big flashy, a great big flashy pamphlet that we're all going to see. It's going to come to our doors. And what do they say? They are reducing the provincial debt — they call it provincial debt — to 3.8 billion. But, Mr. Speaker, it is not the provincial debt because when you go into their book you . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh. Provincial debt is not GRF [General Revenue Fund] debt, my friends. Provincial debt is not GRF debt. Provincial debt is GRF debt and Crown corporation debt, and what is it? What is it?

Well let's find it in their little budget book. What is it? Here we are. Their debt is going . . . Their Crown corporation debt is 3.6 billion on its way to 6 billion. And guess what, Mr. Speaker? By 2015, by 2015 the province's debt, the public debt is going to \$10.5 billion. Well, Mr. Speaker, it was 10.9 billion when they came to office. So they paid debt down on the GRF side. Crown corporation debt is going up. And the public debt, is it going down overall? Absolutely not. The trajectory is up, Mr. Speaker.

And I would just like to remind the members, read the Gass report. Read the Gass report. Because this is what conservatives do to the province of Saskatchewan. I know they're riding high and they think they're big time spenders. They're investing in everything, and they're guaranteeing loans to their friends, Mr. Speaker. And that's exactly how we got ourselves in trouble in the 1980s, and it took us a decade to get ourselves out of it. And we had to scrape and claw our way out of it. And there were bond agencies — and they can ask the people over in Finance because many of them are the same people — there are bond agencies that didn't want to lend the money, lend the province any money because it was a basket case.

And I predict, Mr. Speaker, that if these guys don't rein it in, we're back. We're back . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh, you know what? He says, are we going to get an upgrade? Well you know, Mr. Speaker, you might get an upgrade. You might. But you're adding to the long-term debt of the province of Saskatchewan. That's what you're doing. And you know what? We got upgrades. We got upgrades. Now why did we get upgrades? Because we had our fiscal house in order. But there are risks associated with this budget, and the risk is they're starting to loan guarantee again. They're starting to loan guarantee again — \$230 million to the Immigrant Investor Fund — when it was clear that there's too big a risk in this, and that's what they're up to.

And I predict, I predict commodity prices collapse, which they may. We've got ourselves one big mess because they've increased spending by just about 10 per cent a year in the last four years — 38 per cent. And, well, it keeps going up and up and up. And their own-source revenues are going down and down and down, Mr. Speaker, because they're becoming too reliant on commodity prices. And we know what happens with commodity prices — what goes up comes down.

And so I would say to the members opposite that you should have put a little bit more money onto debt with these kind of revenues in the last four years. They think . . . They're so proud. They're so proud that they've reduced the debt by 3 billion on the GRF, but Crown corporation debt is going up.

The last thing I wanted to talk about is potash. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, the members opposite have just torn a strip off of us because we're talking about a review of the royalty structure in the province. Well, Mr. Speaker, I sat on the Treasury Board when we changed the royalty structure in order to have mine expansion in the province. And what was the price, what was the price of potash at the time?

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. I'm having trouble hearing the member. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — I sat on the Treasury Board when we changed the price, the royalty structure for potash. And I sat on the Treasury Board at the time and the price of potash was a little over, I think, \$300 a tonne — I'm going from memory, but I reviewed my old notes. I reviewed my old notes. What we gave the potash industry was 120 per cent depreciation . . .

An Hon. Member: — Write a book.

Ms. Atkinson: — Oh, I am going to write a book and some of it's going to be about you people.

But, Mr. Speaker, we gave the potash industry 120 per cent depreciation on potash that was, what, \$90?

An Hon. Member: — About 90.

Ms. Atkinson: — \$90 a tonne. Well, Mr. . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh you can say I'm redder than whatever, but you know, this is the level of debate over there. That's the level of debate. There's nothing classy about that, Mr. Speaker.

But the price of potash was, I correct myself, was about \$90. We gave the potash industry 120 per cent depreciation so they didn't have to pay royalties, Mr. Speaker. And when the price of potash is escalating, I think it makes fiscal sense to review it. You know, maybe just a little tad more we might be able to get in order to pay for maybe low-income housing, instead of having to loan guarantee immigrant investor funds. Maybe a little bit more in order to put more money into child daycare in the province of Saskatchewan. Maybe we should do that, Mr. Speaker.

I don't think it's a stretch, but not these people over here. They're onto their spin. They're not thoughtful. They're not thoughtful.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I thought about what it would have been like in the 1990s if these people had been in charge. Well I'll tell you, I'll tell you, they can rip us a new one every day of the year. But I know this: we got this fiscal house of our province in order. I know that.

Secondly, we started the change under Lorne Calvert where people started to come back to the province, you know. And I know the Premier at least has the good graces to acknowledge that, even though the members opposite don't. The last big . . . The largest increase in population came in 2007, Mr. Speaker. Review Statistics Canada. We know that the immigrant nominee program was put in place under the Calvert government which is leading to population growth in the province.

We know that basically the royalty structure for oil, gas, potash, diamonds was put in place and we can review . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . You see, they say now we want to change it. It makes sense. It is prudent to take a look, to take a review. I can't imagine a government not being prepared to at least look at it because it's 120 per cent depreciation when the price per year . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . In terms of their capital investments in the province. Not 100 per cent. Because it was \$90 a tonne. Now it's going up. Maybe we want to review that, Mr. Speaker. Now is the time, Mr. Speaker. Now is the time. Review it. Review it.

Now you see, you don't hear me . . . [inaudible] . . . with the peanut gallery yipping and yapping again instead of paying some attention. It is not inappropriate to review your finances all the time, Mr. Speaker. It is not inappropriate. But these guys, these guys have to spin around the province and say, oh the world is falling in. The world is falling in . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well that's what you're doing.

You know, they're spinning around the province: the world is collapsing — and it's not. Prudent people, good thinkers, fiscally responsible people look at resource rents to see whether or not we're extracting the right price for the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I've spoken beyond my 20 minutes. I want to thank the members opposite for indulging me. But there are two things that this budget does not address, whether they like it or not. It does not address child daycare in the province of Saskatchewan, and it does not address the issue of low-income housing. And with that, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you, I will be supporting the amendment as introduced by my colleagues.

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a number of comments I would like to say about the budget speech, about the budget, Mr. Speaker. I think it's an excellent budget. But after listening to the member opposite, I recognized or realized, I should say, that the speech given by the member from Saskatoon Nutana was the budget speech she never got to deliver as the minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker. This was her opportunity tonight to deliver the budget speech she never had as the minister of Finance, because her stay as the minister of Finance was so short, and she never got to deliver a budget. So the member from Saskatoon Nutana finally got to deliver the budget speech she never had, Mr. Speaker.

I noted in her speech and in the speech of a number of the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, but it was reinforced by the member from Saskatoon Nutana that in 2007 when the Saskatchewan Party defeated the NDP at the polls, that the NDP claim there was \$2.3 billion. Now and when we listen to their speeches, Mr. Speaker, they always say, well we couldn't afford to do that because we didn't have any money. Well, Mr. Speaker, either there was \$2.3 billion there and they had money and they chose not to invest in child care, because there was a dearth of child care spaces in this province, Mr. Speaker.

[20:45]

They chose then not to provide funding for highways that we hear the members from Cumberland and Athabasca complaining about all the time. They even admit that the roads were in terrible shape under the NDP but they had . . . If it's true they had \$2.3 billion, then their NDP chose not to fund those highways, Mr. Speaker.

When they complain about the hospitals and the long-term care and affordable housing, if they had \$2.3 billion at election time in 2007, Mr. Speaker, then they chose not to build those facilities — no hospitals, no schools, no long-term care, no affordable housing, Mr. Speaker, and no highways. That was their choices then if the money was there. So they can't have it both ways. They can't have money in the account and still claim they had no money to be able to carry out those things that the people of Saskatchewan wanted. They can have one or the other, but they cannot have both, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that's what those members always claim.

Now I'd like to return to where I had intended to start, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege and pleasure to be able to serve the constituents of Cannington. And, Mr. Speaker, I remember some of the original speeches of the members opposite in 1991 when they first formed their last round of government, Mr. Speaker. In fact is, I remember the Finance minister of the day, Mr. Ed Tchorzewski, claiming that there had been no debt in 1982 when the Conservatives had defeated the NDP of Allan Blakeney, but that there was a massive debt in 1991.

And yet after persistent questioning of Mr. Tchorzewski, he finally admitted, Mr. Speaker, that indeed in 1982 there was debt in the province of Saskatchewan. We just saw, we just saw, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member from Saskatoon Nutana say that the GRF debt is not just the debt of the province of Saskatchewan. She wants to include the Crown debt. She wants to include the unfunded pension liabilities, Mr. Speaker. Well those things were there in both 1982 and in 1991. They didn't want to count it in 1982, but they sure want to count it now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because . . .

An Hon. Member: — What's changed?

Mr. D'Autremont: — What's changed? They're not the government now. That's what's changed.

For the 16 years the NDP were in government, summary financial statements were not to be seen. Mr. Speaker, no one was to ever refer to summary financial statements. It was GRF only. Well, Mr. Speaker, we talk about both of them. We record both, Mr. Speaker. And in fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the first time that both the GRF debt and the summary financial statements are in a surplus position, Mr. Speaker. Again I was distracted by the member opposite's comments.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to take the opportunity to thank my family for their support over the years. My three children were, I think, eight, seven, and five when I first got elected. Well two of them are adults working on their own, and the last one is in his . . . This will be coming up his final year of university. So it's been a lifetime for them, and it's been a lifetime for me as well.

And, you know, the interesting thing, Mr. Speaker, my constituency assistant started work the same day I did as an MLA. She has been there during the campaign to win the nomination meeting, during the campaign to become an MLA for the very first time, and every time since then. And she still is part of my office . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes. Well one of my colleagues says, if she puts up with me, she should get a medal. In fact is she likes it very much when her husband and I go off on a hunting trip because then she's free of both of us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Cannington constituency has certainly been growing in the last couple or three years. We have seen a huge expansion of the oil industry in our area. Agriculture is doing very well. And as you tour the constituency, you will see that most of the communities are growing. There are new buildings going up in virtually every community. There are at least one new subdivision, if not two or more, going up in the communities. If you look at communities like Camduff, Oxbow, Redvers, Carlyle, Stoughton, Lampman, Wawota, there

are new homes, new businesses going up in every one of those communities.

And fact is, Mr. Speaker, my hometown of Alida, which had probably not grown throughout virtually all of the NDP years starting back to 1944, has seen a significant growth of new homes in the community in the last two years. So, Mr. Speaker, we have a brand new store. We have a new restaurant, and we have a number of oil-field-related service industries as well that are new in the community. And we have a very large trucking company that calls Alida home, Three Star Trucking, that runs probably well over 100 employees, Mr. Speaker. So in a community of 180 people, 100 employees is a lot of people, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, these communities are benefiting from the rules and regulations that have been put in place by the previous administration and our administration, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the oil patch. We haven't changed the royalty rates and that is what's allowing industry to grow.

The fear though is that if the members opposite should ever return to power, which doesn't look like it's going to happen in the near future, but with their statements that royalties need to be reviewed — we need more money so we need to raise those royalty rates, Mr. Speaker — that only scares business away. It doesn't encourage people to come to set up in Saskatchewan, to invest in Saskatchewan, to risk in Saskatchewan, and certainly doesn't encourage them to grow Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And fact is, Mr. Speaker, what we have seen since we have formed government is an expansion of education in the Cannington constituency. Before I was elected, I was on what was called the ad hoc committee for education in the Oxbow School Division, and that took place about 1989, 1990. And part of that discussion was the need to build a new high school, elementary school in Oxbow, Mr. Speaker. So we're talking more than 20 years ago.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a new K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] school in Oxbow. That school was started under the current Minister of Finance, the previous minister of Education, Mr. Speaker. He got approval for that school. And, Mr. Speaker, the current Minister of Education and I will be attending the grand opening, the ribbon cutting ceremony for that school here in a couple of weeks.

So a project that started more than 20 years ago being talked about, had the opposition had the opportunity to meet the need in that area for education, they claim to have \$2.3 billion sitting in their hip pocket in a bank account and chose to not make that investment in the youth of our province. This government has made that investment. As my colleague said, that choice not to make that investment was Roy's rural revenge, Mr. Speaker. Rural Saskatchewan did not vote for the NDP after 1995, and as a consequence of which, the NDP had a scorched earth policy across most of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I may actually get up to 2011 before we're done here, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, throughout all the years . . . And I have a highway that continues to suffer the fate imposed by the NDP, a gravel — well gravel is being generous, Mr. Speaker — a clay

highway, most of which was stuck to the side of my truck until today, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we are building significant roads across this province. We've invested well over \$2 billion in the past three years of rebuilding our highway infrastructure that was allowed not only to deteriorate but disappear under the NDP, Mr. Speaker — more than \$400 million in this budget going into highway construction across this province. We can't get it all done in one year, Mr. Speaker, but we're certainly making a heck of a head start on getting some of it done, Mr. Speaker.

And over the next 10 years, we will more than complete that. Because of all the new growth that's taking place in this province, those highways are still being stressed. And we're going to need to continue to provide support to those areas of the province, especially where the resources are being extracted and where that infrastructure is paying the cost of all that work, hard work and new people coming into the area.

Mr. Speaker, I talked about Oxbow. Well we have a young gentleman from Oxbow working presently in the legislature. Lance Hammell is one of the interns from Oxbow, Mr. Speaker. I saw Lance move up through the school system in Oxbow before the new school was built, and he is certainly a good representative of our area, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture is doing quite well in our area of the province. We have a lot of snow this winter. We had substantial moisture last year, but we weren't nearly as badly affected as most of the rest of the province was, Mr. Speaker. So we're hoping that the weather will turn around, that it will cease snowing, and that the snow will melt and we can finally get on the land and start one of the largest annual investments that any province sees. And it's called seeding, Mr. Speaker, where the farmers of Saskatchewan invest billions of dollars in a risky venture and hope to capitalize on it in the fall.

Mr. Speaker, a number of other things that have been happening in my constituency related to the budget is the investment that is taking place in municipalities. We have seen significant investment through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, both in urban projects, in new subdivisions, new water projects, Mr. Speaker, new water filtration systems, new wells, even a water pipeline, Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, even sewers. The member opposite talks about sewers. Yes, even investments in sewers, none of which happened while he was the minister responsible for any of these things, Mr. Speaker, not even highways. He was the minister of Highways at one point in time, now he complains about the highways he didn't fix, Mr. Speaker. That's why, Mr. Speaker, he's no longer a minister but sits in opposition.

Mr. Speaker, the health care is an important issue in my constituency as well. We have seen new health care facilities go in. We have seen quite a number of new doctors come into our constituency, which is very important, Mr. Speaker, for without doctors, without nurses, we would not have a health care system. What this government has done, we had promised to bring forward 800, recruit 800 new nurses over four years. We succeeded in doing that in less than three years, Mr. Speaker. And Cannington constituency, as many of the other constituencies across the province, have certainly benefited

from this.

[21:00]

One of the areas, Mr. Speaker, that we are benefiting from has been the investment in libraries that have taken place, Mr. Speaker, under the current Minister of Finance, the previous minister of Education, who put a significant capital investment into all the libraries for a SILS [single integrated library system] program which automated a significant number of their systems, Mr. Speaker. This dramatically increased the investment in libraries for that year. While the capital cost has been reduced as an investment to the library system, we still have continued to maintain significantly more money going into the library system than was happening under the previous administration.

And I think it's something that the libraries have all appreciated, Mr. Speaker, and something that we continue to recognize is a very needed educational tool and an opportunity for people to better themselves and for entertainment in reading books. Reading books is very important, Mr. Speaker, and the fact is being a somewhat more senior member of our caucus, I still like the feel of paper when I'm reading a book, Mr. Speaker.

One of the areas that the members opposite have failed to talk about in their speeches, Mr. Speaker, is the reduction of the income tax that occurred in this budget — \$1,000 more deductible, Mr. Speaker. So that means it's \$1,000 less you're paying taxes on. And it doesn't really matter whether you're earning minimum wage, Mr. Speaker, or if you're — to use a name from the opposition side — Bill Doyle, you will not pay the tax on that \$1,000. Now it certainly benefits the person at the lower end of the scale a lot more than it would benefit Bill Doyle, and it has a significant impact across the province.

A family of four earning more . . . or less than \$45,000, Mr. Speaker, would pay no personal income tax in Saskatchewan. That is extremely significant, Mr. Speaker. That allows people to invest in their children's recreation — hockey teams, volleyball teams, figure skating, dance, whatever it might be, Mr. Speaker. That's an additional amount of money that people can advance to their families, Mr. Speaker, or it could be an additional amount of money that they can invest into their community. Because most communities, whether they be the larger urban centres and their smaller communities within those cities or the small communities across rural Saskatchewan, every person in those community invests in their community, in their rink, in their community hall, whatever it might be. They invest both in volunteer time and in cash, Mr. Speaker, as donations for any new projects that need to take place in those communities.

Our community of Alida just rebuilt the community hall here over the last number of years, put cement floor in the rink, rebuilt the swimming pool, Mr. Speaker. There are many recreational facilities and educational facilities that go into these small communities, Mr. Speaker, that are done with volunteer labour and donations.

One of the things that happens throughout the community on a regular basis is a fundraiser for the health care centre or for an

educational opportunity. And fact is a friend of mine, his wife phoned me up the other day and said, I need some money. Oh what do you need some money for? Well I'm in jail. There's a jail and bail at the school in Redvers and I need a contribution. So I sent the lady in question a contribution, and it helped her get out of jail, Mr. Speaker. And the community raised over \$15,000 for school projects in that community. So, Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very good budget.

Now I could start on this part of the speech, but I'm suspicious that the Whip will be tugging at my coattails here very shortly and indicating that it's time for me to wrap it up. But, Mr. Speaker, one of the areas that the members opposite also don't talk about and that's the small-business tax, income tax that was reduced, Mr. Speaker.

We had under the NDP — and it had carried on under this administration — a medium-high level of small-business tax at 4.5 per cent. Well we cut that by over half, down to 2 per cent, Mr. Speaker, making us the lowest small-business income tax in all of western Canada, in all of the new West, Mr. Speaker, and third lowest in Canada. That puts us in a very strong, competitive position for new small businesses moving into this province, Mr. Speaker. They can see that they have an opportunity to grow in this province, along with the province itself, Mr. Speaker. That is good news for the province of Saskatchewan.

The other thing that I haven't heard anybody over on the other side mention, Mr. Speaker, and I guess it is somewhat understandable since none of them actually represent anything outside of a major metropolitan area, Mr. Speaker. We do have the two members from the North, but there's very, very little agriculture takes place there. Mr. Speaker, a major reduction in education property tax has been completed in this province, the largest ever reduction of property taxes in the province of Saskatchewan. The mill rate on agricultural land is reduced to 3.91 mills. Well, Mr. Speaker, before we started on this effort here two years ago, the mill rate in my municipality from education was 21 mills, 21 mills. And we've reduced it down to less than 4 mills, Mr. Speaker, more than an 80 per cent reduction. Every farmer across the province of Saskatchewan benefits from that. Whether they're an owner or a renter, Mr. Speaker, they all benefit from that reduction.

But we didn't forget the rest of the people in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Every residence was also reduced, Mr. Speaker. Every residence was reduced to 9.51 mills, Mr. Speaker. Not as significant as the reduction in agricultural land, but a significant reduction nevertheless.

As well business was reduced, Mr. Speaker, business was reduced. So, Mr. Speaker, back in 1944 Tommy Douglas, the person the NDP put on a pedestal and revere every morning, Mr. Speaker, said that education property taxes on agriculture was unacceptable and needed to change. I don't know if Allan Blakeney said that, but certainly Roy Romanow when he was the NDP premier said that. And Lorne Calvert certainly said it. I was at SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] when he said about education property tax that the status quo was not acceptable.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they had, according to them, \$2.3

billion in the bank, but they couldn't afford to reduce education property taxes. They chose not to do it, Mr. Speaker. This government with the Premier from Swift Current did it, Mr. Speaker. First time in 65 years, Mr. Speaker, and we did it.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier of the Saskatchewan, the member from Swift Current, was named the Politician of the Year. Well I happen to agree with that: the politician of the year in Canada, the politician of the year in Saskatchewan, and the politician of the year in this legislature. Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the budget, voting against the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bradshaw): — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's an honour and a pleasure to join in on the reply to the budget. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is an honour to be here representing the Cumberland constituency.

And I definitely just want to take a few minutes out and recognize some of the individuals that work with me and support me: my wife; my family; Elder Catherine Charles, I just want to acknowledge her; the leadership and community members; and the team that works with me and trying to make sure that we deal with, I guess, the constituency concerns. And I just want to thank my CA [constituency assistant] Al Rivard and the members that help us out and do the job that we need to do in bringing the information forward and their concerns. And it's an honour to represent them and try to deal with their issues. Sometime the issues are, I guess they touch your heart, and you try to do all you can to help them dealing with the different ministries.

But you know, I guess I want to reply to the budget. And you know, you look at the budget and there's record revenue. And I'll give the government that. You definitely have record revenue. You have spent a lot of money. I'll give you that. I think members on both sides have talked about that. And I do, I will give you that. You've spent a lot of money, in four years just about \$40 billion. It's amazing: record revenue. You have picked your priorities. You have made your decisions as a government. And I will get into that a little further on, on comments on whether I feel they were right or wrong. You may feel they are right. And I guess the people spoke, and you will make the decisions for now. Granted that; we'll give it that.

But you know, when you look at the hard times, and there are a lot of people . . . And you can comment about the cuts to income tax. And I think I have to admit, people like to see that, and the cuts are good. So I'll give you that credit, that there is tax cuts. It's good. It helps the economy, whether it's business, individual, a family.

But you know I have to be honest with you. It's very concerning when you left thousands, maybe tens of thousands, maybe a hundred thousand, you left people behind that are not the same income level that others appreciate in this province. They're struggling out there. They're families. They're hard-working. They're trying. And you left them behind. And you can sit here and say, and we can go back and forth and debate it day after day, but you left a lot of people behind in your budget. You didn't take into consideration the challenges.

You had such opportunities. There're people out there that look at the budget. And I know some of the mayors talked about hope and talked about what could be in this budget for them because it was record revenue you had. You had such opportunities — \$40 billion to spend over four years, over four years, what things you could have done to address some of the needs of the trappers, of the trappers, northern trappers. What did you do? Nothing for them. You cut their budgets. So don't stand here and ask what you can do. They've been telling you what you can do.

Then you talk about housing. You talk about the fishing industry in northern Saskatchewan. What did you do there? Nothing. So don't come here and say oh what should we do? They've been telling you. We as MLAs have spoken for them. So don't tell me that, what can we do? But if you're really sincere about that, when we come forward and the leaders, the leaders of the Northern Trappers Association come forward and ask, then I'm glad to see if you're asking, that you're telling us, Mr. Speaker, that they're going to do something. Wonderful, right on, good. So the trappers know that now. You're saying you'll help them. That's good to hear.

I hope you'll do that as well with the fishermen because, I mean, their industry is struggling. You give them an opportunity. You take them out of a monopoly, and then you turn around and don't give them any support to achieve what they need to achieve. So shame on you for that. You're playing games.

But anyway, you want to talk about certain areas. You go into an area and you talk about First Nations and Métis. And yes, you gave them some increase in funding, and I will commend that. This year in your budget, you gave them increase in funding. I give you that. You made some announcements, and that's good. But you know what? You had record revenue. Year one, year two, year three — you did nothing for them but cut their programs. Why is that? But you know what? We know that in six months or so, we'll be into an election, so I guess maybe that's your little incentive. I really don't think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's going to work well with northern people, First Nations, and Métis. They're not going to buy it.

[21:15]

Now we go into the housing area, and we know, we know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we look at housing issues throughout the North, throughout this province. We've had petitions. We've had delegations come here. We've had individuals who are losing their home. They lose their home, a safe place to raise a family, and they talk about it. And then they come up with a plan after the fact. And they put a plan in of 1.7 million, I believe, in the budget for housing but 5 million for, I guess — what was it? — beer, for the off-sale retailers to receive an increase in funding. And good for them, good for them if they got some help from the government.

But it sure shows what they didn't do for the housing. There's their commitment. And that today is pretty sad to see a budget . . . And they can announce things. The eleventh hour, they can announce all they want at the eleventh hour, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They can say, oh we're going to create this housing, a housing plan. Well I think — you know what? — people are

looking at this and they're watching. What will it actually mean? And I think when it's rolled out, the budget, some people will give you the compliment you're looking at, and if they get adequate increase in funding, it's a good thing. There's nothing wrong with that. If they get increase in funding, that's good.

But I'm telling you, there's people out there suffering to make ends meet with utilities, groceries for their family, provide clothing, provide heat. And I see very little to the northern people or people being affected that live in poverty. Whether it's seniors barely making ends meet . . . and you talk about rent controls, and you don't want to look at certain things you run away from. It's pretty sad when you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government that won't commit to protecting our citizens of our province who need the help, and they should be sticking up for those residents.

The government of the day had record revenue and I say that, record revenue. Never seen anything like this, no government, it's a wish list. And they had such opportunities to help the individuals that needed the help. And what did they do? On northern people, First Nations and Métis, for years you turn your back and cut programs. You should be ashamed of yourselves. But on the eleventh hour, they want to reach out. Trust us; we're going to take care of you. So they're going to make the promises, the promises. Why now do you make the promises? Why didn't you start them in your first year when you had revenues that you had? The second year? The third year? But you waited.

And then you sit here saying that mayors are all happy. That isn't so. That isn't so. You're saying that the mayors are all happy. In some areas, you've got compliments; I'll give you that. But in some areas, the mayors are very concerned. And you know it's interesting, watching some of the mayors make comments, and you know you invite them here and you listen. Not all of them left here so happy. And I mean, you know, you think about it. I think one of your old candidates has some issues. He's out there making some comments. So it's interesting what'll happen at the end of the day. I hope he shares that with you because — you know what? — he should share that if he's not happy.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's very clear, very clear. You know, there are mayors who are not happy. There are leaders out there that are not happy, didn't think they got a fair deal in this budget. Record revenue that they have, record spending you guys did and I guess some will say reckless. Some will say you did a good thing. But there are so many people left behind, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This government's vision . . . I don't know who put the plan together, if it was just, you know, a certain few that got to, and maybe some of the special ones with the membership, \$1,000 membership, got into that, and maybe they got their influence in that.

But you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I know a lot of the people back home, and the people that are struggling, and the people that I know and share and talk with, they sure didn't get any input. And they couldn't afford to pay \$1,000 to get in and get any advice. They didn't get to. But I know this. They've made it very clear that they're suffering. Their families are

suffering, and they're trying to make ends meet. And they're very proud. They're trying all they can. And some people work minimum wage jobs, and they try hard. You know, you talk to some of the people that are working two jobs, and they're trying. They'll put in the 14, 16 hours a day to make ends meet.

And then you talk about cuts, tax cuts that some of them will never see. And you say oh everybody's going to benefit from it. It's not so. And I think sometimes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, take a little time and think these things out. You owe that to the people of our province. We all owe that, to defend them.

So you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you see all the different things going on in our province. And you talk about the economics, and a lot of things going on. And you know, you see concerns and you see articles. Well I guess if you think about the Professor Eric Howe and his comments and his concern about the young Aboriginal population, and under this Sask Party government how you failed the Aboriginal population, and he's calling it, he's calling it an economic disaster. He's very clear about that, under your watch, under this government.

So this Sask Party government, Mr. Deputy Speaker — let's make it very clear — they have their priorities, and they have their special friends. And those special friends get sweetheart deals, and we know that. And things will come out as time goes on because I really don't think they can help themselves, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I don't think they can help themselves get the fingers in the cookie jars. You know, it's like my grandma would tell you, same scenario, same scenario. They can't help themselves.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me make it very clear. People are hurting out there, and they want help, and they're expecting the help of a government to come forward with programs. And they expect to be consulted, and they want to feel like their government agencies are listening to them, that their government official are out there doing what they need for all Saskatchewan people, not picking and choosing winners. It isn't right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It isn't right.

Now having said that, you know, you see the challenges on some of the community member's faces. And some of them come into the office, and you listen to what they're going through and the challenges they're feeling, and they feel hopeless. And then you'll have others, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who are scared to come forward, people actually scared whether their business . . . different ones scared to criticize. I wonder why? Why would they be scared to criticize? And that's interesting. Why should they be? It's a democratic process we live in. People should have their views, criticize a budget. And yes, if there are things in the budgets that are good, let's comment about them. But let's be honest. There's been a lot of people — and I said this before, I don't know if it's thousands, maybe it's tens of thousands, maybe it's a 100,000, maybe it's more — that are left behind by this budget. It doesn't deal with their needs, their housing, homeless people.

And, you know, we heard some of the stories from my colleagues today in question period about the suffering of some of their community members, that they won't have a place to sleep at the end of this month. It's pretty sad to see, with record

revenue, a government . . . And you know, there's people who fight. And all over this world, we're seeing the challenges, a democratic process, people fighting for a right, a right to speak out, a right to vote, a right to have a quality of life they feel they should have.

And in this province we talk about the wealth. Yes, it's a beautiful province, a province to be proud of. We have many family members that fought to protect that right in this province. And it is an honour, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to sit in this House and to share the hopes and dreams of our constituents. But I'm telling you; your budget does not address the needs. It doesn't. It falls short. And that I cannot support in your budget.

But I have given you some compliments where, I think, it is right to. Well you know what? Sometimes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know what? It's okay, you know, because I think of it this way. You know, at the end of the day, I hope for the citizens out there that the government will take a second look at some programs.

And when people come forward and they ask for programs, and I think about the trappers. I thought there would be money in it for them, to help them out. And they talk about new programs and they had a program, you know. They wanted to apply for some funding to help at-risk youth, youth that are at risk. And the trappers wanted to reach out to those youth and they wanted a program. This program would actually reach out and maybe save them from being incarcerated, save them from going down a road that is not good for them. So they applied for dollars, and unfortunately — you know what? — there's no money in the budget for them.

And then we get asked to bring your ideas forward. The Environment minister makes it very clear: bring your ideas forward. They didn't bring no ideas forward from the trappers. Well we'll bring the ideas forward. And now I want to see what he'll respond to them. I hope they get the money that they're looking for because it's about time.

Now we talk about our youth and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to be very clear. The youth, our young people, not only in northern Saskatchewan but in our beautiful province, that are suffering. Suicides, addictions — there are many challenges. You know, not all mayors are happy and saying yes it's good to see there's extra money out there to deal with suicide, suicide and addictions. You know, but unfortunately some of them are questioning how much of this money, the new funding, will touch their homes, touch their communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How much of this money in this budget will actually help them with the youth suicide, the addictions, and have a plan?

Now there is a plan. There is a plan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But I look at that and I think this budget falls short of the crisis with our young people. And we talk about education. We talk about education and we look at that. We're saying that we have such a growing population of our First Nations and Métis. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's very clear that this government is trying to reach out in the last minute, in the last minute.

You know, and I've said this before. At the last minute they're going to reach out and now say, it's election year. And they're

going to reach out to them. And I'm telling you, they are going to send you a message. And I encourage people out there, young and old, people that are struggling, people that don't have a place to live, people that are truly living in poverty, people who cannot . . . and are trying to work two jobs to make ends meet for their family — clothes, food, shelter — and they can't afford to do it.

I'm going to tell them this. On election day, we hear all the bravos and all the polling you want. This Sask Party government wants to make it sound like . . . I don't know if they don't care, if they're not listening to those individuals, to the seniors. I don't know if they're not listening to the people that are struggling, homeless, all these different individuals, families that can't make . . . And I don't think they're hearing. But I'm going to say this to them: get out and vote. Send the message to the Sask Party government that you can't be taken for granted, that you have rights, and that you are protected.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget I don't believe goes far enough to help northern people, to help First Nations and Métis, to help . . . A lot of our residents in this province have been left behind by this reckless spending in a budget. They have not addressed . . . And again anyway, and again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, very clearly they have missed and left many people behind, and they will pay a price for that. I know that.

At this time I know a lot of my colleagues would like to join in on the debate, and we're going to get a lot of time to express, I guess, our views on the budget. And at this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm prepared to allow other members to go ahead. And I will be supporting the amendment and not supporting the budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bradshaw): — I recognize the member from Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — It is a pleasure for me to be able to stand in my place and join the debate tonight on this outstanding budget. It's a document for which we have worked diligently. We think that we have addressed many of the needs of the people of this province. It's a document that clearly shares the prosperity of this province across as wide a spectrum as possible.

And it's a document to which much labour and much concern was directed because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the quality of government is often indicated by the budget document. The concerns of a government, the directions of a government, the aspirations of a government, and the aspirations of the people of any jurisdiction, such as the great one in which we live, are often reflected in these budgets. So so much care and attention is given to them as the centrepiece of any government's leadership.

[21:30]

And the title of this particular budget is *The Saskatchewan Advantage*. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't think I've seen a document presented as a budget in this House in my 12 years that more clearly reflects that very reality — the Saskatchewan advantage. We've seen budgets come and go. We've seen them address priorities of different kinds at different times, but none has so clearly addressed the prosperity of the province and the

ability of the people of the province to share in that prosperity. And that's why I'm so proud of this particular document, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Tonight, Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the very real support that I, like other members, enjoy from our families. And in my case of course, my family is now dispersed. I have children in Alberta. I have a daughter now making her temporary residence in Ontario. But my wife and I have started to experience the empty nest syndrome, and as a consequence, we spend more time together. We travel a little more together, and we've really begun an opportunity to enjoy each other's company in a different way.

So I want to acknowledge the support and love of my wife, Marilyn, who is at this time working in the health care centre in the community of Eastend. And we appreciate the opportunity for her to participate in the care of individuals that are residents in that facility. She's developed a real love and concern for the seniors that are residents there, and it's been a mutually beneficial arrangement for her to be employed in that centre.

But I also want to acknowledge the very generous efforts on my behalf by my constituency staff. We have Beth, Glenna, and Carol working in the Cypress Hills constituency office in Eastend. Beth has been with me for 10-plus years now, and she's been a real steadfast soldier on my behalf meeting with the constituents as required, dealing with issues that come to our office on a regular basis. And I can say the same for Glenna and Carol, who are a little more recent but who have taken to their job with real determination and professionalism and, every now and again, just a little bit of relish. They quite enjoy the job, and I appreciate that.

I want to say my own appreciation to the caucus staff, the Saskatchewan Party caucus staff. Researchers and other individuals, particularly those who are in communications and media, have worked very hard on my behalf from time to time. And I think that they often do good work for us, but so often that work goes unrecognized. So tonight I'd like to acknowledge their efforts on our behalf.

And there's one other group I really want to acknowledge tonight. I won't address this particular endeavour in detail, but I also have the opportunity to chair the board of directors for the Global Transportation Hub Authority. And there are a fine group of very professional people working in that office in the leadership team. And they're doing great work on behalf of that project, on behalf of the province, on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan, and they need to be acknowledged tonight as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some of the highlights of this past year in the Cypress Hills constituency would include the response of the communities that were affected by unusual flooding conditions this past summer. And as most people are aware, the community of Maple Creek was hit with a tremendous flood episode on the 18th, 19th of June last year. But the impact of that particular event carried through the whole summer, into the fall, and even now into the winter.

And while I won't go into a lot of detail, Mr. Deputy Speaker, suffice it to say that an episode like that, an event like that

really proves the mettle of a community. It's an opportunity for the community to come together under the most adverse circumstances. But it is those circumstances that really show what a community is made of, what kind of leadership there is in a given community, what kind of perseverance people can and will show under trying circumstances, and how they can move forward after that type of catastrophe.

And the community of Maple Creek, I want to single out as one of the best examples of that community endeavour to rehabilitate itself and to support each other and to work together to achieve great things on behalf of the community. And those who were devastated were assisted by those who escaped the carnage. And seeing the impact on the community and how it's brought them together as a community has been a very rewarding experience for me as the MLA for that area.

It doesn't mean everything went smooth. In fact there were many trouble spots along the way, and there were times at which the government could not respond to the extent that some people expected. But nevertheless our government, through the Ministry of Corrections and Public Safety, through the PDAP [provincial disaster assistance program] program which was tested sorely as a result of all the flood episodes around the province this summer, that all came together in an outstanding way, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I'm very proud of the work that was done by the ministry, by the PDAP staff, and by the community leadership.

Now Maple Creek was most hard hit. But the community of Richmond experienced some flooding. Burstall also experienced some flooding, not overland flooding but seepage, high water tables that impacted so many basements in those communities. The tiny community of Golden Prairie had some issues. There was the odd basement in Sceptre. Even in the community of Leader. So the impact was felt right around my constituency, and PDAP was there in almost every instance to provide support and assistance.

Now there are so many changes that were made to the PDAP program as a result of the experiences of these various communities. I was going to detail them all, but I don't have time tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But I want to contrast, I guess, the response of our government in this crisis to what people had experienced previously because we had from time to time experienced tornados and those types of natural disasters, where claims under PDAP took 18 months to be even heard, basically, to be adjusted for paperwork and the process to unfold. And in the case of the flood, you know, we had the minister on the ground and the Premier there in the community and cheques were issued within just a matter of few short days, initial cheques, to allow people to get started.

Deductibles were improved. The ceilings for claims were raised dramatically. We even had changes to the program that allowed some people to be covered that were always excluded previously. Hutterite colonies were never ever covered by the PDAP program previously. Those changes are now being made. So some of those very significant and crucial changes were part of this year's experience. And I'm glad to be part of a government that was that responsive to the needs, the very real needs of communities that were hurting.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's those kinds of responses, those kinds of reactions to crises that really identify the nature and the soul of the government that is in a position to respond. I mean if you want to wash your hands of things, you can say, these are the rules. We're not changing them. See you around. But if in fact, if in fact you respond to the needs, you address the problems, you are completely understanding of the problems facing the communities that are so affected, that I think speaks to the nature of the government and their concern for the very people who have elected us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about where we're at this year because you may have heard that there's a lot of snow around the province. Well I don't think there's any part of the province that has more snow than the Cypress Hills area. In fact this year is probably going to be pretty close to a record for snowfall, and there's a lot of concern in the Cypress Hills area about a repeat of the flooding circumstances that devastated so many areas last year. And as part of the concern, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government once again has responded proactively by setting aside \$22 million for communities that may be impacted by these flood conditions again. And many communities around the province, including the community of Maple Creek, are taking advantage of some of this funding to take proactive initiatives to help alleviate the impact of any flood that might come.

So once again you've got a government who understands the issue and who has responded, and that's why I am proud to be part of the Saskatchewan Party government and to be able to speak on behalf of this very important budgetary document that will address those kind of concerns for people right where they live, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We had an opportunity in my office to call a number of people in the month of February. So many individuals had phoned our office to talk to us about their concerns with the flood impact and the PDAP program and the adjustments that were being done. So in the month of February, I asked my office and the three people I identified earlier as being my constituency assistants to call every one of those people back — every person who called my office about flood-related concerns. And as it turned out . . . We did up a spreadsheet. As it turned out, there was virtually not a single person who had any criticism of the PDAP program or the officials in the PDAP program with whom they had talked. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that is a tremendous record, given the kinds of devastating impacts some individuals and communities experienced.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I did a media interview with the radio station in Shaunavon today, and I was asked, what is the single thing about this budget that sticks out in your mind? And without having to think for a moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I responded, I think this budget is the most broadly popular document that we could have provided. And the reason is that we have addressed so many issues that were an irritant to so many different people. But not only that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have offered broad-based tax relief across the piece in this budget.

And I just want to identify some of the areas that are most significant. We increased the exemptions, the basic exemptions for individuals, by another \$1,000 each. That's for the spousal

and for the personal basic exemption category. And we increased the exemption for dependent children by \$500 each. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by themselves those numbers aren't all that impressive, but when you consider how much movement has happened in those exemptions over the three years of our government, we now are in the very envious position of being the jurisdiction with the highest exemptions across the piece. There is no province in the country of Canada that has a better track record on that area of taxation. So that translates, Mr. Deputy Speaker, into a family of four being able to earn \$45,550 before they pay 1 cent in provincial tax.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is so impressive — having moved from very far down the pack to the very head of the pack in three short years, over four budgets — that I think the people of Saskatchewan are really quite astounded that that's been accomplished in such a short time frame. But what's really nice about it is that this is representative of where we are as a province and where we as a government have been able to bring this province in the area of taxation.

It's nice to know that we're no longer the poor cousin to Alberta. We're no longer bringing up the rear in so many different areas of endeavour. We are actually leading the nation, and in this category, we are the undisputed leader. And that makes me very happy.

But not only have we got the best record on taxation for individuals and families; we've also been able to remove more than 110,000 low-income earners from the tax rolls entirely. What other jurisdiction could say that, as a percentage of their taxpaying population? I don't think anybody can match that record. And for us to be able as a government to share the prosperity of this province with the most disadvantaged, the low-income workers, the people who are in most need of assistance at that level, for us to be able to do that is a real benefit to our society. And I don't think that we should underestimate the value of that kind of endeavour.

We have had \$420 million in tax cuts and enhanced benefits provided to the people of Saskatchewan through the Saskatchewan Party budgets since 2007, and that's a remarkable record.

[21:45]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also moved to improve the taxation position of small businesses. We've got a reduction in the small-business tax rate. We cut it in more than half. It was 4.5 per cent; we've moved that to 2 per cent. That now becomes the third lowest tax rate in the nation, and this puts our businesses in a much more competitive position and encourages them to expand their businesses and to hire new employees.

But we didn't stop there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We met our promise on the education portion of property tax. We have made dramatic improvements in the taxable portion for property owners and landowners, especially in the agricultural sector, by keeping our promise that we made four years ago. So the education property tax will now be reduced by a further \$55.6 million and that does fulfill our promise to provide tax relief on the education portion of the assessment. So we've got, over the years, \$158.6 million of education property tax relief in total.

Now for agricultural producers, that's an additional \$31.3 million this year, dropping the mill rate from 7.03 to 3.91. We've got a reduction of comparable value in the commercial property sector. And in the residential property sector, the mill rate will decline from 10.08 to 9.51.

We've seen these very deliberate undertakings to benefit the people of this province. So when I hear the NDP say, what did you do with the money or who's benefiting, I can tell you categorically, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of the province of Saskatchewan are benefiting in many, many different ways.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a great night to be talking about the highlights of this budget. There's far too many and way too much material. But I'm not going to stop just yet because I do want to talk about debt repayment. You know, this is a debate, and it frankly . . . It's a debate about opinions, not too much fact. And I'd like to just add my own bit of opinion to this debate.

Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my colleague from Cannington was talking about the \$2.3 billion that the NDP says was in the bank account when the government changed, and where'd the money go? Well the money went straight to paying down General Revenue Fund debt. That's where it went. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that group of men and women, for 16 years, have developed a political legacy based on what they said was the Devine debt. It was the worst possible thing that could afflict this province, if you listen to them speak. That is what they have built their political reputation on.

Now that the Saskatchewan Party is paying off that debt, suddenly it's not such a bad thing. We can't be spending our money on debt repayment. We're wasting our money. You can't have it both ways. It couldn't have been the worst possible thing that could afflict this government, if you want it for political purposes, but when the debt is being repaid, suddenly it's not a bad thing any more. I don't quite understand how they can get around that particular conundrum because it's logically incompatible. And that argument just is fallacious. It's either debt is either a good thing or it's either a bad thing. You can't have it both ways.

But one thing I have discovered, having been around the political horn for a few years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the way the NDP get around that is the following: NDP debt is good debt; debt by anybody else is bad debt. Definitionally that's how they get to their argument. If they generate the debt, it was a good thing. And I've had this discussion with NDPers in my coffee shop who say, if it's a Crown debt it's a good debt because it's self-sustaining. But if it's a General Revenue Fund debt, it's not a good debt because that was a Devine problem.

Well today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, General Revenue Fund debt is down. And if there's any increase in Crown debt it's got to be self-sustainable, by their own definition. It's Crown debt. It's self-sustaining. And in this case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if Crown debt is going up as they assert, it would be to replace the aging infrastructure that they refused to address in their 16 years of government tenure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have farmers whose crops are catching on fire when telephone poles, when power poles collapse in the

field because those poles, even though they've been paying an infrastructure surcharge for who knows how many decades, even though they've been paying that surcharge, none of those poles have been replaced. Those poles have to be replaced. They aren't free. They come at a cost. And when you have to renew the infrastructure that has been left to decay for so many years, then there's going to be a cost associated with it.

And one other thing I'd like to add, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that if in fact the NDP ever get a chance to institute their plan to make 50 per cent of Saskatchewan's power needs renewable, if people think the cost of energy today is expensive, they haven't seen anything yet because every kilowatt of renewable energy will come at an expensive, high cost because there has to be something behind it to guarantee that power. And so the cost really becomes a double cost.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I'm getting the hook. You know, if I was on stage, the stage director would be there with a cane to pull me off. And I think that we are nearing the time when I need to defer and let somebody else have the floor. This budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the finest budget document I have seen in the 12 years I've been in this House. I am proud to support the budget. I will be voting against the amendment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bradshaw): — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Mr. Broten: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to join into the discussion this evening on the budget document. Mr. Speaker, before I get into my remarks I would like to make a few comments. I would like to recognize my wife and daughter who are at home, and I feel very blessed and thankful for their support and the gift of having a child, and it's certainly a special thing to see a little one grow and develop. I'd like to thank my parents as well for their ongoing support and the way that they have been an encouragement over the years.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank my good friend, Linsay, who helps me out in many political endeavours but more importantly is a good friend and an encouragement. As other MLAs have mentioned, of course our CAs do a tremendous amount of work and provide support and friendship to us. To Donna, Ruben, and Bev who help out in the office, I want to say thank you to them.

And constituents, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to meet constituents and to talk with them, whether that's on the doorstep, whether that's in an office, or whether that's online or through social media, Mr. Speaker, it's always a pleasure to get to know constituents.

I should also thank caucus staff, Mr. Speaker. They work long hours and we don't say thank you enough to these individuals but they are here working on our behalf and for the people of Saskatchewan on both sides of the House.

And the last person, but not the least person, I would like to say a hello and a thank you to is my grandma, Ferne Vincent. I know she's in Outlook and watches the legislative channel faithfully when session is on and I want to say hello to grandma. With those remarks, Mr. Speaker . . . I see that the Justice minister also wants to say hello to my grandma and I'm sure my grandma appreciates that.

Budgets, Mr. Speaker, when we're looking at them, they are fundamentally about trust. When we're looking at the expenditures that are made in a variety of fields, billions of dollars being spent, many zeros, Mr. Speaker, it's easy to lose track of the large issues. But when you think about a budget, Mr. Speaker, it is fundamentally about trust.

It's the trust that the people of a province place in a government to act in their best interest, to promote and advance their interests, and to take actions that support everyone in the province.

I think, Mr. Speaker, what we often can tell from the actions of a government, Mr. Speaker, is its true colours when it comes down to specific issues and specific circumstances. I think it's in these instances where we can see the true colours of a government. When billions of dollars are being spent, of course every government is going to get some things right, Mr. Speaker, but they're also going to miss certain things. But it's in the specific events and occasions and sometimes when we have a discussion on a particular item in this Assembly is when the true colours of a government do come through.

And the issue that I would like to talk about, Mr. Speaker, a bit when we talk about the true colours of this government is the takeover attempt that was supported by members opposite with respect to St. Peter's College, a private institution, taking over Carlton Trail Regional College, a public institution. And I think, Mr. Speaker, it's an important story to talk about. And it's an important story for the people of Saskatchewan to know about because it demonstrates the lack of transparency the members opposite have when it comes to finances and it demonstrates a lack of openness with the people of Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, some time ago back in committee in May of 2010, I had the opportunity to discuss with the minister and talk about some of what was appearing on the ground, some problems with respect to what appeared to be a takeover attempt by a private educational institution to a public institution. And, Mr. Speaker, there were many concerns that were raised at that time through committee, through question period, through individuals coming to the Assembly, where individuals were concerned about the process in which the members opposite were pursuing this plan to collapse Carlton Trail Regional College and allocate the public funding that it receives into a private system.

Now, Mr. Speaker, members opposite, especially the minister at the time, brushed off these concerns and said that they were not accurate. But, Mr. Speaker, that approach of brushing off those concerns flew in the face of overwhelming evidence that the ministry's involvement and the minister's involvement and involvement by members opposite with this takeover had been there from the very beginning and, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite were very involved in this process.

Mr. Speaker, a joint board was appointed, a joint board from both organizations to discuss a merger. Now when a merger or a takeover may occur, if two groups want to come together, Mr. Speaker, they ought to be doing so autonomously with clear thinking and sound advice. Mr. Speaker, despite the minister's brushing off of these concerns, he appointed a joint board.

There was also, Mr. Speaker, on this joint board, a ministry official. There was actually someone from the ministry sitting on this board. I assume, because I know civil servants are good at what they do and pass on information, that individual was getting information back to the minister.

Mr. Speaker, we also had the minister approving the siphoning of public dollars from Carlton Trail under the public umbrella to St. Peter's. This was done, Mr. Speaker, through the approval to pay for the CEO's [chief executive officer] salary, the joint CEO, through public dollars. Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, we also saw a huge amount of public resources being funnelled to the private college, Mr. Speaker, in order to grease the wheels for this takeover.

Mr. Speaker, the amount of public funding that was sent to St. Peter's College, a private institution, was \$60,000 per student for building projects. Mr. Speaker, \$60,000 at one institution. The U of R [University of Regina], in the same window of time with respect to receiving funding per student for the available dollars, was 1,430. The U of S [University of Saskatchewan] as a comparison, 1,354. SIAST, Mr. Speaker, facing certainly challenges with space, especially in Saskatoon, 1,317. And, Mr. Speaker, Briercrest, an example of a private institution like St. Peter's, received \$112.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as information has come out about this merger and how it has gone off the rails and how members opposite have been supporting it from the very beginning, it was clear, Mr. Speaker, that there were a number of problems that came forward. There was the fact that public dollars paid for a \$1,000 Sask Party membership in an elite Enterprise Club that the CEO attended. And we can only assume that significant lobbying occurred because based on the amount of funding — \$60,000 versus about \$1,300 for other institutions — it appears the Enterprise membership connection was certainly beneficial for the CEO who has since been fired from the minister.

Also, Mr. Speaker, there's other problems that have, that have been brought to the minister's attention: a missing Sony television as one example, double claims for reimbursement for travel. And, Mr. Speaker, there were instances where members opposite were alerted to concerns with the process and with concerns around ethics and governance at Carlton Trail. We know of at least two emails that went to the minister's office. This was not enough to alert red flags. And, Mr. Speaker, so for now, for members opposite to suggest that they did not know what was going on, to suggest that this was a total surprise to them, to me, Mr. Speaker, is not believable. There are too many points of contact for members opposite to be alerted to problems. And so now, Mr. Speaker, what we see is an attempt by the minister and members opposite to blame others, to blame everyone else except the individual looking back them in the mirror. We know that they appointed the joint CEO. We know that they appointed the board with Sask Party insiders. I think the former Finance minister might know about that.

[22:00]

And now we see, Mr. Speaker, the minister desperately attempting to blame others as opposed to taking responsibility. That minister . . . but it's not only the one minister, Mr. Speaker. While members on the front bench and the benches

behind have been happy for the minister to be taking heat on this issue, I think there's also tension between members or among members on this issue. And I think, Mr. Speaker, there are other members who certainly were alerted to red flags and should have acted. I think members opposite, especially those in the area who had conversations and interactions with people on a daily basis, I think for them to claim that no one talked to them about concerns with the merger, that no one talked to them about some of the things that may have been going on, I think, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite had a decision in mind, had a course that they had charted already, and were plowing straight ahead.

I think, Mr. Speaker, the member from Humboldt, given her connections in the community and her connections to the board, had many opportunities, Mr. Speaker, to hear what was going on. I also think the member from Silver Springs, Mr. Speaker, had conversations with individuals when they were alerted to problems. I think also, Mr. Speaker, the member from Batoche also had conversations with individuals and was alerted to problems. I don't know about the Minister of Justice. I know that the file has now been referred to his ministry, and he's claiming that he hasn't seen anything, but I don't know. I think the Minister for Social Services also may have had individuals who spoke to her about problems and these concerns.

And they laugh now, Mr. Speaker, because that is the approach that they're taking, one of blaming and one of simply shrugging off any sort of criticism. And that is the approach that they have taken in this process all along, despite the fact that their fingerprints have been involved in this process throughout.

Now members opposite don't like this, Mr. Speaker. They don't like this conversation because for them, Mr. Speaker, they recognize that there are problems. And now they're actively engaged in a process of dragging their heels with respect to getting to the bottom of this ordeal. Under much pressure, they finally agreed to the fact that a forensic audit ought to occur, Mr. Speaker, when instead of being clear with timelines, with expectations, Mr. Speaker, they are more than happy, more than happy to slow walk this along, Mr. Speaker, hoping that the problems that could be found will not cause problems for them.

Mr. Speaker, I think when we see this one example of a government that was more than happy to collapse a public college and roll it into a private institution, Mr. Speaker, I think it demonstrates the members opposite can't be trusted with finances. I think it shows a disregard for public dollars and a proper control and oversight of those dollars. I think also, Mr. Speaker, that it shows that they do not always act in the best interest of the public. And I say, Mr. Speaker, with respect to a large amount of public dollars flowing to private institutions, when compared to other public, compared to public institutions being funded in a much lower level, Mr. Speaker, I think that is yet another concern.

And then when problems are exposed in the open, Mr. Speaker, instead of owning the problems and admitting that they have been involved from the very beginning, what we see is the blame game, blame game. We see an approach of deny, deny, deny on every opportunity. . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well you know, the Minister of Advanced Education can comment on a colour of tie, and sadly that's the level of debate that this

issue has spiralled downwards to when dealing with him on this topic, Mr. Speaker. Instead of honestly talking about the issues about public accountability, the minister would prefer to talk about colours of ties. And I think that's a sad commentary, Mr. Speaker, but it is very fitting with respect to the process that this merger has unfolded and also fitting as an indicator with respect to the type of proper foresight and thoughtful consideration that a merger such as this should have received.

Mr. Speaker, I think that story that I shared sets the stage and describes how, when it comes to issues of public finances and public trust, members have demonstrated that they are more interested in other motives as opposed to the interests of the public.

When looking at the budget, as I said, Mr. Speaker, when any government spends a budget the size of Saskatchewan's, there are going to be things that are positive in there and that are an encouragement to Saskatchewan people. There will be programs that have been started or continued. And I think that that is a good thing. But budgets, Mr. Speaker, also have instances where there are concerns or problems.

In my critic area, my one critic area of Advanced Education, Mr. Speaker, we have seen that education tuition for post-secondary students has steadily climbed over the past years. And I know for students that is a concern. The 3 per cent increase that is slated for this coming year, Mr. Speaker, is not necessarily a 3 per cent increase evenly across the board, where it is quite possible that some colleges will be affected more so than others. And so I know for many post-secondary students, tuition is a real problem. Tied directly to tuition is the issue of affordability and rents, affordability for all aspects of life. And I know that's an additional pressure that students feel.

When we think of our educational institutions, specifically at the university in Regina, and we think of the graduate programs, I know this budget . . . and without extending the benefit of the graduate retention program to master's and Ph.D. graduates, I identify that as another area where, Mr. Speaker, where I think more could be done to assist those who are most highly educated in our society.

In the area of education, Mr. Speaker, well there have been some things that are appropriate and right in this budget. There are some problems that members before me have identified. The member from Nutana talked about a real shortage in this province of early learning child care spots and how that is a pressure for many families. And while there are certain steps in this budget to address that, Mr. Speaker, we know when the budget . . . We know that any steps that are being made, Mr. Speaker, that the need is very great and that must be taken into consideration when decisions are being made. The YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] released a report saying that we were last in the country with respect to regulated child care spaces.

You know, Mr. Speaker, a few members before me have identified the issue of the \$5 million beer subsidy for off-sale for the retailer selling, Mr. Speaker, and I think when we look at the \$5 million for that and how that may have helped more child care spaces or any number of the issues, certainly is a concern. And I'm not certain, Mr. Speaker, that with that \$5

million subsidy for beer that, you know, an individual's six-pack of Pilsner will actually be cheaper when they pick it up.

And, Mr. Speaker, another area where there's a shortfall in this budget with respect to education is the failure of the government to live up to its promise to provide a long-term and stable, predictable funding for education, a formula for education funding here in the province. Despite making changes to the education property tax system and promising school boards . . . We've seen a situation now where the School Boards Association says they are operating in a state of limbo and not being able to do the long-term planning that is required and that they are so good at doing.

We can also think, Mr. Speaker, how the budget has not addressed needs for teachers and educational professionals, a lack of recognition from earlier statements made by the previous Education minister with respect to reductions in EAs [educational assistants] that should occur. No clear statement that that is an improper thing. And we also see, Mr. Speaker, that the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation has characterized this budget as having a lack of imagination and certainly not addressing needs for teachers in the province.

Mr. Speaker, while there are a number of issues, I know time is limited on this topic and I know that other members want to speak on this budget. I will say, Mr. Speaker, that this budget is about trust, I think demonstrated by the St. Peter's College and Carlton Trail merger takeover that was backed by the minister and members opposite. I think that gave a clear example. The members can't be trusted on financial matters and on openness and transparency. I think that clouds this budget and I think it clouds the decisions that are being made, because it's characteristic of an overall approach that this government has taken, as opposed to being open and transparent. They have sought an approach of secrecy.

Mr. Speaker, I think this budget doesn't do enough for university students. I think this budget doesn't do enough for early learning spots. I don't think this budget does enough in meeting the promises that were made by members opposite with respect to funding the education system. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks, and I will not be supporting the government's motion but I will be supporting the amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bradshaw): — I recognize the member from Prince Albert Northcote.

Mr. Furber: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that. I'm pleased tonight to join in the budget debate for the budget that was released this year. But first I'd like to say some thank yous, as many other members have. I'd certainly like to take this opportunity to thank my wife for her incredible support. She's always there for me when I need her. And certainly we do spend a lot of time apart, and I know that's not the easiest thing in the world. So I'd like to thank her for her patience in my chosen field of work.

I'd also like to thank my constituency assistants. They do an amazing job, both in the constituency office and in helping many other people in the community. They volunteer for a

number of different activities related to community development, and I'd like to thank them for their dedication both to the work that they do in the constituency office and outside. So thanks, Rose and Caroline, for that.

I'd like to thank my family, like many other members have, because they are incredibly supportive. They work very hard and make sacrifices for me to do this job. And that goes right down to my nieces who have birthdays delayed so that their uncle can attend when he's back from the legislature. So I appreciate that. And certainly I do bring them a big gift on occasion, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to thank the members of my indoor soccer team who will have just completed the semifinal tonight. I'm not sure if we won or not, but if we did, I'm looking forward to playing in the league final on Friday night here, Mr. Speaker.

Now the folks in Prince Albert have weighed in on this budget, and I've heard from many of them. And they talk about this budget and ask whether or not it's something that they can believe. Is this a believable document, Mr. Speaker? And so I would ask the members of the government if this is a credible budget.

Because there have been promises made to the city of Prince Albert by the Premier, by this government over the last, well over four years because it was in the run-up to the election, Mr. Speaker, and we see those promises unfunded. We see that the government has had record revenues for the last number of years. But they still, with record revenues and, incredible as the taxpayers federation believes, about \$8 billion more than they should have been spending, they still don't have enough money to keep their promises to the city of Prince Albert. And so that's sad, Mr. Speaker. So they're asking me if you can believe this budget.

Did they keep the promise to provide funding for a second bridge, Mr. Speaker? No, they did not. The Premier took his occasion to stand on the bridge for a photo op with the paper with then Mayor Jim Stiglitz and say that Prince Albert should have a second bridge. Is there any money in four years for a second bridge? None, Mr. Speaker.

He promised in the run-up to the election that there would be airport improvements if the Saskatchewan Party government was elected. Have we seen a dime of provincial money for airport improvements, Mr. Speaker? Not a dime.

They promised two years ago a long-term care facility for seniors in Prince Albert, and they have not built one bed of the long-term care facility that was promised to the people of Prince Albert over two years ago.

Now the seniors' centre in Prince Albert that they were supposed to have funded with these record revenues, but chose not to, is called Pineview Terrace, Mr. Speaker, Pineview Terrace Lodge. And it's an aging facility with a bunch of wonderful people who stay there, and they deserve a better facility, Mr. Speaker. They deserve it. And certainly they're questioning why this government would choose the residents of Pine Grove over the residents of Pineview Terrace. It's inexplicable to them that they would do that.

[22:15]

Now another place where you might ask, can you believe this budget document, can you believe anything that's in here, Mr. Speaker, relates to housing. Now this housing issue has been a pretty amazing one this last couple of weeks if you followed it, Mr. Speaker. Because if you look at their different budget documents, for the same program, for the same amount of money, a paltry amount, they say that it's going to first build 300 homes. And in another budget document from the same year, handed out at the same time, it says that they're going to build 350 homes with this money. And then in a flyer that goes around to every mailbox in Saskatchewan, that flyer says that with the exact same money, they're going to build 650 units, Mr. Speaker. So how is it that in their own budget document they can't figure out . . . It's not an auction sale, Mr. Speaker. This is not an auction sale to see where the highest bid ends. But yet we see, just this week, a week after the budget is brought down, the members opposite come out with a scheme for housing.

They come out with a scheme for housing because in their own budget they've got \$5.1 million for beer to reduce the cost, not for the people of Saskatchewan but for vendors. They've got \$5.1 million for beer and \$1.7 million for actual housing. Three times as much for beer as for housing, Mr. Speaker. So you have to ask yourself, have they had a plan for housing? We've been certainly raising the issue for three years. And certainly the response has been absent if there's been any at all. And it's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that they've got three times as much money for beer discounts as they do for housing.

And, Mr. Speaker, their housing program that they just announced this week, the week after the budget comes out, they couldn't get it ready for the budget because the napkin that they'd written it on got lost. However they have a housing program where the price of housing is not cheaper. It's not any less expensive for people.

So only the Saskatchewan Party government could provide \$5.1 million for beer and not make beer cheaper for Saskatchewan residents. Only the Saskatchewan Party government could say that they are going to provide \$230 million for housing and not make housing any cheaper for Saskatchewan residents. Only this Saskatchewan Party government could have math that's that inaccurate and that bad, Mr. Speaker.

Now another story that you have to ask yourself whether or not this document is believable, they have sent around in that same flyer that I had referenced earlier a comment that the public debt of Saskatchewan is going down. That's what they say, Mr. Speaker. But here we have the 2011 and '12 budget summary, and what does it say on page 61, Mr. Speaker? What does it say? It says that by 2015 the total debt of the province of Saskatchewan is going to increase by \$2.5 billion, \$2.5 billion. And so what they've done is they've shifted money from the GRF, the debt from the GRF, and applied it to the Crowns. They're hiding all of the debt that they can hide in the Crown corporations of the province of Saskatchewan.

And one of the speakers tonight from the Saskatchewan Party, the member from Cypress Hills, says that the reason that you move debt from the GRF to the Crowns is because Crown debt

is self-sustaining. That's what he said. But he doesn't recognize, Mr. Speaker, that the people of Saskatchewan are the people that pay the bills for the Crown corporations in Saskatchewan. It's hard to imagine that debt is self-sustaining when it's every person in Saskatchewan who owns a piece of those Crown corporations and is forced to pay bills in those Crown corporations and certainly pay for the debt of the province of Saskatchewan, whether it's in the GRF or in the Crown corporations in the province of Saskatchewan. So, Mr. Speaker, it's another reason, another sad reason that this budget document is not to be believed.

Now if you look at where you believe that the government priorities should be, certainly if you make any passing reference even to the demographics in the province of Saskatchewan, we have before us a tremendous opportunity with the Aboriginal population. Certainly the constituency of Prince Albert Northcote is blessed to have an extremely young population and a high percentage of Aboriginal people living in Prince Albert Northcote. And we're blessed with those people, Mr. Speaker, and they need an opportunity. They need opportunities in the modern economy of Saskatchewan. And what has happened over the last year, Mr. Speaker? What has happened? The employment of Aboriginal people has gone down by 10 per cent, 10 per cent, Mr. Speaker. And one of the province's leading economists has called the Government of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal employment record an economic disaster. And so you would think, Mr. Speaker, that you would do something to address Aboriginal employment in the budget, but there is a woeful response, a woeful response to something that has been called an economic disaster.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you have to ask yourself, even with record revenues, even with record revenues, is the budget this year and budgets from previous years, are we on a sustainable trajectory? Because in spite of the fact that there are record revenues, spending has outstripped those revenues. The spending in the province of Saskatchewan . . . Mr. Speaker, these people, the members of the Saskatchewan party government, will call themselves conservatives. But they are absolutely not fiscal conservatives because if you look at spending in the province of Saskatchewan over the last four years, it has increased by 40 per cent. This budget is another step in the incredible increase in the budget, year over year in the province of Saskatchewan, up 40 per cent from what it was in 2007.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, the budget is not believable. It's not credible. And you have to ask yourself, well in terms of the housing announcements, in terms of the numbers in the budget where there is not one dime set aside for a contract with teachers, where there is no money set aside for health care workers and the contract that they're negotiating right now, are the totals in this document believable?

Well I would argue that this budget is no different than the announcements that they've had on carbon capture and storage, where they announced a grandiose scheme. The Premier agreed with the Governor of Montana, who said that it was one of the best things to happen since going to the moon. And what happened to that, Mr. Speaker? It blew up.

The government announced that they were going to start nuclear power in Saskatchewan, that there was going to be a

nuclear power plant built in Saskatchewan. That blew up. Then they said that they were going to go after the federal government for nuclear isotopes and they were sure that that was going to work. That didn't work.

Then they said that we should have a domed stadium in Saskatchewan, and that didn't work. They promised again, Mr. Speaker, long-term care facilities, 13 long-term care facilities for Saskatchewan. That hasn't happened.

They promised last year, about 370 days ago, that there would be a housing program called Headstart housing and, Mr. Speaker, the program was reannounced yesterday by the Minister of Social Services and her announcement was ruled out of order by the Speaker because it was something that was a reannouncement from a year ago and was not allowed in the legislature. And, Mr. Speaker, this is their answer to a housing crisis in the province of Saskatchewan. So it is hard to believe, Mr. Speaker.

Now one of the other . . . Not only is housing in a crisis, Mr. Speaker, but health care in Saskatchewan is also in a crisis and certainly that's no more true than in rural Saskatchewan. They've closed hospitals in Spiritwood and Big River and they have no plan of reopening. There's certainly nothing in this budget that would make you believe that they're addressing the health care concerns of the people in rural Saskatchewan. And it's gotten so desperate, Mr. Speaker, that there are many, many RMs [rural municipalities], communities, towns who are raising money and increasing taxes for doctor recruitment. It was another program that was announced a number of years ago by this government that is smouldering on the ground and burning. Like carbon capture, nuclear power isotopes, domed stadium, the doctor recruitment strategy is a failure.

And what makes me say that, Mr. Speaker, I'm referring to a letter that was sent by a councillor in the town of Arcola. And remember that this is a part of the constituency where their own government member said that the constituents of Cannington could either choose highways or health care. And unfortunately somebody must have had an Enterprise membership and chose highways because health care is in a shambles.

The Moose Mountain Health Care Recruitment corporation is an operation that is attempting to recruit physicians to that area, Mr. Speaker. And the member, the councillor from the town of Arcola who wrote this letter, is a part of the committee. And she has been working diligently to find a strategy in order to recruit doctors to their area. And, Mr. Speaker, what does she say about the health care strategy? What does she say about what the Saskatchewan Party government has done for rural health care in her community? She says this. She says that we must remain vigilant in our recruitment and fundraising efforts. We cannot count on the health region or the government to provide us with health care.

So that's the feeling of the people from the town of Arcola, Mr. Speaker. The government, we cannot count on the government to provide us with health care. Mr. Speaker, in the province of Saskatchewan where medicare was invented and had been nurtured and built under the NDP, we have a situation where in rural Saskatchewan today they're saying that we cannot count on the government to provide us with health care.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are many, many reasons that this budget fails. It fails on housing. It fails on health care. It fails because it doesn't provide for seniors in the city of Prince Albert. There are many of whom who will be hurt by a broken promise from this government.

And, Mr. Speaker, there are, because of these and many other reasons — because the residents of the constituency of Cannington are forced to choose between highways and health care, because the long-term care patients and patrons in the city of Prince Albert, the government chose for them to support Pine Grove over Pineview, and because this government chose beer over housing in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker — I cannot support this budget, and I will be supporting the amendment this year. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bradshaw): — The time now being 10:30, this Assembly stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:30.]

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President of the Executive Council

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

Hon. Bill Boyd
Minister of Energy and Resources
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