



THIRD SESSION - TWENTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE

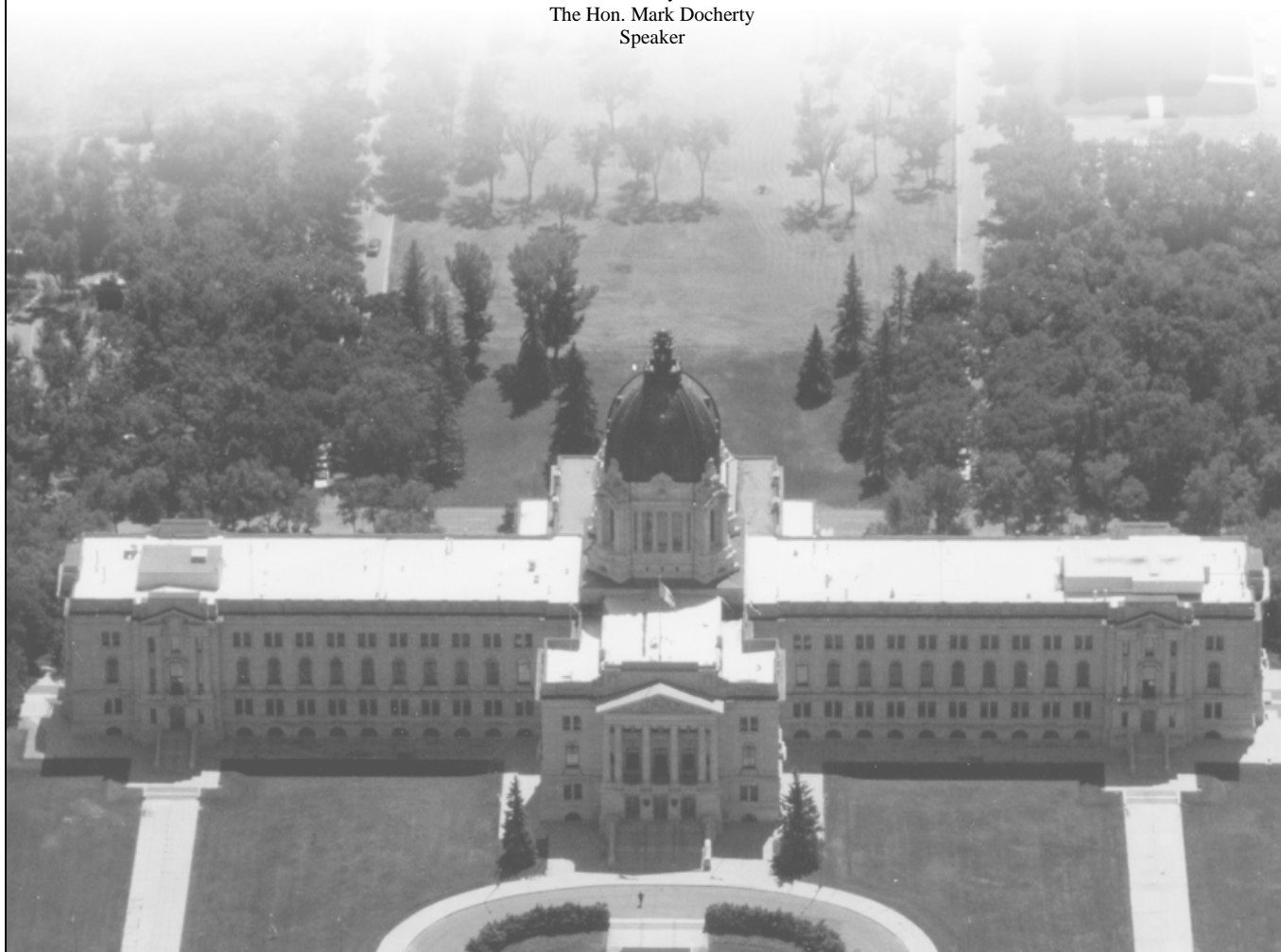
of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

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The Hon. Mark Docherty
Speaker



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3rd Session — 28th Legislature

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[The Assembly resumed at 19:00.]

EVENING SITTING

The Deputy Speaker: — It now being 7 o'clock, I'll call the Assembly back to order. We'll continue with debate concurrently on both the main motion and the amended motion. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Riversdale.

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

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to wade into the debate this night for budget 2019. I'm going to keep my thank yous . . . I'm very glad to hear there's some very enthusiastic members on the other side of the aisle and here as well, Mr. Speaker. I'll just start by keeping some of my thank yous short, but they're very important to me.

As a lone parent who lives in Saskatoon and does this job, I couldn't do this job without the support of an entire team of family and friends behind me, Mr. Speaker. My mom, who has my dog Taxi tonight, my mom and dad . . . My dad has moved into long-term care so the support now is sort of going the other direction. I live across the street from my mom, Mr. Speaker, but I have a sister and her husband.

My sister we affectionately refer to as Auntie Mommy, which isn't nearly as much fun as being Auntie. But my sister Michelle makes it possible for me to be able to do this job, Mr. Speaker. So I just want to give a big shout out to Auntie Mich and to Uncle John who gives up his wife for a session in the fall and spring when she moves in with me.

I have to say too that my sister has taken on the added responsibility of another being to care for in my house, Mr. Speaker. In the fall I became the proud dog owner of a Great Pyrenees, and without consultation with my sister. And so she's a pretty good sport. You probably don't realize this, but Great Pyrenees are the only of the mountain breeds that are nocturnal. So my sister hasn't been thrilled with taking on that part of the responsibility, but she's still a pretty good sport about coming to stay at my house.

I want to mention my kids who, as you and I were talking earlier, my youngest was one when I was first elected. So she's not known anything else really, and she's now 11. And my daughter Hennessey . . . So my youngest is Ophelia and my oldest is Hennessey, and Hennessey is 21 and it's actually Hennessey's birthday today, Mr. Speaker. This time 21 years ago, I was a mom for an hour and a half at about this time 21 years ago, Mr. Speaker. So I just would like to wish Hennessey a happy birthday. She's the reason . . . Actually, I grew up in a really

political household, but it wasn't until her birth where I sort of saw myself in the role as an advocate. That was sort of when my own passion for social change really began. I was really interested in midwifery and leaves for parents, child care, just basically doing better for families. So I want to send a big happy birthday to Hennessey and thank her for being a big part of the reason why I'm here today.

I want to thank my staff in my office. I've got Dan, Tammie, and Judy, who keep things going for me. Our staff here in the legislature, both in our caucus office and in the building as in general, they're really important in allowing us to do our job. And I want to thank the people of Saskatoon Riversdale, who never hesitate to stop in or call or send emails with their thoughts about things going on, both in Saskatoon Riversdale and in the province as a whole. So I always really appreciate hearing from them and their willingness to connect.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been the Health critic for about five years up until this past fall when I had the enormous privilege of becoming the mental health and addictions critic. This is the first time as a caucus that our leader has carved that part out of health care, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's probably the first time in this legislature as well where there's been a designated portfolio for mental health and addictions. And I've been hugely honoured. That's been a big part of the work that I've done as the Health critic, but I have to say it's really nice to have that part carved out to put some really good focus on it. We felt, and our leader felt, that if the government wasn't going to shine the light on this like they should, we were going to, Mr. Speaker.

So most of my comments tonight will focus on mental health and addictions. It won't be a comprehensive list of everything good or bad in the budget. But before I get there, my mom always said, if you can't say something nice don't say anything at all. So I would like to say a couple nice things, or a couple things that I did appreciate in this budget, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to say that the tax credit for first responders is hugely important. I've had the privilege and the pleasure of working with first responders — with paramedics, firefighters, and police. And those were all professional services who are paid and have the supports in place for doing their job. Volunteer first responders in rural communities play a huge role in providing supports for our communities, so I commend the government on this tax credit, Mr. Speaker.

I was really happy to see some operational dollars for Glengarda hospice in this budget as well. I know this has been a long-time project and there was just a \$6-million anonymous donation to get the building actually built for Saskatchewan's first free-standing hospice. It's been an ongoing fundraising campaign, but the \$6-million boost got them closer to them being able to open the doors. And it's operational dollars. I believe it's supposed to open in the fall of . . . I can't remember if it's '19 or '20, but it's a positive thing, Mr. Speaker.

And Sanctum 1.5, which is a 10-bed hospice for pregnant women who are HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] positive. This is near and dear to my heart. I think that pregnancy is a huge opportunity if women are well supported to really turn their lives around and to have the support to make better choices. And

Sanctum is a really important project, both the original hospice and now this hospice for HIV-positive women as well.

So those are a few things that I think are good in the budget, but there is a lot that I think is lacking, Mr. Speaker. And as I said, I'm going to concentrate the bulk of my remarks on mental health and addictions.

I hearken back to grade 3 or grade 4, Mr. Speaker, when I had a really amazing teacher, Mrs. Stodola. I had lots of amazing teachers actually, from K to 8 [kindergarten to grade 8]. But Mrs. Stodola, I can remember her saying something when I think I was probably getting a little bit big for my britches or maybe was taking credit for something that should have been expected, Mr. Speaker. And I remember her saying, "Do you want a medal or a chest to pin it on?" And I don't think I really knew what that meant in grade 4, but I did know that the message was conveyed very clearly that I might have had a success, but it was something that I should have been doing anyway, Mr. Speaker.

I kind of feel like that is the theme for this budget around mental health and addictions, Mr. Speaker. I've heard members all on that side of the House crowing about the money that they are putting into mental health and addictions. And I welcome money on this particular area, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely critical that we add resources, desperately needed resources, when it is really a matter of life and death, Mr. Speaker.

There are people I know on both sides of the House who've been touched by mental health issues, personally and within our families as well. It really is a matter of life and death. I lost a nephew almost six years ago to bipolar disorder. I know that there's other people who have had the same experience. So I will make no apologies for saying this government hasn't done enough, Mr. Speaker, just to put that out there. I will make no apologies for pushing for greater resources around mental health and addictions.

So again, Mrs. Stodola's comments around, do you want a medal or a chest to pin it on, Mr. Speaker. I want to go back to August 2016. Some comments just around the context in which I make those remarks. So there was a story in August 2016 where Louise Bradley, the executive director of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, said, "Access to care is abysmal in most places throughout the country and of course that's linked . . . not only, but very much to funding," she said.

So at that point in August of 2016, her organization and other organizations were calling for the mental health share of health spending in the provinces and territories to increase by two points over the next decade from the national average, the then national average of 7 per cent to 9 per cent. So we really are playing catch up, Mr. Speaker. And even back in 2016 with this national average of 7 to 9 per cent, it leaves us lagging behind other places like New Zealand, Australia, UK [United Kingdom], where the funding levels range from 10 to 14 per cent for mental health, Mr. Speaker, as a percentage of the budget.

Again just for context, we can go back to a *Leader-Post* story in August 2016 where Dave Nelson, the associate executive director of the Saskatchewan division of the Canadian Mental Health Association, says, "Action on the action plan has been very slow. When this report came out and they didn't target any

resources for mental health — that was prior to the downfall in oil."

Again in that same story, Mr. Speaker, the former executive director of the Schizophrenia Society said, "We're all burning out here." So the reality is, things haven't been so great around mental health and addiction spending here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. So it is much-needed money and it is welcome, but it certainly is not enough.

We can talk a little bit about the concept of the burden of disease. And not just . . . Okay, so it's not enough from a person-centred focus, meaning what the impact it has on people's quality of life, but what it means to our society, our economy, people's lost time to disability, to their inability to be in a workplace, Mr. Speaker.

So the burden of disease is a concept developed in the '90s by the Harvard School of Public Health, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization to describe death and loss of health due to diseases, injuries, and other risk factors of diseases around in the world. So it's estimated by adding together the number of years of life a person loses as a consequence of dying early to illness and the number of years of life a person lives with disability caused by the disease. And so neuropsychiatric conditions are the most, the biggest cause of disability in all the regions of the world, accounting for about 33 per cent of all years lived with disability among adults age 15 and older, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I just want to draw your attention . . . So if we're approaching 7 per cent of expenditures here in Saskatchewan, I just want to draw your attention to a document called *Strengthening the Case for Investing in Canada's Mental Health System: Economic Considerations*:

In Canada the estimated \$15.8 billion spent by the public and private sectors in 2015 on non-dementia-related mental health care represented approximately 7.2 per cent of Canada's total health spending . . . This spending is well below that of other western countries. By comparison, the National Health Service in England spends 13 per cent of its health spending on a similar set of services.

The OECD's recent analysis of spending on mental health worldwide concluded that even England's 13% spending might be too low, given that the mental illnesses represent as much as 23% of the total disease burden.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, so we are well below investing what we need to make sure that people have an opportunity to engage in life fully and not be disabled by their mental health or addictions issues.

Specifically to this budget, Mr. Speaker, well actually I want to give a little bit of context. I mentioned my nephew Jordan. My sister-in-law, Lori, is a huge advocate for mental health and addictions. And she had wrote me this email a couple years ago, and I asked her if I could share a part of it here tonight, just around how we spend on physical health compared to mental health. And be assured she's not saying that we shouldn't be spending on physical health, but this is her experience as a mother who's lost a child to mental health issues, Mr. Speaker. She says:

If my child had developed a brain tumour, the health care system would have thrown every resource it had at him. People would have thrown us a fundraiser. His friends would have shaved their heads in support or run a marathon or simply stood by and understood that he couldn't help his odd behaviour. Even if he had developed another type of brain disease like Parkinson's, MS, epilepsy, the story would have been the same.

But he developed a chemical imbalance that society has chosen to view as shameful and embarrassing, and as a result he was desperately alone and isolated. As a society we still spend millions of dollars on cancer research, on treatment and drugs, and ribbons and arm bands. Cancer has touched my family. I have lost people dear to me to cancer. I share the suffering of those parents who, despite heroic efforts, paid the ultimate price in the loss of their child. I am simply asking for a broader conversation, a normalizing of mental illness, a recognition that my child and your child deserve heroic measures.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had a series of . . . Over the course of the fall session there were women, mothers, who came every week to the legislature, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to share similar sentiments. They had lost their children to addictions. Some of them literally lost their children to addictions; their children had died. Some of them, their children were in active recovery. Some of them were still struggling.

[19:15]

Mental health and addictions, just to be clear here, are not a moral failing. They're a chronic medical condition, a relapsing medical condition. And hopefully you can support a person through recovery into long-term recovery before they end up losing their life, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The reason those mothers came to the legislature every week is they wanted this minister and this government to see the impact of their lack of action on mental health and addictions. So I'm very glad to see that that message seems to be getting through.

But it's important to point out that we are still lagging far behind, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There are good things in this budget and good things around spending on mental health and addictions that will have a positive impact. But I have to point out the new dollars being spent directly for mental health initiatives, if you don't count the Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford doctors and nurses, is less than \$10 million for new provincial initiatives — \$9.85 million, provincial dollars, for new initiatives. So that is actually 0.18 per cent of the entire health budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

That's what folks on the other side are crowing about — 0.18 per cent of the entire health budget for new provincial dollars. If you factor in the folks who will be working at Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford, it would go up to 0.4 per cent. So yes, there are positive measures, long-awaited, long overdue measures in this budget, but there is a reason why I'm a whiner and a complainer, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know in some of the media and in comments today members opposite have said, oh the opposition will just say it's not enough. I will very clearly say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not enough. We have a long way to go.

Around some of the mental health spending, so aside from that 0.18 per cent of the Health budget being spent on new mental health initiatives, in this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a 1 per cent increase for community-based organizations, health-based, community-based organizations that provide, some of them provide front-line mental health care. We've got Crocus Co-op in Saskatoon; Crisis Intervention; mobile crises in P.A. [Prince Albert], Saskatoon; Canadian Mental Health Association, the chapters here in the province — organizations that provide direct front-line services to folks who live with mental health and addictions issues.

Just looking at a story from 2018, actually just less than four months ago, at Crisis Intervention in Saskatoon, in 2018 they broke the 100-call mark for the first time, 100 calls in a day. The call ratio at these places has gone up and up and up, and the resources haven't kept pace.

This year there's a 1 per cent increase, which for all intents and purposes is a cut because it's not keeping up with the cost of living. The last two years it was zero, and the previous two years I believe it was two. Regardless, in the last five years CBOs providing health care, and in this case I'm talking about mental health, they will receive a 3 per cent increase in five years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which does not keep pace with not only with the cost of living, but with the demands that have been placed on them in terms of call volume.

The good news is, stigma, we're talking a little bit more about mental health and addictions, mental health, then we have in the past. So that is contributing probably to some of the increase in call volume, but that doesn't make it any easier for that worker trying to support those folks who are calling in.

As well we are in the middle of a crystal meth crisis. And if the members opposite think I'm using hyperbole, I'd like to draw their attention to a comment from a 2018 CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] story where Robin Wintermute of the Saskatoon Police Service, a detective sergeant, says of crystal meth: "It's both alarming and problematic, not only in Saskatoon but in the province of Saskatchewan, to an epidemic proportion."

So this is a government who has watched crime statistics over the last five years, six years that had trended down for more than a decade all starting to go up. Property crime, violent crime, gun violence, vehicle thefts, thefts from within vehicles — all those have started to go up. And according to police services, you just have to have a conversation with anybody who works in law enforcement in any part of this province and they will tell you it is directly related to crystal meth, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which is a huge issue. So I've talked a little bit about the CBOs who desperately need attention. Three per cent is not good enough in five years, Mr. Speaker.

The mental health short-stay unit, I'm very pleased that they've decided to keep the short-stay unit, but I think the government missed the point about what people really were asking for. They don't want simply . . . So I'm talking about the mental health assessment unit that is currently at Royal University Hospital that was designed to be temporary, and the Dubé family donated money for capital along with other people. That has turned out to be a bit of an overflow for people waiting to get into the Dubé because the Dubé, which is an acute psychiatric centre, has been

over capacity now going on the last four years, I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am getting the hook and I am just getting rolling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I think the point about the mental health assessment unit, folks didn't want . . . and they might have changed the name to short stay unit. And I noticed in the news release that they said it would be a place people could stay, so a roof over your head. But is it a therapeutic space is the question. That's really what people are looking for. They were hoping that the decanted space at Royal University Hospital could be turned into a day hospital modelled on the psychiatric emergency care centres that they have in Australia, that have been really great at channelling people out of long stays in hospitals and helping getting people home and into community and well supported in community.

There is some new beds for treatment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it's 22 new beds. There is an eight-week wait at Calder Centre right now between detox and getting into Calder. So 22 beds is better than none for sure, but I also want to know, I'm looking forward to committee and asking some questions around are we going to make sure that those beds have the resources they need to provide long-term, necessary care that people presenting with crystal meth addictions have. Right now 28 days isn't enough. Twenty-eight days is based on the American model that the Americans . . . but insurance companies used to pay for rehab. So I'm hoping that we'll get some of these questions answered.

Anyway, 20 minutes goes really darn fast, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I said, I'm just getting going. There is a lot more to talk about, but again I'm always glad to see more resources for mental health and addictions. And my job and our job are to call the government out and hold them to account for things they are doing poorly or not doing well enough.

And I am grateful that there are more resources, but I can tell you from lived experience and from people with whom I work with every day in my office, that this is certainly not enough. And they need to listen to Mrs. Stodola's words: do they want a medal or a chest to pin it on, Mr. Speaker? And for that very reason, I will not be supporting this budget and I have to support the amendments. I will be supporting the amendments.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cypress Hills.

Mr. Steele: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I get into my speech here tonight, I'd like to give out a few thank yous to especially my wife. She's at home on the farm all alone, taking care of the place. She's got the old Lab dog there. He can't hear anything, can't see much, but he's there. But anyway, I'd like to thank her for all of her support and that type thing.

I'd like to thank my family, my son and my daughter-in-law and their new daughter, baby Bea there. They just had a little girl here about six months ago. Those two individuals put their life on the line every day to protect the public. They're both police officers in the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police]. And you know, it's very nice, and I'm very proud of them that they are there.

And my oldest daughter, Nicole, she's a teacher. She lives out

here and a little bit west of Regina here, Grand Coulee, her and her husband. She's a teacher out there, and he works for SaskEnergy. And their two little boys, Kohen and Hudson, pretty proud of those two little characters. They've got quite the personalities.

And just last week, my youngest daughter . . . She's a nurse practitioner and unfortunately she is in Lethbridge, Alberta. She took her university there and she did her practicum and they kept her. She just got engaged on her birthday last week, in Jamaica.

And I'd like to thank my CA [constituency assistant], Twila Wedrick. She's an amazing CA. I'm pretty fortunate to get an individual of her quality. She is amazing with the public and she guides me around pretty good. So I'd like to thank her for all the hard work she does.

And all the voters and the constituents in the Cypress Hills constituency, you know, the percentages show that we have great support there, and not just because of me but because they believe in what this party represents, you know. But I'd really like to thank them for that.

But anyway, we're going to get into the meat and potatoes of this speech here so, Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh, I've got to thank princess in 140 too, used to be in 140. We'll just throw that in there anyway, so there.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to stand in support of the budget. This government and the caucus has shown clearly that we are keeping Saskatchewan strong with the 2019-2020 budget. The job of every member of this Legislative Assembly is to help keep Saskatchewan moving forward and shaping a better province for today, tomorrow, and the future.

Mr. Speaker, we stayed on course, and our hard work has resulted in us bringing the budget to balance while maintaining the competitive tax and business environment while focusing on important programs and services that are sustainable for the long term. The job of every member of the Legislative Assembly is to help keep Saskatchewan moving forward, shaping a better province for today, tomorrow, the future. And this job we all take very seriously.

These decisions are what was needed to meet the challenges we faced, with the end result bringing the budget to balance. The most important part of any budget is keeping the revenues and expenditures manageable. With the resources and revenues declining over the last couple years, our government was faced with economic budgetary challenges in the 2019-2020 budget.

Mr. Speaker, this year's budget continues to commit to moving away from relying on resource revenues and continuing to build on a solid foundation using our revenues, resources during the challenging times. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud that we have chosen to continue moving our infrastructure, and in doing this we are helping improve the quality of care in our communities across the province and benefiting the people that we serve.

Investing in infrastructure that we drive on will help to make . . . safe for travel and support the growth of our economy. New infrastructure of schools ensures that the facilities housing education, pre-K to grade 12, continues to provide educational

growth and will create a tremendous benefit down the road. Building and adding on to infrastructure of our hospitals helps over-capacity pressures and emergency department wait times.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that our government is continuing to take care of our people in Saskatchewan while maintaining infrastructure of our communities. Our government will continue to do that and keep the best interest of the people in Saskatchewan. Under financial strain, our government made tough decisions.

We continue to invest in our province's future through investing in infrastructure and keeping the deficit and the debt in control. Mr. Speaker, we are still all maintaining infrastructure throughout the province. It will keep the economy growing, create jobs, and make it easier to move products and sustain economic growth, an investment that will benefit our province for years to come, improving the quality of lives for generations to follow. These smart important investments will help grow our economy and make Saskatchewan an even better place to call home.

[19:30]

Mr. Speaker, the budget maintains a strong investment in education. 2.48 billion will be invested in programs and services to continue with supporting child care, early childhood years, libraries, and pre-kindergarten to grade 12. This government continues to invest in the future of our children of our province. The increase in funding will allow school divisions to invest at the classroom level, to invest and support our teachers and educational support staff.

Mr. Speaker, education plays a great role in everyone's lives. Getting a proper education is very important and provides us with the fundamental tools that we will continue to use throughout our lives. Just like food is necessary to maintain a health body, education provides us with mental, physical, and social well-being so we can be successful in our personal growth for our future.

We as a government want to continue to ensure that we are able to provide important tools and offer support and strength in the classroom for our children, our communities, and our province. Schools are the hearts of our communities and it provides stability within our communities. Mr. Speaker, the NDP [New Democratic Party] closed 176 schools during their time in power. Education is a fundamental part of the foundation of our province, and our government wants to make sure we are providing the right services in the right locations, using the best delivery options possible. We want to ensure education remains relevant and viable.

Mr. Speaker, our government is dedicated to meeting the challenges before us: controlling and reducing spending, and ensuring our economy remains strong. As a government we took the time to look at every area of service delivered to ensure that resources are being used in the most effective and efficient manner.

Mr. Speaker, we all know how near and dear health care is to our hearts, and I want to point out that Saskatchewan has long been known in Canada as a pioneer in the health care field since we

took office in 2007, including reductions of wait times and increasing in health care spending. The longest surgical wait times was when the NDP had been in power. In fact they were the longest surgical wait times in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial Health Authority's priorities is to strengthen and improve the way health care is administered in an effective matter, meeting the health care needs at a local level. Our government has shown that not only does this benefit our urban care centres, but also those in rural and remote areas of this province.

Mr. Speaker, we have made significant improvements towards creating facilities, providing innovative services, and recruiting health care professionals throughout the rural and remote areas of this province. In the areas of physician recruitment for the province, the numbers speak for themselves, with the increase in physicians from the previous government's time in power to nearly over 750 more licensed physicians and over 3,400 more nurses. Saskatchewan lost more than 173 doctors and over 450 nurses during the previous government's time in power, during 2001 and 2006.

Mr. Speaker, it's not only physicians and nursing that has increased since 2007. The number of specialists in Saskatchewan has gone up as well. The Canadian Institute of Health Information even recognizes Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, as one of the two provinces with the highest physician growth rates in the past five years.

Mr. Speaker, the 2019-2020 budget commits to continuing to build a solid foundation. We will continue to look after and keep the best interests of our people in Saskatchewan. We are not off-loading the budget or stress onto the hard-working families and individuals or businesses in our province.

Mr. Speaker, modernizing and expanding taxes has secured a more stable economy, ensuring Saskatchewan's taxes remain fair and competitive. Our government has taken into consideration the growth rate of our province, lowering income tax rates, which we realize will be key for the strong economy. This will continue to track new economic activities, which in return will create new jobs and investments throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, our government is ensuring that taxes remain fair and competitive at every income level. Our next couple of years, the reductions in personal income tax and reductions will continue to grow. Since 2007 there's been nearly six billion in tax reductions for families, individuals, businesses, and farmers. We are among the lowest in personal and business tax burdens in Canada. The NDP government raised taxes 21 times during their 16 years in power, including raising the PST [provincial sales tax] four times and the gas tax twice.

Mr. Speaker, even with the PST at 6 per cent, Saskatchewan still has the lowest provincial sales tax rate in Canada. Saskatchewan people will pay among the lowest income tax in Canada because everyone at every level of income will be paying less income tax. Saskatchewan is leading Canada in job growth and with our province's low tax and tax incentives, we will continue to attract new investments and jobs to the province.

Our government has refused to sign the carbon tax agreement set

out by the federal government. Saskatchewan's economy would be hit hard if another tax was enforced on the people of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is the only province in Canada with no carbon tax of any kind. Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind everyone that the NDP is in favour of a carbon tax that would put a hardship on the people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, in the southwest, agriculture plays a large part in everyday life. The 2019-2020 budget invested 39.13 million towards the agriculture sector. The work on the farm or a ranch differs throughout the year, with each season bringing its highs and its lows as well as rewards. Spring is a very busy time of year for agriculture as we see the newly worked up soil when planting crops and the sight of our newborn calves.

Mr. Speaker, our budget included increased funding for agriculture in many different aspects. The Ministry of Agriculture budget will be increased by 3 per cent in the 2019-20 budget to 391.3 million. Through all this hardship, producers always emerge stronger than before. They bind together and support each other and display Canadian pride, which has sustained farmers and ranchers for so many centuries.

On our modern farms youth are more knowledgeable and achieving things that forefathers never thought possible before. Our government wants to continue to support agriculture, investing in agriculture research, and continue to support management programs such as we have in crop insurance.

Agriculture is the foundation of our province, and our government wants to make sure we are providing them with the right services in the right locations, using the best delivery options possible. We are also asking producers and industry how we can better serve them and how we can better ensure activities remain relevant and viable.

With the industry forever evolving, our extension activities need to be driving sustainable growth and ensuring our producers stay competitive in the global markets. Agriculture research will continue to be supported with an investment of 31.9 million being funded by the province, Mr. Speaker. We are fostering programs for new technologies and increased funding for food centres, livestock, and research, supporting farmers and ranchers to continue to develop and produce a self-sufficient, high-value operation.

Our government wants to ensure that our next generation is in a good position to build their futures right here at home. Mr. Speaker, even though there are signs of improvement in the economy, we are still facing challenges due to the threat of a damaging federal carbon tax, continued sanctions from the United States on our steel, our uranium industry, and the deeply discounted prices for oil caused by the lack of pipelines.

Politicians from Ottawa made headlines with the plans to hit Saskatchewan with a carbon tax. This is a shell game that they are trying to force us to pay more for basic necessities like fuel, heat, power, while promising a new rebate for families to offset all of these increasing costs.

Mr. Speaker, the Trudeau Liberals are now desperately trying to convince us that we will actually be better off by paying more to heat our homes, that we'd be better off to pay more to keep our

lights on, and that we will be better off to pay more to fuel up our vehicles. Mr. Speaker, most of us here in Saskatchewan have to drive for work. Many of us do not have the option of carpooling or riding our bike. The carbon tax means that all of these things are going to . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . A little bit less gravel though. The carbon tax means that all of these things are going to cost a lot more and these are going to just cut the direct costs we know about. Hockey rinks, rec centres, school divisions, municipalities are going to be paying a lot of carbon tax, and at the end of the day, that cost is going to be passed down along to us. This will have a direct hit on everyone across the province.

According to research from the University of Regina Institute for Energy, Environment and Sustainable Communities, a federal carbon tax could potentially reduce Saskatchewan's gross domestic product by almost 16 billion with little effect on emissions. Our government missed the deadline to sign the federal plan, meaning that Saskatchewan will not receive 62 million in funding for emissions reductions initiatives. The NDP leader, Ryan Meili, is speaking out about Saskatchewan missing out on 62 million. What are we actually doing is avoiding a tax that would have cost us up to \$4 billion, as it is a job-killing tax with no proof that it will reduce emissions.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has been excluded from the lower carbon fund because we won't sign on to the federal plan. Just a reminder, Quebec has not signed the constitution, yet they continue to receive \$11 billion a year in equalization payment. Our government will protect the economy and competition and reduce the emissions. While our government is challenging the carbon tax in court, unfortunately we will still have to apply carbon tax starting April 1st during the legal process.

Mr. Speaker, as a government, we have honoured the commitments we have made to those who have supported us and who have voted for us. Our government has taken the time to listen to our people of our province and we have acted. Our government has made choices that will define our future. We are continuing to move forward and keep up the maintenance of our aging infrastructure.

[19:45]

Mr. Speaker, our highways handle a lot of wear and tear in the Southwest between agriculture, oil field, and general traffic. We continue to invest in our highways to ensure that they remain safe and sustainable for years to come. The 2018-2019 budget invested 16.1 million towards highway construction and repairs and maintenance. Last summer Highway 21 north of Maple Creek to the junction of Highway 221 south of Maple Creek was worked on. Bridges have been replaced near Eastend and Maple Creek. North of Cabri saw paving done on Highway 32.

Mr. Speaker, our government continues to invest in infrastructure. In doing this, we are helping to improve the quality of care in our communities across the province to ensure they are maintained for the safety and benefit of the people that we serve. Our government has made its choice that will define our future. Instead of putting a freeze on capital spending we will continue to move forward by keeping up with the maintenance of our aging infrastructure, lowering the income tax for the people of our province, and keeping the carbon tax at bay.

Mr. Speaker, our government will also continue to ensure important government program services remain affordable and sustainable. This year the budget will continue to see more maintenance and repairs with 1000 kilometres of highways improvements being done across the province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the budget. I am proud of the decisions that we made. This budget demonstrates that our government cares for the people of Saskatchewan. Our government worked hard to bring our budget to balance while maintaining a competitive tax and business environment, and we focused on important programs and services that are sustainable for the long term. I support the 2019-2020 budget. Thank you.

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

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to enter the debate. And I commend the member from Humboldt, the Minister of Finance, for the budget that she brought down and thank all of her officials. There are many people that worked very hard to make a budget. Her staff, members of treasury board do lots of work. Of course, cabinet and caucus all have an important role in developing a budget.

As the minister and many of my colleagues have said, it is a balanced budget, \$34.5 million surplus. But it's balanced in other ways. When we started under the leadership of the former premier, Brad Wall, there were many discussions about how to get to balance; you know, everything considered from balancing in one year to more than one year. And I think this was the right approach because not only fiscally balanced, but you have to balance the effects of cutbacks and tax increases it would have on people, especially the disadvantaged. And that's where the balance and the hard decisions come in, where to make that all work.

There is a number of people I'd like to thank as well. First of all, the constituents of Biggar-Sask Valley who have supported me, and it's been a pleasure to work for them to bring their issues to both caucus and cabinet in the legislature.

My son and I are surrounded by very strong, opinionated women, and that's not a bad thing. So I'd like to start first with my son, who is going to P.A. Polytechnic. He's taking the corrections program studies, and he's doing very well. So I'd like to mention him.

Now the strong women that are around me that keep me in line are my wife, Cindy, who is an educational assistant at Biggar Central School 2000. And she really enjoys her work. She's dealing with different children. Some of them just need a little help with math and different things like that, but other children have very many disorders, autism and different disorders that she works with. And she really enjoys her work.

My daughter, Lacey, and her husband, Nick, they live in Regina. They have two little girls. My daughter is going to be having a third child, another grandchild for me and Cindy, probably before we adjourn in the end of May. So we're looking forward to that as well. She works for Nature Saskatchewan, and she has a real passion for the environment and the politics and the debate around all environmentalist issues.

My youngest daughter, Alex, and her partner, Andrew, live in Saskatoon. And Andrew works for Viterra, and Alex works for the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] in Saskatoon. She works actually placing homeless women. And sometimes their children walk into the YWCA — could be anytime of the day, in the middle of the night or during the day, whenever she's working there — and it's her job to find a place for them to stay. So she finds it very rewarding, but it's also very hard on her to see people in really dire straits. You know, she has a passion for social justice and the fate of disadvantaged people, so another strong-willed woman in my life.

I'd like to thank my constituency assistant, Janet Hanson, who has been with me since 2012, and she has three daughters. The oldest one is in first year university, so her and her family are doing very well.

I always mention little Zane. Zane, we've been looking after little Zane. He's five years old, and we've been looking after him full time for the last two years while his parents go through some very difficult times. And so when we talk about mental health and drug addictions, it's really brought that home to us because both of Zane's parents have had a lot of difficulties with drugs, crystal meth, and the legal system. So Desiree is back in Zane's life, but let's just say it's a work in progress.

Desiree works for AGI. It's a manufacturing company in Biggar. It's an amazing company that's based out of Biggar. It's owned by the Burton family. Dave is the father, and two sons that work actively in it. And they built the shaft for the K+S potash mine at Bethune. They now have a contract to build one of the shafts at the Jansen mine, the BHP Jansen mine. They employ over 100 people; they're an amazing business and amazing ownership who employ a lot of people and are very important to the economy of Biggar.

One thing about Dave Burton, he has a passion for hockey. And so we have the Biggar Nationals, a senior hockey team. And it's had its ups and downs, but he a few years ago just decided that Biggar is going to have a hockey team, and he in one way or another keeps it afloat and keeps it active. So that's really his passion outside of his business.

Just want to mention one other business in the constituency that I recently had a chance to visit, and it's owned by the Fehr family, Stan Fehr and his children and grandchildren. They're all working in the business. They had a grand opening of a 50,000-hen laying operation. It's a mammoth, new building that they built, state of the art technology. You know, it's really animal friendly, and it's amazing all the new things that have been put into that barn to look after the birds while they're in there. So that was quite an interesting get-together that we had and tour. So I'd like to mention them as well.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, getting into some of the budget items — I'm not going to touch on every one of them — but first the tax credit for the volunteer firefighters and first responders was a very important measure that our government brought in. You know, it's not that big of dollars in the scheme of things, but it's very important to the volunteers because a lot of those people do a lot of dangerous work looking after the community when they're needing it. So that's something we can give back to them.

In the advanced education file, you know, some of the budgetary items are the \$429 million to the U of S [University of Saskatchewan], the University of Regina, and the federated and affiliated colleges; \$152 million to the Saskatchewan Polytechnic, the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, and the Gabriel Dumont Institute; \$29 million to Saskatchewan regional colleges; and more than 22 million for capital repairs and maintenance throughout the post-secondary sector.

So in Biggar we have Great Plains College. We have an LPN [licensed practical nurse] course. They have a number of other programs and, you know, many people get their basic adult grade 12 education through there. And there's people, naturally from the Biggar and district area, that are able to go to the college and live at home. And also both two reserves send a lot of people to get their education: Red Pheasant reserve and Mosquito reserve. So it's a very important part of the community and to the people of Biggar and district.

Of course, agriculture is the mainstay of Biggar-Sask Valley in rural Saskatchewan. Agriculture budget will increase 3 per cent in 2019-20 to \$391.3 million, ensuring programming to support the success of farmers, ranchers, agri-businesses continue. The budget fully funds business risk-management programs and sustains investments in agriculture research. This will encourage our agriculture sector to continue to grow.

So we've been very fortunate that agriculture has done very well. There's always clouds on the horizon, as we know with the canola situation with China. But you know, every spring is . . . Farmers are optimistic and they go out and seed their crops. It's a very rewarding profession, and we hope all the best for the agriculture community in the future.

Now in the Northwest — which I consider Biggar as part of and much of my constituency is in — corrections and policing and justice and really the crime wave is very acute and on everyone's mind. So our government is striking the right balance by making strategic investments in the province's correctional facilities, Saskatchewan Coroners Service, and by continuing to fund target police initiatives across the province.

Included in this budget is an ongoing investment of more than \$7 million for the operation of the new Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford. And I had the honour and the privilege to attend the grand opening. That was quite an experience to see the facility, and what an amazing facility and programs that they have. The secure side of the facility will provide services to offenders living with significant mental health issues. This first-of-its-kind facility will be operated by the Saskatchewan Health Authority and provide 96 beds for offenders.

More than 8.5 million has been invested in the correctional system to increase security, reduce contraband coming into facilities, and increase the number of beds for young offenders. The budget includes more than \$15 million to continue funding 128 municipal police positions and targeted policing initiatives across the province.

The ministry also remains committed to addressing the issue of rural crime through the continuing investment in the protection and response teams, crime reduction teams, and the combined traffic safety services Saskatchewan initiative. And it's working.

You know, you see the response team and the crime reduction teams working not only in Biggar but in other areas in the Northwest, and they definitely make a difference. The problem is, once they arrest a drug trafficker or someone that's stealing vehicles, you know, there's always somebody there to replace them. But you know, I think the approach is the right approach and will bear fruit over time.

Under the education part of the budget, our government is supporting Saskatchewan students by increasing funding for classrooms, libraries, community-based organizations, and early learning programs. The 2019-20 budget provides \$2.48 billion for the Ministry of Education. This supports pre-kindergarten to grade 12 classrooms, early learning and child care, libraries, and literacy. And Saskatchewan's 27 school divisions will see \$1.9 billion in school operating funds for the '19-20 school year, an increase of 26.2 million over the last year's budget of \$1.87 billion.

This includes \$3 million to provide planning and design funding for the following new major capital projects: joint-use replacements of École St. Pius X elementary school, Argyle elementary school in Regina; a joint-use replacement and consolidation of Sacred Heart, St. Mary's elementary schools, Empire and Westmount schools in Moose Jaw. And so that's very good. That's part of the balance that we continue. We'll balance the budget but also continue investment in infrastructure, in hospitals, in schools.

[20:00]

There's a number of initiatives in the Environment ministry, but one thing that is important in Biggar and in Biggar-Sask Valley is Sarcan. It is a recycling program and garbage container collection. So this includes an addition of \$2.24 million to help deliver those programs. And as I said, Sarcan is very important because they hire people with disabilities and really give some training and purpose, and so it's good to see that the continuing concern and input into those areas.

Just a few words on municipal revenue sharing. Government of Saskatchewan's 2019-20 balanced budget increases support to municipalities with consistent and predictable funding. Direct provincial supports to municipalities will total 437.1 million for the coming year, supporting infrastructure projects and community initiatives through the municipal revenue-sharing programs which give local governments the funds they need to properly administer and grow their community and economy. This represents a 25.4 million or a 6.2 per cent increase over 2018-19.

This funding will be distributed as follows: 161.3 million to urban municipalities, 71.7 million to rural municipalities, and 18.6 million to northern municipalities. Also a part of this is 89.4 million in provincial infrastructure funding for the New Building Canada Fund. This is so important as communities have to replace their water treatment plants and pipes and different things and sewer systems, and that money is very important to help offset some of those enormous costs.

Under the health care portion of the budget, we've invested a record of 5.55 billion in health care programs and services, an increase of 196 million or 3.7 per cent over last year and up to

60 per cent increase since 2007-08. This includes record funding of almost 402 million for mental health and addictions service, up nearly 30 million over last year's budget. New funding of \$558 million will support the creation of a provincial organ donor registry. Work will commence immediately with the goal of launching a registry before the end of the fiscal year.

The health capital budget also includes 12 million to begin construction of a new long term care facility in Meadow Lake, with capacity increased from 55 to 72 beds. Construction is expected to begin in the spring of 2020. Capital funding for \$5 million will be divided between Weyburn hospital replacement project and the Prince Albert Victoria Hospital redevelopment project to prepare both proposals to enter the stages of approval.

Part of the health budget is about individualized funding for children under the age of six with autism spectrum disorder, will increase over \$4,000 annually to \$6,000 annually providing parents with greater flexibility to choose from a range of therapeutic interventions and supports for the children. An estimated 700 children are eligible to benefit from this \$700,000 funding increase.

And also as the member from Saskatoon Riversdale pointed out, you know, we've been listening and we have on the whole mental health issue. And there's never enough money, but I think we're moving in the right direction with this investment in mental health and addiction services in Saskatchewan's history. Its 8.39 million in funding will be used to create approximately 75 new residential support beds for individuals with intensive mental health needs who are transitioning from the hospital back to the community, freeing up hospital space for other patients.

Approximately 50 new pre- and post-addiction treatment beds for individuals who are transitioning between detox and in-patient treatment were back to the community, more than doubling pre- and post-addiction treatment bed capacity in Saskatchewan. It also includes 10 new in-patient addiction treatment beds in Pine Lodge, a community-based organization located in Indian Head. Six new in-patient addiction treatment beds will open up in Calder Centre, an addictions treatment facility in Saskatoon, and six new in-patient addiction beds for youth under 18 that will open in southern Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's many areas we could continue to speak on in Highways and Infrastructure. Just one thing that the community of Maymont had concerns about: a guardrail on Highway 376 at the Maymont bridge. There was a constituent of mine went off that embankment and down in the valley and the man's wife broke her leg. And it's not a joking matter, but they asked for a guardrail to be put in and so I would like to thank the government for having the funds for that.

Just some more on social services. The Government of Saskatchewan invested an additional 55.5 million in social services in '19-20, increasing the ministry's budget by 4.7 per cent to a record \$1.23 billion. And the government is continuing to work toward improving and increasing funding for the Saskatchewan assured income for disability program. The ministry's income assistance budget will increase by \$10 million, including a 6.3 million increase for SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability]. The remaining 3.7 million reflects overall

program costs and a further investment service delivery.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could go on and on. There's a number of areas that I haven't even spoke to, but I just would like to end my presentation tonight. And I will be supporting the motion brought by the Minister of Finance and supporting the budget. Thank you.

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

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand here tonight to speak in support of our government's balanced budget, a budget that allows for sustained and sustainable investment into both people and infrastructure for our growing province. This budget is balanced, and it is the right balance for Saskatchewan. It carefully manages spending while investing in priority programs, services, and infrastructure. This budget has no new taxes, no tax increases, and will help support a strengthening economy.

Before I get into the bulk of my speech, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to of course thank the people that help me and all of us do our work: my constituency assistant, Jackie, whose undying and enduring support is indeed heartening. And she always manages and gets things done. I never do concern myself at all with how things are going at the constituency. I have my office here at the Legislative Building that Brayden . . . Well with Brayden, he's amazing. I never have to worry about anything because Brayden is on it. He's amazing. He's amazing. And of course we have Ken, the ministerial assistant, and my senior admin, Shelley. And we're a small team, Mr. Speaker, but they are mighty, that's for sure. Yes. Right? Right. The peanut gallery.

Now I'd like to get into my ministry's budget. This year we are increasing the Corrections and Policing budget by nearly \$4 million or about 1 per cent, to a total of 409.3 million. This modest increase strikes the right balance between maintaining funding for key initiatives and priorities, and helping keep spending in check.

This is also an increase of 70 per cent since 2007, 26 per cent since 2011, and 11 per cent since 2016. This is money that is used to help keep Saskatchewan citizens safe no matter where they live in the province of Saskatchewan. It helps show our government's commitment to keeping Saskatchewan strong and ensuring that Saskatchewan is the best place in Canada to work, live, and raise a family.

One investment in infrastructure that I'm extremely proud of, Mr. Speaker, is the new Saskatchewan Hospital in North Battleford. The state-of-the-art facility will help in assisting those who suffer with mental health issues. Mr. Speaker, this hospital was a long time coming. It was indeed needed for the province of Saskatchewan, and I know that those suffering with mental health issues, mental health challenges, will indeed be well served by this state-of-the-art hospital. The new facility will house 284 beds — 32 more than the previous hospital — and includes 96 secure beds for offenders living with mental health issues.

Mr. Speaker, I think we all could agree that there's a large percentage of our provincial offenders that are currently in our correctional facilities that are suffering with varying degrees of mental health issues. Also a large percentage of our offenders

face addictions issues. The best place for them experiencing mental health and addictions issues, of course, is in a facility that is indeed made for and designed to help them with those mental health and addictions issues.

The most important part of all of this, ensuring that offenders get the help that they need, is that they will be going out into their communities someday. We want them to be fully functioning individuals that contribute to their communities and are good citizens within their communities. And quite frankly, we don't want the offenders to come back. We want them to stay in their communities and be well in their communities and contribute to their communities.

Our government invested \$407 million into the facility and using a P3 [public-private partnership] model, it will be maintained in a like-new condition for the next 30 years, helping the public and offenders for many years to come. Our government also saved \$90 million by using the P3 model in this regard compared to a traditional build, money that can be reinvested into other services such as additional supports for mental health.

On the secure side, 24 of the rooms are currently open with 13 being filled. The mental health team is working with correctional staff to determine which offenders are most urgently in need of care at the new hospital because obviously we can't take them all.

We're also investing approximately \$7 million this year to provide offender-specific programming to the offenders at the Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford. This facility will be focused on clients with mental health issues and will operate with a very patient-centred philosophy. We know that many offenders are dealing, as I've mentioned, are dealing in a large way with mental health issues. This facility is the first of its kind in our province, and it is going to have a tremendous impact on rehabilitating these offenders because not only are we dealing with the criminalities, the issues that put them in our correctional facilities, but we're also dealing with the mental health and addictions issues. By focusing on improving mental health outcomes for offenders, they will be better able to reintegrate into society and less likely to reoffend.

This new facility will also assist other correctional facilities around the province by creating a dedicated space where offenders can get treatment in a hospital rather than a prison. Our government, as seen with our historic investment in mental health and addictions care with this budget, is committed to helping those who are suffering from mental health and addictions issues.

Mr. Speaker, it was mentioned that this is not enough. Mr. Speaker, and I can probably speak to the majority of people that are here tonight. How many times have we advocated for mental health services in our provinces, more mental health services? We are all MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] that have people coming into our offices with stories that are heartbreaking. And we have all . . . I have; I speak for myself, but I'm sure my colleagues have done the same, advocating for improving our mental health and addiction services in the province of Saskatchewan.

This is a step in a process, Mr. Speaker. We're not done. We will continue pursuing what is best for the people of the province as

they struggle with their mental health and addictions issues.

[20:15]

This is not the end of the line, Mr. Speaker, and we will consistently and constantly look for ways, through analysis and looking at outcomes, what best serves the people that we serve. And the people that we serve, there are some with extreme cases of addiction, extreme cases experiencing mental health crisis in their families. And mental health does not just affect the person. I'm sure all of us know that, and I'm probably preaching to the converted here. Mental health and addictions has impacts on all of those around the person experiencing the mental health and addiction crisis.

And it is apparent in this budget, Mr. Speaker, that this government does view mental health as a part of health. It's not separate from health; mental health is part of health. It's a part of our physical health. It's part of our being. And this budget is a continued recognition of the fact that we see this as important. It is as important as what we put into the budget with respect to our physical health. And we will continue to pursue what is needed by the people of the province.

Our government also knows that crime, especially rural crime, remains a significant issue in Saskatchewan. Our government is committed to continuing to provide the resources police need in order to help reduce crime. While the crime rate has dropped, our crime rate still remains far too high, especially compared to other jurisdictions. Our government has committed to increasing the number of officers in our province. Since 2011, we've increased our policing budget by over 50 million or 32 per cent. Included in this is an approximate \$33 million increase to the provincial policing services agreement allowing the RCMP to hire an additional 192 officers.

We've also invested over 15 million into municipal police grants to help support local police and the great work they do. This money that has been put into municipal police grants also serves to have the officers serving the province of Saskatchewan with the priorities of the people of Saskatchewan. A lot of these funded positions are in the integrated child exploitation unit, gang units, drug units. They all serve to ensure the safety and security of the people of the province. This funding helps support, as I said, the specialized units, the combined traffic safety units, enhanced community policing, missing persons, serious crimes, and the list goes on. All of these areas are of concern and importance to the people of the province.

We are also continuing to invest in strategic initiatives and programs, including the protection and response team, crime reduction teams, and the community safety officers. The protection and response team has responded to more than 3,000 policing actions, including a number of emergencies. In this year's budget we are continuing the funding for the crime reduction teams which were implemented in 2018. These teams conduct targeted enforcement based on intelligence, analysis of crime trends, and can assist in responses to rural crime.

The rural crime teams and the hard-working men and women on these teams have assisted in reducing crime across the province. Since February 7th of 2018, it has executed 363 arrests, 455 executed warrants, conducted over 2,900 traffic stops, gave 496

warnings and 209 tickets, seized 8 guns and 10 stolen vehicles, had 5,700 police contacts, 305 business contacts, and made 184 bar walks.

Our budget also includes funding to continue supporting the community safety officer program. This program allows local municipalities and First Nations to hire special constables that assist in delivering high-priority, low-risk service for the communities' safety. If we look at it from a purely financial standpoint, is that we do want the highly trained police officers in the province, RCMP or municipal police, to do the job that they are hired to do. And the special constables in a community can address issues like barking dogs — you know, bylaw offences, that kind of thing — which would of course free up the highly trained officers to do their job and, as we know, dealing with much more serious matters.

They build partnerships with communities, focus on crime prevention, and assist police officers by allowing them to focus on issues that have a higher risk in public safety. The member from Regina Northeast may say, or did say that officers do not prevent crime, that they only respond to crime. Our government knows this is absolutely not the case.

If you look at, and I'll get into a little bit more detail later, that probably one of the pillars . . . No, not probably. One of the pillars of policing and ensuring public safety is suppression, intervention, and prevention. Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt in our minds that police officers are the first line of public safety in any community across this country.

We also understand that the police doing their job properly, doing their job properly and disrupting crime, disrupting people from committing crime, the high visibility of police — they are all a part of preventing crime. If you stop a vehicle and disrupt a vehicle that is carrying large amounts of drugs and/or weapons, you are preventing a crime from occurring down the road. So yes, the police do prevent crime. Their visibility prevents crime and their actions prevent crime. There is little doubt that the police do respond to crime. They take the action required when they are responding to crime, and that's what we want them to do.

These initiatives help support our efforts to reduce crime in urban and rural Saskatchewan and are continuing to be supported by our government's balanced budget.

The crime reduction teams in rural Saskatchewan and the provincial response teams in Saskatchewan have added a significant number, over 258 officers, in the province of Saskatchewan. This high visibility of police, higher visibility of police in rural Saskatchewan, has indeed shown positive effects, albeit hasn't been in operation all that long. The more visible that police are in the community, the less crime you are going to have. Now having said that, it also is interesting that the more police that you have, the more your crime statistics will go up because, quite frankly, police find crime that's occurring and has occurred, and it is reported statistically. In essence, Mr. Speaker, not only is their visibility important but also their actions and how they engage with the community, how they receive intelligence about crime, their actions taken in response to crime.

I also must note here too, Mr. Speaker, that the RCMP in particular is a huge member — a significant, pivotal member —

of the hubs, the hub tables across the province, which brings all the human services ministries together to deal with high-risk situations. The RCMP are part of the hubs across the province, Mr. Speaker, as can happen and has happened, where the RCMP bring a family or an individual to the hub table to ensure that they get the supports and the resources that they need in order to address the issues that they may have.

So you know, the police aren't just out there, you know, making arrests or stopping people for speeding or whatever the case may be. They are pivotal to addressing some of the issues that people are facing. Albeit they don't provide the service, but they are certainly in a position where they can get that person or that family the services that they need.

We also recognize the need to ensure that we have adequate supports in our correctional facilities. We are continuing a number of capital projects in our correctional facilities. We've invested 2.5 million in this year's budget to construct and staff a 14-bed unit at Kilburn Hall, which will maintain our bed capacity in our youth correctional centres. We've also invested 3.8 million in this year's budget to continue replacing security infrastructure in our correctional facilities. Continuing these projects is necessary to keep the staff, the inmates, and the facilities themselves safe and secure. And if our facilities are safe and secure, then the communities are safer and more secure.

We're also working to reduce the flow of contraband and drugs into our correctional facilities. That is why we are investing \$1 million this year in our contraband reduction initiative, which includes adding a body scanner to Prince Albert correctional facility this year. And we are planning to expand this body scanner concept to other facilities across the province. This is in addition to the body scanner already announced last year at the Regina Correctional Centre.

We're spending 1.6 million annually for small capital projects within our correctional facilities, community corrections, and policing offices. These projects represent our government's commitments to investing in our correctional system and helping to keep offenders, staff, and the public safe. This is in stark contrast to when the members opposite were in power. They were closing bed spaces, while our government has done the opposite, adding 489 bed spaces since 2007.

Finally, our budget includes new funding for our gang violence reduction strategy and drug-impaired driver training for police officers. Our gang violence strategy is focused on three pillars, and I mentioned them earlier, Mr. Speaker: prevention, intervention, and suppression of gangs and gang violence in the province.

Through expanded co-operation between law enforcement communities, correctional services and other partners; relentless outreach and support based on effective practices in other jurisdictions, based on evidence and outcomes, Mr. Speaker; and reallocating policing resources for provincial priorities, we will work at reducing the impact of gangs and gang violence.

We are also continuing to allocate resources to train front-line officers in fighting drug-impaired driving. Three hundred officers will be trained in standard field sobriety testing over the next three years. Currently 218 have already been trained with

this funding. One hundred drug recognition evaluator officers will be trained over the next five years, and of that currently 78 have been trained.

The members opposite have been speaking about crime and public safety in recent weeks. The member from Regina Rosemont stated last Wednesday that the residents of the province want a government committed to community safety and crime prevention. And I was indeed quite surprised about that comment, given what this government has done with respect to community safety in this province. This budget, one that is balanced with funding for targeted programs and initiatives, should help answer that member's questions.

This is a budget that supports the great work that front-line officers do every day across our province, whether RCMP or municipal, who work with communities to prevent and fight crime.

[20:30]

I am also proud of the new funding for school capital projects in Regina and Moose Jaw, the additional revenue sharing to the city of Regina, and the record investment into mental health and addictions support.

In closing, our government's budget is balanced with no new taxes, no new tax increases, and helps support a strengthening and growing economy. I'll be supporting the motion and not the amendment put forward by the members opposite. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Pedersen: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my honour to rise here to participate in this debate. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, this is always a momentous occasion. Every year we get the government's spending plan for what the upcoming year is like and it's a challenge to try to dig into it as opposition and try to figure out what it means when we get into the details. Of course the assistance of my constituency assistant, Morgan, is vital to that, and I'm very appreciative of that. And of course the support of my parents and my sister and my daughters and my girlfriend, you know, it's all important in doing this job and I thank them for that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member from Regina Wascana Plains was just referring to some of my remarks earlier and, you know, in this Assembly sometimes we get a little carried away with hyperbole. And you know, as she was speaking, you know, I think it's a fair comment to say that she did point out some examples of how the police do prevent crime, and I thank her for drawing my attention to that. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of course we know that police largely do . . . All the good work that they do, largely is responding to crime. But there's no . . . Nothing is 100 per cent all of the time. And so I thank her for drawing my attention to those remarks.

But speaking of hyperbole, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, the members from Rosthern-Shellbrook, from Cypress Hills, from Indian Head-Milestone, and Moose Jaw Wakamow, and I think a few others, they were bragging about the 176 rural schools that

they reopened, and the 52 rural hospitals that they reopened . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh, you're right. What am I talking about? It didn't happen. So maybe those, maybe those places should have been closed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fact of the matter is there's been 11 years here to reopen 176 rural schools, the number they keep citing. There's been years to reopen 52 hospitals, if those are the numbers. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it didn't happen. They've had 11 years. It hasn't happened. The roads aren't paved with gold. Rural highways aren't paved with gold, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The province is in record debt after having record revenues. That's the legacy.

Earlier today we heard about the promises that there would always be \$500 million left in the rainy day fund. What happened to that? Promise made, promise broken. Earlier today we heard about a promise that the debt would be reduced by half. What happened to that? Promise made, promise broken. It's set to triple by 2021. We heard about a promise to set aside non-renewable resource revenue into a heritage fund, a legacy fund, after the debt was paid off. What happened to that promise? Promise made, promise broken, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is the legacy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it was the member from Carrot River made note of my electric vehicle plugged in in front of the legislature earlier today. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've written out a cheque actually to the Ministry of Finance to make sure that the public purse is reimbursed for my electricity.

But while I'm at it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I couldn't help but notice that the member from Estevan and the member from Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood and from Cypress Hills and the member for Moose Jaw North and the member from Indian Head-Milestone and the member for Melfort were all using the electricity on the public purse to charge their laptops and their iPads and so on as we're here. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope, I hope that they will be following my example and writing a cheque to the public purse to reimburse the treasury for the free electricity that they've been taking advantage of.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in all seriousness, we've heard lots about carbon tax. The reality is that this government, this government had the opportunity to protect farmers, to protect the hockey rinks that I think the member speaking second before me referred to. This government had the opportunity to protect our citizens from the federal carbon tax and chose not to. They chose to leave farmers exposed while they spent five years in court suing the federal government. So they're choosing to leave farmers exposed to the federal carbon tax while they do that. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government chose to leave our hockey rinks and our schools exposed to the carbon tax while they pursue a five-year crusade through the courts. Mr. Speaker, that's harmful to our province, harmful to our communities, harmful to our farmers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I heard some comments about the bypass and the money that's been spent on there. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by my admittedly extremely rough math, this works out to something like \$70 million per kilometre of bypass road that got paved. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we used to have a saying way back in the '80s that to err was human but to screw things up that bad, that's divine. Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$70 million a

kilometre? Wow, way too much.

Speaking of hyperbole, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over and over and over again I heard members talk about how there were no tax increases. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I think about taxes, when you change the rules and as a result of those changes in the rules you take in more taxes, that's a tax increase. Guess what? This government has increased taxes. They increased taxes on the potash producers, They increased taxes on the construction industry. They increased taxes on restaurants. This government has increased taxes. They have almost doubled the take on the PST in this province. That's a tax increase. When the tax revenue goes up, that's an increase. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there have been tax increases, some pretty significant tax increases under this budget and those tax increases are felt by the lowest in our society the hardest.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, now a family in Saskatchewan is saddled with an extra \$778 in average PST burden under this government. That's just the increase. So that's a tax increase, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not a decrease. That's an increase.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's no balance here. There's no balance when our ER [emergency room] wait times are high. There's no balance when there's over 9,000 people waiting more than three months for surgeries in our health care system. There's no balance when the number of people who need mental health support and services aren't getting it.

This government likes to talk about the increased spending on mental health. But when you take out what they spent on the building, the new hospital, when you take that out, when you take what they spent for staff in that new hospital, we're down to less than half a per cent of the health budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this new funding for mental health services. We're down to just a few million dollars for new mental health spending initiatives. So it's nothing to brag about.

What's missing is that investment into root causes, that investment into helping people before they get hospitalized, before they need to get hospitalized. That's what's missing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And when it comes to health and social services and crime, that again, is what we're missing. We're missing an investment in the root causes. We're missing . . . Instead of looking at root causes, over and over again we're just . . . This government just looks at continuing more of the same, more of tinkering around the edges and reacting to problems. And this is how we end up.

This is why we are ending up in the situation where we are right now where the debt is up almost \$2 billion since last year. This is why we are in the position we are where the debt is set to triple since 2009, up to \$23 billion. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this why we are at a place right now where every taxpayer in the province of Saskatchewan, their share of that provincial debt is over \$27,000.

That's why we're at a spot where just the cost to service the government debt on an annual basis now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is over \$1.2 billion, over \$1,500 per head, per taxpayer, in the province. And that's a problem, because even if, you know . . . Debt can be spent for good things. This government talks about the spending and infrastructure that they've done. Debt can be spent for good things. But debt comes with a price. That price is

interest. That price is financing, and the cost of financing is now becoming a problem.

This government has essentially created a new ministry, a ministry of interest on the public debt, and that new ministry is the third-largest ministry in the government at 1.2 billion. The only two ministries that spend more are Health and Education. And that's a problem, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When we have interest at that level on the public debt, that's a problem. It directly affects the sustainability of our provincial finances. That's a problem.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, under this government, the debt has tripled; the take on PST has almost doubled; the economy has flattened. Students are left without the supports that they need — this year only \$14 million more spent in the classrooms, not even keeping pace with inflation, not keeping pace with the growth in students. Mr. Deputy Speaker, our post-secondary institutions are still reeling. They're still suffering from the cuts that have happened over the past couple of years. Has that been restored? No. More zeros for them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our economy is struggling. More homeowners are in arrears on their mortgages. More homeowners are in arrears on their property taxes. More homeowners are in arrears on their utility bills. This economy is suffering.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's no balance when debt gets piled into our Crowns on an unsustainable level. There's no balance when things are so razor-thin and the assumptions are so optimistic that one miscalculation results in a deficit. That's not a true balance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[20:45]

In general, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we're seeing here is a failure to invest in people, a failure to invest in root causes of the problems and the challenges facing our provincial economy and families in our provincial economy. And so with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm going to wrap up my remarks. I think it's fair to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker — this won't come as a surprise — that I will be supporting the amendment. I can't support this budget. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Bonk: — I'll begin my remarks, as I should, by making a few thank yous. First of all, I'd like to thank my wife, Candace. She is the one that keeps everything running at home. And as everyone knows, she's kind of a meek, mild person but boy, you should see the texts I get after question period. And you change your mind pretty quick on that. The second person I'd like to make a thank you to is my daughter Emma. She is 15 years old now and many of the people in this Chamber know her. And she has just started driving. She's got her learner's driver's licence and everyone in Wolseley is on high alert, but things are going quite well.

I'd also like to make special mention to my CA. Everyone in here talks about their CA being the best CA in the province. Mine isn't, and he'll admit it freely. But I'll tell you one thing about

my CA, Tim Hovdestad. When someone comes into our office, they felt like they've been the most listened-to person in the province that day. If they phoned the office, they felt like they've had their concerns truly listened to. And he's just an excellent CA. We've had such a great time working together and I really appreciate Tim and I hope he understands how much.

I'd also like to thank Stephen Scriber. Stephen Scriber is someone in Wolseley who has been a great source of inspiration to me. Stephen Scriber and I, we share a love of words and language, and he's been known to turn a phrase here and there and does an excellent job of it. And I really owe a lot to Stephen Scriber. I'd also like to thank Tyler Thomlinson. He's become a very good friend of mine and he's someone I can always rely on. He's always there to help and just a great community man and someone we should all aspire to be like.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank the member from Lumsden-Morse. It's a little more difficult . . . He sat down right beside me before the speech here by accident, I think, but I just want him to know that I really do appreciate the advice he's given me. And especially in times where I could have used some good advice, he was there to offer it and I do appreciate that.

I'd also like to thank my parents. And my parents are always there to help when I'm here serving in the Chamber. And my dad's looking after the farm; my mother's looking after everyone. And I really appreciate just their willingness to help out any way they can.

I'd like to thank my father for one thing. When I was about eight years old, my dad brought home one day a really tall TV antenna. And this antenna had a rotor on it so we could move the antenna around so we could pick up different stations. And growing up in Wolseley, we were quite close to the American border and we were able to get TV from Minot, North Dakota. And one of the shows I remember as a, I think about eight- or nine-year-old kid, was a program called *Free to Choose* on PBS [Public Broadcasting System]. And *Free to Choose* was a program that was hosted by the great economist, Milton Friedman. And that program has really, really had an effect on me in those formative years. And I was thinking back to that time when I was preparing for this budget speech because the value of fiscal conservatism is so important and we can see the results of that now in this balanced budget that we have.

So having the privilege of sitting in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, reminds me every day of the old saying once used by Sir Isaac Newton when he said, "If I see further, it's because I stand on the shoulders of giants." Much of what we do here is because of the work done by our predecessors. And when I look at the modest history of my own hometown, Wolseley, I see that I'm following in the footsteps and building on the work of a senator, three members of parliament, and five members of this Legislative Assembly.

And today, Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize our theme of finding the right balance by recounting some details of the lives of three of these Wolseley men on whose shoulders we stand, men who were instrumental in making our province what it is today. These three are Senator William Dell Perley; his son, Ernest Edward Perley; and a personal mentor of mine, Graham Taylor.

Mr. Speaker, these three men, like me, were fiscal conservatives. They were men who had the rare balance in their lives that they saw the achievement of significant personal success while balancing it with a sense of responsibility to their fellow man. Their lives may have been summed up by the novelist Ursula Le Guin when she said, "We must learn to keep balance. Having intelligence, we must not act in ignorance. Having choice, we must not act without responsibility."

Mr. Speaker, the legacy of these three men became the building blocks of the Saskatchewan Party's economic policy. They, like us, felt that government existed to help individuals make sound decisions for themselves, to help individuals build a strong economy and a strong society. They felt that people needed the government's support to lead the lives they chose for themselves, not to be told how they ought to lead their lives. These three men, like our government, Mr. Speaker, felt that our citizens should be able to keep as much of their own money as possible to buy their own homes, to be given the opportunity to direct their own lives.

This is why, Mr. Speaker, in this budget we announced no new taxes for the citizens of Saskatchewan. In an economy that has had significant stresses in the last few years, this government will not burden the people of Saskatchewan with any new taxes. It is important to note, Mr. Speaker, that our citizens will continue to pay some of the lowest income taxes while having the highest tax-free threshold in the nation. I'm sure it's not news to you, Mr. Speaker, that as I look across at the group that left a legacy of new taxes and higher taxes in the last 16 years of the NDP government . . . Twenty-one times in those 16 years they raised taxes and took the money of their fellow citizens, money that could have been used to let individuals pursue their own dreams and improve their own lives.

So, Mr. Speaker, to the first of the three men whose lives and careers so influenced the way I look at life and balance. William Dell Perley, a native of New Brunswick, was one of the first men who answered the call of the West in its formative years. Dell Perley, as he was known, arrived only months after the Canadian Pacific Railway laid rails through Wolseley in 1882. He immediately set out building the town's first hotel and livery stable. He would soon establish the first creamery in the territory.

Of course, Mr. Perley's initiatives soon made him a man of means and influence in the Wolseley area, but he wasn't satisfied to sit on his wallet and watch his wealth grow. Within a year of his arrival, Dell Perley had established and led a committee of local citizens who immediately engaged a teacher, Miss Peach, and found a place for her to instruct the first school lessons in the area. Education was important to Dell Perley, Mr. Speaker, as he was well aware that his personal success needed to be balanced with responsibility to promote and facilitate the education of his fellow citizens.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, and I quote, "The 2019-20 budget strikes the right balance by maintaining operating grants to Saskatchewan's post-secondary institutions and technical schools." Since our government took office in 2007, Mr. Speaker, we have increased the operating and capital funding for Saskatchewan's post-secondary institutions by 53 per cent, and we have also ensured that our students have had our full support in financial assistance in both repayable and non-repayable bursaries. This will ease the financial burdens of more than

18,000 Saskatchewan students.

Our budget will also make \$7 million available in subsidies to students such as the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship and the Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunity Scholarship. I think Mr. Perley would've been more than pleased with our government's graduate retention program, which provides Saskatchewan income tax credits for tuition fees paid by graduates who live and work in our province.

And it wasn't only in the area of education that Mr. Perley made his mark, Mr. Speaker. A man of tireless energy, Dell Perley established one of the first homesteads in the area and would build his modest holdings into one of the largest farms in the province. Ever the advocate for education, he became well known for taking young homesteaders under his wing, teaching them to cope with the harsh realities of farming in this new territory. Mr. Speaker, Dell Perley would've applauded our government's continued commitment to agriculture in Saskatchewan. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture's funding will increase again under this year's budget, ensuring continued growth in our agriculture sector.

Dell Perley lived through turbulent times, and he would've celebrated our government's commitment to safety in rural Saskatchewan by pledging \$15 million to continue the funding of 128 municipal police positions and targeted policing initiatives across the province. And, Mr. Speaker, our government will also continue to invest in programs such as protection and response team, crime reduction teams, and the combined traffic safety services Saskatchewan initiative.

Dell Perley had been interested in politics since his youth in New Brunswick, and when the Qu'Appelle seat in the legislature of the North-West Territories was established, he ran and won the right to represent that constituency in 1885. Two years later he would run in the federal election and would win the parliamentary seat for Assiniboia East. And the year after that, Sir John A. Macdonald would elevate Mr. Perley to the Senate where he would become a vigorous advocate for the interests of the Canadian West until his death in 1909.

The people of Wolseley still encounter the Perley name daily, as the downtown area is dominated by the impressive Perley Block built in 1906 by Senator Perley and his son Ernest, who would be later be elected as a Member of Parliament. The building was recently refurbished by the Nicor Group in Regina, assisted by our government's Main Street program.

Mr. Speaker, Senator Dell Perley is an outstanding example of a man who exhibited the right balance of personal responsibility and a sense of obligation to the well-being of his fellow citizens. And when the senator passed in 1909, his son Ernest Edward, known to one and all as E.E., was more than willing and equipped to carry on the work of his father, both as a successful farmer and as an unflagging public servant. The Perley farm north of Wolseley became one of the largest producers of grain in Saskatchewan under Ernest's direction, and he was always keeping himself up to date with the latest agricultural methods and machinery.

When Mr. Perley was elected to the federal parliament in 1930, he immediately became its most passionate advocate for Western

agriculture. His fellow MPs [Member of Parliament] often heard his favourite declaration, "Where would this country be without the farmer." Mr. Perley would've been delighted with our government's continued funding of agricultural research and business risk-management programs. This budget continues to fully fund business risk-management programs offered under the federal-provincial Canadian Agricultural Partnership, or CAP, including crop insurance, AgriStability, AgriInvest, and the western livestock price insurance. Our government will also continue its investment in agricultural research with a total of \$31.9 million which will include research projects and the demonstration and adoption of new technology.

Mr. Speaker, E.E. Perley continued to make the Perley farm thrive because he was committed to the business of agriculture. He would have seen the wisdom in this budget, including the enhancements to crop insurance, higher coverage on tame and native grazing land to better reflect the losses producers experience during a shortfall in forage production. E.E. Perley would have been amazed at the progress our Saskatchewan Party government has made in the province's agriculture sector. While he built his farm's production to such a scale that elevator row in Wolseley included the Perley farm elevator, he would have been amazed at hearing that Saskatchewan has just had its sixth straight year of a harvest of more than 30 million tonnes.

And with his lifelong commitment to the improvement of farm methods in Saskatchewan, he would have praised our government's funding of initiatives such as Agriculture in the Classroom, the Saskatchewan 4-H programs, and Farm & Food Care Saskatchewan. Both the senator and his son E.E. Perley befriended, encouraged, and supported the Banbury brothers, Edwin and Richard, who would expand a small Wolseley lumberyard into a nationwide Beaver Lumber chain.

As men of initiative, innovation, and ambition, these four would certainly have flourished in the business atmosphere that the Saskatchewan Party has helped to foster in our province. The Perleys and Banburys would have marvelled at the emergence of Saskatchewan farm machinery manufacturers such as Seed Hawk, Morris, Bourgault, SeedMaster, Brandt, only to name a few. They would have been amazed that 300 food processing companies are now employing over 5,000 Saskatchewan people in a province that has had the third-best job creation record in Canada since 2007.

And they would certainly have been amazed at the inroad Saskatchewan has made in agriculture and manufacturing markets throughout the world. Mr. Speaker, while they may have not fully understood the AAA credit rating, the concept of Saskatchewan's creditworthiness and its ability to meet its financial commitments would have not been lost on them.

Mr. Speaker, in public affairs, E.E. Perley was a councillor of his rural municipality, president of the Wolseley Agricultural Society, and mayor of the town of Wolseley, taking a leadership role in the committee that erected one of the province's most beautiful and poignant memorials to the fallen of the Great War in Wolseley. Men like E.E. Perley would have welcomed this year's budget increase in municipal revenue sharing, providing more than 251 million, an increase of 10.5 million compared to last year. In fact there was more than 437 million in direct provincial supports to municipalities and multiple ministries

across our government, an increase of 25.4 million or 6.2 per cent over last year.

[21:00]

Mr. Perley would have certainly noticed that since our Saskatchewan Party government took power, it has increased revenue sharing to municipalities by 98 per cent with total investments of over 2.6 billion. Municipal infrastructure in this budget, Mr. Speaker, will exceed 229 million, an 11 per cent increase. This will include funding for programs such as Investing in Canada infrastructure program, the New Building Canada Plan, and the public transit fund.

Mr. Speaker, Ernest Edward Perley served as a Member of Parliament for 15 years and was, like his father, a leading advocate for western agriculture. He was an outstanding example of a man who had remarkable success in a life balanced between his farming career, his personal life, and his life in public service.

Mr. Speaker, if you want to talk about a man who lived a life that exemplified the right balance, you need to look no further than Graham Taylor, another Wolseley man, a man I can proudly count as being among my mentors. When I think of Graham Taylor, the lines from Rudyard Kipling's poem "If" are foremost in my mind. They go like this:

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings — nor lose the common touch.

The strength of Graham Taylor came across from his grassroots upbringing on a farm where he was born and raised south of Wolseley. Graham knew rural people and he knew that they wanted action more than words. So when he spoke, the few words he used went a long way. This was Graham Taylor's greatest gift, Mr. Speaker. When he said his few words, he didn't orate. He didn't pontificate. He didn't scold. What he did was catch people's attention and invariably those people's response would be, darn right.

And in the 10 years he sat in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, from 1979-89, Graham brought that common-sense attitude to everything he did. From his run for the party leadership to his years in cabinet, Graham Taylor brought his darn-right approach to everything that he did.

Before being elected as an MLA, Mr. Speaker, Graham Taylor was a school principal, a man known to his students to be firm but always fair, a man who had their best interests at heart. I know he would have supported and endorsed our government's record in education. He would have noticed the 46 new or replacement schools that have been constructed, and he would have been well aware that while student enrolment has increased by 13 per cent since our government took office, K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] operating funding has increased by 34 per cent.

Mr. Taylor would have appreciated this budget's increase for funding in classroom learning, for school operating funding, for early childhood intervention, for public libraries, and for child care. And, Mr. Speaker, he would have been especially pleased to see school infrastructure investments increase from 95.6 million to nearly \$120 million in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, Graham Taylor had his greatest political success as this province's Health minister, and he would have been proud to have a hand in our 2019-20 budget with its record expenditure of \$5.55 billion in health care programs and services, a 3.7 per cent increase over last year.

This budget, Mr. Speaker, sees new funding for the establishment of a provincial organ donor registry, something that has been sorely needed in Saskatchewan for some time. It extends capital funding of 5 million so that hospitals in Weyburn and Prince Albert can enter the final stages of approval to be replaced or redeveloped, and this, Mr. Speaker, following the construction of new hospitals in Moose Jaw and North Battleford, not to mention the soon-to-be-opened Jim Pattison's Children's Hospital in Saskatoon. In this budget, Mr. Speaker, the children's hospital will receive an extra 23 million to access the services of additional doctors, nurses, and staff to ensure the best care for Saskatchewan's young people.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Wolseley long admired the tenacity of which Graham Taylor and his wife Isabel fought for the best care and opportunities for their son, Peter, who was born with Down's syndrome. They would have been very pleased that this year's budget has increased individualized funding for children under the age of six with autism spectrum disorder. With an injection of \$700,000 in new funding, an estimated 700 children and their families will benefit.

This budget, Mr. Speaker, will also see significant increases in funding for the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan to expand services to the north and east of the province; increased funding to the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency, adding 18 oncology drugs to the medications list; increased funding for the training of 24 physiotherapists and occupational therapists and nurses for the 30,000 patients in our province who suffer from lymphedema; and an increase of over 15 million for new physician care — in a province that once had the longest surgical wait times in Canada, a trend that began to turn around soon after we came to power in 2007, in a province that continues to bring new doctors and nurses into the health care system.

And our budget, Mr. Speaker, will give major attention to mental health by increasing funding by nearly 30 million to a total of almost \$402 million. This will translate into 140 new beds for mental health and addiction treatment. It will increase support for the Saskatchewan Hospital in North Battleford, and it will finance the launch of three rapid-access-to-addiction medicine clinics in Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert. It will include \$685,000 to hire mental health professionals to assist the citizens of Saskatchewan who need their help the most.

The list of enhancements to mental health care and health care in general in Saskatchewan go on and on, Mr. Speaker, and accentuate our government's commitment to the well-being of our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, one of Graham Taylor's darn-right moments was his relentless campaign to have the highways twinned between Regina and Moosomin. He always would take the opportunity to declare, I'm tired of seeing my friends killed and maimed on that winding stretch of road. And he would eventually see the fulfilment of that campaign. This is why Graham Taylor would have vigorously supported our government's investment of

\$13 million of funding for the first year of the five-year enhanced intersection safety program that will eventually see an expenditure of \$65 million.

This funding will accelerate the completion of intersection safety enhancements and finance the installation of rumble strips and clear-sight triangles to improve intersections. This budget, Mr. Speaker, will fund the improvement of 1000 kilometres of provincial highways to the tune of \$350 million for capital projects, including repaving and preventative maintenance for more than 60 million for twinning and passing lanes. Mr. Speaker, our government has invested almost \$9 billion in highway infrastructure since 2007, building and improving more than 14 000 kilometres of Saskatchewan highways that were sorely neglected under the NDP.

Graham Taylor was a down-home, grassroots politician, Mr. Speaker. He was a man that was quite at ease walking the sidewalks of small towns in this constituency and yelling across to you to enquire how your parents were doing, or how you liked your new combine. He was also at ease entering the Canada Cafe in Wolseley to have coffee with his friends and neighbours. And Graham Taylor would know that among those rural people, some of the most precious were the volunteer firefighters and first responders.

And I know, Mr. Speaker, that Graham Taylor would have applauded our government's new non-refundable tax credit for these volunteer firefighters and first responders who jump into action to help Saskatchewan people in times of crisis. Beginning in the 2020 tax year, individuals with at least 200 hours of volunteer service will be able to claim a \$3,000 tax credit. It is a small way to repay the valuable service these men and women provide to our people.

This is a budget, Mr. Speaker, that Senator Perley, E.E. Perley, and Graham Taylor would have supported and praised. It would have confirmed their dedication to the principles of fiscal conservatism. Mr. Speaker, I commend the Minister of Finance on producing this balanced budget. It once again points out that this government is an island of fiscal responsibility in an ocean of economic chaos. It once again emphasizes that we are a government that will not leave a black hole of debt for future generations.

When I think of those dark economic days before 2007, Mr. Speaker, it brings to mind a quote of another novelist, one that might be familiar to most of us here, Margaret Atwood. In her book *The Tent*, Mrs. Atwood has the following quote: "Our heaven is their hell, said God. I like a balanced universe."

I have no hesitation in supporting this budget, Mr. Speaker, and will not support the amendment.

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon University.

Mr. Olason: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually I don't know actually what I'm supposed to call you, so I'll just call you Mr. Speaker, if that's all right. You're good with that?

An Hon. Member: — The deputy deputy.

Mr. Olason: — The deputy deputy speaker. That's good, eh? I'm honoured to stand here today and say that I will be supporting . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Mister sub-deputy speaker, is what I'm being told by the Minister of Justice. But I'm here to say that I'm in support of our budget that was presented by our Finance minister just last week, and I won't be supporting the amendment put forward by the member from Regina Rosemont. I'm sure that comes as no surprise.

And before I begin my remarks, I'd like to thank a few people. You know, many hands make light work, and the people that are around me and surround me are very kind, caring people who helped lift us up and make sure that we can come here and do the work that we do here every day.

You know, I have to start with my partner DonnaLyn. You know, she looks after everything as we're down here. She looks after the house and makes sure the kids get to where they need to go and makes sure that the bills are all paid. And I'm very blessed that I can just come home and things are looked after. You know, I have to do my part but that part is very small in comparison to what she does, especially for our three daughters.

You know we've got Abby who is in grade 9 and is doing well, although today was her first day. She got braces today so she's feeling a little self-conscious, but she's pretty happy that she has them. And she's doing great at school; she's working towards being on the honour roll. So I'm very proud of Abigail and I hope that she'll complete her goal.

And then we've got Danielle who also today got braces, so we had two big bills in our household today. And so I'm looking forward to seeing pictures of them, although they probably won't be. And Danielle is a fantastic soccer player. She's really excelling at playing soccer. And everybody had their tryouts this weekend, and I'm sure that she's going to continue to excel in her sport.

And then we've got Rebecka. And you know, she's in grade 6 this year and looking forward to coming down here next year and seeing her stepdad at work and learning a bit more about the legislative process. She's a pretty big keener. She's a pretty smart kid and is always looking for extra work and helping the teacher at recess and at lunchtime and, you know, looking for stuff to do. So I don't know where that really comes from, because she doesn't . . . I don't set a very good example for her, but she's a hard worker and also an excellent soccer player. So between our house and the soccer centre and the fields around our schools, we don't get to see much else other than that. So of course, they all chip in and look after things when I'm away.

The people that work here in the building, in the caucus office, you know, ever since I've been blessed to be the caucus Chair, we have great groups of folks that really help us and lift us up. And I know that they've drawn the attention of the member from Saskatoon Centre a few times and . . . See, I got you in there. Every speech I have to make sure that I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre for the comments he made. I don't know, it might have been a couple of years ago now that he made a comment that our staff was lacking in their research.

And I say that nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to work with them and for them, and they

turn out great material for us. So there's John and there's Paula, Hayley, Tayler, Karalee, Kim, Lee, and Keenan — they are the bedrock behind this team that you see here. And you know, I wouldn't feel right if I didn't thank all those folks there.

You know, my constituency assistant, Madelaine, looks after me very well, and we're well served by the things that she does in my office in Saskatoon. And I would have to echo the member from Moosomin when he said that when people come to us, we all know that they're not at the best place usually of their lives, and they're looking for help. And some of the stories are heartbreaking, Mr. Speaker. And Madelaine has that excellent way of giving empathy and listening to their stories and listening to their problems and going, you know, above and beyond where a lot of people would try to help.

[21:15]

She just has that heart of gold, and you can see that with her sideline. She is a cat foster parent, and I've never heard of something like that. But when a cat needs a home, she looks after it, and then when it's ready to be adopted, you know, she lets it go. So she's got a heart of gold in that way and she's very organized. So I have to thank Madelaine.

Then you know, where would we be without our mothers? My mom is a really strong support. I've spoken about her in this place before and she supports me, you know, whatever I do; however, she also holds me accountable. And as a constituent as well as your mom, it's kind of unnerving when you have to answer the phone and she invites you over for dinner, especially if you've made a few decisions that she doesn't agree with, and you have to answer not only to a constituent but to your mom. It's a tough conversation but, you know, we have those. And family dinners are a little bit more fun now than they were a couple of years ago, Mr. Speaker. And you know, she always supports me in everything I do.

Most importantly though, Mr. Speaker, is the constituents of Saskatoon University who I think are some of the brightest and smartest and most engaged constituents in the province, Mr. Speaker. You know, they never miss an opportunity to let me know what they're thinking or how they feel that some decisions that we've made affect them and what they think of those. Whether it's in the Sobeys or in the Mac's store close to my place, they don't have a problem stopping, and I actually enjoy that, Mr. Speaker.

We can disagree and we can talk about different decisions that have been made here in this place. And you know, it's always respectful and they let me know when they're happy and they let me know when they're not as happy. And thankfully the last year or so they've been more happy than not, and so I'm happy, you know. I'm privileged and I'm blessed to be able to serve those people in Saskatoon University.

Now I had the pleasure of speaking to the budget not last year but the year before. At that time we were meeting the challenge, and then we were on track, and now I'm proud to say that we have the right balance. And you know, that's a significant milestone in the path that we had set three budget cycles ago under former Premier Brad Wall in order to right the ship and get the right balance for the people of Saskatchewan, and I'm proud to say

that we've done that. And here we are today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with a balanced budget and it's the right balance for the people of Saskatchewan.

You know, we had a plan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we followed that plan step by step. And yes, it wasn't very popular when we started down this path. There was tough decisions to make and everybody, you know, everybody, I have to say, pulled their weight, tightened their belt, and got into the spirit of it.

It was uncomfortable, Mr. Speaker, and they weren't really good discussions for the most part, especially with my mom. There was some decisions we made that she didn't like. But you know, thankfully the people of Saskatchewan saw what we were trying to do and they saw that we had a plan and they had faith in the government and everybody pulled together. You know, we tried not to affect too many people, but we knew we were going to. We tried not to affect industries or business, but we also knew we were going to. But we kept our eye on that goal and, you know, we made those decisions and here we are today, Mr. Speaker, with a balanced budget.

Now those decisions that were made a couple or three years ago and leading up to this budget, you know, it's in stark, it's in stark comparison to the opposition, Mr. Speaker. You know, they were claiming to be the government-in-wait. You know, I don't see that they had a plan then. I don't see that they had a plan a year ago. And I don't see that they have a plan now. All we hear is, you need to spend more on health, education, and social services. Yes, I agree. There is never enough resources to meet every single need, Mr. Speaker. I think we all would agree on that. But you need to do it while balancing the budget and not increasing taxes or fees or the things that actually bring in revenue. And so, you know, I don't know if the proper expression was, but you can't have your cake and eat it too. So I don't see a plan coming from over there.

And I also don't see a grasp, and I've heard this from two or three members, especially the member from Regina Northeast, about understanding debt versus deficit. And so I'll take a couple of minutes here to try to explain a little bit of that. So whenever you are going to buy a new house, Mr. Speaker, you go and you have a certain amount of money that you can put down. And then you go to the bank and you ask for a loan. And I don't know many people who have actually bought a house with cash. Maybe the member from Regina Rosemont did, but I know that I couldn't certainly. And so you get a loan from the bank, you know, if it's a 25-year mortgage or a 30-year mortgage, and then you make payments on that house. And at the end of it all you end up with an asset. You end up with a house. So that's debt. While you're paying off that house, while you're gaining . . . I forget the word.

An Hon. Member: — Equity.

Mr. Olauson: — Equity. There, thanks. Thank you. While you're gaining equity in the house, you know, you're making your payments and that's debt. And that's good debt. I think everybody would agree that that's good debt. So when you build hospitals or when you build highways or when you build schools, there's going to be debt. You don't have enough money to pay for those things right off the bat.

Then you talk about a deficit. And I think, you know, if there's

one thing that the opposition should know about, it's a deficit and deficit spending, operational deficit spending. We like to call it the big orange credit card, Mr. Speaker. And that's when, if you're bringing in a certain amount of money and your day-to-day expenses are taking up more than the money that you've got, that's when you start getting operational debt. And that is a problem, Mr. Speaker, because you will never . . . It's a structural debt. You will never, ever have enough revenue to pay what you're spending every year, and that's a problem. And that's a deficit, and that also adds to the debt. But that is bad debt. That's credit card debt and that's something that we are not doing in this budget.

When we talk about borrowing money to build infrastructure — that's highways, that's schools, that's hospitals, long-term care facilities — when we talk about that, we also have this thing called a sinking fund, Mr. Speaker. And on page 50 of the budget document, we talk about sinking funds. And you know, I hear the member from Regina Rosemont talking about it as well, so I'm sure that he knows what I'm talking about — sinking funds. And those are monies that are set aside for the orderly retirement of a portion of the government's debt. So that's what we call a capital plan. You buy something, you go into debt to pay for it, and then you pay it off.

Sinking funds as of March 31st, 2019, Mr. Speaker, are \$2.23 billion. So that is a plan to pay back the capital spend that we're making to build highways, to build hospitals, to build long-term care facilities. That fund is our capital plan to repay that debt, and it's going to grow every year. For 2019-2020, sinking funds are expected to increase by \$208 million to almost \$2.5 billion, and that's due to the estimated level of sinking fund contributions for the year. Now don't take my explanation for it. It's right here. It's right in the budget, page 50, so you guys can take a look at it all you want and you can read it again. And if you need more, you know, further explanation, I'm here, as well as the Minister of Finance, to explain it all to everyone here as well.

So yes, you know, we take a look at BC [British Columbia]. BC's a pretty fiscally responsible province and, Mr. Speaker, it's an NDP government in BC. So this year they've got a balanced budget — actually they've got a little bit of a surplus — AAA credit rating, Mr. Speaker. Here's what we go. Here's how BC is doing, Mr. Speaker. They are going to borrow \$5 billion this year, \$5 billion they are going to borrow this year to build infrastructure — once again, hospitals, schools, highways, and long-term care facilities. They're going to build all of this infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, and they're going to borrow \$5 billion for that. Next year, Mr. Speaker, they're going to borrow another \$5 billion or more to build hospitals, highways, long-term care facilities, and schools. Now that's BC and they have an NDP government there, Mr. Speaker, so apparently it's not all bad. Debt apparently isn't bad.

So we'll just carry on from there, Mr. Speaker. I was listening to the member from Regina Northeast and he was talking about his electric car. And I commend him for it actually, for driving an electric car. Good on you and good on that. But I have to correct something. So he mentioned that other members here had talked about him using the electricity at this building to charge his car, and that wasn't fair. And I agree. I agree that that isn't fair. There isn't a gas pump set up outside for those that don't drive electric

cars to just fill up when they'd like to and . . . Well you know what, maybe there is. You know, I haven't seen it yet so I haven't used it. So I haven't written a cheque to the Minister of Finance for the fuel for my car because I don't do that.

Now it's admirable that the member from Regina Northeast has done that, but to compare that to plugging in our computers or our lights or our laptops or anything like that, Mr. Speaker, that's disingenuous, and I felt that something needed to be said about that. If we're going to fuel up our cars on the taxpayers' dollar, then fair enough. Then we'll have a gas pump, you know, installed out here, or not. So anyway, I just thought I had to say a little bit of something about that.

In Saskatoon University, you know, as the name suggests, we have the University of Saskatchewan. And you know, we have made some tremendous strides in trying to make sure that the university is a good place to learn and is innovative and, you know, kind of nurture our youth. So this budget, you know, we maintain the operating grants for the University of Saskatchewan as well as all other universities and technical schools. We're going to invest \$728 million to ensure that Saskatchewan's post-secondary institutions are sustainable now and into the future.

We're increasing funding for the student financial assistance program thereby ensuring that students can get help when they pursue their post-secondary studies. There's upfront grants of up to \$4,000 per year in combined federal and Saskatchewan assistance for a typical full-time student. There's \$7 million for scholarships, Mr. Speaker, such as the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship and the Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunity Scholarship, and the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship will be converted to a needs-tested support. In addition, students will continue to receive benefits after their studies through the graduate retention program, which provides Saskatchewan income tax credits of up to \$20,000 for tuition fees paid by graduates who live and work in Saskatchewan.

Also in Saskatoon University, Mr. Speaker, we have the brand new Jim Pattison Children's Hospital. It'll be opening in the fall of 2019 . . .

[Applause]

Mr. Olason: — Yes. Yes, that's a big thing here in the province of Saskatchewan. It's something I've spoken about passionately here in this place, and I feel very strongly about it because it's affected a lot of families, but it's affected my family as well.

If I just think of how much time and effort and stress was caused by my brother and his family to have to travel to Edmonton and Toronto and Calgary and Philadelphia with my niece, Anna, who's doing quite well now, Mr. Speaker. I think of all the stress that could have been taken away, perhaps not all of it — everybody's a realist — but some of it could have been taken away by having this children's hospital. So I'm very proud that we're opening it in October, and I know that it's going to be a good success. And it's unfortunate that we need one, but we're going to use it and help alleviate some of those family stresses.

[21:30]

To have a sick child or a child that's not doing well is one thing, and that's stress enough on a family, but then to have to pick up the family or leave some of the family at home and have only one parent travel with the sick child is . . . It's heartbreaking, Mr. Speaker, and hopefully we can alleviate some of that, as well as alleviating having children actually come to the hospital from the northern or the southern parts of the province through the robo-doc program which is fantastic and allows a doctor to actually treat the patient right where they're at home, so they don't even have to travel to Saskatoon. And that program with Dr. G and folks over there at the Saskatchewan children's hospital is going to make big strides in how we treat our children and hopefully improve the health outcomes of them.

Mr. Speaker, in the health budget we have a bunch of good news, and of course it's never enough, but you know, we're going to make the strides and we're going to take step by step by step. So one of the things is new funding of over half a million dollars to support the creation of a provincial organ donor registry, and that work will start now. We hope to launch that registry before the end of this fiscal year. There's also \$12 million for a long-term care facility in Meadow Lake with an increased capacity up to 72 beds, and construction is expected to begin in the spring of 2020. Capital funding of \$5 million divided between the Weyburn hospital replacement project and the Prince Albert Victoria Hospital redevelopment project to prepare both proposals to enter the final stages of approval.

The budget increases the operating funding to the Saskatchewan Health Authority to 3.6 billion, a 3.2 per cent increase from 2018-19, and includes also a \$23 million increase for doctors, nurses, and staff to start and help staff the children's hospital. Individualized funding for children under the age of 6 with autism spectrum disorder will increase from \$4,000 annually to \$6,000 annually, providing parents with greater flexibility to choose a range of therapeutic interventions and supports for their child. That's help.

All right, I've got lots more to say and so I'm going to say some more. We have to talk about municipal revenue sharing, and I'll end on this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This year municipal revenue sharing is up \$10 million and if there's, you know, one thing that I've been passionate about as well as the children's hospital, it's been municipal revenue sharing.

And I look back and I remember back in the days before we were able to form government, and it was dismal. There is no other word for it. It was dismal. You know, cities never knew what they were going to get. My city of Saskatoon was never sure what they were going to get, if it was 4 million or 7 million or 6 million, and the government of the day just couldn't make a commitment to that. And that, Mr. Speaker, you know, it caused the municipalities' administration headaches, and nobody knew what the tax increase was going to be or if there was going to be a decrease or what they were going to get.

And the minister at the time, and I forget his name but he said, you know, maybe — this was 2006 — he said, maybe next year we can put a plan together for you. You know, we haven't had a plan this far . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Harry Van Mulligen apparently is who it was. And he said maybe, Mr. Speaker, next year in 2007 we can get a plan together. We'll come up with a plan or maybe, you know, we'll give you a plan in 2007. And,

Mr. Speaker, they sure did. The people of Saskatchewan sure did get a plan together and elected this government that we have here today.

This year our city of Saskatoon is going to receive \$45 million in revenue sharing — \$45 million. That's an increase of 140, over 140 per cent since 2007. So our commitment to our cities are there. Our commitment to the people of Saskatchewan are there. We thank them for the last couple of years in belt-tightening and trusting and looking forward with our vision. And so I'll be supporting the budget and I won't be supporting the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Rural and Remote Health.

Hon. Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in my place this evening and share a few comments about our 2019-20 budget brought forward by our friend, the Minister of Finance, and of course led by our Premier and seconded by the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Of course as is customary, Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize my family as I begin, first and foremost my wife, Leone, of almost 33 years coming this summer. We've been together almost 39 years, so high school sweethearts, and just we've been blessed with a real amazing family, two daughters, and of course our son Brayden who we lost in 2000 but is still a big part of our life with fundraising stuff that we do in his memory every year.

Our two daughters, our oldest one, Katelin, got married over the last summer, and with that marriage we gained two new granddaughters, Raya and Malaya, along with son-in-law Mark who is a project manager for a construction company in Yorkton. Great additions to the family.

And of course our younger daughter Rayanne, married to Austin Krahenbil. He's an oil field geologist, works around Torquay at this time, and he's been keeping himself really busy along with building themselves their dream home just outside of Yorkton. We get to visit with them quite a bit and enjoy our grandchildren, Wynnslet who is turning four tomorrow, and Otto who turns one on the 5th of April. And they're going to grace us with another grandchild this coming October, so we're really looking forward to that addition to the family, Mr. Speaker. And they really are a blessing. They're just a real grounding force when I get back home, and of course always supportive. And Wynn's kind of up on the FaceTime now, so quite often she'll be FaceTiming Grandma and Grandpa, maybe at inopportune times, but I'm always quick to grab that call and have a little chat with her. She's going to be smart as a little whip and a real good source of information sometimes as well.

When it comes to staff, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the staff in this building that supports both the Rural Health office and the Minister of Health's office. I'll let him get into some of his comments tomorrow probably, acknowledging his staff. But of course my chief of staff, Adam Nelson, just joined us. He's been doing a really great job. And our new admin, Abby, is doing a great job. Whitney Kelsch, our caseworker. Carter Zazula, my communications MA [ministerial assistant] has always got my back and he's looking after me, keeping me on course. I think he's actually watching tonight with his pyjama pants on so . . . I

can see you. He's a real hard worker and we're really happy to have him in our office. I get punchy at night, Mr. Speaker.

Constituency assistants back home, Mr. Speaker, Laurretta Ritchie-McInnes has been with me for over 12 years. She was with Bob Bjornrud in Melville-Saltcoats previous to that for about 12 years or so. So she's served in that capacity, I think one of the second-longest CAs in the province I believe, if not very close to it, and really serves the office well. She's become a very close friend of mine as well, Mr. Speaker, but really serves the constituency of Yorkton. As well as Rachelle Sawatsky who has been with us for a number of years in Yorkton. And you know, what I've noticed between the two of them, they share a lot of skill set but they also complement each other. Where one is maybe slightly weaker — although I'd be hard pressed to figure out where they're weak — but where one might be weaker, the other one backs the other one up. And they just do an amazing amount of work and of course serve the constituents of Yorkton very well.

And with that, I really have to thank the constituents of Yorkton. I'm, you know, coming to the end of my third term here and looking forward to a fourth term. I've been nominated for that fourth term and things are looking pretty positive. You never know, but looking forward to serving possibly another term for the constituents of Yorkton. And of course that doesn't happen without the volunteers with the constituency association and those that have supported me over the last, you know, 12, well more than 12 years because I was nominated for a couple of years before that. So I've had a lot of hard workers that have kept me here all that time and I'm really appreciative of all them.

Of course my colleagues on this side of the floor . . . previous colleagues, I'll touch on it a bit, but also colleagues that are here now. Our new Premier has served just over a year and, I mean, I think the polling numbers are out today, Mr. Speaker, and amazing numbers that he is attaining. And you know, I think a lot of it comes from how he carries himself, his intelligence and just his ability to interact with people, but he's very, very, very, very approachable. And I think a lot of people just see him as a, just a huggable dad is the type of fellow he is. So he's really a very warm individual that is approachable, and people are really starting to get to know our Premier very well.

Of course all the colleagues I have on this side of the House. My colleague, the member for Rosetown, the Minister of Health, is an amazing partner to work with in this building. Our offices work very close. We know each other's files pretty well, but we kind of specialize in different areas and we are a very good team. And we're complemented again by our office staff that do a really good job in supporting us.

You know, the executive and staff and all the front-line workers through the Saskatchewan Health Authority, we've been through quite a time over the last year or so, year and a bit, transitioning to this new single health authority. And there's a few issues rise from time to time but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can say that we're very impressed with the team that's been put together through Scott Livingstone and all the VPs [vice-president] and executive directors and all the staff below there and of course all the way through the front lines. We wouldn't be able to do our jobs without the exemplary performance of all those dedicated professionals throughout the system, Mr. Speaker.

Of course I talked a bit about our Premier. You know, he became an MLA in 2011. I recognized pretty quickly with his portfolios that he held, you know, representing Saskatchewan on the provincial, the federal, the national stage was something that was very recognized, and of course his skill set has done nothing but get greater and improve over the last number of months and year. And he's really grown into an amazing Premier that leads this province with dignity and strength and knowledge. And we're very, very blessed to have him, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I've had the pleasure to serve in this place since 2007 now and I'd be remiss if I didn't kind of refer at least briefly to our former premier, Brad Wall. He's continued to be a good friend. We stay in touch. You know, I bounce things off him from time to time and he just is an amazing fellow. And it's just great to see him kind of move on to the next part of his career with his consulting work, with his . . . Apparently he hosted Gormley today. I kind of listened to a bit of that. It was a fun listen. But just the respectful way that he does whatever he does with the utmost skill and dedication to doing the best job possible, which was example of what he did here and what he's continuing to do on in his life whether he's in his business or interacting with his family or just being a representative of the province, and still standing for Saskatchewan values, Mr. Speaker. So we're just very blessed to have had his leadership over the years, and the leadership that we have now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget represents a decade of hard work and it's been very responsible I think, for the most part, and a strong commitment to the people of Saskatchewan. And of course we know we've been faced with a lot of challenges over the last number of years, the downturn in the resource sector, \$1.3 billion annually. So we had to do a lot of changes, a lot of, you know, significant policy decisions and strong, tough decisions we had to make to continue to keep us as close to balance as possible.

But of course we know that the economic slowdown continued. It hit our energy sector, our mining sector, even our agriculture to a certain extent, and now we know, with some of the challenges we have around the world with trade issues, that's hitting our agriculture even harder. But you know, we're a resilient bunch, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And with the partnership of those in the province that have had to make some concessions and accept some of the challenges that we've been facing, we've come to a point now over the three-year plan that was of course put in place three years ago by Premier Wall and carried through with this team, and of course brought home to where we are today with the final budget that we're delivering this year with a balanced budget, again brought forward by our Minister of Finance from Humboldt and seconded by our member from Indian Head-Milestone who is just an amazing, knowledgeable asset in this House and of course I think a friend to all of us here as well. So just a real strong voice to those here, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I'm proud to be part of a government that's committed to braving these headwinds and standing strong for our province and against the obstacles like we've been having to deal with, like the federal Trudeau carbon tax or, you know, the trade issues that we had no control over, Mr. Speaker. So again I'm very proud of our team addressing these challenges and I know that this budget shows a government . . . Unlike the opposition, we don't want to saddle our children with future

challenges.

And it's balanced. It's got investments in infrastructure. And of course we can talk about, you know, general revenue and summary financial statements and how that all plays out. You know, formerly we were under the general accounting practices where it's basically like a chequebook — money in, money out — not saddled or not having to report all the debt of our third party partners and those outside of some of our direct control. So now that we have to add all those up, and continuing to add up with some of the investments that our Crown corporations are making, is what shows this perceived increase in debt.

[21:45]

And yes, there is increase in debt, Mr. Speaker, but again there's been . . . An example that's been explained through a lot of the speeches that I've heard throughout the last little while, it's like having a mortgage. So I mean the spending and the expenditures are balanced.

We're investing in our Crown corporations. We know that if we're going to continue to invest the billions of dollars that's needed in those Crowns to keep them strong, the only way other than that is to increase rates, and we don't want to increase rates to the point of being unaffordable. So of course we have to do the borrowing through the Crowns and invest in some of these initiatives and some of the other infrastructure that we need to deliver these services to the people of the province.

And, Mr. Speaker, what do we see from across the floor is the no-darn-plan party again with . . . I know the new leader came up with about a \$10 billion spend over, I think it's over four years that . . . Some great ideas for sure, but where is that money come from, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Future spending to exorbitant values amounts but no plan to pay that back, so we've got some definite questions when it comes to some of the plans that they've put forward.

But of course we've made difficult decisions, but they've been necessary to get the province back on track, get back to balance. And we believe this is the right balance for Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Of course this wouldn't be possible with the previous leadership. I mentioned Premier Brad Wall, our former premier, but also I know Kevin has been mentioned a couple of times to the House here, Kevin Doherty. He did a lot of heavy lifting over a couple of years to make sure that we got this plan in place and, you know, faced a lot of criticism I believe. Did a lot of heavy lifting, a lot of good work. And of course over the last couple of years, our Finance minister from Humboldt has done an amazing job carrying through leading treasury aboard.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't thank the members of treasury board. I know first-hand the amount of work that they do. It's an amazing amount of work. And to bring us to a point with all the analysis and the questions that they ask the different ministers and ministries, to bring us to this point of this budget is no small feat. So we're very thankful to them and of course Kevin Doherty who has moved on to the private sector. And I'm very thankful again for the leadership of our team here, Mr. Speaker.

So you know, when I think about our Premier and our Finance minister, treasury board, and this team over here, but specifically the leadership, we can look at the steady hand, the strong leadership, the sensible approach, and of course the commitment to the three-year plan that has brought us to where we are with this balanced budget, Mr. Speaker.

So you look at where we've come from, a have-not province in 2007 when the Sask Party took office to now in 2019, a balanced budget and one of the only AAA credit ratings in our country, Mr. Speaker. We have one of the highest debt-to-GDP ratios in Canada, billions in infrastructure spending . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . a really loud member from Saskatoon city centre. No new taxes, no tax increases.

And, Mr. Speaker, you know when we look at some of the criticism on the PST and such, Mr. Speaker, we know . . . We looked at the housing markets, for example. And sure, the PST on construction labour did have a little bit of an impact when we look at the housing market as a whole. We look at the used housing market, no PST on that, it's still soft, Mr. Speaker. So we know although some of the decisions we made had some impact, and we'll own that, we also know that the federal stress test for mortgages and for first-time homebuyers and homebuyers has had a heck of an effect on them. And, Mr. Speaker, you know that's something that we recognize as well.

So of course when we look at the strong fiscal management, all the while holding that with a record-breaking investment in some of these key crucial areas, Mr. Speaker, I just want to quickly focus on some of those as I start trying to wind some of this up. We look at . . . I'll just go kind of high level on most of this. But we look at health, Mr. Speaker, \$5.89 billion. That's a 2.9 per cent increase over last year, the largest health budget in the history of this province. That's a 60 per cent increase since 2007. That's reflected in mental health, addictions, as well as health.

Mr. Speaker, \$30 million this year to mental health and addictions, which I know some of the members were talking about some of the third party partners out there that would criticize some of the spending on mental health, and some of those very impressed with some of the feedback that we've gotten where they'll agree, you know, we need to continue down this road. But they're very impressed with the investments this year, where it's being spent, and the impacts that they're very hopeful it's going to have. So again \$30 million increase to mental health and addictions for \$402 million total to mental health and addictions plan which brings us very close to that 7 per cent.

But when we look at government wide, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at the Farm Stress Line, we look at the supports to the education system, advanced education, throughout the services of government, we're looking at about a seven, three, 7.5 per cent spend on mental health and addictions. So, Mr. Speaker, we're on the right track.

When we look at, you know, through some of the other ministries, whether it's education, social services, again some of the best and largest investments that we've seen in history, Mr. Speaker, in some of those. And I'm not going to delve too much into the details of some of these, but we've heard about the 140 new mental health and addictions beds and that's rural, northern,

and urban, Mr. Speaker.

Something that isn't in this budget, we invested with the Lac La Ronge Indian Band to invest into 10 more addictions beds in the partnership with them. And of course we look at — it has been spoken about at length, so I won't delve into it too deep either — but the additional money for the operating of the Saskatchewan Hospital in North Battleford, which is the largest investment in mental health infrastructure in this province's history. We look at the continued investment, the Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society or STARS program, a commitment for more new helicopters and 10 years longer commitment to 2030.

We looked at the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital. I know that my friend, the member for Saskatoon University, did a very good job of talking about that, Mr. Speaker, but that was something very special to me. It was the first project that I got to turn dirt on when I became Rural Health minister about four and a half years ago. I think this week would be about four and a half years.

But for me it was quite an eventful day as well, because as we were turning sod, I was looking up to the third floor, which would be P 3000 [Pediatrics 3000], which is where our son got his cancer treatment and surgery recovery back in . . . it would have been '98, '99, and 2000. And where that hospital is built is what he would call his car collection. He would look out there and it looked like a matchbox set with the parking lot. And you know, 15 years after that, after the loss of his battle, to be able to turn dirt on the site that was very special to him, that's going to serve children for decades and decades into the future, is something that's very special, that I think we can all be very proud of that investment, Mr. Speaker.

We can look at over \$8 million in new funding and new supports for a variety of different areas. We've heard about the provincial organ donor registry money, the money that's going to Meadow Lake facility for the new long-term care facility, the one facility we promised a number of years back. We never quite got it started. This year we're getting it started. We're going to get that built for the people of Meadow Lake. I had a visit there just a few short months ago, prior to final approval, and it was very evident it needed to be done, Mr. Speaker. So we're very thankful to the community and of course the local MLA, the member for Meadow Lake, for the patience, but now we're going to get that facility started.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we heard about the Weyburn and the Prince Albert Victoria Hospital money, \$5 million to get towards the completion of the finalization for both of those, Mr. Speaker. You know, and that announcement . . . I want to touch on, as quickly as I possibly can, my own facility in Yorkton. I heard a lot of, you know, what about Yorkton, and we know P.A.'s important and all the rest of it. Mr. Speaker, from my point of view, I'm the MLA for Yorkton, a very important facility to get that built. It's been in various stages of consideration over the last 10 years or so that I've been elected.

What I realized a couple of years back, a few years ago — and I know my fellow ministers probably had the same recollection or realization when you look at that infrastructure list — P.A. serves a very specific purpose to the North. About the same age as the Yorkton facility, but it's got a great purpose ahead. When we get that built, to start doing a lot of the work, a lot of the services for

those people in the North that don't want to be travelling to Saskatoon, which will help of course offload some of those increased capacity issues that we have to deal with in Saskatoon. So that's a very important facility that's . . . You know, we've got to get that one out the door here fairly soon.

Weyburn, I got my tonsils out in that facility in 1969. In my recollection back then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it wasn't good then. So it's great that we're getting that out the door. I've never made a specific commitment to when Yorkton would be done, but it does need to be done. It's not a matter of if; it's when. And it was always realized that, you know, those are probably some of the top three regional projects. So P.A.'s getting done, Weyburn's getting done, and I can just keep advocating for my own hospital in Yorkton which I know it'll be coming in the future.

You know, it's been a great honour to be a Health minister, but of course that's not the only area that we've seen these significant increases. And of course I touched on education, social services.

But also, Mr. Speaker, I think I heard the comments from one . . . maybe the member from Fairview about Grenfell not in the budget and Pioneer Village is also, you know, not specifically in the budget, Mr. Speaker. But those are commitments we made to replace the . . . I got some feedback from some of the leadership in Grenfell. They were actually listening to the member for Fairview. And I'm not sure what she was saying, I never heard all of the comments, but all they said was, that's factually incorrect. So I'm not sure . . . I'd have to replay what she had to say but they were a little bit put back with some of her comments.

But we do know that, Mr. Speaker, once those RFPs [requests for proposals] are done and come back, then we'll know the direction we're moving forward. But we have committed to publicly funded, long-term care for both those facilities including Grenfell. So that will happen and we'll have those plans set out probably by summertime.

You know, I wanted to just touch on the Fyke commission report one more time. I know the member from Rosemont, he criticized us a number of months ago — might have been about a year ago or so — about this health panel report and restructure, just dust off the Fyke commission report. Mr. Speaker, I want to point out again that the Fyke commission report, if you read it — I don't think the member for Rosemont read it; I think he's maybe read it now — it called for the closing of 50 to 70 more long-term and care facilities and hospitals, Mr. Speaker. That's not what this government is doing. We're opening . . . We're building new facilities, opening new facilities, including provincial facilities and local facilities and regional facilities. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're not dusting off the Fyke commission report. The NDP can put that in their campaign platform. We're building this province. We're building the health care system.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I talked about education, \$2.48 billion investment this year, a huge amount of investments all the way through infrastructure programs, largest ever budget. Social services, \$1.23 billion, Mr. Speaker, largest social services budget from what I've been told.

We look at my friend from Estevan, the Minister of Highways, the multiple investments in safety improvement, infrastructure improvement, a record of 9 billion in highways and infrastructure

since 2008, 14 000 kilometres of highways. Mr. Speaker, I think it points to our commitment for infrastructure in this province. I've often said, you know, to people, would you like it if we spent the whole fuel tax on infrastructure? Well that'd be great. Well under the NDP, I think it was somewhere between 25 to 50 per cent of the fuel tax you spent on highways and infrastructure. Under this government, we've continued to exceed the fuel tax intake, sometimes doubling that intake to fuel tax to invest back in infrastructure. We're going to continue to do that.

And of course, in the wake of the tragedy at Humboldt, the bus crash, we're now delivering on a lot of these promises and a lot of these concerns that have been talked about, Mr. Speaker.

So as I'm kind of wrapping up here, I just want to touch on a few investments in my home constituency of Yorkton. The \$1.2 million in family services money which is going to fund 18 different facilities, walk-in services. SIGN in Yorkton, Society for the Involvement of Good Neighbours, has been doing that service for a number of years and they're very excited about that investment. I know first-hand the work that they've been doing with mental health and addictions walk-in, and we can only anticipate how much that's going to impact the whole province when we get 18 of those opened up throughout the province, Mr. Speaker.

The Alzheimer Society First Link program up to this point hasn't been available in Yorkton; now it will be. It's very exciting news. The Saskatchewan Cancer Agency increase is something that's very close to my heart and my family's heart as well. Recruitment money, coverage for drugs, Mr. Speaker — it's just going to strengthen that organization even more, and we do know that we have some of the best cancer care in the country. You know, overhaul and increases for income exemption calculations; third-party agencies that deliver services on behalf of Social Services; the CBOs [community-based organization], 5.9 million increase; \$27 million for at-risk children and families; 6.6 million to adults with intellectual disabilities.

The construction of the passing lanes are coming to Melville-Yorkton, Yorkton-Canora this year which is something the community is very excited about. As well as a commitment Highways has made is to work with the RM [rural municipality] of Orkney to upgrade Grain Millers road to heavy-haul gravel status and then eventually the RM wanting to pave that. So you know, for the most part continuing, completing that truck reliever route around our city and increasing the economic availability of expansion with Grain Millers and the canola plants, P&H [Parrish & Heimbecker] elevator, and all those ones that may develop along there, Mr. Speaker.

So you know, we know there's going to be increases to intersection safety improvement, signage, sightlines, lighting, rumble strips. And of course the member from Saskatoon University talked about revenue sharing. I know the city of Yorkton is benefitting from our revenue sharing, Mr. Speaker.

So in closing, you know, I look forward to continued work with the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority], my legislative colleagues. I commend the work of all of our leaders throughout the province. I'm excited for our future budgets. We're on the right path. And to borrow from our former premier Brad Wall and to channel our friend, Lord rest his soul, Yogi Berra: "It's never over until it's over."

the New Democratic Party — they're not very new; they're not democratic; and there's not much of a party going on over there, Mr. Speaker.

But you know, the one thing that I continue . . . it burned in my mind and it kind of brings everything to roost quite often, Mr. Speaker. And my friend from Rosemont, you know, I love him; he's a good friend. But something he said, we were out in . . . I don't know if he remembers this. I don't know if I ever told him this. We were at our Social Sciences Teachers' Institute and both of us were private members. And we were speaking to 15 or 20 teachers, and we flipped a coin to see who goes first. And the member from Rosemont, he won the toss, so he's going first.

[22:00]

And you know, Mr. Speaker, his quote, his comment burned into my mind and I thought, you know, this is kind of the philosophy of the NDP. And we heard it in some of the replies. It's kind of negative and whatever else. And you know, fair enough. They're there to oppose; they're there to criticize. But what he said to those group of teachers was, "Social New Democrats are critical, negative by nature. We believe the end is always justified by the means." And, Mr. Speaker, that just really struck me as odd. It's burned in my mind. I remember . . . I can still see his face saying that. And I don't know. I don't get it, but I can see in some of the responses that's kind of their philosophy.

But, Mr. Speaker, I just want to close by saying I will definitely support the motion moved by our Minister of Finance, brought forward by our Minister of Finance, seconded by the member for Indian Head-Milestone. I will not be supporting the amendment.

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

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to join in. I'll make my comments on the budget. Before I start out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to again thank my family for the good support, the friends out there and those individuals, Devin and those staff that work in my constituency office that always do a lot of great casework. And there is lots of casework that has to be done because of the lack of services that this government is providing to many families that are struggling — seniors, families, the list goes on. And I'll talk a little bit about that when I get into it.

You know, I think of . . . Any time you have an opportunity to respond to a budget that a government wants to pat themselves on the back . . . And it's amazing how, I get a kick out of how the backbenchers all have the same little cheer. And they must get together before and say, this is what you have to say. And they must practise it, because it's interesting to hear what they have to say. And they all have their own, I guess, supposed to be their speech they're delivering, but to me it's almost like, I don't know, they get a rehearsal and they go over it. But anyway, that's for them.

I wish they would do a little more work in the sense of for the constituents that they're supposed to represent, and to call out the government when the government isn't doing what it's supposed to do for Saskatchewan people. And I'm not saying that they can't give credit, because they all done. They just keep patting

themselves on the back that they're the best government. The people should be so happy. Like, they just go on and on about how great the budget is. And they're like a bunch of cheerleaders, and that's fine. I understand they have to. They're told if you'd like to be here, you better toe the line.

But sometimes remember you can actually have a voice and you can say, look, we are failing Saskatchewan families. And I'll talk about where we're failing them in a minute when I talk.

But overall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are challenges that many families are facing, many Saskatchewan residents are facing. And the Sask Party government wants to put their head in the sand and act like everything's good. Let's just keep saying everything's good, everything's . . . Oh, what is it that they're using now? Balance. They want it standing up for Saskatchewan. Well you know what? The Premier . . . Billboards all over, standing up. You know, that's fine. You can sit there and say that.

But I'll tell you there's a lot of families that I know in the Cumberland constituency that are struggling — seniors, families, very proud people, very proud. They work hard. They do what they can. They have, whether it's our trappers, those who live off the land, those who are trying to carry on and survive. You know, they don't ask for a lot. They're very proud and they're hard-working and they just, they want to provide for their kids, their grandkids. They want to teach them the language, the culture. They want to make sure that there is, you know, an opportunity for their loved ones.

But when I see a government who misses the mark in so many areas and wants to continue to pat themselves on the back . . . And that's fine. I understand that you have to play the politics and you want to make it sound like it's all great. Well let me tell you, the people that I'm talking to that are struggling and saying, here's the message they want me to carry, and as an opposition member I'm carrying their message to you. Whether it's leaders, whether they're First Nations, Métis, residents, they're not all happy with what this government is doing. You may think, you know, that you've hit the mark on every one of the areas that you want to brag about. But I'm telling you there's people you have failed miserably.

And I think about, yes there's times where you have a government who hears the people and they talk about priorities in spending. You know I've seen some of the priorities that this government has spent in the 11 years that you've been here. Record revenue they've had, record revenue. There was money in the bank, but they don't want to talk about that. It's always negative in that sense, but they say, well you guys do your side; we'll do our side. And I understand that that's part of the process. And at the end of the day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is our Saskatchewan families, it is our children, the most vulnerable, those individuals who need supports, whether it's mental health, addictions, and yes, you were embarrassed.

Saskatchewan residents sent you a message. They made it very clear that we had family, family after family, community members telling you that they lost their loved one to suicide, addictions, mental health, the challenges. Our colleagues on this side . . . And I give credit and if it was members on that side that raised it, whether they raised it and we didn't hear about it that they were trying to push their colleagues who are in cabinet at

the cabinet table, to say look, our province is struggling with addictions, mental health. We have to do something. Then I give you credit that you did that. But I wish you would have said it out loud here on this side of the House as well as that side of the House, when we've had opportunities to debate bills. But they talked about . . . They couldn't support certain bills. You know, I think about Bill 613 that I introduced. So I watched how both sides get to play, and we'll do our side in this House, and that's how it is.

It's almost like at the end of the day, they want to deliver that it's all great, that it's . . . Just keep saying it and it's going to be okay. You can say it all you want. Families are struggling. Kids are in poverty. We should be ashamed of ourselves — all of us, not just your side, our side. We should be doing better. Our province is such a beautiful province. It has so much wealth. How is it that the most vulnerable are left behind, that you have to embarrass government that has so much? You have to embarrass them to actually move on mental health and addictions.

And I've given them credit. In the member's statement, I talked about the government's role in the wellness centre. We called for it. I give credit to the Lac La Ronge Indian Band chief and council, Chief Tammy Cook-Searson. Many northern leaders raised this concern. Many leaders in the province raised it about the seriousness and what needed to be done.

I give credit to those families that came forward, that signed petitions; leaders that sent letters; leaders that said what they needed to say to the ministers, to MLAs, wherever they could, to advocate for those that are struggling with mental health and addictions. And I give credit to them. And that's why today, other than embarrassment, you have a government putting it . . . It needs to do a lot more. Trust me. We need to do more if we want to . . .

And, you know, you think about . . . and I'm thinking about the Minister of Corrections and Policing, you know, talking about, you know, give credit — I do — to the front-line workers: police force, members. There's all kinds of front-line workers, first responders that do a great job. And I give them credit, you know, at the end of the day.

But I look at . . . You know, she talks about incarceration. And I think about that as a member, you know, the minister. And you know, I look at . . . Why is it our population is about 24, 25 per cent of the population in this great province, but if you look at our correctional centres, it's 92, 94 per cent of Aboriginal people in there? That's not a record to be proud of.

And you talk about programs where government shouldn't be cutting. And we see a rally at a school in Regina that helps the most vulnerable, and I see my colleagues were there with many students. There's where you have a group embarrassing a government. You should be. You know, you're closing something down, and however you want to justify it, you have the most vulnerable that you're going after.

And I think about affordability. And I talk about power rates, the cost of living up north and in other communities that are struggling. Seniors that are trying to figure out, how do they pay their medicine; how do they pay their bills; how do they pay their rent; how do they pay their taxes or whatever it is — they're

struggling. Our economy . . . You've got nothing to brag about in some areas. It's like, trust me. In some areas maybe you do. You can give yourselves a pat on the back. That's fine. That's part of the process. But you're failing so many. So many are struggling to make ends meet.

And you know, you talk about the PST. That has impacted so many families that are struggling. And the government says, oh, no new taxes. And they want to pat themselves all on the back and say that. Go and talk to some of the families that are struggling with the PST, it being on. They don't seem to understand. Everything's going up for families. The most vulnerable are trying to make ends meet. They are struggling. They're not doing it because they're wasting their money. They can't make ends meet. Like we need to do better. Like this is wrong. We should have . . . And you know, you talk about the Minister of Finance who said, well what's your plan? Where are we supposed to get the money?

You spent a lot of money, I'll tell you, on your priorities that you thought were going to help a lot of people. Well you know what? Take care of the whole province. And I think about the bypass. You know, it started out at a certain amount, I think it was 400 million. Then it went \$2 billion. Okay? Each time they tried to justify it. That's fine. You can justify it. Keep telling yourselves what you need to hear.

The GTH [Global Transportation Hub]. You see the waste on the GTH, the carbon capture, the PST. Like that affects . . . All this stuff is being added to our power bills on that. And like how do you think it's not going to affect families? Like at the end of the day they only have so much money. And they're trying their best. They're working hard, some individuals, to make ends meet.

You know, I think about priorities and that's what this government chose to have is priorities. And I realize they have their wish lists and they go around doing what is . . . I think about, you know, they're talking about long-term care. You know, this government should be embarrassed when you have seniors waiting 160 days to get into long-term care in the North.

You know, you spent 2014-15, you put in 500,000 for planning. It was supposed to be planning for long-term care for the North. And what do you do? Well oh the planning, oh and they put up the little . . . And I went. I went to see the consultants that were hired and, you know, we went in the area where they rented a building and they put up foam blocks and showed you, oh this is what it would look like, and here's how it all would . . . the size of it. That's all fine and dandy. It was planning and you went through that process, and that's really good. But today families are struggling.

And I think about those individuals that have come to this legislature that are signing petitions and are very upset right now, and will be signing petitions, more petitions to say to this government, how could you fail us so miserably? Say we know that you needed this. They made it very clear. Oh no, we know it's a priority. You're a priority. The North is a priority.

And I think about Creighton as well. They're thinking about long-term care for their seniors that are growing old. They want them to stay in their communities. Whether it's the east side, the west side, the North needs to make sure that our seniors can be

close to their families, the language, the culture.

Like you're supposed to govern all the province, not just certain areas. But you know what? I am the opposition member within the opposition of this side of the House and I get to carry a message that the constituents ask me to bring, whether it's the leadership — and I've talked about that — whether it's those that are suffering, the most vulnerable, to say the work we do. Unlike I hope . . . You know, and I encourage the backbenchers, say something to your cabinet or colleagues. Tell them of the priorities. Don't sit back. Say what you need to say instead of always cheerleading. Like, do that. I encourage you to do that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think about the Wollaston Lake road. And I think about the Wollaston Lake road and I give credit to the leadership of Wollaston Lake, Hatchet Lake First Nation, about the way they've done all they can and they continue to work hard and lobby. And I've seen some posts when the budget come out and they didn't get their road. And I've seen a post of one of the community members who put out a post. It was amazing to watch and I give credit to keep fighting. Keep fighting with this government. Don't let them get away with it. It's the wrong thing.

It's about safety. It's about economics. It's about a group of citizens who have a right to an all-season road, who have a right, who keep lobbying the government — federal, provincial. Partner. They've been asking back and forth and it goes . . . It just doesn't make any sense. It doesn't make any sense. It's about safety. To lose any life on an ice road is shameful. It's sad to those families. That's what happened in that community and they're challenged all the time.

It's about economics, you know, the most vulnerable. It's about cost of food. It's about cost of heat. The list goes on. Again I think about Wollaston Lake and I think about their road and this government. That's not their priority. Pretty sad, but I'm going to say to them, keep fighting. We'll keep fighting. I'll keep bringing it up as long as I have to, and I know the leadership and the residents will continue to fight. PAGC [Prince Albert Grand Council], FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations], they all will keep lobbying government, saying, this is the right thing to do.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the list goes on of priorities. And you talk about the debt, you know, and we talk about . . . They want to talk about, you know, grandkids, and that's good. We have grandkids. I've got 17. I've got kids, you know. Is life all easy? No, it's not all easy. But we keep adding the debt and they don't say . . . They want to hide it like there's no debt. Well if you just look at their own, you know, projections on their own budget document, page 48, it's amazing to watch. I've shared it with people. I've seen people sharing it more and more and talking about it, saying, what do you mean we owe that kind of money?

[22:15]

You, as Saskatchewan residents, we all owe this money. We're all going to have to pay. Like my grandkids are going to have to pay that bill. Yes, spend. And they can say, oh, but we're paying down the debt because you put \$4 on it or 400 or whatever it is. And you put up a billboard and you say, oh, we're paying down the debt.

But then the reality is, you know, their own projections, in 2023 it's going to be \$26 billion. The interest alone, the payments alone on that is going to have to be close to a billion dollars. Who knows? Right now I think it's somewhere around 700 million.

So you just keep seeing time after time of the different things. You know, I was hoping in this budget we would see some good announcements. I was. I was hoping we would see some of the projects that needed to be dealt with in the North — long-term care, roads. It's needed. We know it's needed.

I think about the affordability — housing. Some of the communities, there's so many houses boarded up. The housing authority is boarding up homes. And you know, it is about affordability. Some people can't pay their rent. They can't pay their power. So they get evicted because they can't pay their power and all that.

So the challenges are there for many. This government had its priorities. Well there's a lot of people in this province that were not the government's priority, were not the government's priority. You know, and I think about it. I've heard people saying, a lot of seniors, different where you went, different community members, the most, those that were looking for medical transportation, talked about STC [Saskatchewan Transportation Company], hoping it would come back, something — that the government would do the right thing.

We've seen that when they're embarrassed. When they're embarrassed, they change. And we've seen about libraries. We see what they did there and how the people rallied. Again I'm encouraging people to rally . . . [inaudible] . . . long-term care. Let's do some work. And we'll work with residents who want to see that done. And we'll petition. We'll do what we need to do to bring awareness, embarrass this government because that's the only way.

But like I said, there's so much to do in mental health and addictions. And I want again to give credit to La Ronge Indian Band, the leaders and all those community members, and our side, our colleagues, my colleagues as critics who have raised this concern in this House, the member from Athabasca. Many members have talked about it and many comments about mental health, the addictions, and what we need to do. More needs to be done.

And I know the government will say, what more do they want us to do, you guys? Where do you want us to spend it? Well you know what? Give a serious look at it. Go and consult with those that are impacted out there. They will give you the answers. They will. They'll be honest with you. They'll tell you where they're challenged.

And you talk about resources that you announced. I was at the SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] and they announced, their government, the Premier was announcing money, that they were going to get extra money. I think it was 10 million, 10.4. I'm not sure. You know, I want to be clear on it, but . . . And you know, that's supposed to be a real great thing. But if you look at the PST, and I've been asking and I'm going to ask a few of my municipalities that I'm going to be meeting with in the next few weeks exactly how much PST on some of the construction. Some of them we're thinking of building,

they've got to pay PST on that. They didn't have to pay PST before on construction, so now they're going to have to.

So if you get \$120,000 this year but you're paying 3 or 400,000 on PST that you didn't have to pay before, how does the government think that they should be praised from municipalities? Like I'm curious to see how this is all going to work: the cost, more and more, and services that municipalities are being asked to take over because the province hands it off to the municipalities and says, well here's areas where we're not going to be funding, and cutting.

And I think at the end of the day everybody is looking at the budgets or documents, Mr. Speaker, and they're going to look and see, how did they fare in this budget? Are some of them losing money, some of the CBOs? Like they're going to all have time, and it's going to take time to go through the process. So we'll find out because they're going to share and you're going to hear people sharing their concerns.

So for the government to give themselves credit, talk about standing up for Saskatchewan, you need to stand up for all of Saskatchewan. You know, they need to do that. It's not just about certain areas. You need to represent all of Saskatchewan and do the right thing.

I mean there's so many other things a person could talk about on this. You know, when you think about tripling the debt, getting rid of the PST on construction . . . There's so many things my colleagues and myself have talked about, you know, to try to say, this government could have picked these priorities, but they made their decision on their priorities.

So I know others would like to join in on this conversation and at time, and you know, I just have to again just kind of reflect on the struggles that many families are having. And the government, okay, of the day, you know, I hope you're hearing what people are saying . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well you can say that and you may think it's funny. You may think it's funny, but when we're talking about people struggling with, you know, with mental health, addictions, with like paying their medication for seniors.

So members over there can say what they want and think it's funny or whatever. I don't find it funny at all and I think, you know, at the end of the day, those people that I represent and I think many seniors will not be impressed that that's how this government and members on that side are going to respond when you're talking about serious concerns in this side of, you know, the Assembly, to try to show a government of what they're failing miserably to meet the needs of so many people who need that help and who want a good government to take care of them. They've asked them and they've said, we trust you.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know I've taken up my time and at this point, you know, I'll just sit down and take my chair for a bit.

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

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to enter into this debate

even though the hour is late. I'll try to get through what I can this evening. It's my honour to deliver the reply for the 15th time in this legislature, so 15 different budgets. The first four, we were in opposition, and three of those four, I was the Finance critic. So I promised the members on this side, but the members on the opposite side can play along as well, that we'll have a little bit of a trivia game here. You betcha. We'll see who can remember what the NDP talked about in their budgets.

When I was the Finance critic in 2006, you know what the central theme of the budget was in that year? I'll give you a hint. It was about the PST. It was about the NDP — and you haven't heard a word about this in any of their speeches — they increased the PST from 7 per cent to 9 per cent. Now the member from Cumberland just talked about the PST and all the evils of the PST. I wonder what he would have said when it increased from 7 per cent to 9 per cent.

I know we have to go quickly here, so we've got some short snappers. What was the year that the NDP brought in revenue sharing? Was it '04? Was it '05? Was it '06? Well '07 was an election year. If they were ever going to bring in revenue sharing, it must have been in '07. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they didn't get it done. They didn't get it done. But you know what they did? You know what they did with their budgets? They had 14 consecutive balanced budgets.

You know how they did it? They had a term — I don't know if anybody remembers this term — they had a way to do it. It was called the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. I heard somebody say it over here, so another point for the government side. The Fiscal Stabilization Fund. So for 14 years they used this fund to balance the budget, and they talked about it and they talked about it and they said, we're going to take money from this fund and they were going to balance it. Well you know what happened in 2006? They found out there was no money in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. But they were going to do better. In 2007 they actually funded the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. They actually put money into it. So they said, trust us. Now we're going to balance it for the 14th, for the 15th time with a Fiscal Stabilization Fund that actually, that actually has money in it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go on with the trivia, but I'd better do what's customary here to talk about the great constituency of Saskatoon Willowgrove. It's a constituency that's long and narrow. I say it's just like the MLA, you know: tall and thin and whatever. With friends like this, who needs the NDP, right, you know? No, anyway it's a great constituency and I thank the people of Saskatoon Willowgrove.

I want to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, talk about my constituency assistants, Barb and Jenny and Jacquie, who do work for me. And I want to thank them very much for all the work that they do. And the great co-operation that I have, I share my office with a law firm, Churchman & Co., and I'm very, very pleased to do that.

I want to thank the good work of the people in my ministerial office, Elaine and Michael and Carly. She just finished up. She's moving over to Advanced Education, I believe, and Zeyid started in my office for the first day today. So welcome, Zeyid. Carly, thank you for all the work that you've done. Elaine and Michael, certainly, thank you for all of that as well.

I want to thank those public servants that help us as ministers as well. To Mike Carr and his team over at Central Services, it's been busier than anybody thought it would be, I think, in Central Services. Last fall, this spring, you know, we've got a few challenges, but we welcome that activity as well. And thank you to Karen Aulie and her team over at the Public Service Commission as well.

I want to thank my family, my wife Trish, of course. She's very, very busy in her own career. She's working for Jubilee Residences and has just taken on some new responsibilities with the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce. So as well as keeping our house running and doing all the things that she does, she has her own professional career as well. Our son Carter is finishing up his third year in finance at the Edwards School of Business, part of the U of S Husky track team, had a very good year this year. And our daughter Paige, we miss her. She's over in Hamilton at McMaster University and part of the McMaster swim team, but she'll be coming home before too long.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk about my constituency executive as well. The volunteers, the unsung heroes. Wade and Brad and Natasha and Frank and Angela and many others who work as volunteers to ensure that the constituency operates in an efficient manner and it helps me to keep in touch with constituents. So I want to thank them.

And I want to just touch on something that I did earlier today. It was a bit of a . . . well we call it a celebration, but it was a remembrance of a very good friend. And many on this side of this House will know, and maybe some on the other side as well, Mike Morrissey, Michael Francis Morrissey, a good friend of all of ours. He left us much too soon. Six years ago today, March 25th, 2013, he succumbed to cancer. And we had a chance to share some stories and to talk about things. And you know, Mike was the type that always shared a smile and was a person who just lit up the room. So Michael Francis Morrissey, six years ago today, a tribute to you.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about my constituency. I'm proud to represent Saskatoon Willowgrove . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . The tall, thin one, that's right. That's right. It reaches from the very north at the top in Evergreen, to the southern part, to Briarwood Lake. It's a growing constituency. It includes Evergreen. It includes Willowgrove, and one of the fastest growing communities in Saskatchewan, Brighton, a brand new area which will be 15,000 people. It'll be, at some point probably, a constituency on its own. But it's a growing, thriving, vibrant community.

It's reflective of what's happening in Saskatchewan. We all know that almost 170,000 people have come to our province since we became government in 2007, and many of those are in the Saskatoon Willowgrove constituency. And I have the honour of being their MLA.

Saskatoon Willowgrove is very proud of the schools that we have in our constituency, four very, very new schools. And that's what happens in growing constituencies and that's what happens when you have a government that is dedicated to education and to infrastructure. You know, our government . . . Well, let's play a little more trivia just to make sure that everybody's paying attention. How many new teachers did the Sask Party employ in

the last 10 years?

An Hon. Member: — 750.

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Well, higher.

An Hon. Member: — 1,400.

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — No, not quite 14. Nine hundred and twenty-five new teachers. You know what the NDP record was?

An Hon. Member: — Minus 400.

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Minus 400. I have a learned, learned group of colleagues here absolutely.

Well let's talk about new taxes. You know, when you talk about your constituents and I ask them what do they like about the budget, what do they say? I like that there's no new taxes. And well that's something that you couldn't say under the NDP because, you know, how many times they raised taxes in their 16 years? Twenty-one, twenty-two. You know, like when it gets up over 20, it's hard to quantify all of them.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to continue on. I have quite a bit more that I want to talk about. You know, I want to talk about education and about the number of schools that the NDP closed. You know, we talk about it and everybody knows the number. I think it's 176 schools that were closed. But you know what? You know what? The NDP were in government for about 176 months. So there you go, they closed one school a month. That is their record, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know I've got more to say. I'll continue on when I get another opportunity, but at this time I'd like to adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: — The Minister of Central Services has moved to adjourn debate. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Carried. It now being 10:30, time of adjournment, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:30.]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**SPECIAL ORDER
ADJOURNED DEBATES
MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY
(BUDGET DEBATE)**

Chartier	5493
Steele	5496
Weekes	5499
Tell	5501
Pedersen	5504
Bonk	5505
Olauson	5509
Ottenbreit	5512
Vermette	5516
Cheveldayoff	5519

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