



FOURTH SESSION - TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

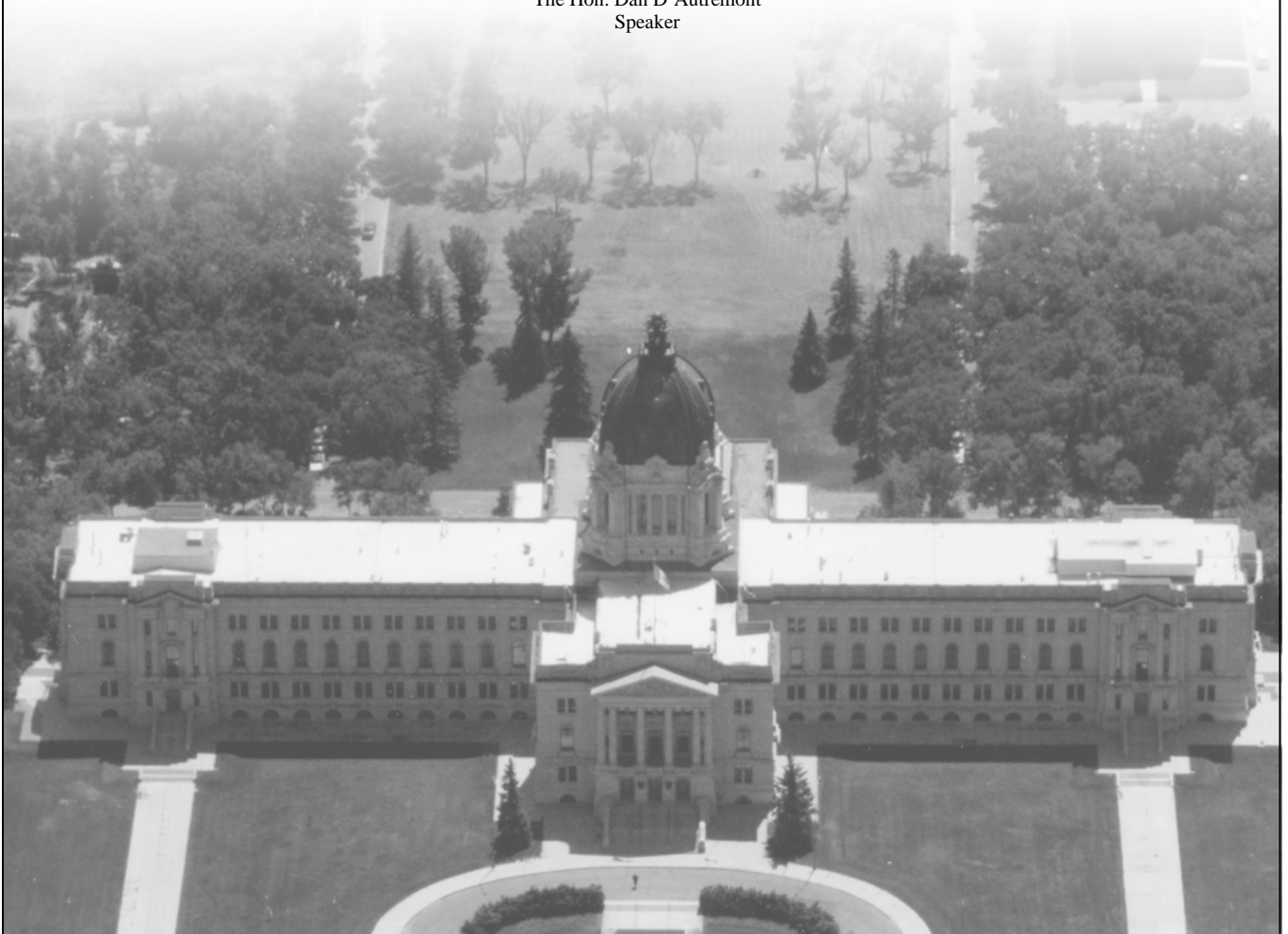
of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of
The Hon. Dan D'Autremont
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Speaker — Hon. Dan D’Autremont
 Premier — Hon. Brad Wall
 Leader of the Opposition — Cam Broten

Name of Member	Political Affiliation	Constituency
Belanger, Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornerud, 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, Hon. 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, Hon. Mark	SP	Regina Coronation Park
Doherty, Hon. Kevin	SP	Regina Northeast
Doke, Larry	SP	Cut Knife-Turtleford
Draude, June	SP	Kelvington-Wadena
Duncan, Hon. Dustin	SP	Weyburn-Big Muddy
Eagles, Doreen	SP	Estevan
Elhard, 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
Heppner, Hon. Nancy	SP	Martensville
Hutchinson, Bill	SP	Regina South
Huyghebaert, D.F. (Yogi)	SP	Wood River
Jurgens, Victoria	SP	Prince Albert Northcote
Kirsch, Delbert	SP	Batoche
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
McMorris, Hon. Don	SP	Indian Head-Milestone
Merriman, Paul	SP	Saskatoon Sutherland
Michelson, Warren	SP	Moose Jaw North
Moe, Hon. Scott	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
Morgan, Hon. Don	SP	Saskatoon Southeast
Nilson, John	NDP	Regina Lakeview
Norris, Rob	SP	Saskatoon Greystone
Ottenbreit, Hon. Greg	SP	Yorkton
Parent, Roger	SP	Saskatoon Meewasin
Phillips, Kevin	SP	Melfort
Reiter, Hon. Jim	SP	Rosetown-Elrose
Ross, Laura	SP	Regina Qu’Appelle Valley
Sproule, Cathy	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Steinley, Warren	SP	Regina Walsh Acres
Stewart, Hon. Lyle	SP	Thunder Creek
Tell, Hon. 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, Hon. Nadine	SP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Wotherspoon, Trent	NDP	Regina Rosemont
Wyant, Hon. Gordon	SP	Saskatoon Northwest
Young, Colleen	SP	Lloydminster
Vacant		Prince Albert Carlton

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister for Corrections and Policing.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — I request leave for an extended introduction.

The Speaker: — The minister has requested leave for an extended introduction. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — I recognize the minister.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you, the students and instructors from Saskatchewan Polytechnic that are here in the very first community safety officer program from Saskatchewan. The students will be graduating in April and will become special constables.

From the RM [rural municipality] of Kindersley, Pam Wake. Wave, Pam? From the city of North Battleford, Barry Adams and Ross MacAngus. From the RM of Edenwold, Roderick Ash and Ronald Roteluik. From the city of Prince Albert, Suzanne Stubbs and Keleen Wolfe. From Onion Lake First Nation, Greg Chief, Tia Trotter, Jessica Whitstone, Patrick Wolfe, William Diduck, Tineil Pahtayken.

We also have instructors James Pratt and Marlene Dormuth — you want to stand up, Marlene? Thanks — and Brendan Tuchscherer. Brendan is from the Global Transportation Hub, and we want to thank the Global Transportation Hub for the partnership and collaboration for making Brendan available to deliver defence and tactics training. Thank you. And last but not least, the program head, community safety program, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, is Dawn Fleming.

Mr. Speaker, they are seated in your gallery, as you can see, and I would ask you and all members of the Assembly to show a warm welcome to these students and the instructors. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just like to respond to the minister's introduction on behalf of the official opposition and say a great word of welcome and congratulations to these learners who've come to their Legislative Assembly. The community safety officer program, building on some of the good work that has been done previously at Saskatchewan Polytechnic, but also with . . . So congratulations to Marlene and certainly Jim Pratt if you give him our best, and to the instructor from Sask Polytechnic as well.

But I want to give a special shout-out to one Rod Ash who's no

stranger to security matters, having served with distinction with the Regina Police Service for I believe upwards of three decades. And once upon a time Rod Ash was a cool high school student at Scott Collegiate, a couple years ahead of my older brother, and certainly came back and did a tremendous amount of great work representing the Regina Police Service but also helping the community in North Central. So if we ever get it together to have a hall of fame in North Central, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure Rod Ash is going to be right in there in spades.

So anyway, congratulations to all the learners. Good work. Carry this forward. And with that I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming these individuals to their Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Cox: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to all members of this legislature, I would like to introduce a group of people from The Battlefords. Just give us a wave. I'm going to introduce, from the Battlefords Trade and Education Centre, board members Julian Stelmashuk, board Chair; Tammey Heinemann; and Terry Tait. And from My Community Cares, the fundraising committee members, Rob Rongve and Mac Driscoll; and the mayor of North Battleford, Ian Hamilton.

Mr. Speaker, these are a great group of community-minded citizens who are dedicated to building our new facility in The Battlefords for the Battlefords Trade and Education Centre, and I would ask everyone to please welcome them to their Legislative Assembly.

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

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the member opposite in welcoming this delegation from The Battlefords constituency and thank them for the good work that they're doing, Mr. Speaker. And of course a particular mention to Mayor Hamilton for his work as His Worship in the community; and Mr. Rob Rongve as well, familiar to people all throughout the province for the early morning reports on the radio as well, Mr. Speaker. So I'd like to welcome all of these guests to their legislature.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cut Knife-Turtleford.

Mr. Doke: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the member from The Battlefords and welcome the group from The Battlefords here to talk about the new BTEC [Battlefords Trade and Education Centre] facility. But in the group is a constituent of mine, Terry Tait. He's a former councillor for the village of Meota and also past mayor of the village of Meota. A strong community volunteer, Terry has a daughter named Megan that is a client of the BTEC facility. And I would ask that all members welcome Terry to his legislature.

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

Mr. Marchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and

through you to all the members of the Assembly, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce 29 students from the Regina Christian School accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Geoff Glasspell. This is Geoff's annual visit to the legislature, and I look forward to visiting with he and his students following question period this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

I'd also like to just mention that this is a particularly good time of year for Mr. Glasspell. He was an outstanding college basketball player at the University of Regina, and March Madness is on and Hoopla of course. His students will be in there. So members, if you don't mind, please welcome Geoff and his class to our Assembly.

And while I'm on my feet, I too would like to join in welcoming the special constable class here and in particular Marlene and Rod Ash. I had the great pleasure of working with both of these constables when they were with the Regina Police at Scott Collegiate. Their work in the inner city of Regina is absolutely outstanding and pioneers in the resource officer program. And so, hats off to you and welcome to your Legislative Assembly. Good to see you here.

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 support for education here in Saskatchewan. And we know that education is one of the most vital services that government provides to citizens; and that this government has failed to deliver a long-term plan and vision and the necessary resources to prioritize the delivery of educational excellence; and that this government has failed to deliver a real plan to close the Aboriginal education gap and to support English as an additional language students, support community schools and their communities and students. And I'd like to read the prayer now:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly call on this government to immediately prioritize education by laying out a long-term vision and plan with the necessary resources that provides the best quality education for Saskatchewan, that reflects Saskatchewan's demographic and population changes, that is based on proven educational best practices, that is developed through consultation with the education sector, and that builds strong educational infrastructure to serve students and communities long into the future.

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

Mr. Speaker, I do so present. Thank you.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise once again today to present petitions on behalf of concerned residents as it relates to the unsafe conditions created by that government on Dewdney Avenue: that government's failure to act, their failure to listen to plans that have been brought forward to

them, their failure to recognize the unsafe conditions that they've created. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly call on the provincial government to immediately take action as it relates to the unacceptable danger, disturbance, and infrastructure damage caused by the heavy-haul truck traffic on Dewdney Avenue west of the city centre, to ensure the safety and well-being of communities, families, residents, and users; and that those actions and plans should include rerouting the heavy-haul truck traffic, receive provincial funding, and be developed through consultation with the city of Regina, communities, and residents.

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

These petitions today are signed by concerned residents of Regina. I so submit.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition Whip.

Mr. Vermette: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition. Homelessness is a major problem in La Ronge and other parts of the North, and it is getting worse. Shelter is a basic need for everyone, but under this government it's getting harder and harder for people to find adequate housing, especially families, seniors, women and children who face abusive situations. The problem is getting worse because of the rising level of poverty, skyrocketing home ownership costs. And the prayer reads:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: to cause the Saskatchewan government to build a homeless shelter in the Lac la Ronge area to meet the needs of addressing homelessness in the Lac la Ronge area.

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

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

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition in support of safe staffing levels in long-term care. The petitioners point out that the Government of Saskatchewan needs to recognize that safe staffing levels must be able to provide hands-on care to residents; that this government is failing to fix the basics in long-term care, including rejecting the further urgent requests from long-term care facilities for increased and needed staffing levels; that the government has removed the regulations requiring a minimum standard of care for seniors, resulting in neglect. Mr. Speaker, the prayer reads as follows:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: to cause the government to commit to the creation of safe staffing levels for all valued members of the health care team and to reintroduce actual numbers of staff to match the level of care needs and the

number of residents under their care in long-term care facilities.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed from folks in Prelate, Leader, Lancer, Regina, Silton, Moose Jaw, Govan, Warman, Sceptre, Saskatoon, and Strasbourg. I so submit.

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

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition for real action on climate change. The individuals who have signed this wish to bring to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the following: that Saskatchewan produces the highest greenhouse gas emissions per capita in all of Canada and that our emissions continue to grow; that the Saskatchewan government has failed to tackle climate change, reduce the emissions to the province's own targets, or put in a real plan to protect the natural environment; and that since 2009, climate change funding has been decreased by 83 per cent. So the prayer reads:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan enact a real plan and allocate appropriate funding in the provincial budget to tackle climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, helping families transition to energy-efficient homes, and encouraging everyone in the province to take real action to protect the environment.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by individuals from Regina, Saskatoon, Melville, and Moose Jaw. I so present.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley.

Spring Free From Racism

Ms. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak about the 16th annual Spring Free From Racism family day celebration that took place yesterday at the Italian Club in Regina.

Spring Free From Racism is becoming an annual tradition in our province. The Minister for Parks, Culture and Sport was honoured to bring greetings on behalf of the government and to congratulate the committees, the volunteers, and the sponsors on another fabulous, successful event.

The first Spring Free From Racism committee formed in 1995 to address the racial issues of our First Nations people, new immigrants, and visible minorities. Since then we have made many positive strides. Yesterday hundreds of people came to watch many of the dancers, the multicultural entertainers, and of course taste some of the fabulous food. This family event really brings all members of our community together and allows us to appreciate what all the different cultures have to offer.

Mr. Speaker, we hear that Canada is a mosaic, but events like Spring Free From Racism really show us how diverse our

community really is. I would like to ask all members to join me in congratulating the Spring Free From Racism committee on another successful year as well as thank all the sponsors and the volunteers who continue to show off the diversity of our community. It is because of their commitment and hard work that this event has become such a success. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[13:45]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the pleasure of attending the 16th annual Spring Free From Racism event here in Saskatchewan, in Regina, along with my honourable friends, the Leader of the Opposition and the member from Regina Rosemont, and other such luminaries as the member for Regina Coronation Park; the mayor of Regina, Michael Fougere; and Member of Parliament Ralph Goodale.

Saskatchewan is continuing to grow by leaps and bounds, and more than half of the population growth we have seen in our province in recent years comes from international immigration. These people bring more than skills and talents to Saskatchewan. They bring languages, cultures, and identities, and weave their own threads into our province's rich cultural tapestry.

But Spring Free doesn't just celebrate the cultural heritage of those whose roots stretch across the oceans. It is also a time to recognize the importance of the indigenous peoples of Saskatchewan. The music, food, and dances of First Nations and Métis people were on vibrant display at Spring Free.

Mr. Speaker, as our province continues to grow and change, it is more and more obvious that we must all do our part to combat racism. Saskatchewan will never realize its full potential until everyone — First Nations and Métis peoples, newcomers, and the children and grandchildren of immigrants — are able to work in harmony without prejudice or discrimination.

And so I ask all members to join me in thanking everyone who helped make this year's Spring Free a great success and to their commitment to ending racism in Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Z99 Radiothon

Mr. Makowsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. March 19th and 20th was the 20th annual Z99 Radiothon for the Hospitals of Regina Foundation, hosted by CC, Lorie, and Buzz at the Cornwall Centre in downtown Regina. This 36-hour event helps to save babies' lives by raising money in support for the neonatal intensive care unit in the Rawlco centre for mother and baby care at the Regina General Hospital.

I should also mention the radio announcers stayed up for the entire 36 hours, collecting pledges. Long-time radio host CC said there's no way to prepare for staying awake and broadcasting on the airwaves for 36 consecutive hours, but the

energy he gets from people donating keeps him going.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to announce that this year's total raised was a whopping \$770,000. The money raised this year will go toward purchasing an enteral feeding system, a digital X-ray machine, a Giraffe OmniBed, monitor software, telehealth equipment for the feeder hospitals in southern Saskatchewan, and to assist the Rawlco hostel.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank PotashCorp for doing a social media challenge to help raise funds for the cause. Every time the hashtag #Z99PotashCorpCares was tweeted, the company donated \$10. Well Regina and surrounding area responded to the challenge and PotashCorp donated the full \$150,000 to the cause.

I'd like to ask all members to join me in congratulating Z99 for this very successful radiothon, and I'd like to thank the citizens of Regina and surrounding area for their very generous donations. Every dollar donated will go towards saving a baby's life. Thank you.

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

Breaking the Silence

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, on Saturday I had the pleasure to attend the 18th annual Breaking the Silence Conference at the University of Saskatchewan.

As always, there were a number of excellent presentations and guest speakers, covering a wide variety of queer topics of interest to Saskatchewan teachers and students, including a group of students who fought successfully to change the Vancouver School Board policies regarding queer students, a presentation about LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender] rights around the world led by Helen Smith-McIntyre and Bill Rafoss from Amnesty International, and a workshop about our own recent amendment by this Assembly to *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*, protecting people from being discriminated against based on their gender identity.

I also want to congratulate Pat Atkinson, former MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] from Saskatoon, on receiving the Peter Corren Award for Outstanding Achievement, well deserved for her leadership over the years first as a University of Saskatchewan student and then when she served so well as a minister of Education fighting for rights for queer students in our Saskatchewan schools. Pat is an excellent role model for all of us who are elected as MLAs to strive to build a better society that is inclusive for all people.

When it comes to LGBT rights, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad Saskatchewan is making progress. We've come a long way but there is still much more that needs to be done to make sure everyone in our province can live with dignity and safety.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in thanking the organizers of this year's Breaking the Silence Conference. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Deputy Whip.

Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Borden Museum

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 14th I had the great opportunity to attend an event celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Borden and District Museum. The museum first opened in June 1990 and was then comprised of the Turtle Lake School, the Munroe Barber Shop, and the Newbold Butcher Shop. In the years that followed, a replica of the Diefenbaker homestead and the Masonic Lodge were added to complete the five-building museum that exists today.

The innovative, persistent community spirit that was necessary to build our province in its earliest days is showcased and preserved in the Borden Museum. The museum is home to many historic artifacts that tell stories of the proud traditions and heritage of the Borden area.

Mr. Speaker, the evening also provided an opportunity to celebrate the volunteers who built and operated the museum. Helen Sutherland was recognized for being an active volunteer for all 25 years that the museum has been open.

Much like our province, Borden and area was built on volunteerism and community spirit. It is these enduring qualities that allow for the preservation and promotion of our history at the Borden Museum. Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in thanking Helen Sutherland and all the other volunteers who have worked to preserve our province's heritage in the Borden Museum for the past 25 years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Community Safety Officers

Mr. Cox: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate the first class of special constables from the community safety officer program who are with us today in the gallery. The city of North Battleford was chosen as the proof-of-concept site for this program.

The implementation evaluation for the North Battleford program was completed in early December 2014 and exceeded all expectations. In collaboration with SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities], SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association], and the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] and the Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police, our government has developed an alternative enforcement model to assist in delivering high-priority, low-risk community safety programs and services.

The following are just some of the duties special constables will carry out: municipal bylaw enforcement, serving court documents, community relations, community engagement, mediation and problem solving, enforcement of *The Traffic Safety Act* and *The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act*, enforcement of other provincial statutes as determined by the ministry through local consultation, increased uniform presence to enhance feelings of safety in the community.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities have indicated that having an enhanced uniform presence in their communities is a priority

for their residents. This program provides that without reducing the presence of RCMP or local police.

Mr. Speaker, these special constables are well trained, with mandatory core training approved by the ministry including use-of-force training to the standards required by the Saskatchewan Police College.

I would like all members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating our province's first class of community safety officers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Education Funding

Mr. Bradshaw: — Mr. Speaker, the budget announced last week is great news for the students in Saskatchewan. It affirms our government's commitment to education with an average increase of 4.5 per cent for operational funding to each of the school divisions, and 424 million in capital, the largest budget day education capital announcement in the history of Saskatchewan.

Last week the Leader of the Opposition was claiming we cut English as an additional language, EAL funding. Once again, Mr. Speaker, we have to correct the record because he was just plain wrong. Last year we announced an additional 1 million commitment to support EAL — 588,000 of that money went out in the '14-15 budget and 420 went out in last week's budget, totalling 1 million this school year. As usual the NDP [New Democratic Party] didn't know what they were actually talking about.

In the last year NDP's budget priorities, the members opposite called for "rerouting of standardized testing money into teaching and one-on-one help for students." Well, Mr. Speaker, in the budget we took that money; we put it into supports for students. And the NDP still complained about it.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader has made a choice not to take a stand on most issues, but he should at least make sure his Finance and Education critic does his homework before he stands up in this House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Quality of Patient Care in Hospital

Mr. Broten: — Earl Luhr was 79 years old. Despite being in generally good health, Earl was admitted to an acute care unit at the Pasqua Hospital because of awful choking episodes. His health kept deteriorating, but three weeks later without even having a diagnosis, Earl was moved into a converted storage room on the transitional care unit to wait for a seniors' care placement. The hospital was chronically over capacity and they wanted Earl out.

Just a couple of days after being moved into the converted storage room, Earl died tragically. His family is here today, Mr.

Speaker, because they don't want another Saskatchewan family to have to go through what they have gone through. Will the Premier meet with the Luhr family today to hear about Earl's awful experience?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Our sincerest condolences go to the family that is here. And, Mr. Speaker, if I'm unable for any reason to meet with them today, the Minister of Health or the Minister of Rural and Remote Health would certainly meet with them to hear first-hand about their situation.

Mr. Speaker, we take all of these cases, when they come before the House, very seriously. Mr. Speaker, we also want to ensure that across the system we are improving health care in the province, that we are actually increasing investments in human resources but also in the capital facilities, Mr. Speaker, that we seek continuous improvement so that these stories are never, never happening and certainly not repeated in the province.

Mr. Speaker, that has certainly been evident in our government's decision with respect to health care budgets over the last number of years, both from an operating standpoint and the capital. Obviously there's still more work to do, but we'll continue to seek improvement, Mr. Speaker. And as for this particular case, someone, certainly myself or the Minister of Health, will meet with the family today.

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

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the family expressed to me that they've had contact with the minister's office already and, if possible, they would greatly appreciate the opportunity to sit with the Premier and share their concerns and their ideas.

When Earl would have a choking incident and press the nurse call button, his family says it would sometimes take 30 minutes or longer for a nurse to respond. Now we've heard of this regularly happening in seniors' care facilities, and that's unacceptable and it demands action from this government. But when someone is in the hospital because of an undiagnosed problem that causes severe choking incidents, the response to a call button bell should be immediate. It shouldn't be 30 minutes or even longer.

My question to the Premier: does he agree with that? Will he undertake an immediate review to determine how long hospital patients are waiting when they push their call bells and the reason for those waits?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly we will be following up with the family, as the Premier has offered to do. I will meet with Earl's family today if it's convenient for them, Mr. Speaker. Obviously in cases like these we also want to follow up with the health region to determine more information on these types of cases. The Leader of the Opposition has stated that the family has been in contact with my office. I don't have the particulars, Mr. Speaker, but I

would be happy to look into their concerns, Mr. Speaker, knowing that this doesn't change what happened to Earl.

Mr. Speaker, I can say though that the government, working with the health regions, we have certainly increased resources to our health regions. We've increased the number of acute care beds in the two hospitals here in this city as well as others, and we've added, Mr. Speaker, over 2,600 nursing individuals in this province of all designations. But when situations like these come forward, we want to learn from them, find out what exactly happened to ensure that they never happen again.

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

Mr. Broten: — Well I know, Mr. Speaker, the family's had a lot of contact with the region, trying to bring proper changes. And the question specifically was about long waits when a call button is pressed, Mr. Speaker, and I think that's something that needs to be definitely looked at.

The government actually, they actually used to survey patients to ask if they received the help they needed when they pushed their call bell. But it stopped surveying them, Mr. Speaker, because of the John Black lean project. And that is unacceptable.

Because of his severe choking incidents, Earl needed to be fed through a feeding tube. But the hospital didn't send up the special liquid food on his first night in the converted storage closet. Earl's family was told, believe it or not, that staff couldn't go to any of the other spots, Mr. Speaker, to retrieve the appropriate food for his feeding tube because that was part of another ward's supplies, and their budget.

My question to the Premier: how does it make any sense that one hospital ward can't go to another for desperately needed supplies like feeding tube food for very hungry patients? Is that part of the John Black lean kanban inventory system?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, certainly our health regions, working with the Health Quality Council, will survey on a number of different areas, Mr. Speaker, throughout a year, throughout a number of years, Mr. Speaker. That will change from time to time in areas where we want to have more information, Mr. Speaker. It is a large health care system, and so the surveys will change over time.

With respect to what the Leader of the Opposition has raised today, these are questions that I will be asking of the health region, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what I would expect, what we would expect is that people that are in our care are treated with the utmost respect and dignity, Mr. Speaker, that supplies, that medication would be delivered to them in a timely manner, and that call bells, particularly somebody that is having distress, will be answered in a timely fashion, Mr. Speaker. So I commit to the family, to Earl's family, that I will be following up specifically with the health region to find out exactly what happened in this case, Mr. Speaker, and what the region is putting in place so that it doesn't happen again.

[14:00]

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, we know the surveys stopped, as the obsession has been with the John Black lean project. And I think that's a real shame. Earl's family says that he was starving to death in the Pasqua Hospital. But instead of figuring out what was wrong with him, instead of diagnosing the problem and giving him proper treatment, well first he was turned away twice, sent away from the ER [emergency room]. Then after they finally admitted him, they shuffled him out of acute care without a diagnosis, put him in a converted storage room in the transitional care unit to just wait for a long-term care placement. My question to the Premier: how on earth is this acceptable? Is it because Earl was almost 80 years old? Is that why there was so little regard for his life?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Mr. Speaker, certainly I think members of this House, members of the public, would expect and should expect that all health care providers — physicians, nurses, everybody that works in the health care system — have the utmost, first and foremost the patient at heart and the patient in mind, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition I think is getting into issues around clinical decisions. I can't speak to those, but I will certainly endeavour to find out from the health region what exactly took place in Earl's situation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the Leader of the Opposition isn't saying anything about the health care providers that were providing care to Earl. But again, my offer is to the family, that I will meet with them, and I will follow up to determine as best as we can what happened in this place in this situation, Mr. Speaker, as well as with the region, what the region is putting in place to ensure that this doesn't happen to any other patient in our system.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, these are the concerns that I'm raising straight from the family. Last January 6th, the liquid food was plunged into Earl's feeding tube far too quickly, and it went into his throat and lungs. Earl immediately sat up. While gasping, he wrote "suction" on a piece of paper because he knew that he urgently needed that liquid sucked out.

Time was wasted as staff tried to get the suction working. Finally they called code blue, but there was no crash cart on the ward. The code team that came from another ward was locked out of the transitional care unit because the WanderGuard system was activated by an Alzheimer's patient that was at the door. By the time the code blue team reached Earl with the crash cart and a portable suction machine, they told the family that it would cause too much pain to try to save him.

Will the Premier commit to a full review of all transitional care units, including the level of staffing and training and emergency protocols such as a code blue override for the WanderGuard system?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I've said already in the House, I'll repeat it: certainly I am willing to meet with the family. I would appreciate that opportunity to learn more about what happened. We will be following up though with the health region, Mr. Speaker, to determine what exactly took place in this regard, what happened to Earl, and his care, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we'll be following up with the region.

We'll be following up with the facility itself, Mr. Speaker, to determine what action has been taken, if it was appropriate, whether or not some of these types of concerns have been forwarded on to the regulatory bodies that investigate these types of things, Mr. Speaker. I can't speak to that at this point, but we will be following up with this matter. This is a serious concern, Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition has outlined, but we are trying to make improvements.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think one improvement in this budget that is of note is the fact that we need to add a geriatrician to southern Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, we've added \$700,000 in funding so that our facilities and our providers will have the support of geriatric support here in the city of Regina to serve in southern Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, we need a full and proper review of the transitional care units. We think also of Sylvia Phillips and her family who had to hire private care support to go in to make sure that their mother's basic needs were being met.

When Earl was moved into that converted storage closet, his family was not told that it was just a holding area for those waiting for seniors' care, and his family was not told that this unit provided less care to patients. And that's unacceptable. After having liquid food plunged into his lungs and his throat and after waiting too long for the code blue team, Earl was wheeled into the ward's lunchroom for his family to say their goodbyes. He died after 8 p.m. last January 6th. Earl may have died eventually of what was wrong with him, but the family will never know that because our health care system not only failed to diagnose Earl, but it caused his premature death.

Mr. Speaker, this government has spent far too much time and money listening to its \$40 million American lean consultant and the Japanese senseis. The Luhr family is here today, Mr. Speaker, with a list of improvements that they want to see. Will the Premier commit to finally listen to them and listen to what needs to be done so that our health care system can indeed be fixed so that the basics can be addressed, and so this family can have some answers as to why they were so horribly let down?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, certainly I commit on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan to not only meeting with this family but to listening to this family and to taking any advice, any recommendations that they have based on their experience, based on their loved one's experience in this particular situation, Mr. Speaker.

Again I'll be following up, my office will be, with the quality of care coordinators for both Regina and the province to determine what steps may have taken place since this time in the work that they would have done to look into this, if they in fact had been involved. As well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not at this point aware if it was deemed a critical incident. If it was, Mr. Speaker, we would obviously take that information very seriously.

We are committed, in this province, Mr. Speaker, this government has committed to improving the health care system for the people of this province, Mr. Speaker. That is why we have invested record dollars into our health regions, hired record levels of health providers, and are in fact investing record dollars into the infrastructure of health care in this province, Mr. Speaker, and looking at different ways and better ways to providing services. So I commit that on behalf of the government to this family and to all families in this province.

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

Housing of Young Offenders

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Speaker, the Corrections minister completely mishandled her plan to move the Regina community-training residence into the Normanview neighbourhood here in Regina. Time and time again she gave wrong information. Even on Thursday in question period, the minister said there was only a bit of painting done at Dales House. Then she admitted in the rotunda after question period that there were also windows replaced, flooring work, and electrical work.

So increasingly people in Saskatoon are thinking they can't trust this minister's plan to shut down the Yarrow Youth Farm and move an open custody facility into the Buena Vista neighbourhood. After messing up the Regina plan so badly and giving so much wrong information, how can the Corrections minister expect Saskatoon residents to trust her plan for Yarrow?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister for Corrections and Policing.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Mr. Speaker, I'm going to correct the record here. What I said in the House in question period was in relation to what I knew at the time, I stated that absolutely, and that all I knew at that time was that there was painting being done, Mr. Speaker.

When I went out and was interviewed by the media, I then was provided more information from Central Services. Mr. Speaker, this is not our ministry. Central Services is the one responsible for the repairs — you know, electrical work, that type of thing. I was provided that particular information, and as such, Mr. Speaker, I responded accordingly.

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

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Speaker, to steal from the words of Shakespeare, methinks she doth protest too much.

The people in my constituency have absolutely no faith in that minister and that government. Nothing about this government's plan makes any sense: shutting down a good facility, mixing low-risk youth with high-risk youth, plopping an open-custody facility in the middle of Saskatoon with no consultation. None of this makes any sense.

And when we look at how that Corrections minister mishandled her plans here in Regina, we lose even more faith in this government's plan for Saskatoon. How can we trust that she has asked the right questions about the plan to shut down Yarrow and move an open-custody facility into the Buena Vista neighbourhood?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Corrections and Policing.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, and I'll say it again, we are closing the underused Yarrow facility and consolidating with an empty wing of Kilburn Hall, Mr. Speaker. We're responding. And we should be pleased about this: the changing realities in our justice youth numbers, Mr. Speaker, they have declined steadily for the past 20 years. Our youth institutions currently remain at around 49 per cent capacity, Mr. Speaker. At the same time we see an increase in our adult correctional facilities, Mr. Speaker. The reason why we are consolidating these is because of capacity to deliver effective programming to the youth within the city of Saskatoon.

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

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Speaker, based on her very recent track record, we have no idea if that minister will walk out into the rotunda and give very different information than she has given in question period. So my question is to the Premier. Will he instruct that struggling Corrections minister to put the plan to shut down Yarrow on hold?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Corrections and Policing.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Mr. Speaker, the Kilburn is an existing facility in Saskatoon and has been in that community since 1926. The closed-custody program has been in existence since the 1980s and the facility had previously housed open-custody youth.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to liken back to what happened during, under the NDP. The NDP closed three youth facilities 11 years ago, Mr. Speaker, a total of 42 beds: House of Concord run by the Salvation Army, Kenosee Lake Youth Camp, and Nisbet Lake Youth camp. Mr. Speaker, these were open-custody youth. You wouldn't believe what the NDP, where the NDP put these open-custody youths once they closed these particular camps, Mr. Speaker. They put them into a closed-custody facility, a secure facility called Paul Dojack here in Regina, Mr. Speaker. I find it incredible that the member opposite is even asking a question about the youth in Kilburn Hall. Thank you.

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

Provincial Budget and Financial Management

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A simple question for the government: could the Minister of Finance or the Premier tell the people of Saskatchewan how much money was in the Growth and Financial Security Fund, the rainy day fund in 2009?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the Finance critic for the question. Mr. Speaker, that information obviously is in all of the publicly released government documents that are there.

But, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to update the member opposite and members of the House on an announcement just recently made this day by Moody's, Mr. Speaker, Moody's Investor Services who have of course given the province of Saskatchewan its first ever AAA credit rating under this government. Here's what they have to say about the budget:

Despite a significant shortfall in oil royalty revenues Saskatchewan's sound fiscal practices [and that would include how we manage funds like the Fiscal Stabilization Fund] combined with increasing potash royalty revenues support the province's balanced budget 2015-16 ... Saskatchewan and British Columbia stand out from the other Canadian provinces that will likely post deficits in 2015-16.

And we achieved this without any tax increases. Compare that to what members opposite did when they were in government and ran into some challenges in the budget. They increased people's taxes. They shut down infrastructure spending. And we certainly never had a credit rating of AAA from anyone in the world, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, pretty simple question there to the Premier, and it's more than disappointing and passing strange that the Premier wouldn't know the answer to a question like that, Mr. Speaker.

The answer? There was more than \$1.4 billion in that account in 2009. And despite a booming economy and record revenues through that period of time, this government just kept drawing down those revenues, those savings, Mr. Speaker, during good times ... [inaudible interjection] ... May be saved by the Finance minister here today, Mr. Speaker.

So another simple question to the Premier, maybe the Finance minister is ready for this one: could he tell the people of Saskatchewan how much will be left in the rainy day fund, that had \$1.4 billion in it in 2009, by the end of this year?

[14:15]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Leader and I would guess his seatmate, the leader of the party, are again asking the question in general terms, where did the money go?

He's referencing about the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. He's referencing about prosperity in the province. So let's review again . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh, they don't want the answer. They don't want the answer, Mr. Speaker.

The answer is \$3 billion in debt repayment. The answer is hundreds of millions of dollars in tax relief. The money went back into families' pockets. The answer, Mr. Speaker, is taking the last seven long years of the NDP's government infrastructure investment of three billion and doubling it to \$6 billion. The answer, Mr. Speaker, is a new hospital in Moose Jaw. The answer will be a brand new hospital, the Sask Hospital, in North Battleford. Bypasses and bridges, Mr. Speaker. The answer is investments that have created one of the, if not the leading economy in the country, Mr. Speaker. The answer is a set of books and a budget so good that three days after the budget, Moody's in New York has more to say than the NDP. They call it a balanced budget and sound fiscal planning. That's what they . . . [inaudible].

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, two questions, no answers, but certainly an agitated Premier here today, Mr. Speaker. And you know, judging by his record I guess we can understand why.

The Sask Party government has drained well over \$1 billion from the rainy day fund during a time of record prosperity. The answer to the question that was asked was that there'd be just \$200 million left in that fund at the end of this year. I guess it's turned more into, I guess, I hope it doesn't rain fund, Mr. Speaker, as opposed to a rainy day fund. All at the same time as it's decimated our savings account, this government is adding a whopping \$700 million of GRF [General Revenue Fund] debt and another \$800 million of Crown debt, a total of \$1.5 billion more debt this year alone.

This government should have saved some money through times of prosperity, but it didn't save a penny. It's drained the rainy day fund, and it's racking up more and more debt. To the Premier: with years and years of record prosperity, how can he simply justify that?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I understand that the member opposite wants to know what was contained in the then referred to as the Fiscal Stabilization Fund under the NDP . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I note, Mr. Speaker, the member from Athabasca doesn't want to really hear this number because he's provided numbers in this Assembly that he just makes up, Mr. Speaker. He just makes them up. Whatever comes out of his mouth is just something that he wants to talk about, Mr. Speaker.

Well the reality, Mr. Speaker, the reality is in 2006-07, Mr. Speaker, the last year of the NDP, the balance in the fund is \$887.5 million. That's reality.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Speaking of Moody's, Mr. Speaker:

agitated, bellowing, hollering, very few answers from that government, Mr. Speaker. And there's no doubt, I know we heard a laundry list from the Premier, there's no doubt this Sask Party spent a lot of money. After all, it's had record revenues in and they've spent every last dollar and more as they've arrived. It's also somehow managed to drain the rainy day fund and rack up more and more debt.

The worst part though is that Saskatchewan families haven't experienced the benefits of this government's massive spending. Classrooms are overcrowded and under-resourced, the waits in ERs are unacceptable, and people are crammed into hospital hallways and unacceptable spaces. Seniors' care is a mess, and the cost of living for the people of Saskatchewan is sky high.

To the Premier: with record revenues, with the savings accounts drained, and with lots more debt added, as in billions, shouldn't Saskatchewan people actually be feeling some of the benefits from this?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to deliver some post-budget speeches here in Regina and Saskatoon. And just now in the city of Moose Jaw, had the opportunity to talk to the mayor of Moose Jaw who was very pleasantly pleased with the fact that the revenue sharing, Mr. Speaker, revenue sharing this year with all municipalities across Saskatchewan is \$265 million, Mr. Speaker — record expenditure for municipal revenue sharing.

Mr. Speaker, I want to correct one thing because the Leader of the Opposition stated a number of times that he would like to compare record revenue of \$8 billion to 14. Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is not quoting apples to apples. Mr. Speaker, today's budget, a summary budget is \$14 billion, he understands that; but on March 31 of 2008, the summary revenue was \$11.7 billion. So, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has to use correct facts, correct terminology, and discuss the budget accordingly.

The Speaker: — Why is the Opposition House Leader on his feet?

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Speaker: — You may proceed with your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As members opposite should well know, and no later than this past Thursday, we had the Premier apologize and withdraw for using the expression "making stuff up."

The Minister of Finance and, I believe, Deputy Premier of that government just used very much the same language, which he ought to well know is unparliamentary, in referring to one of the members in this Assembly. Mr. Speaker, if you could please rule on that.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I too had listened very closely to the debate that was happening during question period. And I would ask that in reviewing the specific words that were said that you look at the specific context in which the words were said. And in fact, Mr. Speaker, I think that you would find that the point of order would not be well taken. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I too was listening to the comments from the Minister of Finance and he did indeed indicate that one of the members had a habit of making things up, which has been previously, while I haven't ruled on it, members have stood and apologized after having made those comments. So I would ask the Minister of Finance to please rise, apologize, and withdraw that remark.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I will withdraw those remarks and I will apologize to the member opposite.

The Speaker: — Thank you.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister for Immigration.

Changes to Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased today to announce improvements our government is making to the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program's entrepreneur category, improvements that will help grow our economy and create jobs here in Saskatchewan.

The SINP [Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program] entrepreneur category has been a source of immigration and investment to our province since 2007. Over 900 entrepreneurs have been nominated by the program since 2007, settling in communities all across Saskatchewan and investing over \$114 million.

We redesigned the program based on stakeholder feedback, best practice research, and consultation with the federal government. The first key change is the consolidation of five category streams into two: the entrepreneur stream and the farm owner/operator stream.

During consultation, stakeholders identified factors such as language ability, entrepreneurial experience, as important qualities needed by an immigrant entrepreneur to settle successfully. As a result of this feedback, a new objective assessment points grid has been developed that awards points to applicants that have the skills and proven experience that best prepares them to settle in a new community and start up their business.

Another program enhancement is the introduction of an expression of interest application process. Interested candidates will now create and submit a profile that includes basic information along with their self-assessed points score. Candidates that meet program criteria and score the highest using the new assessment will then be priority processed. This

is expected to greatly improve processing times.

Business succession and increased entrepreneur immigration beyond the province's two largest cities were also identified as priorities by stakeholders. Applicants planning on taking advantage of the many opportunities in rural Saskatchewan will be eligible for additional points and lower investment requirements.

Finally, only those approved applicants that have fulfilled the terms of their performance agreement will be eligible for nomination for permanent residence. That will ensure approved applicants fulfill their investment commitments once they've landed here in Saskatchewan.

Our government's decision to not raise taxes and continued investments in infrastructure announced in this year's budget will continue to make Saskatchewan an attractive destination for entrepreneurs. Thanks to the hard work of Saskatchewan people, our economy will continue to grow, creating jobs and keeping Saskatchewan strong. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll provide a few comments from the opposition's perspective with respect to the changes that the minister is announcing in this statement.

When we look at any of the changes to immigration and the SINP, we of course need to look very closely, Mr. Speaker. We do know this government's track record when it comes to changes to the program. You know, I think back to the changes around the family class, for example, how that really was disruptive to the lives of many newcomers who have come to Saskatchewan. And so I look forward to hearing and listening and discussions with the newcomer community in Saskatchewan to see how these changes will in fact adjust things and what the reality will be on the ground. And so I look forward to those discussions to find out from those who are most directly affected about what the outcomes of these changes may be and as to the opinion of them from those who are most affected.

The minister in his remarks also mentioned the issue of processing times and I know that's a common complaint that I hear in my constituency office, as do I'm sure many other MLAs with respect to some of the times that applicants face. And so it's important to have the right resources in place for the processing of applications so that they're done in a timely way. So that's an important point I think to put on the record as well.

So with that, I will thank the minister for the statement and the opportunity to respond.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Cox: — Mr. Speaker, I wish to order the answers to questions 718 to 721.

The Speaker: — The Government Whip has ordered responses to questions 718 to 721.

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY (BUDGET DEBATE)

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

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the opportunity to be able to get up and speak to this budget. Mr. Speaker, as I believe the Finance minister has mentioned on many occasions, this was a tough budget and took a lot of work by a large number of members on this side of the House, many hours that they spent putting this budget together, led by our Finance minister, the member for Canora-Pelly. And, Mr. Speaker, I might mention that it's his last budget, and we're certainly going to miss him in this House. Well I won't because I won't be here either. I'll be gone with him. But there's many members in this House are going to remember the member from Canora-Pelly and the dedicated time that he's put in over the last 20 years.

Mr. Speaker, I think the theme of this is important, of this budget, in a time when oil prices have dropped dramatically, of keeping Saskatchewan strong. And I think one of the things that we take pride in over our first seven years in government is keeping taxes low. And I think a number of the members in a number of speeches on a number of occasions replying to budgets have talked about the tax cuts we've made over those seven years, and I think it's been very beneficial to many people in this province, in fact very beneficial to many, many people on low incomes. I think it was 114,000 people that we took off the provincial tax roll, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure it's appreciated by those people.

Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to invest in infrastructure. And, Mr. Speaker, I noticed . . . It was kind of interesting coming in yesterday. I had four different occasions to have to go down to 60 clicks on my way to Regina. And I know you're going to say, Mr. Speaker, what are you talking about? It's not summer. It's not construction season. No, well actually, it is. It's construction season under a Sask Party government because we go year round.

Mr. Speaker, four different times I had to slow down for construction where they're putting either a new bridge in or they're putting culverts across the roads, those same roads that deteriorated under the NDP for 16 years. And finally we're making big improvements to those highways out there, so much so that we can't just do it in the summer. We have to do it all winter, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we're controlling operating spending, I think, to the tune of only a 1.2 per cent increase, and I think that's probably a plus in the long run, Mr. Speaker. I think from time to time many businesses have to make those decisions to keep their businesses viable, and it's no different when you're in government.

[14:30]

Also helping to create jobs, Mr. Speaker, this budget contains new tax incentives for new job creation and continues to support increased training opportunities for our young people. And a lot of young people are either staying in this province that wouldn't have before or returning to the province, that we need so drastically to fill the jobs that are coming available in the province, Mr. Speaker. On top of that, as the Finance minister talked about today in question period, we're doing this for the balanced budget with a surplus of \$107 million, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, some of the highlights in this budget, and I think infrastructure is probably one of the most important things that we can talk about, but there's about \$1.3 billion for core infrastructure in 2015-16. That, Mr. Speaker, is the largest infrastructure investment in Saskatchewan history and a 50 per cent increase over last year. And that probably feeds into what I've talked about where we're having to go year round with construction on our road network across the province because you cannot get it done in the summer months, Mr. Speaker. And we need contractors that are available, and they're available through the months when of course there's frost and snow and things like that, that we have to go year round.

Mr. Speaker, 256 million for health capital, and I know that's important, Mr. Speaker, to many. There were some members in the gallery here today that I know are very interested in the hospital at North Battleford but also the new children's hospital in Saskatoon. And, Mr. Speaker, the new children's hospital in Saskatoon is important to every member of this legislature, not just the people of Saskatoon but to everyone in this province that has children or, Mr. Speaker, in many cases such as mine where we have grandchildren. Hopefully they don't ever have to utilize that hospital but if they do, it's there, Mr. Speaker. And it certainly is going to be welcomed, I know, by the parents and grandparents across this province.

Mr. Speaker, 842 million to build, operate, and maintain transportation infrastructure, which is an increase of 43.4 per cent: 211 million to start the Regina bypass, 19 million to start construction of twinning of Highway 7 from Saskatoon to Delisle. And, Mr. Speaker, from Fort Qu'Appelle to Balgonie, we've had the opportunity to have passing lanes installed, and it's a vast improvement from where it was before and certainly frees up the traffic to move at a better pace, Mr. Speaker.

\$74.5 million for municipal infrastructure, which is also important to rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and something that was a big shortfall at the end of the NDP's reign where they were downloaded on by the previous NDP government. And I know from the comments I've had from this budget from municipal leaders, they're very pleased.

I had the opportunity the other night, Mr. Speaker, to go to a

function in Melville where they're welcoming new people into Melville in the community. Great function, Mr. Speaker. But one of the things I noticed, the municipal leaders that were there had to come over and, you know, after a budget they might say, well I wish we'd have got this or I wish we'd have got that. Mr. Speaker, that's not what they were saying. They were saying, thank you for not cutting revenue sharing. They said, we went through many years under the NDP government where we had no idea what we were getting for revenue sharing. They said, now it's sustainable, reliable, and, Mr. Speaker, they said thank you. And, Mr. Speaker, I believe that every municipal leader out there appreciates the revenue sharing that we have provided over our first seven years and will into the future.

Mr. Speaker, health care, important to all of us, Mr. Speaker, \$5.5 billion for health care, Mr. Speaker, almost getting close to half of the budget of the province of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, we all know how near and dear health care is to our hearts, but I know many members, and including the Rural Health minister and the Health minister, will be talking in more detail on the health budget.

Mr. Speaker, also for education, 3.7 billion in total spending for education including 53.3 million for child care spaces, an increase of 2.2 million over last year and, Mr. Speaker, 4.6 million for supports for learning.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities — I just talked a bit about them here — 265 million for municipalities. And, Mr. Speaker, I know from past experience of being a reeve of an RM, it's nice to have that reliable and sustainable funding coming ahead of time when you know you're getting one point of the PST [provincial sales tax], 1 per cent of the PST for funding for municipalities when you make your budget. Because the way it was before, we had no idea when we put our budgets together whether we would be cut again or it would be the status quo. In fact under the 16 years of the NDP, I don't ever remember once there being an increase. And I could be wrong, Mr. Speaker. There may have been one or two out of that 16 where they actually increased it, but I certainly know there was a number of years where they cut the funding because I was part of a municipality and a council out there that had to deal with it.

Mr. Speaker, so many areas that I think are so important to the province, but I think what's important to talk about, and in my case, being that this is probably my last budget that I'll get the opportunity to speak to, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make some comparisons. And you know, Mr. Speaker, I think we've talked about the budget. We will be talking about the budget for the next week and maybe longer in this House, Mr. Speaker, but I think it's only fair that we start to compare what has happened in the first seven years under a Sask Party government and what the policies are of the NDP on the opposite side, Mr. Speaker.

Let's compare the policies. We know that keeping taxes low are important on this side. Infrastructure spending is important on this side. And we compare that to what, Mr. Speaker? Well you can't compare it to a policy that doesn't exist. The Leader of the Opposition and the Finance critic on the far side, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition gets up and criticizes every day and his common theme is just spend more, spend more, spend more, and the problem will go away. And I don't know where he was for 16 years when the NDP were in power, but that

wasn't the solution to the problems we had in rural Saskatchewan. And I don't believe it was the answer for urban Saskatchewan because under the NDP, they did none of the above, Mr. Speaker. They cut funding. They chased jobs out of this province and chased a lot of health care workers along with it, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think the only comparison that we can make from this side of the House is we compare our record of the first seven years under a Sask Party government to the policies of 16 years of an NDP government, and that would be fair. I think most of my colleagues are nodding, yes, that would be fair. Because every member on this side of the House certainly remembers on a number of occasion they either had a hospital closed, a school closed, no roadwork done out in rural Saskatchewan, funding . . . Agriculture's a prime example. The member for Thunder Creek knows exactly what I'm talking about. The member for Arm River . . . Well there's a whole number of people on this side of the House that actually farm, Mr. Speaker, and we first-hand saw the cuts that were made to programs across this province, Mr. Speaker.

And now a brand new school in Langenburg, and they're very thankful for that, Mr. Speaker. And they were very thankful that in a tough budget that that wasn't put on hold, and we thank the Finance minister and my colleagues for that, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of rural communities across the province of Saskatchewan, and I think we represent all of them in rural Saskatchewan. But I want to give you, just mention a few names here, Mr. Speaker, of important communities: Arborfield, Beechy, Bengough, Birch Hills, Borden, Cabri, Climax, Coronach, Craik, Cupar, Cut Knife, Dinsmore, Dodsland, Eatonia, Elrose, Eston, Fillmore, Gainsborough, Goodsoil, Grenfell, Gull Lake — there's more, Mr. Speaker — Imperial, Invermay, Ituna, Kincaid, Lafleche, Lampman, Langenburg, Leoville, Loon Lake, Lucky Lake, Macklin, Mankota, Mildon, Montmartre, Neilburg, Nokomis, Norquay, Oxbow, Pangman, Ponteix, Radville, Rockglen, St. Walburg, Smeaton, Spalding, Theodore, Vanguard, Watson, White Bear, and Whitewood. There's probably more, Mr. Speaker.

But do you know what those communities have in common, Mr. Speaker? Those communities across this province had their hospital closed, and it wasn't closed by the members on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker. It was closed by members on that side. And I know the member for Lakeview knows exactly what I'm talking about. For a period of time he was the Health minister under the previous government. I believe it was Louise Simard — wasn't it? — that was Health minister when most of our hospitals disappeared.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that is a lot of communities that lost their health care in this province, but not only did we lose the facilities. We lost a lot of doctors. We lost a lot of nurses. We lost LPNs [licensed practical nurse]. We lost care aids. Mr. Speaker, they wonder, when they actually finished their 16-year reign, why were we short 1,000 . . . I think the number was 1,000 or 800 nurses at that time. Well most of them had been driven out of the province by the members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, I can't believe that the members opposite have the nerve to get up now and say, this is how you're going to solve

all the problems in health care, when I just read you that list. And I will bet, Mr. Speaker, that there's not a person that lives in any one of these communities across Saskatchewan that will ever forget who closed their hospital in their community.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in their 16 years, their record wasn't great when it comes to health care, but I just picked out one little part of their record in health care. Between 2001 and 2006, the NDP's last five full years in office — 2007 actually — the province lost 1,160 total health care workers: 455 RNs [registered nurse] and RPNs [registered practical nurse], 173 physicians, 155 pharmacists, and 95 physiotherapists. Mr. Speaker, they didn't bring them into the province. That's what we lost in the province of Saskatchewan under an NDP government.

I want to take a minute or two, Mr. Speaker, because it's so important to the economy of this province, and talk about agriculture. We don't hear a whole lot coming from the members opposite on agriculture. Number one, their record was dismal at best, and that's putting it kindly, Mr. Speaker. But they never valued agriculture to the extent that I think the members on this side of the House do.

I know from my colleague from Thunder Creek and some of the program improvements that he's made and some of the things that we did earlier on under our new watch on the government, and I think that farmers had been asking for for many years, Mr. Speaker, whether it's with crop insurance or even bringing the administration of the programs back to Melville . . . And tied in with crop insurance, Mr. Speaker, I think the efficiencies that were brought to the crop insurance program, and I know the Minister of Agriculture brought in some new changes to crop insurance this year that I know farmers have asked for and needed. And I think that's going to be appreciated out there.

I want to compare that though, Mr. Speaker, because I know a number of my colleagues remember the budgets that this was involved in. Does anybody remember the closing of 31 rural agriculture offices across this province? Well you know, Mr. Speaker, that was a budget, and I wouldn't be too proud to stand on my feet and talk about a budget when we'd just closed 32 rural services centres. Mr. Speaker, under our watch, I think we've opened 11 of them back up again. We've added people to the service centres right across this province, and I think it shows our concern and what is going on in agriculture in this province.

They cut extension services in many of those budgets, the previous budgets. I watched with great interest when they brought those budgets forward of how hard we were going to get hammered in agriculture this time because their record was not all that great.

Remember, Mr. Speaker, and I know we're going back a long way, but when we were in opposition, all of us that were here earlier on, they used to talk about Grant Devine and go back how many years, and it was all his fault. And now the Leader of the Opposition gets up and says, oh we don't want to go back; we don't want to be thinking back when Mr. Lingenfelter was even here. What was that? Four years ago? I saw Link on the news the other night. Anybody see Link on the news? It made my heart feel good to see Mr. Lingenfelter on the news because

you know what, Mr. Speaker? He was probably one of the best things that ever happened to us.

And, Mr. Speaker, I kind of find it interesting that the Leader of the Opposition gets up again and tells us how things should . . . [inaudible] . . . Don't tell us what policy is, what he would have, what he would do. But he tells us, spend more. You should put more into health, more into education, more into highways, more into roads. And, Mr. Speaker, he would because we saw under Mr. Lingenfelter's leadership . . . But he was the right-hand man. The Leader of the Opposition was the right-hand man. Didn't he put together their last policy book?

Some Hon. Members: — Tree book.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Three book.

An Hon. Member: — Tree.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, okay, it's even worse, worse than I thought, Mr. Speaker. But wasn't there like \$5 billion more than we had available? My gosh, Mr. Speaker, I don't think the people of this province even want to take a chance on that Leader of the Opposition ever becoming premier. But as I said before, it did my heart good to see Mr. Lingenfelter back on TV, and I hope anybody that saw that clip is reminded of where we would be had we been so foolish to elect another NDP government.

I'm still on ag, Mr. Speaker. I got carried away a little bit here. Mr. Speaker, they also — and I know a number of the members will remember this on this side of the House — they cut spot-loss hail. Remember it was part of the crop insurance program and they cut it? But they didn't only cut it once. They cut it twice. They cut it. They reinstated it with a lot of pressure, and they couldn't just hold out. They had to cut it again. The member for Arm River knows well what I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker.

They ignored many of the disasters we had in agriculture, whether it was drought or flooding, all those things, Mr. Speaker. It was like the Southwest was a good example for my colleagues that come from that area. And when we come to power, the first people at the door — I know when I was Ag minister and I know the Premier knows this — they were the first people that come and said, we're in trouble out here and we've been ignored for the last four years because of drought. And they were. We toured out there. And the only thing really moving was the gophers. If you had a chance to see it, it was amazing, Mr. Speaker. You'd see a field out there and it was just crawling. The Environment minister's got a smile on his face. He knows what I'm talking about.

Mr. Speaker, they were totally ignored by the NDP through those dry years. And, Mr. Speaker, I think it was the second day that we were in power and had our cabinet posting, and we found our office up there. Tim Highmoor was my chief of staff. We had farmers, we had ranchers, we had cattlemen in, and hog producers. I remember that well, Mr. Speaker. They weren't there because they wanted to be. They were there because they had to be and they were representing other farmers across this province.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, it was one of the nicest meetings I think we've ever had, considering the pressure that was on us at that time. Mr. Speaker, these were people of Saskatchewan that were in trouble, felt ignored, felt neglected, and had nowhere to turn, Mr. Speaker, under the previous government. And you know, in the end we got along really good with these same producers that the NDP felt it was important to ignore across the province. These are the same people that are still out there farming, still out there ranching. In fact cattle prices improved dramatically and some of these same people, if we hadn't helped them a little bit in a time of need, may not still be here farming and ranching. But they are, Mr. Speaker, and taking advantage of some very good cattle prices and in fact are playing such a tremendous part in the economy of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

[14:45]

You know, Mr. Speaker, and I remember back under Mr. Romanow as premier, and then Mr. Calvert, it just seemed like it was kind of a set agenda. But they blamed the feds for everything that happened. Anybody remember that on this side of the House? Something would go wrong or a program wouldn't turn out as we wanted it, and you know, everyone on that side was programmed the same. It's the feds' problem, not us. We're the province, we're a wee province. Remember that? We're the wee province and we'll be in and out of equalization for the rest of our lives. Well that day's over, thank goodness, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, there's so many things . . . Oh, I know one thing I wanted to talk about, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite keep saying, where did the money go? Well every member on this side of the House is going to touch on where the money's gone: infrastructure, new hospitals, 40 new schools. Mr. Speaker, that's where the money's going. The infrastructure deficit in this province was tremendous when the NDP left power.

But you know, maybe we should have asked more often, where did the money go when the NDP were in power. Because I can remind people of this province because I think we forget very quickly when times are better, Mr. Speaker. But does anybody remember this? Big Sky Farms, \$26 million lost. Where did the money go, Mr. Speaker? 90.8 million lost, Navigata Communications. Oh that was a fair chunk of change. That's where the money went. Where is the Finance critic, Mr. Speaker, when I need him here? Because he's the number guru on that side of the House, and I think these numbers are important to him. It's better than some of the numbers he's come up with, and I'll be careful, Mr. Speaker, where I go with that one.

Mr. Speaker, I've got a list here, but I think it's important. Because do you know what we could've done with these dollars, how many highways we could've repaved with these dollars, how many hospitals we could've kept open, how many schools we wouldn't have closed if we'd have had these dollars? We actually might've considered building a school. That didn't happen for the 16 years.

Mr. Speaker, 15 million in Channel Lake. That was a big one at the time. Remember that? Remember Mr. Lautermilch? Oh I

remember him well. \$2 million, Guyana. There was another good one. It's only 2 million bucks, but it would've gone a long way . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Exactly. \$16 million, NST [NST Network Services of Chicago], Chicago. That was another one. 9.4 million lost in Persona Inc., a Newfoundland cable company. Now there was a venture we needed to get into.

Mr. Speaker, 24.7 million loss, Retx.com. Remember that one? I can't even say it, but it lost 27 million, \$24.7 million. Mr. Speaker, 6.7 million lost in tappedinto.com, a Nashville dot-com company. \$3 million lost in Clickabid. We all remember that one. 5.6 million lost on Soft Tracks Enterprises . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Exactly. Here we are, Mr. Speaker.

\$10 million lost on Craig Wireless, a Manitoba Internet company. Now we really need to be funding Manitoba right now, in the socialist haven of Manitoba. I think we'll just keep investing right here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, under a Sask Party government. I know you're getting tired, but there's a long list here. Mr. Speaker, 17.2 million lost in Coachman Insurance, an Ontario company. Isn't it funny that every one of these pretty . . . well not Big Sky. We did that right here at home. We blew that 26 million. But a lot of these companies and investments are nowhere near Saskatchewan and didn't do a thing for Saskatchewan people.

8.9 million lost in Agdealer, a farm equipment Internet site. 8 million lost in mega bingo. And this is a real pet peeve of mine. Mr. Speaker, we are investing in bingo across the province of Saskatchewan. In my communities they put bingo on voluntarily. They don't need the NDP investing in it, Mr. Speaker, but that's where the NDP went wrong. They seemed to think that father government was a little smarter than the average people across this province and put \$8 million into a bingo project.

Mr. Speaker, also they spent another 6.5 on Minds Eye Entertainment. Remember that one? \$40 million lost in Austar Communications, an Australian company. Away down under we dumped 40 million bucks. Mr. Speaker, 2.42, Business Watch International. 2.2 million lost in Clinicare.

Mr. Speaker, I'm getting hoarse just listing all the ventures that the NDP put across this province and, Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No, I think I . . . Did I not mention SPUDCO [Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company]? Sure enough, I forgot it. But, Mr. Speaker, you've got to forgive me, Mr. Speaker, because the list is so long under the NDP and I honestly . . . And I think the members on this side of the House find it amazing that every member on that side of the House has the nerve to get up and, in one of the parts of their speech somewhere they say, where did the money go? I mean if I had a track record like that, I'd be quiet, I'd sit down, and I would not get out of my seat because of the record that we had, Mr. Speaker.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to retire here pretty quick and I know some of my colleagues are going to be the same as me. We're going to get out there and we're going to be watching TV when question period's on and, Mr. Speaker, we're going to be watching to see what everybody else is doing in here. But I will never forget what happened under the NDP,

Mr. Speaker, and I know what's going to tick me off the most is when the members opposite . . . Now I'm not sure how many there's going to be. It could be the same member every time on their feet. I don't know. They're probably going to be down a few on that side. Last time they dropped what, 11? They can't afford to go that far this time. Say there's two or three or four of them. And I don't mean to be arrogant about this. They may be more on that side of the House. We don't know. Elections are funny things. But, Mr. Speaker, I know I'm going to get riled up when I hear a member on that side of the House — and they're definitely going to be on that side of the House — get up and ask questions about health care, education, infrastructure, all of these things, when they know the past history of what they've had on that side of the House. It's almost hypocritical. It's not but it's almost hypocritical, Mr. Speaker. I'm really careful.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk a little bit . . . I think I only went through, yes, only went through the hospital closures. But, Mr. Speaker, and I won't put you through this again, Mr. Speaker, but ho, do I have a list here of school closures in the province. And, Mr. Speaker, I know there's . . . well everybody on this side of the House, even our urban members, probably had something happen to some of the schools in their area. But I'll have a little go at it, Mr. Speaker, because there's communities like Neville, Admiral, Piapot, Lang, Earl Grey, Kronau, Gray, Wilcox, Francis, Odessa, Glenavon, Moose Jaw, Willow Bunch, Briercrest, Crane Valley, Limerick, Macdowell, Prince Albert, Smeaton, Sylvania, Melfort, Uranium City, La Loche. Mr. Speaker, there's just too many to go here. I just can't do it. I'm going to lose my voice.

But, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that every community and every MLA on this side of the House has had occasion to have to come in here and speak on behalf of the people that lost their schools out there. And let's be fair about it, there were schools where the population was dropping and the enrolment in those schools . . . What were they chasing out, 35,000 students out of the province of Saskatchewan? So some of our schools had to run out of kids. They honestly did because people were moving out of the province in droves. And, Mr. Speaker, that was probably one of the main reasons that they were closing some of these schools, but it was also solidifying into the bigger centres and making those schools viable, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, things have changed in this province. Isn't it nice to go home when you can see somebody, in my case from the community of Langenburg, and they've got a smile on their face because that new school is being built? Mr. Speaker, there's so many good things. The member for Martensville, good things happening there with schools, the member for Wadena and Kelvington. It's right around the province. I could probably name every member on this side of the House, but I could also name nine on that side of the House that I believe are also, they're also getting new schools and new facilities across the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

So I think what that tells you is politics have nothing to do with the new facilities and the infrastructure dollars we're spending. The province of Saskatchewan as a whole is where we put our priorities, Mr. Speaker, and we represent the whole province of Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker, I won't bore you anymore with a bunch of the names of places where schools were closed, even though I have another five or six pages of names out there, but we will never forget in rural Saskatchewan what happened to our infrastructure and schools out there.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just remind you, Mr. Speaker, because I've gone on maybe a bit longer than I should have here, but I'm comparing the Sask Party record — which we saw the last seven years, and it's fresh in all our minds, and I believe it's fresh in everybody around this province's mind — what's happened in the last seven years I think is mostly up here. Do you remember under the former government — and I think it was Mr. Calvert, and a fine man; I liked Mr. Calvert, got along with him good — but do you remember him calling this the wee province, and we'd be in and out of equalization for the rest of our lives?

Do you know what's changed the most in my home communities? It's attitude. And do you know what helped that attitude is a lot of young people coming back with fresh attitudes. And frankly, they don't care about politics. If somebody said to them, who's your MLA, probably some of them, well maybe quite a few of them wouldn't know who it is. But, Mr. Speaker, they're not interested really in politics. They're interested in raising their families, having a good job. And more and more we see that happening.

I'm lucky. The other day, Mr. Speaker, Mosaic announced a \$1.7 billion expansion on top of the dollars they already had invested out in our communities out there, Mr. Speaker. So can you imagine what that does to all my communities out there again? Population growth, new businesses. It's just a great place to live and be at this time in history, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know, there's another good sign, and I've mentioned it once or twice, but population. It's so nice to go out . . . I don't know if there's a community in this province that hasn't actually grown rather than, you know, the decline we saw before. But I thought I'd give you a few quotes here I found. It was kind of interesting. Remember when we were in opposition and we said we want to grow the province by 100,000 people? And I can't remember how long we said over. I think it was 10 years. Does that sound right?

An Hon. Member: — Yes.

Mr. Bjornerud: — 10 years? Okay. We were really being optimistic, weren't we? 100,000 people in 10 years . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yeah, said it couldn't . . . Well here's what they, that's exactly what they said: "... the Saskatchewan Party's plan to increase our population by 100,000 [people] in 10 years is more wishful thinking than statistically attainable." You know who said that? Doreen Hamilton. That was only one member on the other side.

Also it said, another quote I have is it said, "... they propose to increase the population of Saskatchewan by 100,000 people over . . . I forget what number of years, Mr. Speaker. Well it is so over the top, it is . . . farcical, Mr. Speaker, that it flies in the face of reality." Harry Van Mulligen

Does anybody remember Harry Van Mulligen? Wasn't he the

guy who was Finance minister, and we went through a whole election and they didn't talk about raising taxes? We got in here, and Harry couldn't even get out of his seat quick enough to raise the PST? That was our beloved NDP under that finance . . . but he was also the guy that made that quote, "We'll never grow this province."

Also one more quote I'll give you. And I won't continue too long on this, Mr. Speaker, but the quote says:

Of course he says that he wants to increase the population of the province by 100,000 people. Well who would disagree with that? That's fine, but the question is, do you have a plan to achieve it, Mr. Speaker? And I say they do not have a plan or at least they do not have a plan that makes any sense.

Eric Cline. Now there was another Finance minister. Wasn't he Finance? . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, Attorney General for a while. So it just shows you that it was right across. They not only didn't think we could grow this province by 100,000 people, they thought it was ridiculous.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's why they're on that side and we're on this side. And thank goodness, Mr. Speaker, for the communities in this province. You know, a lot of the growth that we've had, Mr. Speaker, in this province has nothing to do with the government of the day other than the fact that we get out of the road, let them run their businesses. And where there's places we can facilitate that growth, we do that, Mr. Speaker, whether it's red tape removal, any of the programming that we do that's necessary we'll do for businesses, but other than that we stay out of their way. And I think that goes back to what I talked about before is why the attitude in this province has changed.

You know most of the businesses in my area say our biggest handicap is we need more people. And I think a lot of our communities are in that situation, Mr. Speaker. We need more immigration. We need more families moving back to our communities, whether it's A&W, McDonald's, Tim Hortons, it doesn't matter what the small business is in our area, we need more people. The communities need more people. So really, Mr. Speaker, it's changed so dramatically since we were in power.

So, Mr. Speaker, just a little review of where I've been here. And I realize I've been all over the map, but I want to review it anyway, Mr. Speaker. But compare our record to the NDP record: new hospital in Moose Jaw; new hospital, children's hospital in Saskatoon; new hospital in North Battleford; 2,600 more nurses; 400-plus doctors since the NDP left power and we came to power.

And I believe there's 7 to 800 more people working in the long-term care facilities across the province. And I know the members opposite have brought some valid concerns up, Mr. Speaker. But can anyone imagine what it would be like in those long-term care homes with 7, pretty near 800 less staff in them than there is today? And the Leader of the Opposition has the nerve to get up and say, this will solve the problem; just go hire more people.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there's maybe areas that we do need more people. But we certainly took a stab at it, Mr. Speaker: from where we were seven years ago, dramatic improvement in where we are today. And that record, Mr. Speaker, that I talked about in health care is dramatically . . . flips over to the other side, where they closed 52 hospitals, 53 with the Plains.

I'd be remiss . . . I talked to a surgeon. My wife had the misfortune to have some surgery here not long ago, Mr. Speaker. And it was kind of surprising because the surgeon did not know that I was an MLA because I usually tell everybody, but I forgot. I didn't tell her. I made sure I didn't tell her. I didn't want anybody to take it out on my family.

But anyway that surgeon was talking, and she said, one of the worst things that's ever happened in this province was the closure of the Plains hospital. That's not me talking politically or any member of this House talking politically. That's a surgeon that had the opportunity to work in the Plains hospital and saw how well it worked, how good it could work out here because all those expansions could have taken place, acres out there, that they could have expanded the Plains. And you know what? They actually could have parked more than 10 cars there. That would even be a plus, Mr. Speaker. I can vouch for that with the ticket I got, parked in a fire lane to pick my wife up, Mr. Speaker.

[15:00]

Mr. Speaker, closing the Plains hospital was a political decision. I remember it well. And for those of us that were in this House at that time, there was no reality to why their justification for closing it was. It was inner city politics at the time. That's why the Plains doesn't exist out there as a hospital.

Remember it was supposed to be asbestos in the walls? That was the reason we closed it . . . They closed it. We didn't close it; they closed it. Well it's funny. Isn't SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] out there right now in that same building? And you know, there was doctors at the time said, close the whole floor. If there's asbestos in here, take it out. We'll function without it and go from there. No, couldn't do it. Had to close the Plains.

Mr. Speaker, education. I talked a little bit about that before. Let's contrast the Sask Party record to the NDP record. Our record right now, and I think one of the main things is 40 brand new schools, either in the process of being built or going to be built, Mr. Speaker. That's a pretty good record. And I don't mean to stand here and brag about it, Mr. Speaker, but I don't care what the government of the day is. If they can get up and say we're in the process of building 40 new schools, it's important to every person in this province.

Now contrast that to a 16-year record — that 40 new schools happened over the last seven years — contrast that to the 16-year record of the NDP where they closed 176 schools, Mr. Speaker. I'll take our record any day, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to education.

So, Mr. Speaker, I don't know about the rest of you, but it's really hard to get up and give a speech here and say, this is what we're doing. We think we're heading in the right direction.

Have we made some mistakes? Probably have from time to time. We admit it when we do.

But the members opposite, whether it's the Leader of the Opposition or the Finance critic, don't we think it's time to actually come out and say, if we get to be government a year from now — they only have a year left to go — we should know what they stand for. I think the people of Saskatchewan deserve to know what they stand for, Mr. Speaker, because, you know, they might have some good ideas, who knows? They haven't used any of them yet. Didn't use them for 16 years, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I won't go on and bore you anymore or bore my colleagues anymore. But, Mr. Speaker, I personally think it's time, when the Leader of the Opposition has his chance to get up and reply . . . And he's going to be critical of the budget. I know he is because he's going to talk about lean, lean, lean, lean. That'll be his big pet peeve, Mr. Speaker. He doesn't believe in bringing efficiencies to any department, whether it's Health or Education or Highways, whatever it is. He doesn't believe in trying to bring efficiencies. But I think he has an obligation to the people of Saskatchewan to start telling them what he would do.

Mr. Lingenfelter told us what he would do. We saw it front and centre. I mean, give the guy credit. It was crazy, some of the stuff he was going to do. He was going to twin every highway in the province. Remember that? He couldn't find enough highways there that one day when he was making announcements, and part of those announcements where the Leader of the Opposition was writing them for him.

Mr. Speaker, I think we all agree, and I think the public, anybody that's watching today would agree with me, that the Leader of the Opposition, it's time he put some policy on the table. When he gets up to reply to the budget, I hope he says, you're doing it wrong over there — well he will say that — but then tell us what he would do because I think he has that obligation as Leader of the Opposition in the province of Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker, I certainly will be supporting this budget. This was a tough budget, I know, from my colleagues that had worked many hours on it and for the caucus that also had input into this, Mr. Speaker. And I will be supporting this budget, and I really, Mr. Speaker, am going to miss these meetings we have, you and I together, where I get the opportunity to get up and speak. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Arm River-Watrous.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a privilege to follow the member from Saltcoats. He uses all my points. I could just say, ditto, and sit down. But I've always admired the member, the speeches he's given, and this is one of his better ones. And he'll be missed in the House as we move on.

Also another member will be the Finance minister. I've worked with him on treasury board, and worked with him a number of years. And he did an excellent job with the past budgets and this one. And knowing his commitment and his passion for the work

he's did there has been excellent. I've always been . . . admired, admired the Minister of Finance.

As we move on in this budget, we also want to acknowledge two other people that work very hard for me: my two constituency assistants, Lavonne Lyke and Donna Petit. They're probably the only two right now that are actually watching this on TV. But they did a lot of work, they hold the fort down while we're up here, taking the calls. And I just want to acknowledge for the work that they did and going to be doing in the future.

As we move forward in this budget debate, you know, we're going to be hearing a lot of different opinions varying, a lot of different accusations, and a lot of different things. But one of the things before I move actually into the budget I'd like to mention is, in parts of the world that for people don't have that right, they're dying for what we're doing here, in the speaking back and forth. And I think that's something that we have to always ensure that happens as we move forward.

I know that, you know, you can say the word terrorist, but to me they're not. They're just low-life scumbags that's happening in the rest of the world. And what's been happening there, and trying to take away the democratic rights, if anybody that actually has a varying opinion from them, you know, when you start killing women and children and people for that reason, I just hope that all members here — and I know on this side, and I hope the other side too — will support what's going to . . . as a war on terrorism continues on. And I know that I support our troops and support all the politicians federally that know that what has to be done as we move forward.

Getting to the budget, Mr. Speaker, you know, this was a tough budget, but they're all tough. There's always people that are going to come to you wanting more money spent. I've been here since we formed government, even when we were in opposition. But even when we were in opposition, when we asked for things, we always asked things reasonably.

Both our leaders — Elwin and our Premier right now — they knew that what they had to ask was for the betterment of the people, but also make sense money wise and could be sustained. Those are things we put out even when we were in opposition. We put out a book of policy of what we would do, what would we do if we would form government, and we've stuck to that.

Now that's something that the opposition parties haven't. They've yet to put out anything on what they would do. It's pretty easy to ask and ask and ask. Right now, you know, the member before me that spoke about Lingenfelter, I mean he had overspent \$5 billion. Well that's not even close to being sustainable on a budget. The members opposite right now, what they put over I think is over \$1 billion in debt. And that's just some of the asks that have come forward with no actual plan how to actually increase . . . How are they actually going to increase the revenue to cover that shortfall?

It's easy to just say yes to spend, to spend, but there's also a responsibility of developing a budget and making this province sustainable because that was one of the problems that wasn't . . . When we were in opposition I mean this province was

losing businesses. It was losing people. It was losing ground because it didn't have a plan. It was going backwards, and the budgets that were being presented were unsustainable.

I can go down the list, but I'm not going to say what the member from Saltcoats said. But I mean we can go down that list, when you were spending and losing like \$20 million on SPUDCO and 15 million on Channel Lake instead of building hospitals and long-term care facilities. Well that's the difference between our government and the opposition is we're building and putting that money into infrastructure: 13 long-term care facilities, one of them in my constituency in Watrous. They had their funding set aside since about '93, and every year would always ask for the government's share. And when we formed government, we put it in, along with the other 13 that we're working on.

Those are the things that we're addressing. Those are the things we're spending money on, not going out and losing money in Guyana and Australia and all of them other things. You've got to have your priorities, and so far from the opposition side I haven't heard where their priorities are. I've got a lot of constituents. Even if the slightest, slightest chance they ever form government, would they go back to that? Would they go back to where government has to own businesses, where it's up to the government to drive the investment?

Well we believe that that's not right, Mr. Speaker. And I think it's proven in how this province has grown in our population and the optimism that's happening throughout this province, never mind my constituency. As you go to each and every town, I mean the optimism is there, not just with the farmers and the ranchers and the businessmen but with the working people, that this province is now sustainable. It's never going to be a have-not province again. We're actually proud to be from Saskatchewan and proud that this province is growing, that it's well known across the world, well known across the country as a place that you can do business, a place you can bring your families, a place you can raise your families, that there is a job here, that there is adequate health care, that there is adequate highways, that the government is working to provide the services to make that possible.

As we talk about health care, I mean that's always a tough budget as we move forward. We're spending I think over 5.5 billion on it this year, with more demands on it, and that's always a growing concern. And that is why we have to make sure that every health dollar spent is spent wisely because we don't have the option of spending not wisely. I think we have to look at every department, and that's what we're doing with lean and different initiatives all through departments, of saving money where we can and making sure that each dollar is well spent as we move forward.

I know that talking to constituents, they said, always look inside the government first to try to save money before you raise taxes. Taxes should always be your last resort. And I'm not saying that, you know, forever taxes will always stay the same. They understand that, but they know that that money coming from them needs to be well used. I know that we had a lot of calls and a lot comments that yet even with this tough budget, we looked inside, still trying to make some savings rather than a chance of raising taxes and a chance of actually slowing the

economy down, costing more jobs.

As we talk about the oil industry, I mean back home there's guys that still aren't going to work yet. They're waiting till after breakup, and they may not go because they didn't work from when they came home at Christmastime to breakup because of the slowdown in the oil industry and now they may not be called back yet for a while. So I mean those are things you have to take into consideration, that they're struggling to make their ends meet.

As a government that's what they're asking us. Before raising their taxes, look inside and see where you can save and make sure that every dollar is being well spent. And I think it is when it comes to health care. You know, never mind the long-term care facilities, the children's hospital. What we've had . . . The North Battleford hospital is what we're doing.

The member opposite, the member before me from Saltcoats mentioned the Plains hospital. And you're right. That was a huge mistake on their part, huge mistake closing that. And it's cost them, cost them their political, any credibility they ever had over on the other side when they closed that.

You know, as we move forward also on the municipal end, we've kept the rink affordability grant going because we know and understand that towns are struggling to provide recreational services. Those are things, programs that we still know had to keep going forward as we developed this budget.

You know, it'd been so easy to do like the previous government. All they ever did was just, if they ran into any kind of trouble, they just raised taxes, raised taxes. And yes, that brings in some income, brings in the income but also then drove this province to what it was, where it lost the people, lost the businesses, and then it just keeps moving down as you lose businesses and then you lose the workers. The workers have got to leave. You work less and you get less tax money. You know, that system doesn't work.

We've turned that around. I won't say just our government, but we provided the facility for the businesses to move forward or the atmosphere as we go. And the optimism is there now, that we're not going to get in your faces. We're not going to, if you start actually making some money, we're not going to start taxing you or possibly nationalize you or just causing you more trouble, more red-tape trouble, more things along the line that's going to cost you money at the business end.

Highways are always a major issue. You know, I have 15 Highway. We're going to keep working on that. There's a four-year plan. I believe in this budget again, they're going to be doing some paving because that tendering's going to be going out. And we've already did a chunk of it, and we know that we have to keep moving forward. Never mind the big demands around the Warmans and the Martensvilles where they have to do the interchanges and the going around the city, the bypass here as this city grows hugely.

You know, those are demands that we have to meet, but we've decided to keep going with that because we know that you can't put them programs on hold, whether it be the school in Langenburg. I mean it would have been easy to just say no, you

know. Let's just pause it for a year. But no, you can't. Once you start it, you've got to . . . We've decided as a government, we're going to keep this going and keep what we're building. Whether it be hospitals, whether it be schools, whether it be highways, we have to keep that momentum going.

[15:15]

Blackstrap is another in my constituency, a park where we're spending money on. There is a huge potential for that, being close to Saskatoon. So we're increasing, you know, funding to go to that. There's been the electrified campsites. There's been different things we did throughout the parks, knowing that we still have to keep spending money on the recreation.

You know, education is always important. We've increased that budget I think by over 2 per cent. In Kenaston we have the long-distance learning centre has opened there, you know, and it's helped immensely for the students that it's reached with the smaller communities that had schools that may have had to close, or that student would have to go to a bigger centre. I give kudos to the Sun West Division for bringing that forward in Kenaston. They've increased teachers there by I think there's been three educators put on now. That gives them 30 full-time educators there right now.

When I was in opposition, I can remember that a lot of my schools were wondering if they were actually going to stay open. I can remember when that program first came in and they were struggling with it but, you know, the school board had the foresight with us coming into government saying, you know I think this is going to start growing. These towns are going to start growing, and it has. You look at our students, the population that's grown. They had the foresight to look forward, and so does the health districts in providing the funding for the long-term care facilities, in growing them because the optimism is out there.

Now the towns, you know, that's one of the reasons most of us got into roles as politicians. This province was basically being run in the ground. I mean every town I met with just said, how are we going to deal with the people that are leaving? We have empty houses. Our schools are looking at possibly going to be closing. There was basically no plan for the province. You know, we came in with the schools. We actually put limits on to where a school division could actually then look at possibly doing a closure. Before that, it was up to the division to do however they wanted, and we had lost this . . . The government of the day, the NDP, were projecting 3,000 less students.

So I mean as a school division, you're going to be thinking, well if the government's projecting this every year, why would we be spending money on schools? Like, why would we? So they weren't. They weren't spending any money on them because they were listening to the government of the day, which was the NDP, which was just always doom and gloom, always don't plan for success. The NDP were always negative, and so what happened was a lot of these divisions didn't spend money on infrastructure.

Now we've got schools that are busting at the seams. How many more students have we got? Even the small towns, the students are coming back. The towns are growing, you know.

But for 16 years when you get that from a government, the NDP government that just keeps saying over and over again that we're going to expect less . . . We're going to be a wee province, in and out of equalization. You know, if you keep telling people enough of that, it starts to register even though deep down they knew it wasn't true. So one of the things when we became government I mean is making this place, this province open for business and saying, business friendly. And you've got to have some optimism.

I mean and look what's happened with the potash, with the potash industry, the growth in it. Investments have been huge. The oil and gas investments, the uranium, you know the potential in this province is huge. It's always been there, but under the previous government they always seemed to like to hold it back and say, no, don't grow. We're always going to be this wee province. Don't expect much.

Revenue sharing, there wasn't any. I mean at budget time, towns . . . I was town councillor before '99. You never knew what you were going to get from the government, from the NDP. I mean nothing. You know, a lot of years it was less from what it was the previous year. And they said, you know, we've got to have some . . . Does this government, the NDP, have a plan? No. So we came in. We knew we had to do revenue sharing, something where you can do some long-range planning.

Mr. Speaker, it comes down to this budget. That's the difference between us and even the present-day NDP that are sitting across. I've yet to see a long-range plan from them, any policy, anything that would say, yes, we're going to keep this province growing. We're going to keep balanced budgets. We're going to keep doing investments. I have yet to hear one word over there.

And you know, when I talk to constituents — I've actually door knocked a bit in Saskatoon — that's what we hear on the doorstep too. They say, yes, we haven't heard anything from them. I mean at least you guys are laying out a plan. We look at your last years when we were in government. You look at their previous record of seven years. When you compare the two, it's pretty pitiful when you look at their side, on the NDP, you know.

That's what the people are looking for. They want good governance, and they want a long-range plan as we move forward, you know. And that's what we offer instead of just getting up every day in question period and just saying, well either spend some money here or spend some more there or spend this, but we don't have a plan on health care. We're not, you know, we're not going to look at any efficiencies in education or health care. Just possibly maybe throw some more money there and leave it alone. And how about long-range planning for infrastructure? Any on tax increases? Nothing. You've never heard a word from them on that.

And I think when it comes to election time, you're going to struggle to hear anything from them too. They're just going to be negative. But you know what? As an MLA, I'm proud to run on a record of the past seven years when I take it around. And as we go into election next year, I'm proud to take this budget and this record, and I'll talk to anybody on the doorstep. I know

when I go around, I mean it's been very positive from door to door to door.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to wrap up my speech. With that I will be supporting this budget and definitely not supporting the amendment brought forth by the members opposite.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Moosomin.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to be able to stand in this Assembly again and speak to the current budget that was presented just four or five days ago here in this Legislative Assembly.

First of all I need to extend a few thank yous. Mr. Speaker, each and every member in this Chamber, past and present and even those in the future, will acknowledge that the challenges of life, living life as an MLA, are significant but certainly can be enhanced with the support of family members and staff in our constituency offices.

I first of all want to extend a special thank you to my wife, Lois, and our three children. Our son Byron was eight and Graham was six and Stephanie was two when I entered this Chamber, and now we have the two boys married and we have six grandchildren which we thoroughly enjoy and love. And our daughter Stephanie is, in fact, our daughter Stephanie is looking forward to being married this summer so Dad's got to dig a little deeper in his pocket to provide for a wedding. But we're excited to have another member added to our family. So families are important.

And I think you've heard over the years, members have talked about their families and how important it is and that support mechanism out there. And then I'm sure all members also have very close friends that have supported them through the years and continue to offer support. Because of the challenges in this Chamber, sometimes it can become a little discouraging and a little depressing, but then to have that support factor out there is truly important.

I also want to extend a special thank you to my current CA [constituency assistant], Jeff Cole, and also Audrey McEwen who continues to serve in the office. As members, we acknowledge that those individuals in many cases provide the buffer. They're the first persons that receive the calls that come into the offices, and many times calls that come to the offices aren't necessarily coming from people who want to say thank you. They are calling from people who have run into challenges in their lives, whether it's personal or whether it's issues of a larger nature, and our CAs are the individuals who take the calls and then pass on the information. And at the end of the day as we go through the files and as we communicate with the ministerial offices, Mr. Speaker, in many cases we're able to resolve or at least bring a bit of a resolve to the situation and help people in their time of stress. So thanks, Jeff, and thanks, Audrey. A special thank you to Tina Durbin who served as my CA for a number of years.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is all about keeping Saskatchewan strong and keeping Saskatchewan growing. As the minister pointed out the other day, it's about keeping taxes low. No tax reductions, also no increased taxes in this budget, Mr. Speaker,

trying to maintain a tax regime that allows the people of Saskatchewan to continue to invest and believe in this province. It continues to invest in infrastructure even while the revenues to the provincial government are being challenged at this time. We also recognize that there is an infrastructure deficit out there, and if we just put that on hold as the NDP did in the past, we'll just find ourselves in a deeper hole. So this budget continues to invest in infrastructure while at the same time controlling spending.

This budget is all about helping create jobs so we can build and plan for the future and the growth of this province, and helping educate the young men and women who will become the entrepreneurs and fill the specific jobs that we have that are continuing to grow in the province of Saskatchewan.

When I think of jobs and job creation, and I think of the investment opportunities and the way we've structured the business tax and the capital tax, I can't help but think of the Seed Hawk manufacturing, or Vaderstad now owns the plant at Langbank, and that plant is expanded again this year. And the last I understood they were looking to get to a workforce of some 400 people.

Mr. Speaker, that wouldn't be taking place if it wasn't for the fact that this government has created an investment climate that is open to business in the province of Saskatchewan. And this budget not only is spending money on infrastructure needed and keeping taxes low and investing in people, but it's also . . . We're also operating on a balanced budget.

Mr. Speaker, we have over the past number of years and certainly months . . . and the member from Athabasca has been very, it's noted, has been always raising or calling out from his seat and asking, well where did the money go? Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say this. The money, for the benefit of the member from Athabasca, the money went to reduce debt. And as a result of reduced debt of almost \$3 billion over the last seven years, the first seven years of this government, it has meant a savings of \$1 billion in interest costs which this government has then been able to put back into the people of Saskatchewan. It has gone to reducing the tax burden that the people of Saskatchewan have had over the years, over many years of NDP government.

And one of the most important reductions was the reliance on the property tax to fund education. And, Mr. Speaker, no matter where you go in rural Saskatchewan, you will continue to hear people, property owners in rural Saskatchewan so grateful that that reliance on the property owner to fund education was finally dealt with, contrary to a former premier of this province who said the status quo is not on when he was asked about property taxes, and yet once he left the SARM meeting and SUMA and told them the status quo wasn't on, did absolutely nothing. 2007, a change in government, and we addressed that issue and people across all of Saskatchewan are truly grateful for that.

This budget is all about infrastructure and more money into building highways and municipal roads and schools and hospitals and heavy-care centres across this province.

Mr. Speaker, when I talk about where the money went, I just

want a short, brief history lesson because I don't have to respond to a question for . . . and just take a minute. Let me remind the member from Athabasca what his colleagues did prior to the 1980s. The NDP government of the day had a moratorium on heavy-care home construction, a moratorium on heavy . . . What did that mean? No heavy-care beds built during that period of time.

In the 1980s, what did we see? I would ask that member to go to the people in Wawota and ask them whether or not that heavy-care facility should have been built in Wawota or Whitewood or Broadview or Wolseley or Stoughton or Carlyle. And I just don't have the list in front of me of all the facilities that were built. But more than 1,800 heavy-care beds were built during the 1980s. And guess what, Mr. Speaker? Changed governments — 1,200 beds were reduced, taken out of the system.

But, Mr. Speaker, while the NDP were noted for reducing or increasing taxes, or reducing their expenditures in heavy-care facilities or capital construction, Mr. Speaker, the government of the '80s, the Conservative government of the '80s, believed that we needed to invest in this province. And as a result, while we're still short beds, while there are crumbling capital infrastructure across this province, this current Saskatchewan Party government has continued to build and we have invested.

[15:30]

In fact, 11 long-term care facilities now opened across the province of Saskatchewan or under construction with the new long-term care facility in Swift Current under construction. We just opened a new integrated facility in Kipling, Mr. Speaker. Would the NDP have done that? I doubt it very much, Mr. Speaker. You ask the people of Kipling what they think of their new integrated facility. You ask the health staff, the three doctors currently working in Kipling and the nurse practitioner and the nurses and the staff working in that facility. Mr. Speaker, having walked through it and having had the opportunity to utilize it in a minor way, everything I hear is nothing but positive. People are very pleased to see how this government has shown their commitment to rural Saskatchewan and building some of the infrastructure that's desperately needed.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that . . . and we heard a lot about it for about I would say probably a good month, month and a half prior to the budget, and the concern by municipal governments about the fact that this government was going to renege on its commitment of the 1 cent of the 5-cent provincial sales tax, and that it would really impact their abilities to plan for the management of their budgets, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, as we heard last Wednesday, the Minister of Finance reiterated the fact that this government is committed to its ongoing revenue-sharing program with the municipal governments across this province enabling them to plan, better plan and plan consistently for the needs of their ratepayers, Mr. Speaker.

As a result of that 1 cent of the provincial tax, municipal governments actually saw an increase in revenue sharing. And one would say, well you know, the oil revenues are down. What constitutes that increase? Well, Mr. Speaker, that increase is

coming about because of the consumer spending across the province and the fact that there are more people living in Saskatchewan. In fact just the other day the stats came out — 1,132,640 people now living in the province of Saskatchewan. What that means, Mr. Speaker, is we have people moving into the province, is we have more and more people investing in this province. We have people spending in this province, from consumer goods to vehicles, providing for their households. And as a result of that expenditures, the revenues from provincial sales tax have increased which has allowed this government to share some of those revenues with municipal governments.

And, Mr. Speaker, just a couple of comments. SUMA president Debra Button says:

Revenue sharing from the provincial government allows urban governments to make the most of property taxes. We can focus on putting that money into the services and infrastructure our communities need and our residents expect.

A sound endorsement from SUMA president Debra Button.

What did Regina mayor Michael Fougere have to say?

Retaining of the full, unchanged revenue sharing formula is foundational to our growth and critical to our future plans. That funding ensures that we have a much-needed level of long-term financial predictability in the day-to-day operations of the City.

And, Mr. Speaker, I could go through a long list of municipal government representatives and their views of this current budget and how this government has put in place a sustainable revenue-sharing program that enables them to just address the significant infrastructure challenges that they've been facing as a result of the growth we're seeing in the province of Saskatchewan.

This budget also provides for developing the training needed to address the workforce needs in the province of Saskatchewan. Six hundred thousand is the increase to adult education, basic education programs, for a record investment, Mr. Speaker, of \$25 million, or an increase of 62 per cent since the 2007-08 budget. This investment will add 200 additional ABE [adult basic education] seats, enabling young men and women the ability to upgrade their education and prepare themselves to meet the needs of the job opportunities that will be available, are available today, and will continue to be available.

There is \$500,000 allocated to support 100 new training seats in the Trades and Technology Centre at Parkland College in Yorkton. And this centre, Mr. Speaker, opens this fall as the result of an investment by this provincial government into the training, sciences, and trades in the province of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, this budget is all about training young men and women to have the educational abilities and the training necessary to meet the job opportunities of the future in the province of Saskatchewan.

This budget also would, despite its challenges, is making an investment in the farm and ranch communities and agribusiness

of the province of Saskatchewan. What this budget does, it increases up to \$183 an acre for farmers to insure their crops while at the same time reducing premiums, Mr. Speaker. We have a significant increase in the agricultural budget. In fact, for '15-16 the Ministry of Agriculture's budget is at \$362.4 million, a commitment, Mr. Speaker, to the agricultural community of Saskatchewan.

What this budget also includes, Mr. Speaker, despite the challenges that this government is facing, despite the challenges, what the minister was facing, is record investment in highway construction across the province of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't speak for a minute just about the completion of Highway 48 from the community of Kipling to No. 9, the fact that you can now access Highway 48 at White City and drive right through to Manitoba, in fact to Virden, Manitoba, and just have a beautiful highway to drive on. And every day I hear comments about that, the fact that that piece of highway is now completed and the type of construction that was put into the completion of that highway.

And, Mr. Speaker, that was a commitment that this government made to ensure that highway maintenance and repair is completed, also that there is access for the heavy truck traffic, not only from the oil sector but the farming community in my area. And so, Mr. Speaker, this government is committed not only to past upgrades and maintenance of highways, but also to building for the future as this province continues to grow.

And what we have in this budget, Mr. Speaker, we hear a lot about the Regina bypass. And I think each and every one of us are aware of it. And I'm not sure if there isn't a rural member who doesn't hear about access to Regina almost every day or every time you're talking to people. And they keep asking, when are you going to move forward with a bypass that actually moves the traffic out of the centre part of the city and gives traffic flow, creates a more uniform traffic flow around the city? Well this budget is committed to moving forward with a Regina bypass.

This budget also commits 19 million to the start of construction of twinning of Highway 7 from Saskatoon to Delisle. Mr. Speaker, as this province has grown, a number of people have chosen not just to live . . . Both of our two major cities have grown, but a lot of the surrounding communities have grown. And what that means is more and more commuters travelling back and forth to jobs in the city. And what the construction of twinning on Highway 7 says, that we're creating a safer driving environment for those people who are driving from Delisle and communities in between Delisle and Saskatoon to access their job opportunities in Saskatoon.

We also have funding for the twinning of 39 from Estevan to Bienfait, Mr. Speaker, and there are a number of other projects. I'm not going to go into them all because a number of my colleagues on this side of the House will no doubt want to speak about the highway commitments that will be taking place in their constituencies and the added benefit that it will bring.

This budget puts investments in provincial parks. And, Mr. Speaker, we have seen over the past number of years an increase in the demand for parking spots in our parks for campers, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to see that this budget has

funding to replace the service centre buildings at Moose Mountain Provincial Park and Blackstrap Provincial Park. It's also development of full-service campsites. There will be a further development in Moose Mountain Provincial Park as well as other parks across this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, what I'd spoken of about No. 48, not only does No. 48 create easier access for transportation in the area that I live in. But we're also seeing, now that No. 48 is complete, more and more traffic flow flowing down to Moose Mountain Provincial Park, which has meant that we've had to look at more full-service campsites at this park because of the demand.

And also let me just mention, Mr. Speaker, as a result of the opportunity to speak with the former minister responsible for Environment and the current minister, working with local people we've found a way to move water from the back country into the Moose Mountain . . . into the lake, Mr. Speaker. And I would invite any of my colleagues to come out to the park and just look at what that lake looks like now with the increased flow and with the levels of the waters that are up. What it's going to mean, it means more recreation for the people who attend the park. It's going to mean in the future more opportunities for people who enjoy fishing to now get back out on the lake and to engage in their favourite pastime of fishing.

Mr. Speaker, the movement of water into the lake which for years there was study after study as to what's happening to the water, and the reality is we just needed to talk to some of the local people and find out there's a local solution if we're willing to work with them, whereby we can move water from the back part of the park into the lake, creating a great tourist attraction in that part of the province.

Mr. Speaker, this budget puts more money into First Nations and Métis partners on child welfare transformation, and it also increases benefits to the Saskatchewan assured income for disability programs for the fourth year in a row, Mr. Speaker. In June 2015 those in residential care will receive an increase of \$20 a month for individuals, and couples will see increases of 50 and \$55 respectively, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to be part of a government that is willing to invest not only in the young people but also willing to invest in the people with disabilities, Mr. Speaker. I would say, Mr. Speaker, that is one of the things that I really treasure the most, the fact that we are thinking of those less fortunate and willing to invest in them and to tell them that they are respected and they have a place in growing the province of Saskatchewan. So thank you to the Minister of Finance and my colleagues for supporting initiatives of this nature.

Mr. Speaker, we also have increased the seniors' income benefit and increased the funding for individuals who are living in private care homes. The funding now will bring assistance to seniors who are on a low fixed income, giving them the opportunity to have access to about \$2,000 to help them pay for the needs that they are receiving in personal care homes across this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to those who are running these homes, thank you so much. Thank you for investing in

this province. Thank you for thinking of the fact that there are seniors who don't qualify for heavy care but are in a position, a point in time in their lives when it's really not . . . They don't have the ability anymore to remain on their own but still can provide for themselves with a bit of assistance. So thank you to the many men and women who have invested in personal care homes in the province of Saskatchewan. Your commitment to this province is truly appreciated.

[15:45]

Mr. Speaker, another thing and a question that I got — this certainly was the first one that came up — was the graduate retention program. Mr. Speaker, there was a sense or an understanding or, if you will, a lack of information that went out there that this program was being discontinued. The facts are, Mr. Speaker, this program is not being discontinued, but this program will now be paid out over a 10-year period.

This program isn't just about handing out a cheque. This program, as young men and women enter the labour force and start to generate income in the province of Saskatchewan, they will be able to get a tax credit which will reduce their provincial tax payable based on what they have coming to them from the graduate retention program. Mr. Speaker, I believe this is an excellent program for young men and women who are educating and giving them a strong reason as to why they should live in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I've shared a number of things, initiatives that this budget is doing to support the people of Saskatchewan and, as we continue to move forward, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be part of a government that is investing in people, that is leaving more money in the pockets of people, that is investing in the infrastructure of this province and is looking to build the province of Saskatchewan. So, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the main motion and not supporting the amendment. Thank you.

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

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a little tough I guess hitting cleanup, so to speak, after three veterans just so eloquently talked about the situation within Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start off by thanking a few people. First and foremost, I've got to thank my wife, Leane. It's very difficult as members not from Regina or area that we're travelling. We're away from our family quite a bit. Leane holds down the fort for me in Saskatoon, doing all of the daily stuff that I'm not able to do, Mr. Speaker, so I wanted to say thank you very much. I very much appreciate all of her support in the day-to-day stuff while I'm down here working on behalf of the people of Saskatoon Sutherland.

And of course I'd be remiss if I didn't thank my kids and in the same breath apologize to them. There's lots of things that I can't attend, Mr. Speaker, because of my responsibilities down here.

I wanted to thank my two stepdaughters, Cassidy and Keely.

Kassidy is working two jobs right now, living independently and trying things away from home, so I wish her the best of luck with that. And my other stepdaughter, Keely, who is a straight-A student at Holy Cross while maintaining, five nights a week, dance, up to three to four hours a night, a very impressive little dancer . . . She's in competition this week so I want to wish her the best during her competition in Saskatoon.

And of course, Mr. Speaker, I've got to thank my own kids, Courtney who is just the apple of my eye . . . She is the most beautiful thing out there, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud of her. As a typical 16-year-old teenage girl, presents some challenges here and there, Mr. Speaker. There are some challenges, I can't deny. And anybody who has lived through the teenage years, as I believe a few of my colleagues have, it's challenging times, Mr. Speaker. But she is an absolute beauty. She's participating in Special Olympics these days in four different sports, as well as we just got the best parent-teacher interview, my ex-wife and I, on Friday, that she is doing the best that she's ever done in her two years at Holy Cross. So very proud of Courtney.

And again I do have a few other . . . my son Carter who I've been told is the spitting image of me but much more athletic and much better at school than I was, Mr. Speaker. He's doing very well, maintaining well above a 90 average in school, and made city-wide hockey teams with the Saskatoon Kodiaks. They didn't have a very successful season, Mr. Speaker, but they made a run in the playoffs. I think they won six games throughout the season, but in the playoffs they seemed to hit their stride and knocked four teams out of the playoffs and finished third overall in the city. So again congratulations to my son and the Saskatoon Kodiaks for all their hard work.

And I want to thank all of the coaches within minor sports. I know my colleague from Regina Dewdney as well as lots of other people in this Legislative Building give their time to coach the kids, and I think that that's very important, that we recognize that the coaches are out there. We want the kids to win. We want the kids to have fun. But the coaches are giving their time freely, Mr. Speaker. So again I want to thank the coaches on my son's team and all the hockey teams, and all minor sport coaches and volunteers out there for all of the hard work that they do throughout the year keeping our kids busy. And if the kids are busy in sport, Mr. Speaker, my feeling is that they're not going to get into trouble and that they will lead productive lives, know how to work independently as well as on a team. So again thank you for that.

My parents. Obviously my father had a major influence on me coming down to Regina and running for the Saskatchewan Party and making sure that we keep this province going in the right direction. A lot of people that are in this Legislative Assembly were born in Saskatchewan and chose to stay here. We chose to move here from Ontario in 1988 when southern Ontario was very successful. We saw the opportunity here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, to raise a family.

And Saskatchewan, there is no better place in this country, and I've travelled from one end of it to the other. There is no better place than Saskatchewan to be able to raise a family when you have the ability to be 15, 20 minutes from a school, you can see the teachers in the supermarket, you can see them out at the events, you can talk to them, and you know that your kids are

safe in the communities in Saskatchewan. So I want to thank both my father, Ted, and my mother, Marie, for instilling the values in me and hopefully I will be able to instill those values into my children and other people that I meet, that Saskatchewan is strong, Mr. Speaker. We saw it back in the '80s, but man, did we have some dark years.

We had some really dark years. Sixteen years of living through what the only thing that I can qualify is, is as a depression. We had a downturn, a depression. People were leaving here. I grew up and went to high school at Campbell Collegiate just around the corner from here, Mr. Speaker, and people were leaving in the droves. It wasn't a joke in the early '90s, '92 on, that people were leaving.

Suitcases were the grad gift. They were gone. I lost most of my friends to outside — Manitoba, Alberta, Ontario. They wanted to get out of here because they saw no opportunity in Saskatchewan. And I'm pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, that they have come back. Lots of people have come back to Saskatchewan, lots of expats as well as people coming from around the world.

And I think this budget is one of those messages that the Minister of Finance was able to get out there to be able to say, Saskatchewan is strong. Send the message across Canada. We have a balanced budget. We are on track. We have a AAA credit rating, and we're moving forward even though times are difficult, Mr. Speaker.

Before I get too much into the budget speech, I want to thank a couple of other people. I want to thank the Minister of Finance. I want to thank him for all of his hard work. I also want to thank . . . People might not understand, outside of government, how this works. But within government, during December and January, we have people from our caucus that make up treasury board. Now these people deliberate each and every ministry, and every minister has to come in and present to this group and convince them on why they need to do this.

This is not an extra position. Nobody gets paid extra for this, Mr. Speaker. But what they do is they go through everything line by line by line of the budget. And you can just imagine how large that is when we have a \$14 billion budget. They analyze everything. And the treasury board people, I wanted to thank them for that, the Minister of Finance and his staff, countless hours of working, thinking about this to make sure that the budget was balanced. And we actually have \$107 million surplus, Mr. Speaker, so that's very important.

I want to thank my colleagues, the MLAs certainly on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, for being able to give me some knowledge in areas that I didn't have a very deft knowledge as far as different areas of Finance, certainly with Justice, Environment. There's some areas that I needed to broaden my horizons in.

And I wanted to say that the ministers were always open to answering questions, whether it's in caucus or on an individual basis, to be able to enlighten me on what is going on in certain areas within the government. Because it is a big machine, Mr. Speaker, it's a huge machine. And the more knowledge that I have, the more I can pass on to my constituents and people

when I'm talking on a day-to-day basis. The caucus staff, Mr. Speaker, John and all of the people that are working within the caucus, Paula and Megan, to be able to prep us and give us all the information that we need and bring our needs forward.

I also wanted to put a quick thanks out to my in-laws, Leo and Sylvia Durand, down in Willow Bunch, Saskatchewan. They are very interested in what's going on here from a farming perspective. My mother-in-law was a 30-year RN in Willow Bunch area before the Willow Bunch clinical unit was shut down and she was moved over to Assiniboia. And my father-in-law, Leo Durand, who farmed for 40 years in the Willow Bunch area and is retired, now working for my brother-in-law, Collin MacLean and the MacLean family down out of Fife Lake. So a quick thank you to all of them.

But now getting into the budget — now that I've done all of the official thank yous so I can cross that off my list, Mr. Speaker — I want to talk about our plan versus their plan. And the only reason I can say . . . They don't have a plan over there, Mr. Speaker. We haven't seen one. The newly minted leader of the New Democratic Party, 750 days plus, Mr. Speaker, we have not seen anything as far as a plan. There is nothing that they have presented to the people of Saskatchewan to say, this thing's different. They are criticizing us, Mr. Speaker, in all aspects of the government, but yet they don't have any suggestions.

Now I was taught very young — and I'm trying to instill this into my son — is you don't come always with a problem. If my son has a hockey problem I say, you know what? You need to present an alternative to your coaches, to be able to say this is how you would do it. Then you can discuss it. I've instilled this with my daughter as well. Don't always come with a problem. Come with a solution. I haven't seen anything on their side of the legislative or in any advertising that they've done, anything that they've done out there, Mr. Speaker, to be able to say, this is where we stand.

And we keep talking to him about their previous record, and the leader over there of the New Democratic Party doesn't want to talk about it. He said openly in the House, well this is when I was in high school. I don't answer for that. Well guess what? You absolutely do answer for that. You answer for everything that the New Democratic Party has done to this province.

They have kept this province down and I don't care if he was sitting in this Legislative Building at the time. His great-grandfather, somebody's distant relative was a member of the NDP or the CCF [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation]. He answers for that. He answers for every hospital that they closed, every school that they closed, every time they raised taxes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He needs to answer for that.

He represents the New Democratic Party now and forever, right back into . . . as I'm sure that my good friend from . . . will talk about the Regina manifesto and . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . from Wood River, thank you, that will talk about the Regina manifesto and how business is bad and capitalism should be absolutely eradicated.

Now on that, just on a quick note on the capitalism, it should be eradicated, I don't know how they can honestly stand over there

and say that they support businesses. When they presented a local business bill to this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, they couldn't even spell "business." They had difficulty spelling the word "business." So I don't know who they're talking to in the business community because I . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . And yes, that's exactly right. They have a teacher over there that would be able to correct this, plus all the technology that we have out there with the autocorrect, Mr. Speaker. But I'm curious as to why they think that they can support business if they're not even spelling the word properly, Mr. Speaker.

So again, I want to talk a little bit about my experience just last week and over the last year. I've been out talking to people in the community. I talk to business leaders. I talk to community-based organizations. I talk to people in the health care. I talk to people in education. Every time I go to my school, the people that work in education, they're not coming up to me and saying the same things that the opposition is saying. They're saying, yes we understand what's going on. We appreciate what's going on as far as the new schools and the investment that we have put into education.

Because unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, when we formed government, we had a \$1 billion deficit in the education system alone. And then the opposition, the critic for Education, stands up and says that we are doing things wrong within education, that we have schools propped up. We're trying to fix them as fast as we can, Mr. Speaker, but the problem is we can't catch up because the pit is so deep. We will catch up, but we have to make sure that we do not deficit finance these schools, Mr. Speaker. We do not need to go into debt.

We have a plan on what's going to happen with the schools in the next few years. We are building 18 new schools, 9 joint-use schools, in the Leader of the Opposition's backyard. He was the guy that stood up here, Mr. Speaker, and said 52 times or 59 times, petition after petition, I need a new school in my area. He got a new school in his area. Wasn't at the announcement for the school. Wasn't even there at all. Disregarded that the school was even being built there. And I've been in his area door knocking and talking to the people. They're not talking about the leader's hard stance on P3 [public-private partnership]. They're talking about a new school that's going in. They can see what the Saskatchewan Party government is doing when that new school goes in, Mr. Speaker.

[16:00]

I want to touch a couple of things, Mr. Speaker, on our economy. As the Premier has said and as we firmly believe over here, the reason that we are able to provide the services within social services, health care, education, highways, advanced ed, education K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] is because of our economy, Mr. Speaker. The only reason we can do this is because Saskatchewan has a diversified economy.

Now this is our plan. When the Saskatchewan Party was newly formed and our Premier was sitting as leader of the opposition, he presented a plan: this is what we were going to do. This is how we are going to do things different. And within that plan was economic growth, growth of population. And we've all heard the quotes that the NDP thought that it was farcical that we could actually grow this province. That absolutely boggles

my mind, Mr. Speaker. How can you actually be in a state of mind where you think you can't grow any more? Does that mean that you can't continually learn as a person? I can't grow as an individual. We can't grow as a province. We can't diversify our economy. We can't do anything — that's the mindset.

And I really hope that the people of Saskatchewan, when we go to the polls, they understand exactly what they did. They did nothing. They don't have a plan. They never did have a plan. All they had a plan was, Mr. Speaker, is they reached into my pocket. They reached into my pocket and raised the PST. They reached into my pocket to . . . They raised the PST three times, raised income tax twice. So now they're in this pocket, Mr. Speaker. They raised the business tax four times, Mr. Speaker. So now we've got another pocket on the inside here that they've dipped into, Mr. Speaker, another one on this side, and this doesn't also count the property and education tax hikes as a result of their failing to properly fund education.

They reached into . . . Whenever they had a crisis over there, whenever they ran out of money, we can go through a list of all the things. The member from Saltcoats went through a litany of bad investments, and I think about 95 per cent of them were out of Saskatchewan, all the way from Australia to Nashville and on and on, Mr. Speaker. Why did they feel that every time that they made a mistake or something went wrong, they had to dig into my pocket and take some money out of me? Why is it like that?

That's the difference between this government and the previous government. When we're presented with a challenge, Mr. Speaker, we figure out a way how to solve the problem without reaching into somebody's pocket. That is not a solution. That's the quick and easy way that the NDP did that. How would they do that? They just kept going on and on and on raising the taxes. And on top of raising the taxes — you would think that's bad enough, Mr. Speaker, that they just continually raised the taxes — no, on top of that they shut down infrastructure. They stopped building Saskatchewan. They stopped it dead in its tracks. They also closed 52 schools, one a week for a whole year.

We were just talking about this. The Plains hospital, they closed down the Plains hospital. One of the worst moves that they could do. Unbelievable that they closed that hospital down. And they did it, I believe personally, they did it for purely political reasons, Mr. Speaker. They closed 176 schools. And on top of that they had the audacity over there to stand up and criticize us about building long-term care facilities. We are building long-term care facilities. They closed them down; 1,200 beds were closed down under their watch.

The member from Regina Lakeview should remember because he signed off on it. He signed off on closing those 1,200 . . . [inaudible] . . . those 1,200 long-term care facilities, the 52 rural hospitals, and the 176 schools across this province. Everybody on this side remembers that. Our job, Mr. Speaker, is to make sure that everybody in Saskatchewan remembers that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about health. Because as we see, we all know that health is extremely important. It is very important for me as a father, for my mother who is going

in for surgery this week. Health is very critical. And it's all in Saskatchewan, when we go out and talk to people on the doors, this is what they're talking about — the health. They're certainly not talking about John Black and Associates. They've never even heard of John Black and Associates. What they are understanding is that they are getting into the health care system quicker. They are getting their surgeries done faster. They're getting better care after their surgeries. That's what they're talking about.

They're talking about that they went from the longest wait list, when you would go six months to a year to even see a specialist, then it would be six months to a year to be able to get the surgery. And then when you actually had the surgery day, it would probably be postponed because we had a lack of doctors. We had a lack of nurses.

But since we formed government in 2007, we have 423 more doctors operating in the province. We had a 29 per cent increase in specialists, a 44 per cent increase in pediatricians. We also have 2,600 more nurses of all designations operating in the province. That is what people are talking about. They're not talking about John Black. They're not talking about senseis. They're talking about getting their health care done very quickly, done in a proper way, and moving on with their lives. That's what they're talking about.

Mr. Speaker, under the NDP, when I dug back into the archives of what was happening with the NDP, under their watch they had 173 few physicians. They had 455 fewer nurses of all designations. They lost 155 pharmacists.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how they can stand up and say that they are looking out for the people of Saskatchewan when all they did was slash and burn everything that they could. They kept everything to a bare minimum. They kept the infrastructure to a bare minimum and our schools and our hospitals and our highways. We even had the government of the time, the NDP, at the time say, well why can't you go out and fix your own roads? That's the way we should do it. Well why are we paying tax dollars if we should be fixing our own roads? It doesn't make any sense. Because the problem with them after 16 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is they became arrogant and they became complacent with the people of Saskatchewan.

This side of the House will never do that, and I can tell you that. Why, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It's because we went out and knocked doors. We go out and talk to people. We just don't get polling and say, this is the right thing to do to be able to hold on to government. We go out and talk to people and get our direction from that. And when we get our direction, we bring that to the caucus table and we discuss it, and from there it moves onto cabinet and then decisions are made. That's how the process works, Mr. Speaker, is you get the information from the people on the ground, talk to people on their doorstep.

I've been out knocking probably a dozen times in the last 12 months, never seen anybody from the NDP out talking to anybody, never seen them out going to say, oh, is there anything we should do different? Because they firmly, firmly believe that they've never made a mistake. They actually didn't make a mistake. They didn't make a mistake in 2007. I think

they blame the weather. And then in 2011, I don't know what their excuse was because they kept getting all of their MLAs cut in half. So I'm not sure. I bet you their excuse when they come back after the next election, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is say, oh, we forgot our plan. We forgot to tell everybody what we were doing. We were just going to say, oh, we weren't the Saskatchewan Party, so could you please elect us?

That's not how you get to people. People want to know what they're doing. People want to know exactly what the NDP over there are doing as far as a plan on how to grow our province.

They don't want to grow the province. They don't want anybody to come into Saskatchewan because all it does, Mr. Speaker, is it erodes their base. They had a 30 per cent solid base in Saskatchewan, and now that's dwindling.

Because we even get positive comments from the unions on what's going on within our budget. We had a very positive comment. I'll just have to pull it up here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. "SEIU-West is encouraged by the province's funding lift for disability-focused Community Based Organizations." That was in the SEIU [Service Employees International Union] West press release. So we're getting support on different fronts from the unions because they're frustrated with what's going on. They don't even understand what the NDP are doing these days.

Now I want to talk a little bit about Social Services, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is something that's near and dear to my heart after spending four and a half years at the Saskatoon Food Bank and Learning Centre. I saw that there were a lot of cracks in the system. There were a lot of problems within the system that the NDP had built up over 16 years that didn't work for people.

Now you have to consider this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Saskatoon Food Bank, as far as my numbers, and I'll stand corrected on that, have marginally increased in food, food that they have been giving out. But that marginal increase doesn't take into the size of Saskatoon. The size of Saskatoon population has increased a tremendous amount. And there are still a very select few people that need the food bank, and I'm glad the food bank is there to be able to help them out.

But one thing . . . Well not one thing but several things that the NDP didn't do is they never looked after . . . We had the longest wait-list for people with disabilities. And I credit the Minister of Social Services, prior to her stepping out of cabinet, in setting up the SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] program, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because that gave people with disabilities some dignity. They weren't treated like everybody else that didn't have a job that was going through tough times or on the TEA [transitional employment allowance] program or some other programs that were there. They were not able to work because of their disability, and they didn't get that respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This government stepped up. The member from Wadena, in her role as Social Services minister, stepped up and said, we need to look after these people. We need to eliminate the 440 wait-list. And I'm very proud to say that this government has eliminated that 440 wait-list, and I believe that it's over 1,000 people that we have within the SAID program.

An Hon. Member: — And the member from Humboldt.

Mr. Merriman: — And the member from Humboldt. Thank you. Let me tell you about the member from Humboldt. The member from Humboldt has done an absolute fabulous job with Social Services in being able to make sure that the SAID program is getting spoken to at the cabinet table and making sure that there is increases within there. So I very much thank the member from Humboldt for being able to take this and add onto it and build it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm not sure how much more time I've got to speak here. I'm just looking around to make sure . . .

An Hon. Member: — You've got lots.

Mr. Merriman: — I've got lots? Thank you. Thank you very much. I want to talk a little bit — obviously this impacts me as a father — on the education side of things. When the NDP was over there, they were continuing to close down schools. I've mentioned it, and it'll get mentioned several times over here.

We're building schools. Why are we building schools, Mr. Deputy Speaker? You can ask anybody in Saskatchewan, and you know what the good news is? Saskatchewan's on the map nationally, so you can ask anybody across the country. Saskatchewan's growing. Saskatchewan is strong. They're getting AAA credit rating. They're balancing their budgets. This is why we're having to build schools is because people are coming to Saskatchewan now.

They're not leaving Saskatchewan like they did in droves. And everyone . . . And I still firmly believe that that's why Rider nation is so popular across Canada is because all of those people were from Saskatchewan, and they all left. We had 16 years of people just jumping out of this province as fast as they could. They would graduate high school; they would graduate university, and they were gone.

We're building new schools. We're building schools in Saskatoon. I want to talk a little bit about the dollar amount because when you're comparing things, you need to be able to give a good idea of what happened in the past. So under the NDP, the last seven years of their governing time they spent \$190 million in total capital for schools. In comparison, our first seven years we've spent over \$700 million investing in schools. Saskatoon alone got \$155 million; Regina, \$135 million. Those two areas alone got almost double what the entire province got. Why? Because it was easier for them to close down a school, shut down what was going on versus to try to invest in it. And the worst part of that is they weren't investing in our most valuable asset, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which are our kids.

[16:15]

We used to talk about potash. We'd talk about oil and gas, uranium, agriculture — very critically important to our province. The most important thing to our province though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is our kids. And unfortunately, because of the way that they invested in schools and that they invested in our children's future, they decided that it wasn't important for them to invest into our education, into our kids.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's a sad state when you look backwards in Saskatchewan's history. We had so much potential. We were I believe the third largest province until the '40s as far as population. What happened? What happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is socialism happened. Socialism happened across the board, and our province was hamstrung by that, that it was best not to grow. Now I'm proud to say, other than Walter Scott, the province has never grown as much as it did. We are second only to Walter Scott. Premier Brad Wall has grown this province more than anybody . . . Sorry, the member from Swift Current. Sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my apologies for that.

The growth that we're seeing within our province is substantial. I know that because I can see a future for my kids. I can see that we're investing in schools. We're investing in hospitals, and we're investing in those who need some extra assistance. All of our economic growth is to try to bring everybody in this province forward, not just for, as they claim, they keep saying that, oh, we're just doing this for big business. Then how do they explain the SAID program? How do they explain the children's hospital? How do they explain the hospital in Moose Jaw, North Battleford, the investment in long-term care facilities? That has nothing to do with business. It has nothing to do with business.

They stand up every day in this Legislative Assembly and it's almost shameful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the information that they present to us in questions is very, very misleading. Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm not understanding why everything seems to get twisted when we present and, say with educational, English as an additional language, we've actually increased it by 8 per cent. The opposition says, no. No, you've cut it. The numbers just don't match up, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The difference is, we look at the entire facts of what's going on within a specific area. The opposition seems to pick and choose their numbers, and it's a little misleading to the general public.

I want to talk about a couple of other things, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to talk about some of . . . I've heard the member from Athabasca say it quite a few times is where did the money go? Where did this all go? Well I can tell you where the money went. The money went to pay down our debt. The money went to invest in our schools. The money went into our highways, all of the things that they, when they were in government, the New Democratic Party, that they neglected.

We're playing catch-up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we're trying our best to catch up on everything. But like I said before, the pit that they dug in the infrastructure within our province because it was just . . . There was band-aids put on everything. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I can use that analogy. The highways? There was a band-aid, just a little patch here instead of repaving it. The schools? Oh well, we'll just prop it up a little bit. Or you know what? We'll just close down the school and centralize everybody and bus everybody across rural Saskatchewan. They put band-aids on everything.

And what we did is, when we formed government, when the Saskatchewan . . . My predecessors who were elected in 2007, we started looking into this. And it was just every time we opened up a new file, we found another pit, that there was no money invested in this, nothing in the schools, that everything was falling apart. And it amazes me that they can actually stand

there and say and blame us for this. I wish that they would just stop, look in the mirror, and be able to say yes, we made a mistake. I've heard it from some members. A former Finance minister, Pat Atkinson, said, I wish we could have done more. I wish we could have done more.

The problem is the arrogance that's still sitting over there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They still think they're right. They still think that everything that they do is correct, but they don't understand. What they don't see is they are losing everything, any shred of respect that they had with the Saskatchewan people other than the faithful, faithful socialists that are out there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They're not appealing to anybody in the new Saskatchewan.

And the good news is our population numbers are going up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to 1,132,640. Now that's a huge number. There's over 130,000 people that have never seen an NDP government. And our job here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to remind them that we cannot go back to that same old NDP. Because what would they have done with this budget? They'd have reached into my pocket again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They'd have reached in both back pockets and they would have just grabbed all of my money that they could, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

An Hon. Member: — Take the loose change out of your pocket.

Mr. Merriman: — Absolutely. Maybe they would have hung me upside down — I don't know if that could happen — and shake all the change out of me to try to balance their budget or try to be able to increase taxes again.

The work that this government has done to make sure we didn't reach into anybody's pocket was huge. It wasn't easy. As the member from Saltcoats said, this wasn't an easy budget. This was a budget that was deliberated and discussed: treasury board, Minister of Finance, caucus, cabinet.

It went around because we had to make sure that we didn't lose our values. We remember what, who brought us here, and we make sure we remember that our core values are about looking out for the best interests of the people of Saskatchewan, not the best interests to make sure that you get re-elected but the best interests now and in the long term for the people of Saskatchewan. Everywhere from our youngest, newest Saskatchewan person to our oldest Saskatchewan person, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we make sure that we look after every one of them, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I want to talk . . . just a couple of closing comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to make sure that I touch on a couple of things. Again I think in Canada — and again I stand corrected on this, Mr. Deputy Speaker — I think we're the only second, the only one of two provinces that have a balanced budget this year. That is something to say when our neighbours next door on both sides are struggling.

So I guess the question would be to the general public is, if they're struggling so much . . . Obviously they've been impacted by other economic things, but we're affected by that as well. So what is the difference between them and us, is we

manage our money in a very fiscally responsible way. We make sure that we invest in health, social services, and education. Those were the three ministries that got a lift in this budget, and I believe, again I stand corrected, every other ministry had to take a little bit of a haircut to make sure we didn't reach into the pocket.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again I want to thank you for the opportunity to engage in this budget. I want to thank my family. I want to thank all the people here that have prepared me for this. Again I want to thank my parents. And I want to thank the caucus staff for everything that they give for me and that they gave to me. And I also want to thank . . . I want to thank my kids. And I want to thank, just one more time, I've got to thank the member from Humboldt because she's just fabulous. And I will not be supporting the amendment and I will be supporting the motion put forward by my colleague from Lloydminster. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to reply to the budget speech by the Finance minister who's done an outstanding job bringing down a number of budgets, all of them balanced, by the way. And that's a real credit to him and to our government to have another balanced budget.

I'd just like to recognize and thank a few people as well. My wife Cindy who's an EA [educational assistant] at the school in Biggar. We have three children: Lacey who lives and works in Regina, my son Marshall works in Saskatoon, and my youngest daughter Alex who is going to university and working part-time as well.

Lacey's friend Nick works out at building the stadium and he's a carpenter by trade. And it's very interesting work and I enjoy the stories about working out there, especially in the cold weather and under interesting circumstances. He has a daughter, Surayya. And Cindy and I don't have any biological grandchildren but Surayya is definitely our grandchild. I think when even Nick brings her out to visit, he must practise, have her practising grandma and grandpa because she's really ready to go calling us grandma and grandpa. So we consider her one of our grandchildren as well.

The other family I'd like to recognize is a young lady by the name of Desiree and her partner Reno and they have a child by the name of Zane, and he's our grandchild too. In reality little Zane is a year and a half old and he's just a joy to us. And if anybody wants to see pictures after 5 o'clock, come to my office. I'll show you pictures of my grandchildren.

When we talk about the budget and the NDP like to talk about where did the money go, you know, I just can from my part talk about my constituency. I can tell you where the money went. We have a brand new long-term care home that's going to be open. Well the residents are moving in March 31st and April 1st. They've renovated the hospital, attached a new long-term care to the hospital. That's where the money went in Biggar, and it's a fabulous facility and really look forward to the day it opens in a couple of weeks and all the residents move in.

There's another interesting story I'd like to talk about where the money went. This wasn't this year, but a couple of years ago when I did an interview with the local Biggar *Independent*. It was in the summertime and I ended the interview off by saying the only complaints the constituents of Biggar are going to have this year is that the delays in traffic and driving because of all the road and highway construction. And a couple of days later I got a call from a gentlemen by the name of Fred Walter, and he's the head of Big Rose Colony. And Fred in his real dry, dry wit, he says, hi, Randy. I said hi. He says, I have a complaint. And so I knew something was coming. And he says, he says, my complaint is about all the delays when I drive down the highway to the field because of all the road construction. And he had a little laugh and said, thanks for everything; keep up the good work.

And so then, you know, that's where the money has gone in the past — building roads and highways and infrastructure, you know, municipal sharing, going into the rural municipalities. It's been a great relief to the RMs to have the municipal agreement and the money that goes into their coffers so they can improve their road system, and through the last few years where they're very wet years, PDAP [provincial disaster assistance program] and through Sask water security. The amount of money that has gone into Biggar constituency is phenomenal because of the flooding and the damage that was done.

You look no further than Borden, Saskatchewan who was having a lot of problems with flooding, a potential flood that really would've drowned out the whole community and it was diverted at the last minute. But we put literally millions of dollars back into that community to help with flood mitigation and other things around the flood and the cost of pumping water and doing those projects. And the people of that community and the mayor, David Buckingham, did a fabulous job dealing with that potential disaster they could have had, very much appreciates the money that came through PDAP to help pay the tremendous bills, quite frankly, that they had to incur.

You know, other projects in Biggar constituency . . . I had the privilege to attend the announcement with the Prime Minister of Canada and Premier of the twinning from Rosetown to Saskatoon, the other day. And you know that's part of my constituency as well.

[16:30]

And the traffic, that is the traffic jams from Delisle to Saskatoon every morning and evening are quite amazing. There's two potash mines out there, but so many people live in Vanscoy and Delisle and on small acreages that travel it morning and night and the traffic is . . . Well it was very much needed to have that stretch of the highway twinned. And it'll be a welcome relief to traffic and, you know, it naturally improves safety, but also it's good for the business sector and speeds up delivery of goods and services and of course the workers to their jobs.

Throughout the years we've invested a lot of money. Highway 16 from Saskatoon to The Battlefords goes through my constituency. You know, there's been ongoing improvements and repairs to that highway now that it's twinned. It was a great

welcome to have that highway system in such good shape, as I mentioned twinning from Delisle to Saskatoon, that stretch of Highway 7. You know, Highway 14 runs through basically the centre of the constituency and we've done a lot of work on Highway 14 as well, and 4 running from Biggar to North Battleford.

I always go back to the days when the former Highways minister, Pat Atkinson, was in government in the NDP and she used to shout across to me. She says, Randy, how do you like all that paving I got done in your constituency? And what the NDP did in those days, they did about a half a kilometre, maybe even less than half a kilometre in front of every community, and that was it. And I says, well, when are you going to join all the little pieces together? Because I mean that's fine and dandy to have a half a mile in front of Asquith and in front of Perdue, but you know, they need to have a good highway system. You need the whole highway done. And of course they never did get it done. Much of it has been done since we formed government actually, and continue to build highways and roads, RM roads, and bridges and other infrastructure that was needed so badly.

So that's where the money went. And that's the wonderful thing about this budget is that we never increased any taxes so the people and the businesses are able to keep their own money in their own pockets to save or to reinvest in homes or businesses. And our government is controlling spending. If we are asking other people to hold back or save, our government is doing that and our government is controlling spending, only increasing the budget by 1.2 per cent, and we'll still be able to manage all the priorities that are needed. You know, it's so important to continue to fund health care, social services, and education, and we continue to do that and still have a balanced budget and control spending as well.

I spoke quite a bit about investments in infrastructure, and I will further on. But that's the thing, that one of the big mistakes the NDP made when they were in government, when after an election they raised the PST by two points. Not only they did raise PST but they stopped investing in infrastructure. And that really . . . Well we're still paying for those decisions today, trying to catch up on a lack of infrastructure, of building and investment that happened under the NDP.

But not only those factors that affected the future growth of the province, but the NDP never looked after people. I mean, they closed 52 rural hospitals. We've talked about the closing of the Plains hospital. They closed 176 schools and they closed 1,200 long-term care beds, and now they have the nerve to complain about our health record and our care for seniors. Well, Mr. Speaker, I mean if they didn't close rural hospitals and eliminate 1,200 long-term care beds, you know, we'd be in a far better place today trying to catch up with that infrastructure build and those problems.

I think I need to speak, you know, somewhat . . . I mean the members will be speaking on all these points, but I think some of the statistics from the budget needs to be entered into my speech while I have the opportunity.

You know, agriculture remains a very key business as part of our economy, and you know, in the Minister of Agriculture's part of the budget, it is \$362.4 million and we continue to give

strong support in this budget and really minimal change over last year. The budget contains 71.6 million for strategic initiatives, including \$26.7 million for agriculture research and innovation. And our government will once again provide 4.2 million in industry assistance for support of organizations like 4-H Council of Saskatchewan, the Western Canadian Agribition, and Agriculture in Classroom.

The budget also contains \$240 million to fully fund business risk management programs such as crop insurance, AgriStability, AgriInvest, to support farming operations as they look to grow and expand. The agriculture across the province and in Biggar constituency is a very strong and vibrant economy. You know, we've been fortunate with good weather. There's always challenges in agriculture, because it is dependent on the weather which you have no control over. And farmers are also dependent on prices that they really have no control over or little control over.

And our farmers are very efficient, and they are very good marketers. They're making the best of every opportunity that they have. And the farmers of Saskatchewan have, you know, really gone out and applied themselves and taken up new technologies and new ways of farming to remain a very viable and important part of the Saskatchewan economy.

And of course the 2015 crop insurance program includes ongoing enhancements, giving producers more choice and flexibility as well. Premiums are decreasing for producers while coverage levels on average are increasing to \$183 per acre, up from \$162 per acre in 2014.

Another area that is very important, of course, is advanced education. And you know, our budget will keep Saskatchewan strong by investing in post-secondary educational institutes and supports for students. Since 2007-08 the provincial government has provided \$477.5 million in capital funding to post-secondary institutions and 23.6 for preventive maintenance and renewal, 10.6 for renovation and expansion of southwest college in Weyburn, 7.9 million for Health Sciences facility at the University of Saskatchewan, 4.5 million for the Parkland College Trades and Technology Centre in Yorkton.

But this is something that's really dear to my heart as my time as minister of Rural and Remote Health, is that the budget provides an additional 2.5 million to fulfill the government's commitment for more medical training seats in three areas. The budget continues to fund 40 additional medical undergraduate seats to bring the total to 100; 60 medical residency seats to bring the total 120; an additional 20 nurse practitioner seats to bring the total to 40. The budget also provides continued funding for 690 nursing training seats in the province. The government fulfilled its commitment to increase nursing education training seats by 300 in 2013. And these improvements in training and investment in students and doctors and nurses are so vital to the future of health care.

And right in Biggar we have a very solid practice, three physicians. They have come through the SIPPA [Saskatchewan international physician practice assessment] program. And it's a very good situation in Biggar and the surrounding areas that these physicians serve: as I mentioned before, a brand new long-term care home as well as a hospital that's being renovated

and will look after the people in the Biggar constituency very well.

The government has a strong commitment to students, which continued through an array of support programs: 32.5 million for student aid funding, including student loans, grants, bursaries; 9 million for the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship, an increase of 2.3 million; 5.5 million for other scholarships; 6.5 million for the Saskatchewan advantage grant for education savings; 88.1 million non-refundable tax credit for the graduate retention program, and which two of my children are receiving. They're both working and went to school and college in Saskatchewan and now receive the graduate retention program.

Of course under the economy, you know, resource, it's so fundamental to this province. With the downturn in the oil sector, the mining sector has remained strong, continues to grow, and we're much more diversified than other provinces. And it's showing on the balance sheet as we're able to balance our budget with the other sectors that are doing very well in the province and in our economy — as I mentioned, potash.

The 2015-16 budget will keep Saskatchewan's economy strong by promoting responsible development of the province's resource wealth, encouraging new investment and job creation, ensuring a sustainable, competitive business environment. Effective January 1st, 2015, the province is changing the way in which potash companies can claim capital expenditures as tax deductions. All capital expenditures will continue to accrue at the rate of 120 per cent, but the rate to which capital expenditures are deductible from the annual gross sale revenues will be reduced. Very, very common sense changes.

I'd just like to speak a bit on the labour front. The budget has enhanced labour market programs, a \$600,000 increase to the adult basic education for a record investment of \$25 million. And that's so fundamental because there's a lot of young people, and some of them that aren't young, that need to upgrade their training. They never got through grade 12, and I know a number of people that are taking this up and are able to go on and then get trained or retrained in other areas through SIAST or other areas, to gain the skills to be able to work in this new economy of Saskatchewan's. \$1 million increase to the provincial training allowance fund; 500,000 will be allocated to sport; 100 new training seats at the Trades and Technology Centre at Parkland College in Yorkton; funding for the Canada-Saskatchewan Job Grant is increased by two million for a total of \$4 million — all these very important things.

I can go on and on. There's a lot of good things in here about education, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our government remains committed to students across the province and is increasing its overall investment in education by 14 per cent over 2014-15 to a total of \$2 billion. Incredible, Mr. Speaker, under a very tight budget. School operating funding for '15-16, including revenue collected from the education property tax, will be 1.87 billion, up 52.8 million or 2.9 per cent over last year. And there's just other great things that we're doing in education. We're supporting education as we support health care and other parts of the economy.

There's one area that I'd just like to speak about that's very

important right across Saskatchewan, but certainly in Biggar. And there's so many new Canadians have come to Biggar to work in the manufacturing businesses in Biggar. They've come through the nominee program and there's people from all over the world. The highest number of percentage of people have come from the Philippines. They're hard-working people. They build, they buy houses and vehicles, and they're doing well and they're filling the schools and the churches. And I've got to be friends with many of them, and they're all wonderful people and they're working out very well. And the nominee program which really helped get them here and get them set up, there's other people from eastern Europe and right around the world from east Asia as well that have come through the nominee program who are valuable members of the community.

I think I will probably end my reply now. This budget has, as I had said, has no tax increases. Our government has controlled spending and continued to invest in infrastructure, and based on those three things and all the other wonderful things that are in this budget, I will be supporting this budget and I will not be supporting the amendment. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[16:45]

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley.

Ms. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well I rise in the House today to speak in support of the budget and I will not be supporting the amendment put forward by the NDP.

Before I take the time to speak about the budget, I would like to extend my appreciation to the Minister of Finance. I've had the opportunity of knowing the member from Canora-Pelly since 1995 when he was first elected. So I don't consider him just a colleague but I also consider him a friend. And so I had the opportunity to know and realize that this is a gentleman who made the commitment to serving the public very much part of his life, and so I think each and every one of us appreciates that. We appreciate the attitude in which he brought forward this budget: very humble and very sincere.

We also should be thanking the members on treasury board because the amount of time and energy that each and every one of our members have committed to ensuring that they provided a balanced budget was probably very taxing because, as the members were sitting down to put together the budget, they realized that in fact oil prices were tumbling and they were tumbling very quickly. So you can imagine the hard choices they had to make because that's one of the things we've always held true to, is having a balanced budget on this side of the House. So because of that, hard choices had to be made. And because of that, they could have sat around wringing their hands, but they chose not to sit there wringing their hands but rather to roll up their sleeves, make the tough choices, and put forward a very commendable budget.

In order to balance the budget without raising taxes, the government chose to control operating spending and again, as I stated, Deputy Speaker, this was done in very careful deliberation. Spending on the broad themes of health, education, social services, and assistance accounts for 73.2 per

cent of all government expenses.

And I'd like to speak directly about the choice they made for education. I know we're very lucky here in Regina to have three joint schools that are going to be built. We have one in the east, one in the south and one in the northwest. And the constituency of Regina Qu'Appelle Valley, soon to be known as Regina Rochdale, is one of the recipients of one of these wonderful new schools. And the school is going to be located in Skywood, which is one of the new areas in the Regina northwest. Regina northwest, Regina south, and Regina east are the fastest growing areas within this city so these schools are very much needed.

And within these schools we're also going to see community space, but we're also going to see, in the school in Regina northwest, 90 new child care spaces. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's pretty commendable because every time you drive down the street or you go into any of our shops in my area in Regina Qu'Appelle Valley, the constituency of Regina Qu'Appelle Valley, we have young families that have chosen to make that their home. So we have lots of young families with children so the school is very much needed.

We also have two other schools being replaced in the city, both Connaught and Sacred Heart. So I think Regina has been very lucky to have been the recipient of the choices made in education because, like I stated, education is one of the cornerstones of this budget.

Another cornerstone of the budget is health care, and it's interesting to see that our opposition has brought forward questions in question period extensively about senior care. And both our Health minister and our Rural Health minister have very much taken this to heart, but also have focused extensively on ensuring that funding is going to be there for senior care. We have made a commitment of 13 new long-term care facilities and, because of that, we are not going back on our word.

That's one of the things that as a government we have very much committed to doing, is what we say we will do, we do. We do not just pay lip service. One of the things the opposition was very well known for was making an announcement, cutting the ribbons. In fact on one occasion, they even had a earthmoving equipment go out, but nothing happened. And that's one of the things we have made sure that we've always . . . What we said we were going to do, we have followed through on.

And members have managed to attend quite a few openings of health care facilities. We've got a new hospital going in Moose Jaw. How many times wasn't that facility announced, and it's this government that is bringing that forward. The children's hospital, a much needed facility, going to be built in Saskatoon. And again I know the members from the opposition talked about it but they didn't do anything about it. Same thing with the Saskatchewan Hospital in North Battleford. That is a 100-year-old facility and I've had the opportunity to tour that facility and it is in very much need of replacement. It's not repair. It's replacement.

Again that is a commitment that we have made and we will follow through on it because as I said, health care, education,

social services, those are the pillars of this budget. They are the three ministries that the treasury board has made a commitment to increasing the funding, not decreasing the funding. The other ministries had to sharpen their pencils and come up with how they can provide services to them without increasing the funding to them. So I think that was one of the commitments we made, was that we were not going to raise taxes.

People in Saskatchewan work hard for their money. They feel that they want a government that also is prudent, and that's one of the things that we can be proud of, is that we have kept an eye on ensuring that we did not raise any taxes but that we also invested in the infrastructure. Because one of the things the opposition did is that they absolutely halted any growth in this province. And my colleagues and members have stated that in fact people left this province in droves. With the change in government, we have a renewal of confidence in Saskatchewan. People are moving here, and why? Because they see opportunity. To ensure that we keep our province moving forward, we have to make the investment in infrastructure. We have to commit money to schools. We have to commit money to health care facilities and also to new highway construction because we have a higher population today so we have more people on our roads.

I mean the Minister of Highways has made a commitment to twinning of some aspects of the highways, but also passing lanes. And passing lanes are going to ensure that even though we have more traffic on our highways, it's going to ensure that we have safe manner of people moving to and from within communities. We have more and more people commuting to our major centres that are choosing to live in smaller town Saskatchewan or on acreages, so we have to ensure that they have transportation that's safe. But through all of this, it's to ensure that we keep Saskatchewan strong.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the things when I was in business, we used to, if we had tough choices to make, we had what we called a Ben Franklin close or a T-bar close. So you would line up the pros and the cons. And one of the things we can do is it's pretty easy to make the choice between a Saskatchewan Party government and the NDP. Because with the NDP, they had no qualms about raising taxes. They increased taxes 17 times. We're in fact holding the line on that. This budget was a balanced budget without raising taxes.

One of the things that the NDP did was they closed 52 hospitals, 52 hospitals, most of those in rural Saskatchewan or the Plains which was a much needed hospital here in the city. We've made commitment to building new health care facilities.

The NDP also closed 176 schools. Now that's nearly one a month for 16 years. As my colleague from Humboldt likes to say, one a month for 16 years. That's shameful. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're building new schools. Why? Because we have young families that have moved here. We are making a commitment to our families. We're making a commitment to our students to ensure that they have good schools with the facilities that can meet their needs.

One of the things we've also done since we formed government is something that the NDP paid lip service to, but it's a commitment we've made, is we've increased child care spaces

by 53 per cent. Now that's pretty incredible. I know myself within the constituency soon to be known as Regina Rochdale, our new school in Skywood is going to have 90 new child care spaces. That's pretty incredible and I know that young families are going to be appreciating that.

So as I said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you list their accomplishments, which were sad, and what they did, which was in most cases deplorable — closing schools, closing hospitals, not keeping up our highways — on the other hand we've got a Saskatchewan Party government which is building schools, building hospitals, ensuring that we have 13 new long-term care facilities. We're paving roads. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's pretty clear. And I'm going to be very proud when I go to the doors because this is the budget that we're going to be campaigning on. This is a balanced budget with no new taxes, with sustainable growth, and investing in a province that we want to keep moving forward, not moving backward which is what the NDP propose to do.

So thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am going to be supporting the budget, but I will not be supporting the amendment put forward by the NDP. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure and I know I get a chance to speak before, but after supper. But one thing I haven't heard from these folks when talking about the budget is the three new MLAs that they insisted on having put forward for the next election. Now they're talking a lot about history. They're talking about a lot of history but they don't want to talk about the three new MLAs. We have not heard them talk about the smart meter fiasco, and we have not heard them talk about John Black. All of a sudden that part of history is erased from Saskatchewan.

We need to talk more about those three new MLAs and what value they really have for Saskatchewan families in Saskatchewan today. We need to talk about John Black and the consultants — 228 per cent increase, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How are they adding value for Saskatchewan families?

So I'll have a lot more to say about this after supper, Mr. Speaker, because I know you're going to cut me off in a few minutes. But people can tune back in, tune back at 7 o'clock because I'll have some things to say about this budget, for sure, for sure.

These folks like to gloss over what this budget, this borrowed balanced budget really means to Saskatchewan families in Saskatchewan today. It's not a good thing. It's not a good thing and whether we talk about the child care supplements, the subsidies that have been cut back, seniors thrown off the pharmacare, all of these things is not a good thing, Mr. Speaker. So come back at 7 o'clock and I'll have more to say.

The Deputy Speaker: — It now being 5 o'clock, this House stands recessed until 7 p.m. tonight.

[The Assembly recessed from 17:00 until 19:00.]

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