



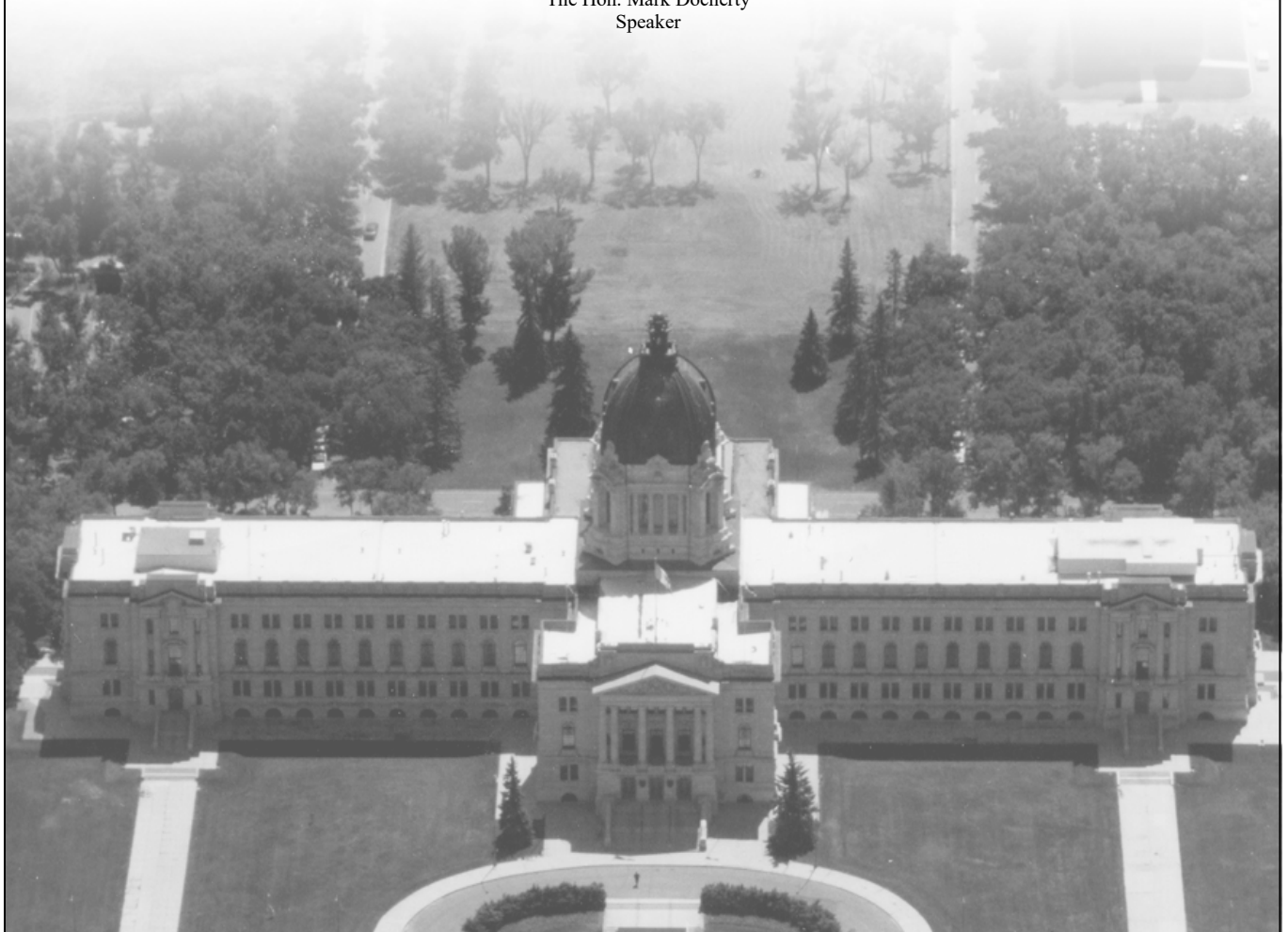
FOURTH SESSION - TWENTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE

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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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

PRESENTING PETITIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Prince Albert Northcote.

Ms. Rancourt: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one item that was not announced in this budget was funding for a second bridge in Prince Albert. Although the construction of a second bridge was an election promise from former Premier Brad Wall and former Sask Party MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for Prince Albert Northcote, once again Prince Albert residents are disappointed by the Sask Party government's lack of support and investment in this important infrastructure funding, and they continue to let people down. But the residents of Prince Albert can depend on a New Democratic government to immediately start construction and finally commit to the much-needed second bridge for the residents of Prince Albert.

Mr. Speaker, I will read to you the following points of why a second bridge is so important. The Diefenbaker bridge in Prince Albert is the primary link that connects the southern part of the province to the North. The current residents, businesses, and tourists in Prince Albert and northern communities require safe and efficient transportation infrastructure that includes adequate bridges; that the need for a second bridge for Prince Albert has never been clearer than it is today.

Prince Albert, communities north of Prince Albert, and businesses that send people and products through Prince Albert require a solution; that the local municipal governments have limited resources and require a second bridge to be funded through federal and provincial governments and not a P3 [public-private partnership] model; and that the Saskatchewan Party government refuses to stand up for Prince Albert and this critical infrastructure issue.

I'll read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan ask that the Sask Party government stop stalling, hiding behind rhetoric, and refusing to listen to the people calling for action, and begin immediately to plan and then quickly commence the construction of a second bridge for Prince Albert, using federal and provincial dollars.

Mr. Speaker, the individuals signing these petitions that I present today come from the communities of Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and Maple Creek. I do so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for The Battlefords.

Mr. Cox: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to present a petition from the citizens who are opposed to the federal government's decision to impose an unfair and ineffective carbon tax on the province of Saskatchewan.

I'd like to read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: to cause the Government of Saskatchewan to take the necessary steps to stop the federal government from imposing a carbon tax on the province.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good citizens of North Battleford and Phippen. I do so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present the petition on behalf of constituents who travel along Hanson Lake Road No. 106. Mr. Speaker, there are thousands of taxpayers who travel this road for doctors' appointments, shopping, sports, and tourism, as well as for work. Northern Saskatchewan residents should have access to the same quality of cell coverage as southern Saskatchewan residents when they are travelling these highways. Cell coverage on this highway would help residents with safety as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, the prayer reads:

That we, in the prayers, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: to cause the provincial government to improve cellular coverage along the Hanson Lake Road No. 106 for the many northern residents that travel it, and to provide the same quality of cell coverage that other southern communities rely on. This would provide support to our northern industries as well as mitigate safety concerns associated with living in the remote North.

Mr. Speaker, the people that signed this petition is signed by many residents of northern Saskatchewan. And on page after page of people that have signed this petition from Denare Beach, Mr. Speaker, the pages are many. And on behalf of the official opposition, I so present.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition regarding Botox injections for pelvic pain. I've had an opportunity to speak with several women who found this was the only form of effective relief that helps them function in day-to-day life. These citizens wish to bring to our attention: that even though the Saskatchewan formulary covers Botox injections for the treatment of severe spastic muscles, the Ministry of Health decided to discontinue coverage for trigger point Botox injections into the pelvic floor; that trigger point Botox injections had a significant impact on people's lives and allowed them to be contributing members of society.

This decision has left hundreds of Saskatchewan women with complex pelvic floor dysfunction without access to this effective treatment, leaving few options beyond emergency room care for pain relief. And despite the Sask Party government's stated concerns about the opioid crisis, this decision leaves a vulnerable community living with complex chronic pain with limited

options for pain management and risks causing dependency and addiction.

I'd like to read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on the Government of Saskatchewan to review the decision to discontinue coverage for this effective chronic pain treatment.

I've got a stack of petitions here, Mr. Speaker. They're signed by individuals from Saskatoon, Delisle, Warman, Osler, Grandora, Dalmeny, Grasswood, Cochin, Langham, Dundurn, P.A. [Prince Albert], Biggar, and folks in rural Saskatchewan. I do so present.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Acts of Kindness During Pandemic

Mr. Buckingham: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to highlight the work of the Sikh communities in Regina and Saskatoon. In response to COVID-19 pandemic, the World Sikh Aid Foundation in Saskatoon began a food delivery service for those who needed an extra hand during the pandemic. They have turned their temple's kitchen into a mobile delivery service and have been making an average of 60 deliveries a day.

Mr. Speaker, the Regina community also expanded their services into Regina and Moose Jaw by offering free groceries, masks, and sanitizer. They've also added two new locations to their free kitchen.

Mr. Speaker, generosity and emphasis on community services is deeply rooted in the Sikh community's faith and values. Sikh temples around the world offer a free kitchen and food service for all, no matter a person's background, economic status, or belief.

When the world around us began to shut down, they found a way to continue to serve, which just goes to show you that not even a pandemic can break the spirit of community. I am grateful for their acts of kindness and even more grateful to call them my friends. I now ask all members to join me in thanking the Sikh communities across Saskatchewan for their generosity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Athabasca.

Suicide Strategy for Indigenous Youth

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was National Indigenous Peoples Day. This day's the time to honour the histories and cultures of our First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. As legislators, we must take this day to recommit to working together with my people, the northern Indigenous communities of Saskatchewan, to build a future that incorporates the contribution of First Nations and Métis upon whose lands we share.

Unfortunately the future isn't as bright as Saskatchewan's Indigenous youth as it could be. The communities I represent have been shaken by suicide crises. Our people, our young people, are in a battle for their lives and it's a battle many of them are losing, Mr. Speaker. Across the province, Indigenous people are demanding more than a band-aid solution from this government. People are dying and young people are giving up hope.

I want to commend my colleague from Cumberland who has been fighting for a real suicide strategy in this province and who made an impassioned appeal to this House to support our suicide strategy. Suicide has touched every community in this province and every family, and our Indigenous people, like many, are crying for help. I ask all members to recommit to Indigenous youth with meaningful action so that one day we can all truly celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day. Thank you.

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

Support for Carmichael Outreach During Pandemic

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I want to recognize the charitable efforts and partnership between a local business and a rugby team who came together for their community during COVID-19.

Back in May, the founder of the Dog River Howlers rugby club, Karl Fix, and Lisa MacMurchy's Brewed Awakening came together to support Carmichael Outreach. They created the Lean On Me Community Lunch Program to donate healthy and nutritious lunches to those who depend on the important services and care that Carmichael Outreach provides. The campaign kicked off on May 20th with special guest Jack Semple who led a socially distanced crowd in a singalong to the program's inspiration namesake, "Lean on Me."

Mr. Speaker, this program asked customers at Brewed Awakening to donate \$10 towards a healthy lunch, and they have also challenged local businesses to join and match donations from the public. And to date this program has already raised \$20,000, and we hope that continues to rise.

Brewed Awakening is one of many locally owned businesses here in Regina that serves up great food and coffee and employs local people. They still worked hard to give back to others during this very difficult time, like so many Saskatchewan businesses and community groups. "Look for the helpers," said my seatmate back in March. Join me in thanking Brewed Awakening and the Dog River Howlers for helping Carmichael during this very difficult time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cumberland.

Suicide Prevention Strategy

Mr. Vermette: — I don't understand, Mr. Speaker. Last week I spoke to our bill for a suicide prevention strategy to tell the Premier and all members that our province needs to act on a suicide prevention strategy to save First Nations and Métis lives, to save lives all over Saskatchewan.

I saw the Premier listening. I saw government members clap when I was done. And I thought they might support it, but they did not. Can the Premier please answer this question: why did the Premier and every Sask Party member vote against this important bill?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I once again want to thank the member from Cumberland for his question today and for the discussion that he has elevated over the course of the last number of months with putting forward a private member's motion, Mr. Speaker, with respect to something that is important in all of our communities across this province, Mr. Speaker, and that's how we move forward as communities, as individuals, as a province on the conversation around reducing suicide. And ultimately reducing suicide in our province to zero is the goal.

Mr. Speaker, I had spoken last week with respect to the advocacy and the speech that the member from Cumberland had put forward, which I thought was very admirable. Mr. Speaker, with respect to what this government is doing on not only the conversation of suicide but guiding our framework as we move forward, we have released the Pillars for Life, a framework which was part of what the bill did call for, Mr. Speaker, was to put forward some guidelines and a framework on how we engage on this important discussion in the weeks, months, and years ahead, Mr. Speaker. We have released that. That is the first steps of a very, very important conversation that needs to occur in this province, Mr. Speaker.

There were some operational difficulties with the bill, Mr. Speaker, but we will continue to endeavour to engage all people across this province on how we can ensure that we are doing better on behalf of the people that we collectively represent.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm with the member from Cumberland — I don't get it. And after that explanation, I don't get it any more.

He made it very clear that the one problem that was raised, that it was the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] and not the ministry, that's easily amended and we promised to do so. My colleague said he'd be happy to see the draft plan that the minister put forward as a starting point. That can be incorporated into a suicide prevention strategy. There's zero policy obstacles to this government supporting this bill.

[13:45]

But instead, after listening to this member speak of his experience, his community's experience, having listened to so many families, so many communities like Makwa Sahgaiehcán who've lost young people, listened to those folks here in the province come down to this legislature — to vote against it, Mr. Speaker? There's no policy reason. There's certainly no moral or ethical reason, which leaves us with politics. Which gives me one question: who does the Premier think is the audience for this? Who is he trying to curry favour with by voting against a bill that would protect the lives of Indigenous young people?

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

Hon. Mr. Kaeding: — Mr. Speaker, suicide knows no geographic or territorial boundaries. It affects everyone in this province. I don't believe there's been many that have not been touched by suicide with their family or their community, Mr. Speaker. The Pillars for Life Saskatchewan suicide plan recognizes youth are certainly at risk in this, Mr. Speaker. We've heard passionate pleas from the members from Cumberland and Athabasca in that area, Mr. Speaker. We've engaged and I have personally engaged with FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations], with Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and looking forward to the opportunity to discuss with them at length as to where we're headed in this province to work with our suicide prevention plan, Mr. Speaker.

This is not the end of a plan, Mr. Speaker. It's the beginning of a plan, a beginning of a plan that we're going to work towards reducing suicide with all residents of our province, Mr. Speaker.

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

Provincial Budget

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question was for the Premier, why he chose not to support it. That was an act of cowardice not to do so on Friday and an act thereof once again to not answer the question today, Mr. Speaker. It's embarrassing. The first time in history of Canada that a suicide prevention bill has been defeated in the legislature.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's obvious that the Premier couldn't introduce the pre-pandemic budget that he'd prepared in March. It made no sense to do that then, so instead he's introduced the same budget in June, the same pre-pandemic budget in June. Except there's one major thing missing that's supposed to be in budgets: those multi-year projections, those ideas of what the plans are beyond March, Mr. Speaker.

When asked, the Finance Minister said, oh, we'll start our budget process in the next four months, Mr. Speaker. So they're not going to start planning, or at the very least they're certainly not going to start revealing their plans until after the next election, Mr. Speaker.

This budget is weak, this budget is lazy, and this budget is deceitful, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that this government wants to hide their true plans from the people of Saskatchewan. No wonder people are worried about the sell-off of Crowns. No wonder people are worried about more cuts to health and education and other key services like they saw in 2017, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Premier come clean about his plans? What is he trying to hide?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I am very proud that this government is the first government in Canada, including the national government, that has come forward with a complete budget that includes the expenses and the shortfall in

revenue from COVID — the first province and including the national government.

Mr. Speaker, it doesn't have projections in the out years quite frankly, because we're still in the pandemic. There is many, many uncertainties that we cannot predict going forward. And if we did, do you know what the members of the opposition would do? They'd say that it wasn't realistic. It wasn't the real numbers. They can't believe it. It doesn't have credibility. Because that's all they know to do is to criticize without giving any credibility to the officials who worked very diligently and very hard to put together this budget, Mr. Speaker.

We don't know . . . We are a trade-dependent province, Mr. Speaker. We are dependent on other countries and their recovery. We have a number of uncertainties in our out years and the revenues going forward.

The Speaker: — Just before we proceed, I caution the Leader of the Opposition. Referring to the Premier as cowardice is out of order, right? You can talk about the government in general, but not a person. All right. I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure the Finance minister should be quite so proud of being the first to introduce a budget that she'd already written before the pandemic, that has no changes. Being the first to do a bad job isn't necessarily something to crow about, Mr. Speaker.

We know that if we're going to have a safe reopening in Saskatchewan, which we all want, people need to have the confidence that there's a plan to deal with new outbreaks, a plan to deal with new developments. We have seen the number of active COVID-19 cases triple in the last week in the province, Mr. Speaker. Of course our thoughts are with the communities as they work hard to arrest the spread of virus in their communities.

But this government was caught completely unprepared in the spring. They were clinging to an out-of-date budget, clinging to their plan for a snap spring election. Now we've avoided the worst so far, despite that complete failure to prepare, Mr. Speaker. What difference do we see now, between that no preparation in the spring . . . Will this Premier tell us what he's doing to show that he's taking a second wave and new outbreak seriously, or does he expect people in Saskatchewan to just hope that he gets away with not planning a second time?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just curious, what about the budget that the member opposite disagrees with. Is it the substantive increase for mental health and addictions, Mr. Speaker? Is that something he doesn't want to see in the budget? Is it the fact that the Health budget itself is increased by just about 5 per cent? Is that something the members opposite don't believe should happen, Mr. Speaker? Is it the substantive increase that covers both the collective bargaining agreement and student enrolment increases for K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] education? Is that something that the member opposite disagrees with in this budget, Mr. Speaker?

Is it the substantive increase to community-based organizations, because they are the front-line workers for those most vulnerable

in our society? Is that something that the member opposite doesn't agree with? Is it the \$2 billion stimulus package for infrastructure that we have in this budget, Mr. Speaker? Is that something the members opposite don't agree with?

Mr. Speaker, there is a contingency in this budget of \$200 million to handle increases in expenses, should we have increased expenses for COVID, Mr. Speaker. Is that something that member opposite doesn't agree with, Mr. Speaker? He absolutely only knows how to criticize. He has no plan himself, and what little he does come out with, he has no idea how he will pay for it.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister likes to talk about her pandemic deficit, but she didn't come up with a pandemic budget. Where is the new funding for the reality of today? This is a cut-and-paste of what was done in March. It's such lazy work to try to pass off the work from three months ago as though this is something that's a response to today's reality.

There was no new money for public health before the pandemic and there's no new money for public health since. There's no serious attempt at funding a recovery in this province, Mr. Speaker, and there's no new resources since March. No new resources since March to deal with the new challenges, significant new challenges in our health system, not to mention the backlog and wait-list of a system that's been underfunded and under-resourced for years. What new resources since March do we see to deal with this current and future outbreaks, to deal with the second wave? Where do we see that in this budget?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, there is just about a 5 per cent increase to the health budget in this budget, Mr. Speaker. There has been savings due to shutdown of surgeries within the health care system. That is savings that then has been redeployed to COVID expenses, Mr. Speaker.

There is increases for additional surgeries in this budget, Mr. Speaker. There is increase for education in this budget, Mr. Speaker, and there has been savings in education. I don't know whether the member opposite understands that. And there is a \$200 million contingency in this budget, Mr. Speaker, that can be deployed to any area within government that has an increase in expenses for COVID, Mr. Speaker.

What would he do differently? Would he cut all of those increases? Is that what he would do, Mr. Speaker? Or would he just spend with no idea how he's going to pay for it? Is that what he would do, Mr. Speaker?

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

Funding for Education

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This budget was out of touch in March, and it's even more out of touch when it's re-presented leftovers, warmed over, cut-and-paste in June, Mr. Speaker. And teachers and parents have also seen the province's guidelines for the return to school in September, and they're not

impressed.

Mr. Speaker, Prince Albert & Area Teachers' Association president Ted Zurakowski said, for example, "There's no clarity on who's going to undertake enhanced protocols in cleaning classrooms," Mr. Speaker. "How does that practically happen?" he said. "Who does that?" Do we want our teachers teaching during the day or do we want them stopping every half hour to wipe down surfaces?

Mr. Speaker, it couldn't be clearer. A safe reopening of our schools is impossible without enhanced funding. To the Premier, who's quiet today, to the Premier: where's that funding coming from?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Minister of Finance. There's a \$200 million contingency in this budget to handle the effects of COVID-19, Mr. Speaker, and that includes increased costs in the school divisions, Mr. Speaker. We know that school divisions saved millions of dollars not having to provide in-class learning over the last number of months, Mr. Speaker. And we expect those funds to be utilized with respect to being able to provide safe learning environments for our children and for our teachers in the classrooms, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the guidelines have been worked on. The chief medical health officer is comfortable with the guidelines, Mr. Speaker. We expect school divisions and the response planning team, Mr. Speaker — who's made up of representatives from the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation], equal representation from the STF, Mr. Speaker — to work on the protocols with respect to the instructional pieces of returning to school.

Safety of children and our teachers and other professionals in our schools is our top priority, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to look to the advice of the chief medical health officer, Mr. Speaker, and the professionals in the school divisions and with our educational partners, to make sure that when children return to school in the fall, Mr. Speaker, they will be safe.

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

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Speaker, kids are not a contingency. This is core business. This is not something that, what if there's extra resources required, Mr. Speaker. A new contract has been signed with teachers. The province has released new guidelines for reopening schools. The minister wants to hide behind the chief medical health officer, but it's not his job to say that there are resources to put those in place. That's your job. Mr. Speaker, it's . . .

[Interjections]

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

Mr. Meili: — This minister's job is to fund the plan, Mr. Speaker. And there's no new money for education in this budget since March — no new money since the pandemic, no new money since the need for a return-to-school program that's completely different, no new money since a teachers' contract

was signed.

Mr. Speaker, school divisions are doing the math, and they won't be able to go forward in the fall without deep cuts. They're not looking at savings in classrooms that were already overcrowded, already underfunded. They're looking at deep cuts in core programs in a time when the challenges are greater, Mr. Speaker.

The Sask Party's had three months to come up with a new plan, three months to come up with a new plan, and they've done nothing. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier tell us, will the Premier tell us — I know he's embarrassed about his response to the member from Cumberland — but will he tell us where the money's coming from to fund our schools in the fall?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Mr. Speaker, this is the largest education budget in the history of the province, Mr. Speaker, another \$42 million which has been added to the budget. I note the Regina Public School Board last week, Mr. Speaker, reported an estimated \$3.7 million in savings in their third quarter financial update as a result of not having to provide in-class services, Mr. Speaker. And whether those savings come from transportation, Mr. Speaker, whether those savings come from plant operations, Mr. Speaker, there's a number of areas.

But, Mr. Speaker, certainly I have said this on a number of occasions, Mr. Speaker, we expect the in-class learning, the instructional piece of children in our classrooms is not going to be affected in the fall, Mr. Speaker. There will be additional resources available, certainly savings, \$200 million contingency, Mr. Speaker.

And if the member opposite wants to question, wants to question the guidance that we get from the chief medical health officer, maybe he should apply for the job, Mr. Speaker.

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

Support for Long-Term Care

Ms. Mowat: — Mr. Speaker, we have yet to hear this government's plan to improve staffing levels in long-term care. With COVID-19 cases on the rise, there is a growing risk of localized outbreaks in seniors' homes. We know there are actually fewer staff working on the front lines of seniors' care than there were in years past, and cohorting has made it harder to fully staff these care homes.

How can we expect our long-term care system to safely manage a second wave or outbreak? And without additional dollars added to the pre-pandemic spending plan, where will the money come from to keep our seniors safe?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we've discussed this issue many times on the floor of this Assembly. Mr. Speaker, in the broad context, where we're at is, since we were given the privilege of forming government, we have almost I think it's in the neighbourhood of 700 more

long-term care workers in the system than we did at that time.

Mr. Speaker, we're constantly evaluating how we do things in the system. Mr. Speaker, we're obviously concerned about COVID and the response to COVID that's happened in other provinces and around the world, that it disproportionately affects seniors, Mr. Speaker — particularly, in Canada, in Quebec and Ontario. Put many protocols in place to keep our seniors safe, Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to do that. We'll re-evaluate them, the public health officials will, because we also recognize the need that while it's important to keep people out so that COVID doesn't get in, it's also important that seniors have visitors and that their mental health is looked after.

[14:00]

But, Mr. Speaker, again, as far as the member's overall question as for the number of workers, Mr. Speaker, we have in the neighbourhood of 700 more long-term care workers in the system than we did when we formed government.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Not since 2015, Mr. Speaker. Not more staff since 2015.

The minister had a pretty strange take on short-staffing in seniors' care last week. When asked why there's fewer workers on the front lines, the minister pointed to his government's closure of Pioneer Village as the culprit. Seriously, Mr. Speaker? The fact that this government allowed Pioneer Village to crumble around residents, and that seniors had to be transferred to private facilities offering lower levels of care, isn't exactly a ringing endorsement for this government's management of seniors' care.

The bottom line is that the needs in long-term care are growing, and there's simply not enough staff. When will we see the long overdue investment, one that was promised in the last election, to improve staffing and help prepare for the risks of a second wave or further outbreaks?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, that's just simply taking what I said out of context. Mr. Speaker, what I said was that when Regina Pioneer Village — because there's obviously significant issues there and there's capital work under way, Mr. Speaker — those beds that when they were transferred to community beds, obviously those staff aren't in the system anymore, Mr. Speaker.

We have plans under way for Regina Pioneer Village. The Minister of Rural and Remote Health the other day announced plans for new projects in both Grenfell and in La Ronge, Mr. Speaker. When those facilities come online, there'll be a corresponding increase in FTEs [full-time equivalent] as well.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Mr. Speaker, that was the exact context that that quote was taken from.

In the days past, the minister keeps pointing to CEO [chief executive officer] tours and surveys as if they are somehow improving quality of care. We are now on our sixth CEO tour report saying the same thing: staff are run off their feet and seniors aren't getting the care they need. But we've yet to see the government do a thing about it.

Again to the minister: given the direct risk to seniors' homes amidst the pandemic, why wasn't a single additional dollar invested? And where will the money come from if those risks become a reality?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, given the risk of COVID, there were many protocols put in place, Mr. Speaker, including cohorting the staff so they wouldn't be working in more than one facility. Mr. Speaker, resources were made available for that, and resources will be made available for anything we need to do to keep our seniors safe.

The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, as I said, there is, you know, there is always some vigorous debate on the appropriate level of staffing but, Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds and hundreds more staff working today than there were in 2007-08. Mr. Speaker, we have spent a lot of money on capital projects, 13 new facilities, more on the way, Mr. Speaker, again the announcement that my colleague made the other day.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to look after our citizens in this province, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to look after our seniors and we're going to continue to make every effort that we can to keep them safe from COVID.

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

Health Care Wait Times

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No answer on that question. We are hearing significant concerns about the length of time Saskatchewan people are having to wait for diagnostic testing and surgeries. We know that over the last three months there were almost 11,000 fewer surgeries performed in the province compared to the same time last year.

The government spending plans drawn up in February allocated \$20 million toward surgeries, but last week's budget didn't allocate a penny more, despite more than 26,000 people on the waitlist. How long does the minister expect that it will take to clear the surgical backlog, and is the minister satisfied with that expected time frame?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, both diagnostic and surgical procedures, as the member opposite knows . . . First of all, Mr. Speaker, our surgical times have been slipping. That was no secret. We've discussed it here many times. We announced the surgical initiative last fall, Mr. Speaker. That, given everything else being equal, Mr. Speaker, would be under way right now, would have been for some months.

When the pandemic hit, Mr. Speaker, obviously everybody in the province is aware that that slowed our response to plans for surgeries other than emergency ones, and it also had a great deal of impact on diagnostics. Mr. Speaker, we share the member opposite's concerns with the wait times for that right now.

That's why the SHA has been working diligently, and they just recently announced not just phase 1 but phase 2 of their plan which, Mr. Speaker, is going to get surgeries up to about 65 to 70 per cent of pre-COVID capacity and, Mr. Speaker, get diagnostics up to about 90 per cent.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He didn't answer how long folks are going to have to wait.

We are hearing from people whose surgery dates have been kicked down the road by a year and a half. For people living with chronic pain, these delays have a significant impact on their quality of life.

An orthopedic surgeon told the media he alone has 100 patients with debilitating hip issues who could face waits of 18 months or more. If the SHA isn't able to adequately clear this backlog, what additional resources will be made available, and where will that money come from?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I said, we recognize the impact that COVID has had on both surgeries and on diagnostics, Mr. Speaker. Again the SHA has announced phase 2 of the resumption of services plan, Mr. Speaker. That will get surgeries up to 65 or 70 per cent, diagnostics up to about 90 per cent.

But, Mr. Speaker, it's amazing how the members opposite, they want everything. First of all, the Leader of the Opposition earlier today is criticizing, saying that there is no plan. Well a plan was put in place, Mr. Speaker, and implemented quickly. It unfortunately involved some cancellation of procedures, Mr. Speaker, and surgeries to free up capacity in the system for a first wave of COVID that luckily didn't develop to any large extent.

Mr. Speaker, but the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, every day he stands in the House, you don't have a plan. Then he doesn't like the plan. Then the plan isn't good enough. Mr. Speaker, meanwhile any plan that we had, if we'd have listened to him, Mr. Speaker, we still wouldn't be in phase 1 of returning to the economy, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to order the answers to questions 110 and 111.

The Speaker: — Ordered questions 110 and 111.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 209

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Harrison that **Bill No. 209** — *The Saskatchewan Chemical Fertilizer Incentive Act* be now read a second time.]

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

Ms. Sproule: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my enthusiasm in putting comments on the record last week on this bill, I forgot to mention that we were actually looking forward to the discussion in committee and that there is no further debate on the bill. So I think that concludes our comments.

The Speaker: — The question before the Assembly is the motion by the minister that Bill No. 209 be now read a second time. Pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Clerk: — Second reading of this bill.

The Speaker: — To which committee shall this bill be committed? I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I designate that Bill No. 209, *The Saskatchewan Chemical Fertilizer Incentive Act* be committed to the Committee of the Economy.

The Speaker: — This bill stands committed to the Standing Committee on the Economy. Why is the Deputy House Leader on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Mr. Speaker, to facilitate the work of committees this afternoon, I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — Pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 14:11.]

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