



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

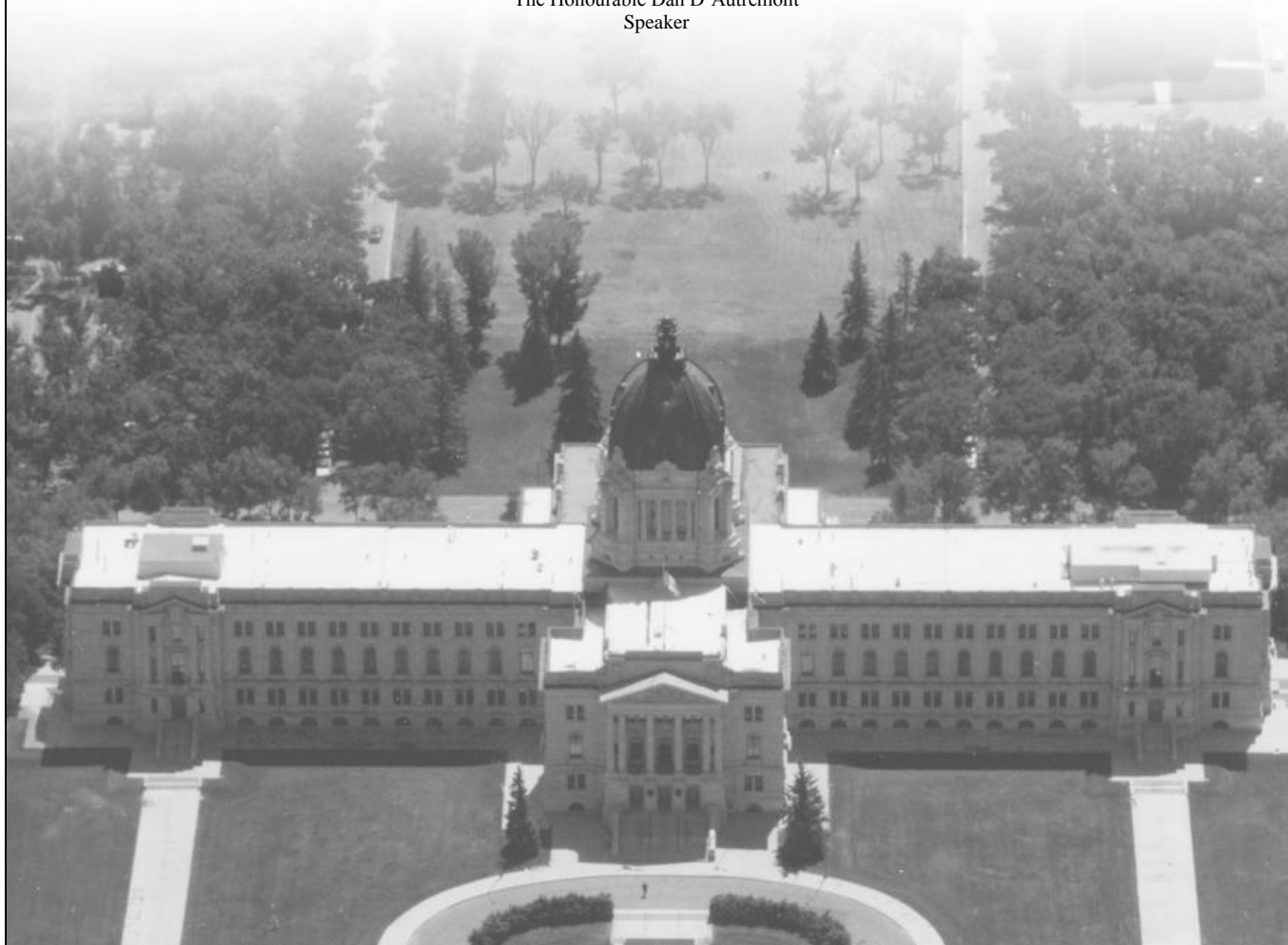
of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Dan D'Autremont
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Speaker — Hon. Dan D’Autremont
 Premier — Hon. Brad Wall
 Leader of the Opposition — John Nilson

Name of Member	Political Affiliation	Constituency
Belanger, Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornerud, Hon. Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
Boyd, Hon. Bill	SP	Kindersley
Bradshaw, Fred	SP	Carrot River Valley
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
Broten, Cam	NDP	Saskatoon Massey Place
Campeau, Jennifer	SP	Saskatoon Fairview
Chartier, Danielle	NDP	Saskatoon Riversdale
Cheveldayoff, Hon. Ken	SP	Saskatoon Silver Springs
Cox, Herb	SP	The Battlefords
D’Autremont, Hon. Dan	SP	Cannington
Docherty, Mark	SP	Regina Coronation Park
Doherty, Kevin	SP	Regina Northeast
Doke, Larry	SP	Cut Knife-Turtleford
Draude, Hon. June	SP	Kelvington-Wadena
Duncan, Hon. Dustin	SP	Weyburn-Big Muddy
Eagles, Doreen	SP	Estevan
Elhard, Hon. Wayne	SP	Cypress Hills
Forbes, David	NDP	Saskatoon Centre
Harpauer, Hon. Donna	SP	Humboldt
Harrison, Hon. Jeremy	SP	Meadow Lake
Hart, Glen	SP	Last Mountain-Touchwood
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Hickie, Hon. Darryl	SP	Prince Albert Carlton
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Jurgens, Victoria	SP	Prince Albert Northcote
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Krawetz, Hon. Ken	SP	Canora-Pelly
Lawrence, Greg	SP	Moose Jaw Wakamow
Makowsky, Gene	SP	Regina Dewdney
Marchuk, Russ	SP	Regina Douglas Park
McCall, Warren	NDP	Regina Elphinstone-Centre
McMillan, Hon. Tim	SP	Lloydminster
McMorris, Hon. Don	SP	Indian Head-Milestone
Merriman, Paul	SP	Saskatoon Sutherland
Michelson, Warren	SP	Moose Jaw North
Moe, Scott	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
Morgan, Hon. Don	SP	Saskatoon Southeast
Nilson, John	NDP	Regina Lakeview
Norris, Hon. Rob	SP	Saskatoon Greystone
Ottenbreit, Greg	SP	Yorkton
Parent, Roger	SP	Saskatoon Meewasin
Phillips, Kevin	SP	Melfort
Reiter, Hon. Jim	SP	Rosetown-Elrose
Ross, Hon. Laura	SP	Regina Qu’Appelle Valley
Sproule, Cathy	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Steinley, Warren	SP	Regina Walsh Acres
Stewart, Lyle	SP	Thunder Creek
Tell, Christine	SP	Regina Wascana Plains
Tochor, Corey	SP	Saskatoon Eastview
Toth, Don	SP	Moosomin
Vermette, Doyle	NDP	Cumberland
Wall, Hon. Brad	SP	Swift Current
Weekes, Randy	SP	Biggar
Wilson, Nadine	SP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Wotherspoon, Trent	NDP	Regina Rosemont
Wyant, Gordon	SP	Saskatoon Northwest

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on a Point of Order

The Speaker: — Yesterday the Opposition House Leader raised a point of order concerning the accuracy of a statement by the Minister of Health made during question period. The comment is in regard to the New Democratic Party's election platform. I have now had an opportunity to review the record, and I am prepared to rule on the point of order.

Essentially this is a dispute about the accuracy of statements made by a member. The Speaker has always maintained that the accuracy of statements is a matter of debate and has consistently ruled as such. I find the point of order not well taken.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan — and I'm sure I'll be joined by the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in a moment — I just want to say to all of our guests who are here for some reason today, that we want to welcome each and every one of them to their Legislative Assembly. Obviously today's an important day in the life of this province when the budget's brought down. And there are many groups here who work hard in their own respective communities, represent other associations that are impacted, obviously, by the budget. We welcome them here today to their Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and we trust they'll enjoy the proceedings.

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

Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, I would also like to greet all of the visitors who are here today. And I especially want to thank each and every one of you for the role you provide as leaders within the province of Saskatchewan. There's no question that the budget day today is important for all of the people of Saskatchewan, but it's especially important for you as leaders because you have to work with the resources that are available for you. So it's very nice to have you here today, and I thank all of you for your good work. Thanks.

The Speaker: — I would like to join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition and welcome all the guests here today. And please remember not to participate in proceedings in the House, and that includes applause.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise

today to present a petition calling for greater protection for late-night retail workers by passing Jimmy's law. We know in the early morning hours of June 20th, 2011, Jimmy Ray Wiebe was shot two times and died from his injuries. He was working at a gas station in Yorkton, alone and unprotected from intruders.

But we also know that there are positive statistics that show convenience store and gas station robberies are down by one-third since 1999, largely due to increased safety practices, including two people working together on late-night shifts. I'd like to read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: cause the Government of Saskatchewan to immediately enact Bill 601, Jimmy's law, to ensure greater safety for retail workers who work late-night hours.

The people signing this petition come from Grayson, Yorkton, Big River, Ituna, and Regina, Prince Albert, and Spruce Home. I do so present. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the government's poor handling of the situation at St. Mary's Villa in Humboldt, I have a petition calling on the government to support the seniors' bill of rights:

We, the undersigned residents of the province of Saskatchewan, wish to bring to your attention the following: that many Saskatchewan seniors live on fixed incomes and are victims of physical, emotional, and financial abuse; that Saskatchewan seniors have a right to social and economic security and a right to live free from poverty; that Saskatchewan seniors have a right to protection from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan to enact a Saskatchewan seniors' bill of rights which would provide Saskatchewan seniors with social and economic security and protection from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of trappers of Saskatchewan. The current regulations being enforced are creating challenges that are a concern to our traditional trappers. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to recognize that the experience gained through practical experience be valued; and in so doing to cause the government to review the current legislation and

regulations with respect to trapping regulations and firearm use in consultation with traditional resource users.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

It's signed by many good people of northern Saskatchewan. I so present.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Support for People with Disabilities

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government of Saskatchewan has been working to make Saskatchewan the best place in Canada for people with disabilities to live. Over the last four years, 76.9 million has been invested in reducing patient wait-lists for people with intellectual disabilities; the Saskatchewan assured disability program, SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability], was introduced; and 40 million was spent for 353 housing units for people with disabilities.

Today we have taken additional steps towards improving the quality of life for between 8 and 10,000 people with disabilities in Saskatchewan. The improved benefits that result from the expansion of the SAID program are welcome developments for our 38 member organizations. Two hundred dollars a month more will go into the pockets of single disabled people who live independently, and an additional \$100 will go to those living in residential care.

The SAID program was initially launched in 2009 as a mechanism that provides money to people with disabilities. SAID is different than social assistance and is involved in collaborative partnership between government and community in all aspects of design and implementation.

People with disabilities contribute greatly to our society. They're excellent, dependable members of the labour force and caring members of our families and communities. Please join me in applauding the contributions of disabled people in our communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Athabasca.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the UN's [United Nations] International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Many events and activities are planned worldwide on March 21st each year.

This day aims to remind people of racial discrimination's negative consequences. It also encourages people to remember their obligation and determination to combat racial discrimination. Canada is home to an amazing source of diversity. With people representing all corners of the world, we are a role model for other countries, an example of successfully welcoming all Canadian citizens into Canadian society.

However, life in Canada is not easy. We recognize that there's a long road ahead for many and a greater effort needs to be made by all to end racism. As a country and as citizens, we must keep striving and join the international effort to eliminate all forms of discrimination. I urge all the people of Saskatchewan to participate in community activities and get involved to learn more about each other. On behalf of the New Democrats and our members, I hope one day we can live in a world where racism and discrimination no longer exist. For me, former Premier Tommy Douglas summed it best when he said, courage my friends, 'tis not too late to build a better world. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Steinley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we recognize the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which is observed annually on the 21st of March. On that day in 1960, a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville, South Africa, against the apartheid pass laws ended in tragedy.

In 1966 the United Nations recognized those atrocious events by declaring March 21st an International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Proudly, Canada was one of the first countries to recognize the proclamation. Since then the apartheid system in South Africa has been dismantled. Racist laws and practices have been abolished in many countries worldwide. An international framework for fighting racism has been created, guided by the international convention on the elimination of racial discrimination.

We must learn from the tragedies of the past and together move forward to create a brighter tomorrow. The first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination reminds us of our collective responsibility for promoting and protecting this principle.

Mr. Speaker, let us honour the memory of those who died in Sharpeville and other racist incidents by redoubling our efforts to eradicate all forms of racism and racial discrimination. And above all, Mr. Speaker, we should cherish the rich diversity of humankind and respect the inherent dignity and equality of every human being. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Saskatoon Film Company Benefits City and Province

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Speaker, Karma Film annually produces four and a half million dollars in film and television projects in Saskatoon and area, creating over 125 jobs in a variety of positions in this cultural industry. Karma Film is a Gemini award winning production company based in Saskatoon and is well known for projects like the TV series, *Wapos Bay*.

Saskatoon Nutana resident and company founder, Anand Ramayya, is dedicated to supporting original voices and original film for the international marketplace. In the last three

months, Karma has wrapped up the filming of two feature productions in and around Saskatoon. Recently I had the opportunity to visit the set of their film, *Rufus*, starring David James Elliott who is best known for his role on the television show, *Jag*. It will be released this fall, and they are expecting recognition at Sundance and international film festivals in Toronto and Berlin.

The film industry in the province has faced challenges in the 10 years Karma Film has been operating. When asked what the one thing he would like to see happen to encourage growth and development, Ramayya says:

I would say we need to do as much as we can to support the development of filmmakers and storytellers from here. If you do that, everything else will follow. They'll start making more and more projects happen.

Anand Ramayya's leadership, vision, and hard work are inspiring. In just 22 days, *Rufus* brought \$150,000 into Saskatoon in accommodations alone. This is just one small example of how a production can directly benefit the city and the province. Cultural industries are surviving in Saskatchewan and could thrive with more support from our government. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Martensville.

Province Experiences Positive Growth

Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the positive growth our province continues to experience. Saskatchewan's population growth continues to be among the country's leaders, with our province's current population estimated at 1,067,612, growing by over 17,000 people in the last year alone.

Two of the top six Canadian communities that have experienced the biggest population increases are located in my home constituency of Martensville. The city of Martensville and the town of Warman continue to be recognized as two of Saskatchewan's and Canada's fastest growing communities, with populations of 7,716 and 7,084 respectively. Combined they have an average population growth of 52 per cent since 2006.

And why are more people returning to our province or choosing it as a first-time home? I believe it's for a number of reasons: a growing economy, employment opportunities, and of course, Mr. Speaker, strong, stable, and positive political leadership.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has always been a welcoming province and a great place to raise a family. Our government will continue to ensure that the rest of the world knows that the Saskatchewan advantage is here to stay.

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

Aboriginal Police Preparation Program Graduation

Ms. Campeau: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on Friday my colleague from Wood River had the honour of

attending the Aboriginal police preparation 2011-12 graduation and banquet.

The Aboriginal police preparation program was developed by SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] and the Saskatchewan police Aboriginal recruitment committee to assist and engage Aboriginal recruits as well as other candidates to successfully gain entrance into policing careers. The course provides individuals with a wealth of information from criminal law to ethics and history of policing. The 40-hour security guard training that is required by the province to work in the field of security is now part of the program, allowing students to be licensed upon completion of the course, and employed immediately.

The achievements of each member of the Aboriginal police preparation program were celebrated during this graduation. Twelve men and 10 women, joined by family and friends, were recognized for their hard work, dedication, and commitment. This program has been running in Regina for five years and has seen a total of 101 students graduate. Mr. Speaker, this program and its graduates showcase the positive steps being taken to address the issue of crime in our province.

We want each graduate to know that we are proud of their accomplishment and that we are extremely grateful for the steps they have taken to make this province a great place to live. Congratulations, graduates. Thank you.

[13:45]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Fundraiser for New Long-Term Care Facility in Biggar

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 11th, 2012, the Friends of the Lodge Valentine Dine, Dance, and Auction fundraiser was held for the new long-term care facility at the Biggar Community Hall. To date the Friends of the Lodge have raised over \$325,000, which will go against the \$550,000 fundraising goal to replace furnishings and equipment for the long-term care project slated to replace the Biggar Diamond Lodge.

A week before the event, tickets sold out, making the event the hottest ticket in town. The real success was reflected in the rave reviews the event elicited in the following days. People are already making plans for next year's events. Jo Angelopoulos, Chair of the Friends of the Lodge stated, "I'm really proud of the Biggar and surrounding people. We've already booked the date and the hall for next year."

The success of the event was due in no small part to the countless volunteers who donated their time and effort, products for the auction, and items used for the evening. These individuals realize the importance of the Diamond Lodge replacement and the vitality of the community of Biggar and the surrounding area.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members to join me in congratulating the organizers of this event for their great work. Thank you.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Provincial Budget

Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the Premier spent the last couple of weeks talking out of both sides of his mouth. In one sentence, he talks about prosperity and growth. In the next sentence, he talks about Saskatchewan families having to brace themselves for budget pain.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan families want to know the truth. They want a straight answer from the Premier. Will the Premier be straight with Saskatchewan families and tell them if this is a time of prosperity or a time of austerity?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, prosperity and austerity are not just words that rhyme. They're inextricably linked, Mr. Speaker.

I remember growing up in Swift Current in the home of someone that was involved in small business since, well since my dad was about 15 years old. And his lessons were pretty clear. If things are going pretty well, that's one thing. But you've got to plan to sustain that growth. There is never a time where you don't want to see some fiscal discipline in the life of a province, in the life of an organization, in the life of a business.

Mr. Speaker, we know the best way to sustain the prosperity of the province of Saskatchewan is to maintain the unique advantage today in the province of Saskatchewan. That advantage is being built on balanced budgets, less debt, lower taxes. Austerity links with prosperity. The province understands it. The NDP [New Democratic Party] do not.

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

Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the Premier's telling families that he had to make some tough decisions in preparation for the budget we're going to see today. He said that when it comes to cuts, nothing is off the table. The Premier said jobs will be cut, that these are the jobs of people who provide services to Saskatchewan families. While the Premier's telling everyone to brace for budget cuts, he announces he has millions of dollars for three more politicians. Can the Premier explain how he can afford millions of dollars for three more politicians when he's cutting services to Saskatchewan people?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, first of all let's have a little bit of a fact check here. The budget for the additional MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] is going to be about \$750,000. And by the way, our commitment is that the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly budget will not increase at all. We will find the efficiencies and we'll balance better representation. Which is why, Mr. Speaker, I think that's why when the Justice minister stood in his place to lay out this plan for electoral map reform, he had some support. Because the

next speaker in this legislature that supported those three more MLAs was the Deputy Leader of the New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, budgeting is about priorities. Pushing ahead to spend millions of dollars on three more politicians while warning the public and people to brace for cuts to programs and services and prepare for job loss is simply wrong.

The Premier's mixed messaging over the last few weeks is inconsistent with his song sheet of record prosperity and growth. Spending increased by more than 30 per cent under the first term of this government, and now the Premier is signalling that he needs to cut. If under his management we're heading into rough waters, why didn't the Premier tell Saskatchewan people sooner?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question because it underscores the challenges that we faced on this side of the House in 2007 after the last election. After that election, Mr. Speaker, we found, as the CAA [Canadian Automobile Association] put it, a \$1 billion infrastructure pothole deficit in our highways. We found infrastructure deficits in health care facilities in this province. We found infrastructure deficits in educational facilities in this province that hadn't received block funding in probably over a decade. It was years, Mr. Speaker.

So we made those investments, record investments in the infrastructure of this province, that we would be ready for growth. Mr. Speaker, you're going to see later this day, I think, probably some continued infrastructure investment, maybe. We'll find out that in a moment, Mr. Speaker, and so will the Finance critic, Mr. Speaker. The only group of women and men that do not understand that you have to have fiscal discipline — a strong fiscal base to ensure long-term sustainability, long-term prosperity to protect the Saskatchewan advantage — the only people that don't get it are sitting right over there.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, it's as if the Premier continues to repeat that message enough that it might become true. But of course he'll be judged by his record.

The people of Saskatchewan deserve the true state of our finances, and they deserve nothing less. Every year on budget day, the Finance minister and the Premier stand up in this House and suggest that they have a balanced budget. Of course, Mr. Speaker, the record is something different: as validated by the auditor, three consecutive deficit budgets, Mr. Speaker.

That Sask Party record includes overly optimistic revenue projections, expenditures that increase throughout the year, and accounting tricks to try and manufacture artificially balanced budgets. If the minister once again tries to stand in the Assembly here today and present what he suggests is a balanced budget, why should Saskatchewan people trust him here today?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, they should trust him because he's a really great guy for starters. They should also trust him I think, Mr. Speaker, when they take a look at the record of the government.

When we look at the definition, the same definition that the NDP used, that the Leader of the Opposition used when he was on this side of the aisle, in terms of a balanced budget, that Finance critic will have to admit that this government has introduced balanced budget after balanced budget after balanced budget, while making record infrastructure investments, while making record tax reductions, and while paying off over 40 per cent of the province's debt left behind by the NDP.

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

Funding for Post-Secondary Education

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Skills training is absolutely essential for the next generation of Saskatchewan workers. But instead of investing in training education and making it more affordable, it appears that members opposite are more concerned with creating more spaces for politicians in the province.

To the minister: Saskatchewan people do not want more politicians in Saskatchewan. What they do want are more spaces, more affordable spaces in our universities, our colleges, and in our trades institutes, Mr. Speaker. My question to the minister: why does he not recognize this?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, thanks very much for the opportunity to tell the people of this province about the track record of this government. We've made record investments in post-secondary education — \$2.8 billion, Mr. Speaker, an all-time record, Mr. Speaker. We've done things like increase funding for student housing by 3,000 per cent, Mr. Speaker, 3,000 per cent.

And, Mr. Speaker, what that means is that students in communities like La Ronge and Meadow Lake and Prince Albert and Saskatoon and more to come, Mr. Speaker, now have opportunities to live in new student residences, making sure that they can succeed in their studies and, Mr. Speaker, with record population and record employment in the province, Mr. Speaker, not just to succeed in their studies but actually succeed in their careers right here in the province.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, post-secondary education in this province under this minister has become more affordable. Over the last budgets, Mr. Speaker, tuitions for students in Saskatchewan has steadily climbed, Mr. Speaker. Students are having to work more and more, simply to keep pace with the

rising cost of tuition in the province based over the last budgets.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan post-secondary students want affordable education. Members opposite want more politicians in the province. My question to the minister: why are his priorities so mixed up?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again our track record speaks loudly. Mr. Speaker, in 2007 we promised, through our campaign, that we would make an additional \$125 million increase for operating funding over four years for post-secondary education. Mr. Speaker, that increase was actually \$274 million, Mr. Speaker, well exceeding our track record as far as what our promises were going to be.

What we can say about affordability, Mr. Speaker, and I ask the member opposite to review these numbers closely, Mr. Speaker, because under the NDP, at the University of Saskatchewan tuition went up 99 per cent, Mr. Speaker; at the University of Regina, 88 per cent; and at SIAST, Mr. Speaker, 260 per cent. Mr. Speaker, the track record is crystal clear. This government puts a priority on affordability for students. The members opposite, Mr. Speaker, they forgot Saskatchewan students and bid them fond farewell as they headed to Alberta.

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

Sale of Television Network

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this House, when I asked the minister questions, he provided us with outdated talking points twice, not answers. We'd like to give him another chance.

Bluepoint picked up SCN at a fire sale price of \$350,000; \$350,000 when the Sask Party sold it off. Now Rogers wants to buy it for 3 million, but they don't want to be held to the same terms requiring investment in Saskatchewan film and television production. This industry has brought to Saskatchewan jobs and economic spinoff, not to mention pride and the chance to share our stories around the world, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: when is he going to stand up for this industry and ensure local production is guaranteed in this deal?

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

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We welcome the member's question. And we'd like to provide a bit of context to begin the discussion. The people of Saskatchewan and our growing economy has created the Saskatchewan advantage. And now we have attracted a national company like Rogers Communications wanting to make investments in our creative sector.

Saskatchewan now has all of the big broadcasters in the province, including Global, CTV [Canadian Television Network Ltd.], and CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation].

This gives our province more profile, more options for viewers, more value for advertisers, and a stronger partner for local film and video producers. This could be a real game changer for Saskatchewan producers as they become associated with a robust company like Rogers who can give them national market exposure for their creative products. We welcome a large company like Rogers in Saskatchewan doing business here and understand they have a very positive history of community involvement. Mr. Speaker, this is good news for Saskatchewan.

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

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a government whose priority has been to add three more politicians rather than to invest in people.

When I asked the minister yesterday on behalf of the film and television industry, he said that the Rogers deal was a good one, and he said that again today. The original terms of the sale stipulated seven years of investment in local productions last year when SCN [Saskatchewan Communications Network] was sold. That would have been over \$19 million funnelled into Saskatchewan's film and television industry. But this Rogers deal has no guarantee of local investments.

So to the minister: when will this minister demonstrate competence and speak up for Saskatchewan interests?

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

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First things first. When we decided it was not appropriate for the province to be running a television station, we sought competitive bids for SCN and chose the offer from Bluepoint, which was the best one for the residents of Saskatchewan.

Rogers Communications did not present a proposal at that time. No one could have predicted when or even if they would be interested. Had we decided to wait for Rogers or another company to come along, we would have had to continue to spend \$6.2 million a year for operational costs, plus more money for technological upgrading along the way. In the two years it took Rogers to come to the table, that figure would exceed \$12.4 million of public investment.

We made a decision that was in the best interests of the people of Saskatchewan with the information that was available to us at that time.

[14:00]

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

Funding for Education

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, after three years and many delays, the government has finally come up with a new education funding formula. Unfortunately the government has been speaking out of both sides of their mouth. In one sentence, they say it's prosperity and growth and the Premier's going to spend millions of dollars on three more politicians. In the next

sentence, they say everyday families should brace for cuts.

The mixed messaging has left school boards anxious about education funding, fearful that classrooms will be facing cuts. Can the minister assure Saskatchewan families that students won't suffer as a result of budget cuts to education funding?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, it's just a few more minutes and that member opposite will know that the Government of Saskatchewan puts education as a priority. We have for four years and we will continue to do so.

We believe it is the huge method of keeping the Saskatchewan advantage for the young people in our province. We are very, very proud that the young people of our province are now staying in our province, not leaving our province as they did in the past. We're very, very happy with our investment in schools, instead of letting them crumble as what happened in the past, Mr. Speaker. We've increased funding for school divisions by over 18 per cent in our first term of government. Mr. Speaker, we will stay committed to education being a priority for our province.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, this is a time of challenges in the education sector. The Sask Party has cut more than 350 full-time educational assistants and they're closing public schools like Dieppe and Haultain, and potentially rural schools like Nokomis and Bjorkdale — the list goes on — which are core pillars of their communities.

It's also a time of opportunities: opportunities to address the Aboriginal education gap, to support community schools and all students, and to support the many new Canadians that are moving to Saskatchewan. My question to the minister: will today's budget address the challenges and grow the opportunities, or will the education sector see more cuts?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And again I will commit that our government feels that education is a priority to keep the Saskatchewan advantage, Mr. Speaker. We've demonstrated that over our first term of government where we have record investment in operating grants for the school divisions, as well as record investment in the infrastructure for schools.

Mr. Speaker, we don't want to go back to the way that it was. And when that member opposite talks about the gaps for First Nations education, between 1996 and 2006, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal high school completion increased, it increased, Mr. Speaker, from 17.3 per cent to 21.6 per cent. The gap in post-secondary completion increased when those members were in government. Mr. Speaker, we are going to reverse that trend and we're going to commit to the education for our students in our province.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, on issues like this we need more than partisan spin from the minister and from that government. When we're looking at the Aboriginal education gap that was referenced right there, this is arguably the biggest challenge and greatest opportunity before our province. This is laid out by economist Eric Howe of the University of Saskatchewan who states that by closing that Aboriginal education gap we can gain \$80 billion of economic activity in this province. That's more than the total sum of potash ever sold in the history of Saskatchewan. Moreover we can save ourselves \$90 billion of social costs by savings in Health and in Justice and Social Services, Mr. Speaker, not to mention the incredibly important gains and improvements we can make in the individual lives of Saskatchewan people.

The rhetoric is enough. The partisan spin isn't what we're looking for. Will the minister commit to a plan today that puts forward meaningful action to close the Aboriginal education gap in this province?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And it is unfortunate that we had a lost decade, quite frankly, under the NDP. But, Mr. Speaker, we have committed funding specific for First Nations and Métis education programming. We're working with our school divisions so that the school divisions can design unique programming. We dedicated over 4 million to those programs, Mr. Speaker, and our school divisions are our best partners in order to deliver successful programs, Mr. Speaker.

As well, and myself along with the Minister from Advanced Education and the Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations are striking a task force working with FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations] and the Métis nation, in order to look at successful programs, not only just in Saskatchewan but across our nation so that we can duplicate that here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

We are working towards closing the gap. We have stopped the trend that was set by the previous government, Mr. Speaker, and we know that there's work that needs to be done.

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

Health Care Issues

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, members opposite have been giving mixed signals about this budget, both prosperity and austerity. Since health care makes up such a large amount of the budget — last year it was 42 per cent — people in Saskatchewan are wondering where the austerity shoe is going to drop when it comes to health care.

There are so many needs in health care in Saskatchewan. We've recruitment and retention challenges. We are failing to address the social determinants of health. We are not meeting the unique needs of health needs in northern Saskatchewan. We have the worst HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] epidemic in all of Canada. We need to do so much more for mental health care, for assisted living, long-term care, and end-of-life care.

Yet faced with all of these challenges in health care, Mr. Speaker, the priority for members opposite is to add more politicians in the province. That is where their priority lies.

My question to the minister: will he recognize that the challenges are great, the challenges are significant, and what is he going to do about it today as opposed to adding more politicians to the Assembly?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that question. It's a kind of a wide-ranging question. What I will say, that when our government came to office we set some pretty bold targets, Mr. Speaker, targets that the opposition when they were in power certainly wouldn't have set. In fact I remember the Health minister at the time saying, we wouldn't want to set a target for nurse recruitment, for example, because we just wouldn't meet it.

Mr. Speaker, in four years we have worked hard to bring the health care system up to the system that we should want and expect in Saskatchewan. We've recruited 900 more nurses, Mr. Speaker. We've recruited 200 more doctors. We've increased the College of Medicine. We've increased the residency positions, Mr. Speaker. There is more work to do, absolutely. But, Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you is that the patient-first movement in this province is alive and well, Mr. Speaker. More work to do, and I think we'll probably hear that in just a few more minutes.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, the one target the member's been very clear on is three more politicians for the province, and that is a target that no one in Saskatchewan wants.

If we look at the deficiencies, Mr. Speaker, in the province when it comes to health care, there are real concerns, Mr. Speaker. There is a kidney transplant program that is not running at full capacity that has been suspended under this minister. People are staying on dialysis longer at a cost that is much greater to the taxpayer. We have caregivers in this province, Mr. Speaker, that are asking for more help to keep their loved ones at home as opposed to sending them to expensive long-term care facilities. We have a helicopter ambulance program coming, Mr. Speaker, but members opposite forgot to build the helipads so the people could actually benefit from the program.

Mr. Speaker, faced with all of this, there are many questions. With the three new politicians coming, Mr. Speaker, to the Assembly, will they be able to do kidney transplants? Will they be able to support caregivers? Will they be able to help with helipads in the province, Mr. Speaker? And if they are not, Mr. Speaker, why are members opposite so determined to be adding more politicians to the province of Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, as I said, there is more work to do, but I want to inform the public that we are working

hard to resume the kidney transplant program. We have a physician back to take extra training that is now doing the procedure here in Saskatchewan. The kidney transplant program is functional, Mr. Speaker. We need to do more work, absolutely.

Mr. Speaker, he kind of again touched on a lot of different issues, Mr. Speaker, but what I would say is that they tend to go back to the extra three politicians. There are two people that have spoke in this House that have supported that motion: the Justice minister, Mr. Speaker, and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, I'm addressing many issues in health care because the issues in health care are great, as opposed to the minister, Mr. Speaker, who is focused on adding more politicians at a time of need for health care.

Yesterday I raised concerns, Mr. Speaker, about assistance being given to caregivers who want to keep their loved ones in their homes longer to prevent them from going to long-term care. We know this saves up to \$75,000 a year when someone can stay at home as opposed to going to a long-term care facility.

And other provinces have acted on this, Mr. Speaker, because they see it as a priority. Manitoba, British Columbia have given much more than we have in this area. On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, members opposite, their priority has been adding more politicians to the province as opposed to dealing with the health care challenges that people face. To them, adding more politicians is more important than assisting caregivers, working on recruitment and retention, addressing northern health challenges, addressing the issues of mental health and addictions, addressing the worst HIV epidemic in Canada. Mr. Speaker, it's a question of priorities, and members are focused on the wrong priorities.

My question to the minister: how will adding more politicians in the province of Saskatchewan address the many health challenges the Saskatchewan people face?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, I don't want to prejudge what will be in the budget, Mr. Speaker. But what I can tell you, over the past four years, there has been record amount of money go into long-term care facilities, Mr. Speaker. We inherited some long-term care facilities that simply were not adequate. That's why this government has moved on 13 long-term care facilities throughout the province as well as one in Saskatoon that the opposition has been very critical of, Mr. Speaker. But I can tell you that there are 50 residents in there calling that home today, Mr. Speaker, something they never would have been able to do under the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition critic talks about many different priorities. I can tell you one priority this government has had once it took office was to reduce the longest wait-lists in Canada for surgery, Mr. Speaker, overseen by the NDP. In fact,

Mr. Speaker, under two years of our surgical care initiative, I can tell you that people waiting 18 months or longer is down by 89 per cent. People waiting 12 months or longer is down by 76 per cent, Mr. Speaker. We're making a real difference in surgical wait times in Saskatchewan.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TABLING OF ESTIMATES AND SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to submit the estimates and supplementary estimates accompanied by a message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

The Speaker: — Would you all please rise for a message from the Lieutenant Governor. The message is as follows:

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2013, and supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2012, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly. The Hon. Gordon L. Barnhart, Lieutenant Governor, province of Saskatchewan.

You may sit. I recognize the Minister of Finance.

MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY (BUDGET DEBATE)

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, colleagues, and visitors, I am honoured once again to rise today to deliver my second budget, our government's fifth budget, and the first of our second term.

Before I begin, I would like to introduce some friends and family who made an effort to come to Regina today for this occasion. I want to first of all express my appreciation to all my friends who are seated in various points throughout the Legislative Assembly, but I do want to introduce five very special people in my life.

Seated behind the bar are Helene and Eugene Wiwchar. If they would give us a little wave . . . These are friends from the Canora-Pelly constituency. I've known the Wiwchars for over 25 years and have been so fortunate to have their support and their advice. So thank you very much, Gene and Helene.

The next couple now resides in Lloydminster but were our lifelong neighbours and best friends in the Invermay district. Ernest and Madeline Robson have been part of much of my life. Madeline is a superannuated teacher and Ernie is a retired farmer and businessman. In a rural area you work on many projects together, and I'll always remember Ernie for a fundraising project to raise money for a new arena in Invermay in the early 1980s. Ernie and I participated in a four-day, 350-mile bike-a-thon from Lloydminster to Invermay. Oh, to be young and foolish again.

[14:15]

My final introduction is of my spouse, Gail. She is the most wonderful person in my life, who is also a superannuated teacher, mother to Bryce and Lindsay, a grandmother to Willow and Scarlett, and of course my adviser. She has been my supporter for everything I have done and continues to stay involved. Thank you for all you do, Gail.

It is a pleasure to have all of you here today, because Saskatchewan has a great story to tell. Mr. Speaker, this year we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of this Legislative Building.

A couple of weeks ago I noted the 100th anniversary of the first provincial budget read in this legislature. That budget was presented at a time of tremendous growth in our province. In 1912 Saskatchewan's population surpassed half a million people for the first time, and Premier Walter Scott's government introduced a budget of \$9 million or about \$18 of government spending for each of those 500,000 Saskatchewan residents. Of course, both the province and the government have grown a bit more since then. The 2012 budget also comes at a time of tremendous growth in our province. Just this morning, we learned that Saskatchewan's population is now 1,067,612 people, up 17,064 in the past year.

The 2012 budget will spend \$11.2 billion, \$10,486 for each one of those 1,067,612 people. That is quite a difference from 100 years ago. Of course today's government provides many more services to its citizens than it did in 1912 when most of the money was spent on highways, telephones, and public buildings, not health and education.

Our government has a responsibility to provide these important services. But we also have a responsibility to live within our means, to ensure our programs are sustainable in the long term, and to balance the budget. Saskatchewan people understand this. Across the world we see the chaos caused by debt crises and failing economies as some governments failed to live up to their responsibilities.

Last fall we had an election that presented two very different visions about government spending. One vision said, our economy is doing well in Saskatchewan so now is the time to spend. The other vision said, our economy is doing quite well in Saskatchewan; to make sure it continues, we need to control spending, balance the budget, and keep Saskatchewan moving forward. Saskatchewan people made it pretty clear which path they chose to follow.

So, Mr. Speaker, let me begin by delivering a message that no other provincial Finance minister in Canada has been able to deliver this year. This budget is a balanced budget. It is balanced in the General Revenue Fund . . . Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat. This budget is a balanced budget. It is balanced in the General Revenue Fund and it is balanced in the summary financial statements.

At a time when so many others continue to struggle with a sluggish economy, huge deficits, and growing debt, Saskatchewan is now a have province. Our economy is leading the nation. Our debt is lower and our provincial finances are sound. That's the Saskatchewan advantage, and the 2012-13 budget is about keeping the Saskatchewan advantage.

Today we are living in a unique time in Saskatchewan's history. I have lived in this province my entire life and I have never witnessed the kind of growth that we see today. Mr. Speaker, I want to remind you that last year when I stood in this Legislative Assembly during my budget address, I made reference to the fact that somewhere in Saskatchewan, a mom or a dad would receive a telephone call from a son or a daughter that would say that they were coming back to the province of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, I was surprised at the large number of people that stopped me or phoned me to tell me that I had used their story. And indeed, they were pleased with what was occurring in this Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, our population is growing. Our economy is growing. Our communities are growing. We had a strong economic performance last year in spite of the challenges created by flooding. Crop production in 2011 was up by almost 18 per cent over 2010. Potash production and sales were up. Value of oil sales was up. Retail trade was up. Our international exports grew by 25 per cent in 2011. The total value of building permits grew by 25 per cent in 2011.

In 2011, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan economy grew by 3.6 per cent, second highest in Canada even with the challenges caused by excess moisture and flooding. The private forecasters expect us to lead the nation with 3.1 per cent growth this year and to lead again with 3.3 per cent growth in 2013. Saskatchewan has the lowest unemployment rate in the country. Our debt-to-GDP [gross domestic product] ratio is the second lowest in the country.

With fundamentals like this, it's no wonder Saskatchewan people are feeling optimistic. A recent survey conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business shows that 70 per cent of Saskatchewan small-business operators are optimistic about the future, second only to Alberta amongst the provinces. But, Mr. Speaker, I know some will ask, why does government need to restrain spending if the economy is so strong? The answer: because that's what will keep the Saskatchewan economy strong. That's what will keep the Saskatchewan advantage.

Saskatchewan continues to be a leader in its management of public finance. We will have a balanced budget this year, in fact a surplus in the General Revenue Fund of \$95 million. We will have a surplus in the summary financial statements of \$14.8 million, and we will show a healthy balance of \$756.4 million in the Growth and Financial Security Fund. So we can be ready for any unanticipated events. Balanced budgets, sustainable spending, sound provincial finances — that's keeping the Saskatchewan advantage.

A growing economy in a growing province creates challenges for Saskatchewan and for our government, but as the Premier has said, we would rather face the challenges of growth than the challenges of decline. One of the challenges of growth is maintaining and improving infrastructure. Since we took office in 2007, a great deal of progress has been made. A total of \$4.1 billion has been spent on infrastructure, and we will continue to make key investments needed to accommodate growth for Saskatchewan residents and Saskatchewan businesses. This budget delivers \$788 million for capital investments. Funds will be allocated to schools, health care facilities, highway and

municipal infrastructure.

In our first term, our government delivered a long-awaited municipal revenue-sharing system that tied growth in funding to growth in our economy. This new formula, coupled with our strong and growing economy, has delivered more funding to Saskatchewan communities than even the most optimistic could have anticipated. In 2011-12, municipalities received \$217 million from the Saskatchewan Party government's revenue-sharing program, a 29.5 per cent increase from the previous year. This year's revenue sharing will provide \$237.4 million, a 9.5 per cent increase from 2011-12. This is an increase of \$110 million since 2007-08.

All of our major cities have seen revenue sharing more than double since 2007, and it will grow even more as the economy expands in the years ahead. Total funding to support municipalities from across government now amounts to \$349 million, or 60 per cent more than in '07-08. This year we will keep our election promise to help communities make their local rinks more affordable by providing a \$2,500 grant to offset operating costs. Working with Saskatchewan communities is an important part in keeping the Saskatchewan advantage.

Mr. Speaker, over half of the total spending in the 1912 budget, \$5 million, was dedicated to creating a new provincial highway system. Today we continue to place great importance on our highway infrastructure, and that is why over the past four years we have spent \$2.2 billion in this area. That's 64 per cent more than the amount spent by the previous administration in its final four years in office.

In the past four years, 770 kilometres of major rural highways were rebuilt and another 1,485 kilometres of roads were repaved. The twinning of Highway 11 between Saskatoon and Prince Albert was accelerated, and \$150 million was invested in the urban connector program to improve the connections to provincial highway systems. Overall, more than 6000 kilometres of roadways were improved in the last four years. This year approximately \$581.5 million has been allocated for the highway system throughout Saskatchewan.

We will keep our election promise to spend another \$2.2 billion on our provincial highway system over the next four years. We will make a \$63 million investment in gateway corridors which will provide for continuing work on the Regina west bypass. We will finish the twinning of Highway 11 to Prince Albert. We will finish the Yorkton truck route, and we will begin construction of the Estevan bypass.

This budget also provides \$3 million to begin a new passing lane initiative. This money will be used to begin design and aggregate work on a section of the highway between Balgonie and Fort Qu'Appelle.

This year we will spend \$207.8 million for transportation preservation and rehabilitation projects. \$18 million will go towards fixing roads flooded in 2011. There is \$59 million for the bridge and culvert strategy, including \$20.7 million to continue work on the St. Louis bridge. This budget also provides \$1.4 million to continue with safety reviews of our major dams. Maintaining and expanding our infrastructure is a key part of keeping the Saskatchewan advantage.

Mr. Speaker, just as creating a new highway system was vital to the growth of our province in 1912, investing in innovation is vital to the growth of our province today. In this budget, we will invest \$99 million in research and development to help drive our economy forward; \$20 million for research and technology grants in agriculture; \$19 million for the Saskatchewan Research Council, which includes a 5 per cent increase to help one of Canada's most effective research organizations extend its reach.

In recent years, the SRC [Saskatchewan Research Council] has become very adept at attracting private contracts in its operations. In 2010-11, the economic impact of its activities was \$527 million. The SRC is becoming increasingly well-known internationally and has become a magnet for companies from around the world needing its research skills. In the past year alone, it has worked with a diverse group of companies, from an African potash mining company to a Canadian vaccine company now exporting its products to Brazil.

[14:30]

We are refocusing the research and development tax credit to ensure it also remains sustainable in the future. Canadian-controlled private corporations will continue to receive a 15 per cent refundable tax credit subject to an annual limit of \$3 million in qualifying R & D [research and development] spending. Other qualifying expenditures will be eligible for a 15 per cent non-refundable tax credit.

We also aim to develop more value-added opportunities for our natural resources through Innovation Saskatchewan. \$7 million will be spent to enhance research, including \$3.3 million for nuclear research and development. At the same time, we are doubling our grant to the Canada Excellence Research Chair in Water Security at the University of Saskatchewan to \$1 million. We will spend another million dollars on the second year of the boreal water strategy aimed at collecting a base of environmental information on our northern lakes to provide information for development decisions. \$250,000 will begin the process of establishing an institute for food security at the University of Saskatchewan, and \$4.1 million will go towards the operation of the Canadian Light Source synchrotron. As well, we will provide \$2.1 million to help fund the operations of InterVac, the research centre devoted to improvements in vaccines. The advancements Saskatchewan is making in research and development are very exciting.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I was reading about some of the traditions of budget day in the British House of Commons. I have recently learned the budget speech can be up to four hours long — four hours, Mr. Speaker. Also the Chancellor of the Exchequer — that is their finance minister — is allowed to drink anything he wants while he delivers the speech, including alcohol. Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that this is water and that this speech is not four hours long.

Our government has always supported Saskatchewan farmers, and we will continue to do so. We were there for farmers last year when they were affected by the second consecutive year of serious flooding. \$94 million was put into the excess moisture program to help them deal with flooded land and unseeded

acreage. We have worked closely with the federal government to improve crop insurance this year to provide better coverage for excess moisture and flooding.

Overall this budget provides \$321.4 million to fully fund crop insurance along with AgriStability and AgriInvest. This increase includes record funding for crop insurance. Coverage levels will increase to a record high average of \$174 per acre. This is almost double the coverage level offered to producers under the previous government in 2007. And producers now have the option of purchasing up to \$100 per acre of coverage for any unseeded acres in the event of more flooding.

The Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership, or STEP, has played a key role in promoting Saskatchewan exports throughout the world and opening up new markets for our agricultural products. This budget increases funding to STEP by half a million dollars. The Ministry of Agriculture is also providing an additional \$1 million for international trade and market development in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, another one of the challenges of growth is affordability. We know that our rapid growth is creating challenges for people in finding affordable housing. That's why we have moved to encourage construction of more affordable housing.

Last year at this time our government announced a five-point housing plan, making it easier for Saskatchewan people with modest incomes to purchase new homes. Our goal is to add at least 4,600 new housing units over the next five years. So far we have experienced significant progress. For example, the Headstart on a Home program has proven to be very successful. The immigrant investor program, which loans money to builders, has sparked the construction of five new condominium projects across the province in the last year. This will provide homes to low- and moderate-income families.

The most recent project is a 21-unit condominium announced in North Battleford. New buildings are also under way in Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, and Yorkton. The affordable homeownership program provides municipalities with a maximum \$5,000 per unit matching grant for the purchase of a new principal residence. We estimated 40 units would be purchased under this program. To date we have received 164 qualifying applications.

Under the rental construction in this incentive we introduced last year, we estimated developers would build 300 new rental housing units. In its first year we have received applications for more than 1,000 new units. This budget provides a \$2 million increase for these two programs for a total investment this year of \$3.7 million.

We believe this is a good start, but there is more to do. We know that part of what is holding back new rental construction in the province is high taxes on investment income. As a result, we are introducing a corporate income tax rebate to qualifying companies to build new rental accommodations. This rebate will equal 10 per cent of the amount of the taxable rental income earned from new rental housing projects over a 10-year eligibility period. We expect this program to build on the success of the rental construction incentive and anticipate an

additional 1,000 rental units will be under construction by the end of this year. When combined with existing housing incentives, we expect that an additional 10,000 new rental units will be built over the life of the program.

We promised the first-time homebuyers tax credit in last fall's election campaign. Beginning this year, a provincial income tax credit of up to \$1,100 will be provided to individuals and families purchasing their first home. Mr. Speaker, there's more to be done, and our government understands that housing continues to be a challenge in a growing Saskatchewan. But make no mistake, we are moving in the right direction. In the past four years, since our government took office, there were 23,632 housing starts. That's an average of 5,908 per year. In the previous 16 years, there was an average of only 2,932 housing starts per year. Housing starts have more than doubled in the past four years, and we expect that trend to continue.

Of course affordability extends beyond housing. In the fall campaign, we also promised to extend the PST [provincial sales tax] exemption on children's clothing to age 17 and under. We made good on that promise immediately after the election, saving families about \$3 million per year. The active families tax benefit was also expanded to include all children 17 and under beginning in 2012. This benefit provides a refundable tax credit of up to \$150 per child to help with the cost of positive activities such as the arts, music lessons, and sports.

Our government has a strong record of making life more affordable for Saskatchewan students. Four years ago, we introduced the graduate retention program, the most aggressive youth recruitment and retention program in all of Canada. This program allows post-secondary graduates who choose to stay in Saskatchewan after graduation to receive up to \$20,000 of their tuition costs back. And it's working. Since the program began in 2008, it has provided over \$46 million in tuition rebates to more than 30,000 post-secondary graduates. More importantly we have stemmed the flow of young people out of our province. More young people are choosing to stay — choosing to begin a career, start a family, and build a life in Saskatchewan.

Keeping our young people is a significant part of keeping the Saskatchewan advantage. That's why last fall we promised to take the next step by introducing a new Saskatchewan advantage scholarship to help every new high school graduate with the cost of post-secondary education. This budget provides \$4.6 million to keep this promise by providing new high school graduates with up to \$2,000 over four years to be applied toward tuition fees at any Saskatchewan post-secondary institution.

Effective January 2013, we are also introducing the Saskatchewan advantage grant for education savings. This will match up to 10 per cent of the annual contribution to a child's Registered Education Savings Plan account up to \$250 per child. That's on top of the 20 per cent matching grant already provided by the federal government.

This budget also adds \$6.7 million for a total of \$36.5 million for the Student Aid Fund. There is also a special assistance program for medical students who face some of the highest tuition expenses in university. This budget keeps our promise to establish a program to forgive up to \$120,000 in student loans

for new doctors and up to \$20,000 for nurses and nurse practitioners who choose to practise in qualifying rural and remote communities in Saskatchewan. It also adds five nurse practitioner training seats to begin meeting the campaign commitment to add 20 new nurse practitioner seats.

Overall this budget provides a \$12 million increase or 2 per cent more to support operating costs at our post-secondary institutions. This should allow them to hold tuition increases to approximately 4 per cent for key direct entry programs.

Mr. Speaker, our government has a responsibility to ensure that these and other important programs and services for Saskatchewan people are affordable and sustainable. Some governments have allowed well-intentioned but unsustainable programs to put them into deficit. In his sweeping report of the state of Ontario's finances, economist Don Drummond said, "The time to act is now, before today's challenges become tomorrow's crisis." While Saskatchewan's finances are in far better shape than Ontario's, Mr. Drummond's advice is sound: the time to ensure your spending is sustainable is before it becomes a crisis.

Today I am announcing some changes in government spending to ensure our programs for people remain affordable and sustainable. We are raising the cap on prescription drug fees from \$15 to \$20 under the seniors' and children's drug plan. This cap has not changed since it was created in 2007. But even with these changes, the plan remains one of the best in Canada in terms of lowering the price of prescription drugs for seniors.

At the same time, our government will continue to improve income benefits to low-income seniors. In our first term, we doubled benefits provided to low-income seniors under the seniors' income plan, and we doubled the number of seniors who qualified for this benefit. There had been no increase in this benefit in the previous 16 years. This year we will deliver on our promise to increase this benefit by another \$50 a month or \$600 per year. Over the next four years, this benefit will be increased by nearly \$1,000 per year, triple what it was when this government took office.

[14:45]

We also promised to assist seniors by introducing a new senior personal care home benefit. Currently estimated at \$278 per month, this will rise to \$369 per month by the fourth year.

In order to achieve savings, we looked at the effectiveness and efficiency of certain tax credit and economic programs. As a result, our government will be ending the film employment tax credit. There have been many high-quality film and television productions as a result of the \$100 million invested through this tax credit. However the overall decline in industry activity combined with the need to increase our commitment in order to compete with other jurisdictions has resulted in this decision. Productions which have already registered for the credit will continue to receive the credit. However new productions will no longer qualify. This measure will save Saskatchewan taxpayers up to \$3 million this year and approximately \$8 million per year when it is fully wound down.

We believe regional economic priorities should be set locally,

not provincially. With this in mind, our government will cease funding enterprise regions. With the significant increase in municipal revenue sharing, we feel this is a role that municipal governments should lead if they so choose. This change will save Saskatchewan taxpayers approximately \$4 million a year. The provincial government will remain focused on creating a strong economic climate through lower taxes, infrastructure enhancement, and labour force development.

Our government continues to look for ways to reduce our own overall size and cost. We are currently in the third year of a four-year plan to reduce the size of the civil service by 15 per cent. We are on track to meet our target and showing that it is possible to have a smaller, more efficient government. So far this effort has saved Saskatchewan \$129 million.

We will continue to work with third party stakeholders to find additional savings through efficiencies that don't negatively impact front-line services. Third parties, such as regional health authorities, post-secondary institutions, and school divisions are all being asked to look for savings within their operations. Mr. Speaker, we are making these decisions and taking these actions now in order to ensure affordable, sustainable programs for people in the future. Balanced budgets and sustainable spending now and in the future — it's a key part of keeping the Saskatchewan advantage.

Mr. Speaker, these measures will allow us to continue taking steps to improve life for people in Saskatchewan. Our government is strongly committed to improving the quality and dignity of life for persons with disabilities. That's why we promised expanded coverage and additional benefits under the Saskatchewan assured income for disability program. This was the single largest promise we made in the election campaign, and today we are keeping this promise.

We are adding almost \$18 million to the SAID program to provide greater benefits to a larger number of persons with disabilities. With this move, the number of people eligible for this program will more than triple to as many as 10,000 adults. The available benefits will go up by \$200 per month in July of 2012 and by \$350 a month in the fourth year. Our goal is to make Saskatchewan the best place in Canada for persons with disabilities, and to make that part of the Saskatchewan advantage.

At the same time, we recognize that not all children in Saskatchewan have the same advantages. Last year we launched a new children and youth agenda to improve the prospects of some of the most vulnerable members of our society. We have ambitious goals. We are trying to transform the child welfare system and eliminate gaps in educational and employment outcomes.

In last year's budget, we devoted an additional \$34 million to programs across government aimed at improving outcomes for those challenged by poverty, poor education, and different social issues. Our new child and youth agenda has greatly improved relationships with First Nations agencies.

This budget will provide an additional \$6 million for the child and youth agenda. This includes an additional \$750,000 for the annual cost of more child protection workers. A new approach

to conduct home assessments for First Nations children who can be placed in the homes of extended family members has been designed. Contracts have been signed with several First Nations agencies, and we have completed 72 home assessments in this fiscal year. This budget will deliver another \$750,000 to build on that progress.

In education we have created 40 new pre-kindergarten programs in 23 communities. This budget adds another 15. This budget also provides \$2 million in operating funds and \$4 million in capital for 500 new child care spaces. This will allow us to move forward in keeping our promise of 2,000 new child care spaces over four years. We also intend to build on our educational efforts for disadvantaged young people by providing \$500,000 for the establishment of 20 literacy camps in the summer months.

In the past year, the Regina Community Clinic life skills and addictions program helped 45 adults with FASD [fetal alcohol spectrum disorder]. Children in the FASD family support program in the Saskatoon area have improved their school attendance, and none have dropped out. We know that FASD is an entirely preventable condition. To continue this good work, an additional \$600,000 for three storefront projects in our three largest cities has been allocated. Our goal is to provide intensive prevention programming to pregnant women who could be at risk of having a child with FASD.

We have provided the necessary funding for the health regions to improve therapy and support workers for those with autism. This budget fulfills our campaign promise by providing another \$1 million for autism programming.

Innovative approaches to community involvement are also showing promising results in crime prevention. An operation called Community Mobilization Prince Albert brings together officials from the police, government agencies, and community partners to provide immediate and long-term interventions in the lives of at-risk individuals to help keep them on track. We believe this initiative has played a role in some very encouraging trends in Prince Albert. Between February and October of 2011, reported crime was down 15 per cent. Emergency room visits were down 10 per cent. The number of public prosecutions was down 12 per cent. There was a 9 per cent reduction in calls to the police for help. This budget will deliver on our campaign promise by providing another \$450,000 to build on the success of this program.

We are also providing \$1.9 million for the first year of our campaign commitment to a high-risk, violent crime reduction strategy. This initiative will get tough on violent crime and make Saskatchewan communities safer by adding new police officers and prosecution resources and by using GPS [Global Positioning System] to track high-risk, violent offenders.

Three million dollars has been allocated to facilitate expansions to the Prince Albert correctional facility, and \$9.6 million will complete the expansion to the Pine Grove Correctional Centre.

Our government will continue to work to improve the lives of our First Nations and Métis citizens through a variety of programs. This budget provides almost \$172 million for First Nations and Métis funding, which includes some of the

programs I have already mentioned. Additional dollars for First Nations and Métis economic and social programs through provincial gaming agreements will increase by 3.8 per cent to \$67 million this year.

We have committed \$1.5 million over three years to our northern action plan to work with leaders to address issues that hinder social and economic progress in the North. Another \$450,000 will be spent on the First Nations apprenticeship program to help promote new careers.

Our efforts to increase the number of Aboriginal people in the workforce are also showing progress. There are 5,900 more First Nations and Métis people employed to the end of February this year over last year. Over the past four years, the number of First Nations and Métis apprentices has increased by 24 per cent. The number of First Nations and Métis journeyerson certifications has doubled from 61 in 2006-07 to 123 in 2010-11.

Education and training are essential to produce a better quality of life for all citizens. High-quality pre-K [pre-kindergarten] to 12 education is the foundation of our province's future success. Our pre-K to 12 system provides one of the biggest challenges but also exciting opportunities for our growing province. Some of our schools are overcrowded. Some of our communities are underserved.

This budget will provide almost \$38 million to begin construction of six new school projects in Warman, Swift Current, Saskatoon, White City, and Lloydminster. We have allocated \$50 million to continue building 15 different major school capital projects across the province. This budget also provides \$4 million to start planning for three school projects. This will mean a new school for Hudson Bay. It will also mean expansions and renovations for the existing high school in Martensville and renovations for the school in Leader.

This budget also introduces a new school division funding distribution model. You will be hearing more about this from the Minister of Education and others. However I will mention that the changes included in the new model will be phased in over three years. Ten million dollars has been added to allow a smooth transition for those divisions that will receive less under the new formula. Overall funding for school operating will rise by 5.0 per cent. Operating funding will increase by \$59 million.

Mr. Speaker, over the past four years, one of the key goals of our government has been improved access to health care. We continue that job today by providing \$4.7 billion to Saskatchewan Health, an increase of 4.9 per cent over last year. There is an additional \$98 million, or 3.5 per cent increase, to our regional health authorities for health care staff, drugs, medical supplies, and other operating costs.

We're also providing \$60.5 million for the Saskatchewan surgical initiative, one of the most important tools we have to improve access to patient care. We have made significant progress on reducing wait times for surgery. The number of people waiting longer than 18 months for surgery has dropped 81 per cent since we launched the initiative in April 2010. The number of people waiting more than 12 months has dropped significantly by 69 per cent. Ninety-nine per cent of all

surgeries are now completed within 18 months of specialist referral, and 96 per cent within 12 months. There's more to be done but our government remains on track toward our goal of reducing surgical wait times to no more than three months by 2014. The additional money this year will allow the health regions to continue with planning expansions to increase surgical capacity in our hospitals and operating rooms.

[15:00]

We have also had great success reducing the wait times for cancer patients. The wait-lists for treatment through the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency have dropped from almost 600 people waiting for treatment to less than 100. This is a huge step which has positively impacted people in our province, and we will continue to build on this success. This budget provides an extra 13.8 per cent, or \$16.9 million for the Cancer Agency. This funding provides for more than 6,000 new patient referrals, almost 30,000 chemotherapy treatments, and 39,000 mammograms. This year we will provide an extra \$4 million to expand the screening program for colorectal cancer province-wide. This will not only improve early detection but will reduce the need for expensive treatments when this type of cancer is found in later stages.

Providing long-term care facilities where they are needed is also a key component of our health care strategy. This year we will move to complete six long-term care facilities currently under construction in Radville, Redvers, Rosetown, Shellbrook, Tisdale, and Watrous.

Construction of seven additional care homes under a new funding model, where the government becomes a shared owner with the regional health authorities, will begin. \$43 million will be allocated to build facilities in Biggar, Kelvington, Kerrobert, Kipling, Maple Creek, Meadow Lake, and Prince Albert. As a result, many seniors will receive the care they need near their homes and families, which is integral to keeping the Saskatchewan Advantage.

Primary care is a huge concern to many, and communities are working hard to improve that care. This budget is devoting \$7 million to develop new pilot projects in delivering primary care. We will also begin the process of building a pool of 20 locums, providing coverage for local doctors when they are away.

Emergency medical coverage is another key element of improving access. \$5.5 million has been allocated to launch the STARS [Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society] emergency medical helicopter service across this province.

We will continue moving forward on a replacement for the Saskatchewan Hospital in North Battleford and have provided \$5 million to continue planning for that facility. We are also moving forward on the new hospital in Moose Jaw, previously announced.

Mr. Speaker, the advantage, the Saskatchewan advantage is real. It has been built by the women and men who live in this province, those whose families have lived here for generations and those who have just recently arrived to start the next chapter of their lives in the new Saskatchewan. This budget is about serving every one of those 1,067,612 people, both by

providing the important government services they need but also by being good stewards of the tax dollars they provide and making sure that every government service and program is affordable and sustainable in the long run.

The Saskatchewan advantage is real. While other provinces have massive deficits, we have balanced budgets. While other provinces have high unemployment, we have thousands of job openings and the lowest unemployment in Canada. While other provinces have sluggish economies, our economy is leading the nation. We have come so far, from a have-not province to a have province, from a declining population to a growing population, from a stagnant economy to an economy that leads the nation.

But, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan advantage is more than economic statistics and strong balance sheets. Today it is measured in the quiet confidence of our people. You can see it in their eyes and hear it in their voices. They know that this Saskatchewan, this new Saskatchewan is a great place to be and that our best days are still ahead. That's keeping the Saskatchewan advantage.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Kelvington-Wadena:

That the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

I so move.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Finance, seconded by the member from Kelvington-Wadena:

That the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member for Regina Rosemont.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to respond briefly to the budget put forward here today. And I too am joined by incredibly important people in my life, powerful, important women in my life: my wife, my mom, and my mother-in-law. So thank you for being here today as well.

The budget I'm prepared to respond to is one that I think is a great disappointment to the people of our province. A government that boasts of the best days of prosperity, apparent record growth, and a resource boom, but for everyday families, it's an austerity budget full of cuts that reach directly into the pockets of seniors, families, and students.

For many of the province's classrooms, it's an austerity budget that asks them to make do with less. These cuts will result in growing pressures in every household. They mean unmet needs in housing and infrastructure. These cuts mean that too many people will be left behind.

And while these cuts are being exacted, the government moves forward with its plan to add three more politicians. While seniors are being asked to reach deep into their pockets for an extra \$5 for each and every prescription that they need, each

and every month, costing seniors hundreds of dollars annually, the budget manages to find room for a new statue at the legislature. And while 500 front-line workers who deliver services are cut in this budget, not one job cut is in the Premier's Executive Council offices. It just doesn't add up.

Mr. Speaker, it's not exactly what voters bargained for and it's not what people expected or were promised. Government preached prosperity, but today they're delivering austerity for everyday families. This budget isn't what people think of when they think of prosperity. Saying we can no longer afford five members on northern firefighting teams is not what Saskatchewan people think of when they think of prosperity. Saying that seniors need to dig deeper and peel off a few more dollars when they need an ambulance, Mr. Speaker, that's not what people think of when they think of prosperity. Telling seniors in long-term care that an extra \$240 a year needs to come out of their pockets for hygiene supplies, that's not what people think of as a prosperous province. Classrooms are facing cuts by the Sask Party, and that's not what people think of when they think of prosperity.

The funding formula cuts tens of millions out of a dozen school boards, and this budget only promises a one-time \$10 million backfill top-up. People will be worried about the impacts in their neighbourhood: increased class sizes, reduced support, school closures. The losses for this year won't be covered, and every teacher, student, parent, and education worker is left to wonder, what about next year, not to mention the big tuition increases post-secondary students are going to face as a result of this budget.

This government is asking everyday families to pay more and accept less. The government is telling people that services and programs that they rely and depend on are going to disappear. And there's no doubt, Mr. Speaker, today's budget spells out clearly that school boards, health regions, and post-secondary institutions have been put on notice. They're being directed to finish the government's slashing and find further cuts. That means, Mr. Speaker, that everyday families can expect more cuts and impacts to be rolled out throughout the year.

A specific concern for the opposition, Mr. Speaker, is the complete abandonment of the film industry, a significant economic and cultural contributor to our province. All of this will be lost, placing at risk our state-of-the-art sound stage and forfeiting jobs and opportunities for creative young people and entrepreneurs.

We have grave concerns about the elimination of environmental programs, leaving nothing positive for those looking for some improvements in the way we treat our beautiful province.

And we have deep concerns that this budget does nothing, nothing, Mr. Speaker, to close the gap between First Nations and Métis employment and non-Aboriginal employment levels as well as nothing to close the education gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, something so important to our province. In fact I'll share the fact Statistics Canada reported that First Nations unemployment rate is currently 20.5 per cent, and that's an increase of 13.9 per cent since the end of 2007.

Mr. Speaker, cuts for our children in their classrooms, cuts in health services that we depend on, cuts to policing and public safety in our communities, cuts to our institutions of higher learning — it doesn't make sense. It isn't fair, and it wasn't what was promised. It seems that the interests of politicians are put first, ahead of the needs and best interests of Saskatchewan people. It seems that a full staff complement in Executive Council offices, more politicians, and more for the legislature is this government's priority. Nobody voted for that, Mr. Speaker, and it doesn't have to be this way.

We have a resource boom, and we are growing. We could focus our efforts to improve the lives of Saskatchewan people. That's smart growth. That's sustainable growth. We say there should be more for people, more for improvements — improvements in the classroom, improvements in health care that we depend and rely on, improvements to housing so young families can fulfill their dream of owning a home.

Mr. Speaker, budgets are about choices. Budget choices are a reflection of a government's priorities. Our province can do better than this. And our government should do better than this.

Mr. Speaker, budgets should also be about balance, especially financial balance. This government suggests that today's budget is balanced, a public relations line they've stuck with the past few years. But the government's own record suggests something else. Verified by the Provincial Auditor, this government has struggled to balance its books. They have now delivered three consecutive deficit budgets and debt, total debt, continues to grow. Today's budget looks like more of the same, and it's still racking up debt.

As an area of caution, it would seem that this government is possibly once again betting too much on a large increase in potash revenues. If this rosy prediction does not pan out, this budget's foundation is damaged.

And now unacceptable accounting changes appear to be a continuing theme of the Sask Party government. The budget pushes \$100 million of debt off their books and onto the books of universities and makes accounting changes that serve to manufacture desired on-paper outcomes. At minimum Saskatchewan people deserve the fair and true state of our public finances to be reported. It's about transparency. It's about accountability.

[15:15]

This Assembly is filled today with many respected business and community leaders. I would guarantee that not one of them get to choose their own accounting policy, nor should government, Mr. Speaker.

We will continue to join the independent voices like the Provincial Auditor in calling for change on this front, Mr. Speaker, change that would provide a fair and true state of our finances. Saskatchewan people deserve nothing less. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people deserve the straight goods and the whole picture. For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, among others, we will not be supporting this budget. Mr. Speaker, we think people expected better. We think this is not the budget that people voted for in November, and we know that

Saskatchewan people deserve better.

[The Assembly adjourned at 15:18.]

Mr. Speaker, I'll have more to say on this budget, a more detailed analysis and critique in the coming days, but it's been my pleasure and my privilege to join debate here today. And, Mr. Speaker, at this point in time I move that debate now be adjourned.

The Speaker: — The member for Regina Rosemont has moved adjournment of debate. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Resumption of Budget Debate

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move:

That debate on the motion that the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government be resumed on Monday, March 26th, 2012.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

That debate on the motion that the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government be resumed on Monday, March 26, 2012.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — Before I place the question on adjournment, I want to first say thank you to all of our guests who have joined us here today and for your cooperation in observing the rules of the Assembly.

I would now like to extend an invitation to our guests to join the members for tea in the Legislative Library on your right as you leave the Assembly and in room 218 to the left. As well I would ask that we have an orderly departure from the Assembly, so, guests, if you would allow the members to leave by the side doors before you depart.

At this time, I will place the question. The Government House Leader has moved that this House do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried. This House stands adjourned to 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER	
Ruling on a Point of Order	
The Speaker.....	687
ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS	
INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS	
Wall.....	687
Nilson.....	687
The Speaker.....	687
PRESENTING PETITIONS	
Forbes.....	687
Brotten.....	687
Vermette.....	687
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS	
Support for People with Disabilities	
Merriman.....	688
International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination	
Belanger.....	688
Steinley.....	688
Saskatoon Film Company Benefits City and Province	
Sproule.....	688
Province Experiences Positive Growth	
Heppner.....	689
Aboriginal Police Preparation Program Graduation	
Campeau.....	689
Fundraiser for New Long-Term Care Facility in Biggar	
Weekes.....	689
QUESTION PERIOD	
Provincial Budget	
Nilson.....	690
Wall.....	690
Wotherspoon.....	690
Funding for Post-Secondary Education	
Brotten.....	691
Norris.....	691
Sale of Television Network	
Chartier.....	691
Hutchinson.....	691
Funding for Education	
Wotherspoon.....	692
Harpauer.....	692
Health Care Issues	
Brotten.....	693
McMorris.....	693
ORDERS OF THE DAY	
TABLING OF ESTIMATES AND SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES	
Krawetz.....	694
The Speaker.....	694
MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY	
(BUDGET DEBATE)	
Krawetz.....	694
Wotherspoon.....	700
Resumption of Budget Debate	
Harrison.....	702

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