



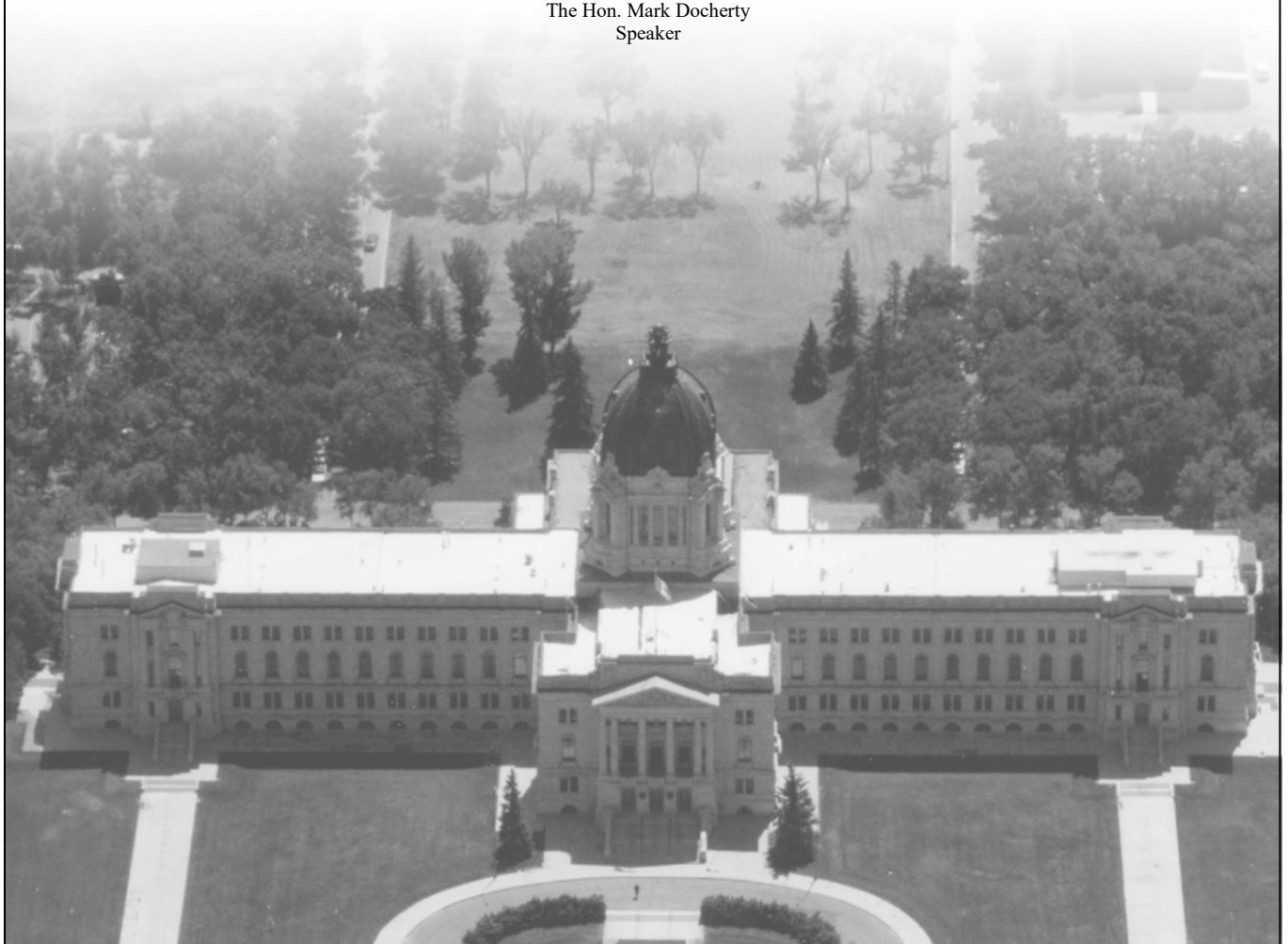
FOURTH SESSION - TWENTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)
Published under the
authority of
The Hon. Mark Docherty
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
4th Session — 28th Legislature

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Leader of the Opposition — Ryan Meili

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Party Standings: Saskatchewan Party (SP) — 46; New Democratic Party (NDP) — 13; Vacant — 2

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[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Lumsden-Morse.

Recognition of Support Within Communities

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Day by day, hour by hour, our world is changing. I know we are all feeling a sense of uncertainty. But during what may seem like dark times, I'm reminded of a lesson from Mister Rogers. His mother would tell him, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people helping."

And, Mr. Speaker, we see those helpers today right here in this province. To the health care professionals, maintenance workers, and 811 operators who are serving their community in these trying times: we see you and we thank you. To the nurses and others working at long-term care facilities protecting our most vulnerable from what may come: we are grateful for you. Whether it's teachers offering to help parents educate their kids during the school wind-downs to delivering groceries to the doorstep of someone who may be in self-isolation, your good deeds and warm hearts are not going unnoticed.

Mr. Speaker, they are the helpers and because of them we know that as a community we can make it through. It's still on us to practise social distancing, wash our hands, and self-assess if needed. But knowing that there are helpers out there in the communities can definitely lift our spirits through these uncertain times. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Recognition of Teachers and School Staff

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is blessed with amazing people who work in and around our schools every day. We know how much they give of themselves to their students and to our whole community. It was the right choice to close our schools, but we know that it isn't without cost. It's hard for teachers to say goodbye to their students, hard for students to say goodbye and to be away from their friends, and hard on families who are now left scrambling to find care for children who are no longer in school.

Educators are used to saying goodbye to their students at the end of the school year — kids who they have taught and learned from, developed relationships with, and watched grow and mature before their very eyes. Normally they have a lot longer to prepare for that day, Mr. Speaker, but we know these are no longer normal times.

To all of the teachers, educators, and school staff who have had their school year shut down due to COVID-19, who are saying goodbye to their kids before they expected to, we say thank you. Thank you for everything you do day in and day out. Thank you

for keeping your students at the top of mind. We are with you.

And if there's one thing I know about Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, it's that during difficult times we come together. Thank you for being the very helpers that we need in times like these.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Government's Preparedness for and Response to COVID-19 Outbreak

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan people are under a great deal of stress at this time. We know that for too many families, it's already hard to make ends meet at the end of each month, and it's only getting harder. To help families across this province, we need to act quickly and decisively.

That's why today I'm calling, we're calling on the Premier to introduce a financial aid package for the people of Saskatchewan, a financial aid package that includes immediate payments to support low- and middle-income families, money that will help keep them whole and that will circulate in the local economy; supports for Saskatchewan businesses to keep workers employed with a focus on small and medium Saskatchewan companies and a response to regional and industry-specific needs; the injection of the necessary dollars into health to have an adequate response to the COVID-19 crisis; support for people who are having to take sick leave or self-isolation, including for those who have no child care options because of the closure of schools or child care centres; utility and rent guarantees so that during this difficult time no one goes without heat or power or communications or finds themselves out of their home; a financial aid package that includes tax changes to reduce pressure on Saskatchewan businesses.

Will the Premier show leadership today and commit to moving quickly on a financial aid package that supports Saskatchewan families? The time to act is now.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for that, what is a very important and timely question given where we are in this province today, and how we are going to support Saskatchewan families, Saskatchewan jobs, and small business and large business that provide that employment in each of our communities across this province.

Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the federal government is going to move forward, is our understanding. Our Minister of Finance as well as other ministers of Finance across the country have been in contact with the federal Minister of Finance, the federal government, Mr. Speaker, on an economic stimulus package that should be announced, it sounds like, sometime tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to be looking very closely at that package and are looking at what opportunities we have as a province to dovetail into those supports that the federal government will provide, so that we can ensure that we are

maximizing our investment, maximizing the opportunity that we have to support exactly those very Saskatchewan families, those Saskatchewan jobs, Mr. Speaker, as well as supporting the business that is providing employment in each of our communities.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The financial pressures on families are massive. There's no time to wait. We need to get people that support yesterday.

And beyond that immediate support, we will need a post-pandemic economic stimulus plan, including a major buildup of Saskatchewan infrastructure — hospitals, roads, schools, power plants, renewable energy. And we need to do that using Saskatchewan companies and Saskatchewan workers, so that we get our economy working again and get Saskatchewan people back to work.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier act now to keep people whole with an immediate financial aid package for Saskatchewan families? And will he commit to bringing forward an aggressive, Saskatchewan-focused economic stimulus plan once we're able to get to a budget?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are going to see how we can dovetail into the federal stimulus package tomorrow for the short term. Mr. Speaker, we also tomorrow are going to table our spending plan for the course of the next number of months here in this province.

It is a spending plan that is going to invest in the resources that we will require, Mr. Speaker, as we navigate through this global pandemic in our province of Saskatchewan in the way of health care supports, in the way of supporting our CBOs [community-based organization] in communities right across this province, Mr. Speaker. And it most certainly is a spending plan that is necessary so that we can capture this year's construction season with the infrastructure, the infrastructure that we need to build here in the province of Saskatchewan. We are going to invest and invest heavily, Mr. Speaker, in hospitals, in schools, in highways, and in infrastructure to ensure that the economy in this province has every opportunity to recover post-COVID-19, the COVID-19 pandemic that we have.

Mr. Speaker, our ministers of Energy and Resources, Trade and Export, our Minister of Agriculture — they have all been reaching out to our businesses that employ people in each of our communities, Mr. Speaker, been reaching out to them to start to discuss what impacts they have already experienced, what impacts they foresee in the days, weeks, and months ahead, Mr. Speaker, and how the government can ensure that, first of all, we mitigate some of those impacts where we can, but ensure that we provide an environment where we can climb out of the economic turmoil that we see ahead of us.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that some Saskatchewan small businesses have already closed their doors,

some of them for good. We know that others will follow. Mr. Speaker, other businesses are telling workers to stay home, and they don't have the means to continue to pay those employees. It's a painful time for many small-business owners and for the employees on which they rely. Small businesses can't wait. What financial aid measures will this government be bringing in to support Saskatchewan's small businesses through this crisis?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, as I said, our Minister of Finance has been in touch with the federal Minister of Finance as we are looking to the federal government to move, quite likely tomorrow, with respect to an economic stimulus plan. Then the provinces — and I think in fairness, many of the provinces — will then look at the opportunities they have to dovetail in on that federal stimulus package, if you will, on how we can support our respective families across this nation. And for us that means the respective families and industries in communities right here in Saskatchewan, understanding the great diversity that we have from coast to coast to coast in Canada, Mr. Speaker.

So we most certainly are under active consideration and active discussions as to how and what opportunities we will have to do that. As I said, this is a fluid situation that we are working our way through here in the province, an environment where we are concentrating on restrictions, also having an eye to the resources, to ensuring those resources will be available and, Mr. Speaker, ultimately the economic recovery that will come after we are at least somewhat through dealing with this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, this starts tomorrow. It starts tomorrow with the federal stimulus package, and it starts tomorrow here in the province of Saskatchewan with us tabling our spending investments, Mr. Speaker, our spending intentions over the next number of months. Mr. Speaker, this is where the resources will become evident to the people of this province, and they will continue in the days ahead as we continue to work with our industries and the hard-working people in this province.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow the government will table estimates that are based not only on financial forecasts that are completely out of date, but that don't recognize the ways in which our revenue has changed and the ways in which our spending priorities need to change immediately.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier acknowledge that these documents are no longer valid, no longer relevant today? Will he act quickly and decisively now and commit to an immediate financial aid package that addresses the health and economic needs that Saskatchewan families are facing today?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, with respect to the revenue numbers in what would ultimately be a budget that should be delivered at this point in time, Mr. Speaker, given the turmoil in the markets, in the commodity prices, given what is happening with all of the things that factor into the revenue items here for the province of Saskatchewan and, quite frankly, factor into the

revenue items for any government anywhere in the world at this point in time, the revenue . . . It is very difficult if not impossible to forecast what the revenues will be over the course of this next year.

Mr. Speaker, if we went back to look at what those revenue items would be today, I don't know how you would formulate what the revenue items would be here for the province of Saskatchewan. But what is important, what is important and what the people of this province need to know is the investment that we are going to make and the investment that we are going to put forward tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, is on behalf of the people in this province.

And it is the very beginning of the investment that we will need to manage the next number of weeks and months with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic that has come into our province now in the way of health supports, in the way of supports for our CBOs, in the way of supports for our communities, and ultimately, over the days and weeks ahead, in the way of supports for our families and communities right across this province, Mr. Speaker. You're going to see the start of an investment in Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker, and the people that we represent in this province need to know this. As the investment is required, it's going to be there.

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

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Speaker, we know that public health measures are one of the most important elements of reduction and delay of transmission of COVID-19 in the community. The first case of coronavirus was identified on December 31st of 2019. The first case appeared in Canada on January 27th. The World Health Organization declared a coronavirus global health emergency on January 30th. The province's pandemic plan was introduced on March the 11th.

We know that there was a great deal of work required to update pandemic plans from 13 different regions as they incorporate into the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] and an incredible amount of work for health care facilities and providers to prepare their specific plans and protocols.

[13:45]

My question to the Premier is this, Mr. Speaker: what additional funding was made available to Public Health in the months of January and February to help them prepare a robust plan and help Saskatchewan flatten the curve?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is absolutely correct with respect to the work that has gone on over the last number of months by the hardworking public servants in the Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Health Authority, Mr. Speaker, in bringing our regions together and also bringing together the pandemic plans that we had in each specific region here to make one pandemic plan for the province of Saskatchewan.

With respect to the funding that has been made available for that work to happen, Mr. Speaker, that was part of the initial design

of bringing the health regions together, was to ensure that they would be able to bring together plans just like the pandemic plan. So the funding that was made available for that work, Mr. Speaker, was made available one year ago, last year at budget time, when we invested a record amount of funding in the Ministry of Health here in the province and into health care in our communities across the province.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just ask, then, if I'm correct to understand that when this massive new challenge for our health system was coming on the horizon, no additional dollars were supplied for public health funding during that period and for preparation.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, with respect to the pandemic plan, there was already a pandemic plan in place here in the province, Mr. Speaker. What has happened through January and February is that pandemic plan has been altered, if you will, so that it is specific to the challenge that we are facing in this province and in this nation and across the globe here today, Mr. Speaker, and that is the COVID-19. So our plan has been in place, Mr. Speaker. It's now been modified for the current-day reality.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Contrary to what we heard yesterday, there are indeed fewer nasopharyngeal swabs, reagents, and capacity for testing than Saskatchewan needs in order to be able to do the ideal testing in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Mr. Speaker, we need to be able to detect community spread, identify and isolate clusters, and respond immediately with the quickest possible interventions. This is not only a Saskatchewan challenge. Other provinces are facing the same difficulties and are having to ration use of testing.

My question is, what clinical decisions are being made about who to test, and how? And what pressure is being put on the federal government to make sure that sufficient testing materials are made available to have the ideal response?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — With regards to many of the questions there, Mr. Speaker, I think they in fairness would be best directed to our chief medical health officer, Dr. Shahab, as there's much of this that he actually decides, Mr. Speaker, as he serves as Saskatchewan's chief medical health officer. And we thank him for his service, in particular over the last number of weeks and months with his loyal service to the people of this province and the expert medical advice and the advice, public health advice that he has provided the government, provided the people of this province.

With respect to the supplies, Mr. Speaker, in particular the testing supplies, there's been no shortage of testing supplies thus far, Mr. Speaker. As we move ahead, we're expecting the number of tests in this province to greatly increase. We are, and we're preparing for that as we have additional supplies on hand as we continue to

receive supplies and order supplies in the days and weeks ahead, Mr. Speaker, as we are anticipating there's going to be additional testing. And the rate of increase of the testing that we are doing in this province is going to increase.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We learned yesterday that the province has 91 ventilators to support critical care. We welcome this information. It's very important that people have a full understanding of our capacity.

I have a couple of follow-up questions on that information however. One, how many of those 91 ventilators are already being used prior to COVID-19 patients requiring them? What does the modelling tell us about the likely demand for ventilators and how many we will need to weather the COVID-19 storm? And lastly, we understand the SHA has ordered 50 more ventilators. With jurisdictions around North America having to make similar decisions about expanding their capacity, how confident are we that those new ventilators will be delivered in time for the patients who need them?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member opposite for the question with respect to the ventilators that are available. I understand there's just over 90 ventilators that we have in the province. There's a number that are on order, Mr. Speaker. I believe 50 have been ordered. Since then there's been another 200 that have been ordered as well, Mr. Speaker, by the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Mr. Speaker, we're actively endeavouring to ensure that we will have the medical supplies here in Saskatchewan should we need them in the days, weeks, and months ahead. As I said yesterday, we also are working in collaboration at not only the chief medical health officer level, but the ministers and the ministries, Mr. Speaker, with other provinces and the Government of Canada to ensure that not only do we have sufficient resources in equipment, medical equipment here in Saskatchewan but that we are having the sufficient resources across Canada as well.

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

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Speaker, Ontario and British Columbia have ordered hundreds of beds for acute care, ICU [intensive care unit] beds, even stretchers. We understand that the SHA has not made those same steps to date, Mr. Speaker. It's obviously going to be a very big issue as we have a big increase in the number of admitted patients, that we have enough beds for them to be put in. If we don't make these orders now, if we don't have these beds coming already, we'll be competing with other jurisdictions who are making similar choices, Mr. Speaker. We need to act fast.

What is the plan to have enough beds for the influx of new in-patients? Have these beds been ordered and, if not, when will that happen?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my

understanding that it has happened, that beds have been ordered by the Saskatchewan Health Authority, Mr. Speaker. In addition to the ordering of those beds and a number of other supplies that we predict we may need in the days, weeks, and months ahead, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan health association is actively starting to reduce some of the elective surgeries and some of the elective procedures that are occurring in our communities in Saskatchewan to start to create that space in our facilities should we need it, should our numbers increase above the number of seven, which is the current number of positive COVID-19 people here in the province, Mr. Speaker. We are expecting that number to increase; we aren't naive about what we are dealing with here, Mr. Speaker.

And we're actively planning within the Saskatchewan Health Authority with respect to ordering and sourcing of the supplies that we will need, from testing equipment to beds, as well as opening up the maximum amount of capacity that we have in our current facilities.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health care workers are raising concerns about the SHA directive that sets the date for self-isolation of health care workers at March 16. Media stories have shared these concerns, pointing out the risk of transmission to vulnerable and immunocompromised patients.

We've heard from returning workers who have returned from travel and chosen to self-isolate for their own health and for the health of those around them. And they've been told that they'll be off work but they'll be off work without pay, despite making those choices for health reasons, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier please explain the rationale behind this decision and reconsider and review that one-size-fits-all approach to returning health care workers?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, I'm uncertain about if there's a health care worker that is being told that they won't be compensated as they're off work. I think the government and the Minister of Health would like to know about that specific incident.

With respect to the directive, the Saskatchewan directive on health care workers returning that may not have to self-isolate for 14 days but would be self-monitoring: first, that is mirroring a federal policy that is in place; second, that is not a blanket policy for all health care workers, Mr. Speaker. That is a policy for specific services that may only be provided by a very small grouping of health care workers, Mr. Speaker.

It is not that they just go to work as they normally would, Mr. Speaker. They have to take some extra precautions, if you will, with some of the personal protective equipment that they will be working to ensure that they're protecting not only themselves but also protecting the people that they would come in contact throughout the day.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is a very, very selective piece that is in there for just a few disciplines that may be required, Mr. Speaker. And it is a policy that Saskatchewan has adopted mirroring the federal

policy.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How is the provincial government planning to address the impacts of COVID-19 on correction centres with increased pressures on staffing and on infection risk? Other jurisdictions have chosen to release some inmates early. Is the Premier planning to do the same? If so, how many? And when?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I caught most of the question. With respect to our correctional centres, Mr. Speaker, there's no plans to release inmates or anything of that nature, Mr. Speaker. What there is plans and what is actively in motion is we are treating our correctional centres in very much the same way we are treating our long-term care homes, Mr. Speaker, where we are restricting the access, the visitor access into those centres, restricting it quite significantly, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we are not having an outbreak in a confined area like a correctional centre.

Mr. Speaker, as we know there will be some individuals that also may be high risk in that facility, and we want to protect those individuals in the very same way that we are making every effort to protect our elderly in our long-term care homes, in our personal care homes, or in our Saskatchewan group homes as well.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are certain groups in our population in Saskatchewan that are higher risk during the COVID-19 outbreak: seniors, people with immune-compromised health troubles, people with diabetes, heart disease, lung disease. There are also people living in poverty, living in more crowded circumstances. To date, we have not yet seen a plan for how resources will be mobilized different for individuals at risk and in communities at risk, in particular rural and remote communities, on-reserve communities, communities with crowded housing.

What is this government's plan to get ahead of COVID-19 in the areas that would be most hard hit?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, we continue to focus in these days on population restrictions, if you will. And as I've said, we've made a number of changes there with respect to long-term care homes, with respect to our personal care homes, our correctional centres, Mr. Speaker, our group homes to limit the access into those facilities, to limit that point of contact, reduced our numbers of gatherings down to 250. We now see, Mr. Speaker, other provinces that are further reducing that down to 50.

Mr. Speaker, myself and others will have a meeting — the Minister of Health — with Dr. Shahab this afternoon, and we'll see what recommendations he brings today as this a very fluid environment, Mr. Speaker. And there are changes that will be

made day by day, make that assurance, Mr. Speaker, as we continue to work hard to protect the people and the families of this province of Saskatchewan.

With respect to some of our northern and remote communities, the Minister of Government Relations as well as other ministers have been on the phone with leaders in numerous communities and numerous municipal organization and leadership organizations in our communities. The Minister of Social Services has been in discussions with Red Cross. Mr. Speaker, myself and other ministers have been in discussions with Indigenous leaders from northern communities as well as southern Indigenous communities, Mr. Speaker.

We are continuing to work through some of the restrictions that we are doing, Mr. Speaker. As we go through tomorrow, with the release of our investment plans, Mr. Speaker, you will see some of the resources that are going to come behind that restriction conversation.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With schools closed, many parents are being forced to choose between staying home with their kids and going to work. What supports will the government be providing for parents who don't have child care now because schools are closed? And if and when the same happens with child care centres and daycares? And including what are the plans to make sure that families where both parents are needed, where both parents are needed on the front line of health care, how are we going to make sure that those families have the child care support they need to get through this difficult time?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, three good questions in there. The first, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the schools closing, this was a very difficult and challenging decision, one that didn't come about lightly, Mr. Speaker, but one where we felt we really tried to draw the balance between the safety of our children, ultimately the safety of people in our community, but also providing that opportunity for people that need a few days to transition into some child care options, Mr. Speaker. They would have that during the course of this week.

With respect to child care options, Mr. Speaker, that is challenging and there may be resources that will be required, Mr. Speaker. And we will be looking to the federal government and their stimulus package that comes tomorrow and how the province can then dovetail in and support best the families here in this province.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to health care workers specifically, that is a discussion that is actively ongoing here in the province, the essential services that we will need. And they may not just be in health care. They may be the individual that is ensuring the water treatment facility and the wastewater treatment facility in our communities is operating. It may be the individual that ensures that we are able to get back and forth to work, or our law enforcement officials. There are a number of essential services, if we get to that point, Mr. Speaker, that we will ensure that we are working closely with them to support them so that they can

continue to do that essential service, continue to keep our community and our province running.

[14:00]

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

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Speaker, we know the province of Ontario declared a state of emergency today. They're limiting gatherings of 50 people or more. We know that very soon, we'll likely stop gathering in this room as well and that's entirely appropriate, Mr. Speaker, for the protection of the public and for the safety of everyone in this room.

However, the work that happens in this legislature is extremely important. How does the Premier plan, should this legislature be closing down, how does he plan to continue that work effectively? How does he plan to involve the members on this side and leaders throughout the public in coming up with the best health and economic response to make sure that on the other side of this pandemic, we look back and see Saskatchewan as one of the success stories? That we got ahead of this, that we flattened the curve, that we did the best we could.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect to updating members opposite and updating the general public in the province of Saskatchewan as well, we have our chief medical officer. Dr. Shahab will be updating the public daily, Mr. Speaker. I believe he will be in just not too long this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and again tomorrow, the day after that. And I think that's important not only for us in this House, but for members in our community to be able to listen directly to the chief medical health officer as to where we are today versus yesterday, and where we may be heading tomorrow, along with any recommendations that he may have.

Mr. Speaker, we'd also commit, as I know has occurred yesterday, to update the Leader of the Opposition from time to time as well, with respect to exactly what our intentions are, and take advice, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, from the Leader of the Opposition and others as to what moves we may have to make in the days ahead, Mr. Speaker, and on an ongoing basis as we deal with this pandemic.

Also, Mr. Speaker, with how we are going to support a move from restrictions, not totally away from restrictions, but from restrictions to the resources necessary, Mr. Speaker, you're going to see — as all of the people of this province are going to see — our spending plan tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. Our spending plan which will be the starting point for how we are going to start to support the people, the families, the jobs of this province, Mr. Speaker.

In fact some of that is going to start even today with the introduction and hopefully the passing of some legislation that is going to protect the jobs of hard-working people in communities right across Saskatchewan.

The Speaker: — Why is the Minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To request leave to introduce and consider all stages of Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020* immediately.

The Speaker: — The minister has requested leave to introduce Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020* immediately. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. The minister may proceed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 207 — *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the minister that Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020* be now introduced and read the first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Principal Clerk: — First reading of this bill.

The Speaker: — The minister may proceed to move second reading of this bill.

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 207 — *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be moving, during my remarks, second reading of Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*.

First I want to thank the staff who worked quickly to put together the necessary amendments to *The Saskatchewan Employment Act*. It is through their hard work and dedication that we have been able to move swiftly.

With the onset of coronavirus, we want to ensure that workers do not need to be concerned about their jobs should they need to take sick leave or care for someone who is ill.

Today I'm pleased to say that our government is removing the requirement for an employee to have 13 consecutive weeks with an employer. We are also removing the requirement for the employees to provide a certificate of illness or injury from a medical practitioner. These two amendments ensure that all

employees can take sick leave and know that they have a job to come back to.

New to the legislation is the introduction of an unpaid public health emergency leave that can be accessed when the World Health Organization has determined that there is a public health emergency and the province's chief medical health officer has also issued an order that measures be taken to reduce the spread of a disease, or that the province's chief medical health officer has independently issued an order that measures be taken provincially to reduce the spread of a disease where it is believed there is sufficient risk of harm to citizens of the province. The orders would also be made public to ensure everyone is aware of the direction.

The provisions in the Act would allow employees to access the new leave to provide care and support to children or family members who are affected by the government's direction or the chief medical health officer's order. It can also be accessed when an employer directs the employee to go home from work, a physician requires an employee to go home, or the government or chief medical health officer directs that they go home.

Our government believes that these amendments are the right thing to do for Saskatchewan employees so they have the necessary job protection in place, but also so that the health and safety of everyone is their priority. As a province we have always taken care of one another, and this bill continues that practice in a way that makes sense for Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I want to announce to the Assembly the receipt of royal recommendation for the following bill. This was not received in time to appear on the order paper. Therefore I beg to inform the Assembly that His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the subject matter of Bill 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act*, recommends it to the consideration of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to move that Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020* be now read a second time.

The Speaker: — The minister has moved second reading of Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*. Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to rise today in this House to enter into the debate of Bill 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*. I first want to thank the minister for the embargoed briefing earlier so that we can all work together to approve this as quickly as possible.

Mr. Speaker, we are indeed in grave circumstances, and we must act as quickly and as effectively as possible as we respond to the global pandemic of COVID-19 to ensure that supports are in place to protect Saskatchewan workers. Mr. Speaker, the time is now to act. Mr. Speaker, we need measures to support workers, low- and middle-income families, including supports for people who can't access child care as a result of school closures, and those who are at risk because of their own unique circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition supports this measure for public health emergencies leave that is based on the chief medical health officer's determination that we need to take effective measures to stop the spread of a disease, in this case COVID-19. We note and support that no medical note is needed. The length of time is based on the call of the chief medical health officer's order and covers many unique circumstances, including parents whose children who will be at home now because of school closures and people who need or require to self-isolate.

We were hopeful that paid leave would have been possible, but we believe this is a good step forward. People are looking to their leaders and their legislatures to work together to deliver on that. We will keep doing that as we go forward, as we address the many needs that we know will arise as we are indeed in uncharted territory.

Mr. Speaker, as the opposition, we are committed to doing our part. I now conclude my remarks. Thank you.

The Speaker: — The question before the Assembly is the motion by the minister that Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020* be now read a second time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Principal Clerk: — Second reading of this bill.

The Speaker: — To which committee shall this bill be committed? I recognize the minister.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I designate that Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020* be committed to the Committee of the Whole on Bills and said bill be considered in Committee of the Whole on Bills immediately.

The Speaker: — This bill stands committed to the Committee of the Whole on Bills. I do now leave the Chair for the Assembly to go into Committee of the Whole on Bills.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ON BILLS

Bill No. 207 — *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*

The Chair: — The item of business before the committee is Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*. Clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Clauses 1 to 8 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows:

Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*.

I recognize the minister.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I move that the committee report the bill without amendment.

The Chair: — The minister has moved that the committee report Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020* without amendment. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. I recognize the minister.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I move that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chair: — The minister has moved that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of Committees.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the committee to report Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020* without amendment.

The Speaker: — The minister may proceed to move third reading. I recognize the minister.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 207 — *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020* be now read and passed a third time.

The Speaker: — It has been moved that Bill No. 207, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020* be now read the third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Principal Clerk: — Third reading of this bill.

The Speaker: — When shall the committee sit again? I recognize the minister.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Next sitting, Mr. Speaker.

[14:15]

The Speaker: — Next sitting. I'm advised that His Honour the Lieutenant Governor is here for Royal Assent. All please rise.

ROYAL ASSENT

[At 14:16 His Honour the Lieutenant Governor entered the Chamber, took his seat upon the throne, and gave Royal Assent to the following bill.]

His Honour: — Pray be seated.

The Speaker: — May it please Your Honour, this Legislative Assembly in its present session has passed a bill which in the name of the Assembly I present to Your Honour, to which bill I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

Clerk: — Your Honour, the bill is as follows:

Bill No. 207 - *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*.

His Honour: — In Her Majesty's name, I assent to this bill.

Members of the Legislative Assembly, a little bit unusual for me to remain but, in conversation with the Speaker, I ask for a moment of your time. It is unprecedented times that we face collectively. And I just wanted to personally acknowledge that fact, but also acknowledge the work that you continue to do and will into the future to make sure that the citizens of Saskatchewan, who you represent, will receive the appropriate supports as we move forward to face this challenge across this province, but also across this country and around the world.

It is a difficult time, particularly for leaders of communities and, in your case, the province. And all of you play an important role to ensure that the citizens of Saskatchewan have the confidence that you are doing what is right for them. I certainly do and I express that now. I have the confidence that you will continue in the role that you pledged to and will support you in any way I can.

And finally, as you work to support us, the citizens of Saskatchewan, I want to encourage you and urge you to make sure that you look after yourselves and your families. So with that, again thank you. Thank you for your ongoing service to the citizens of Saskatchewan.

[His Honour retired from the Chamber at 14:19.]

The Speaker: — Why is the minister on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — It has been moved that this House do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried. This House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 14:21.]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Recognition of Support Within Communities

Stewart6915

Recognition of Teachers and School Staff

Beck6915

QUESTION PERIOD

Government's Preparedness for and Response to COVID-19 Outbreak

Meili6915

Moe6915

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 207 — *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*

Morgan6920

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 207 — *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*

Morgan6920

Forbes6921

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ON BILLS

Bill No. 207 — *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*6921

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 207 — *The Saskatchewan Employment (Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act, 2020*

Morgan6922

ROYAL ASSENT

His Honour6922

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