



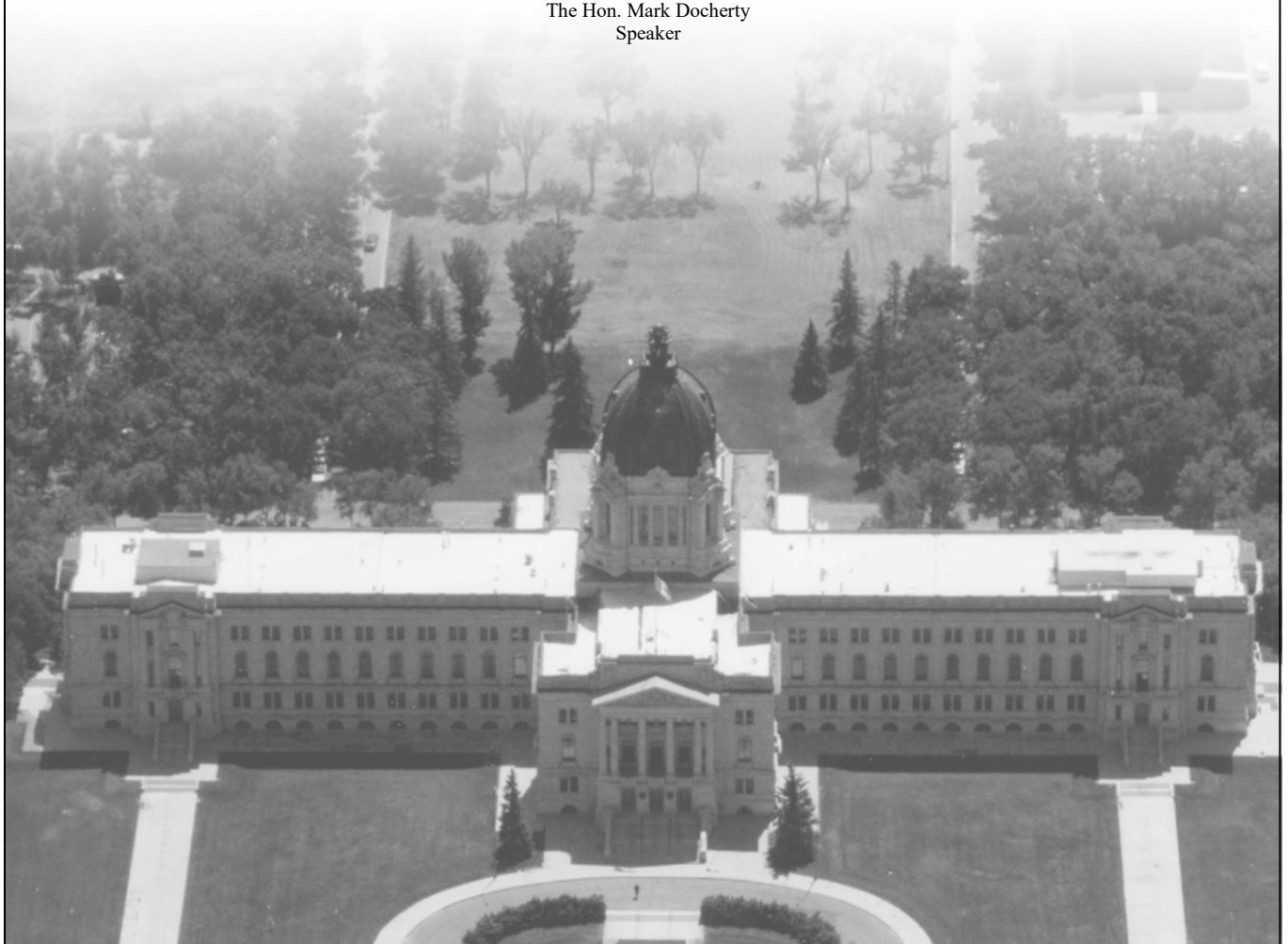
FOURTH SESSION - TWENTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE

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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Wotherspoon, Trent — Regina Rosemont (NDP)
Wyant, Hon. Gordon — Saskatoon Northwest (SP)
Young, Colleen — Lloydminster (SP)

Vacant — Regina Walsh Acres
Vacant — Saskatoon Eastview

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

Clerks-at-the-Table

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Principal Clerk — Iris Lang

Clerk Assistant — Kathy Burianyk

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[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

The prayer reads as follows:

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Mr. Buckingham: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to present a petition from 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 Saskatoon and North Battleford. I do so present.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present petitions on behalf of concerned residents. These have been hard and heavy times for so many. For many that face racism, it's been like that for generations or for lifetimes, Mr. Speaker. In face of recent tragedy, loss, hate, and racism, people have been rising up to clearly say that black lives matter and that Indigenous lives matter and to call for justice, to call for change, and to call for a better tomorrow.

One such person that's been a part of that voice is Latoya Reid, a Regina resident who has organized a very important petition. Latoya Reid is a social worker, a health educator, an addictions counsellor, a mom, and an incredibly inspiring community leader.

The petition makes the following points:

We, the undersigned residents of the province of Saskatchewan, wish to bring to your attention the following: that racism needs to be understood as a traumatic experience and that racism and racialized experiences can have detrimental impacts on the mental health of black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour; that mental health issues relating to racism and depression affect people of all ages, education, income levels, and cultures, and many suffer in silence due to the lack of adequate support; that systemic and structural racism within mainstream mental health care can reinforce trauma if we continue to maintain the status quo from the dominate Eurocentric perspective that is often used to treat racialized groups; that Saskatchewan does not have in-hospital advocacy and supports for black people who experience difficulties and barriers in accessing health care or an effective care plan.

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on the Government of Saskatchewan to take the following action: invest in mental health supports for black people and other racialized people; reduce barriers to accessing mental health supports and commit to funding affordable mental health, housing, homelessness, community outreach, employment support, and harm reduction programs to support marginalized groups; ensure social agencies serving black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour are funded equitably; remove the barriers for black and other marginalized groups to access provincial funding; create an anti-black racism secretariat, charged with articulating and delivering a provincial anti-black racism strategy to combat anti-black racism and address discrimination in provincial institutions, policies, programs, and services; develop an anti-racism work plan for the provincial government and municipalities; and engage, support, fund, and build capacity of ethnocultural communities to amplify their anti-racism initiatives.

These petitions today are signed by concerned residents of Regina, from others throughout Saskatchewan as well. I've got many petitions right here, and in fact hundreds of others have been signed online, Mr. Speaker. I so submit.

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

Ms. Rancourt: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of residents of La Ronge and area that are calling for enhanced internet services in the tri-community area. The tri-community is the 14th most populated community in Saskatchewan, but has slower internet service than many communities with smaller populations. Saskatchewan has a growing rural and urban digital divide when it comes to internet access and affordability. High-speed internet is a very important service that people use more than ever when it comes to education, small business, work, communication, or to stay informed.

Mr. Speaker, I'll read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the government of Saskatchewan take steps to ensure that high-speed internet is available and affordable for residents of La Ronge, Air Ronge, and the Lac La Ronge Indian Band.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by many residents in northern Saskatchewan. I do so present.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Wood River.

Man With Lung Disease Improvises Exercise Areas

Hon. Mr. Marit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise and recognize a very dear friend of mine, Dale Roach of Moose Jaw.

In 2009 Dale was diagnosed with severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, commonly known as COPD. He then began treatment at the pulmonary rehabilitation program at Moose Jaw Hospital where he would be able to receive physical therapy. This community was very important to Dale, and through their exercise programs he is able to manage his COPD.

However, when COVID-19 arrived, many rehab facilities like this one had to close. It was particularly impactful for those suffering from respiratory conditions. Dale and his fellow participants feared that being unable to exercise would cause them to lose their hard-earned progress.

So he found a way for people with lung disease to once again exercise together while being able to socially distance and stay healthy. He converted his backyard into his own pulmonary rehabilitation program. Dale used improvised materials to make exercise areas while still ensuring the stations were 6 feet apart. Now Moose Jaw residents with lung disease can continue their progress.

Dale's efforts are a great example of the perseverance that has been shown by so many Saskatchewan residents during this time. I would ask that everyone join me in thanking Dale.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Provincial Budget

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan deserve a full accounting of the government's finances. Saskatchewan people have done what the government has asked. They've stepped up to help flatten the curve at a real personal cost. This budget was the government's chance to live up to their end of the bargain and give the people of Saskatchewan a full accounting and a real plan for recovery.

Unfortunately this budget does not live up to that test at all. It is a cut-and-paste job from three months ago in pre-COVID conditions. Instead of a budget that responds to the needs of people, we have a budget that takes the unprecedented step of removing future-year projections from the budget. Things like projected economic growth, debt, deficit, revenues are all missing.

And it leaves out the exact period that the Finance minister says will be required to return to balance — no accountability. The budget also hides government spending plans behind a \$200 million fund that will mean spending decisions, budget decisions will be made after this legislature is finished its sitting. This budget should have answered the questions that Saskatchewan people are asking. Instead it leaves more questions and more uncertainty.

This simply isn't good enough. These are serious times. The budget presented in this Assembly is simply not a serious document. The people of Saskatchewan deserve better.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood.

Thank You, Saskatchewan

Ms. Lambert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few months, we have seen what it truly means to be a community. From hanging painted hearts in the windows to organizing support for our most vulnerable, Saskatchewan has made an exceptional effort in pulling together by staying apart.

When the pandemic arrived, many of our Saskatchewan-based designers quickly halted their daily operations and used their expertise in sewing to start producing masks for communities and volunteers. Hamper and delivery services for the elderly or immune compromised were set up in almost every city and town to ensure everyone had the essentials they needed. And we even saw people building medical equipment like ventilators and face shields right in their homes.

Mr. Speaker, we witnessed many local businesses adapt to these unprecedented times in a creative way. From distilleries producing batches of sanitizer to restaurants donating their own supplies to food banks, so many found a way to lend a hand.

Mr. Speaker, we have said many times in this House how important it is to find the helpers. Well, Saskatchewan, we see you and we thank you for your help and for being such a great neighbour in your community. On behalf of this entire Assembly, thank you, Saskatchewan.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Provincial Budget

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday we gave the Premier a chance to come clean, to return to the legislature with real numbers and a real plan. And on so many occasions this Premier has had to and ultimately has backed down from bad decisions, Mr. Speaker. He planned to run a snap election during a pandemic. He backed down from that. Tried to slip through a pre-pandemic budget. Sort of backed down from that; we kind of got the same budget after all. We saw him try to keep the legislature closed for the entire summer until after the election. He backed down from that, Mr. Speaker.

But now, given the chance to come forward with real numbers and a real plan, instead of backing down he's doubling down on this idea of hiding his true plans until after the election, Mr. Speaker. It's strange that this is the time that he chooses not to back down; this is the time that he chooses to stick to his guns. What is it that he's so desperate to hide that this is the hill he'll die on?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I do thank the member opposite for the question with respect to this Legislative Assembly and what we've been able to accomplish in this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker. And we're quite proud that we've been able to pass the legislative agenda on behalf of the people of this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, very shortly later today we hope that we'll be

passing a budget here in Saskatchewan. A budget that was introduced about two and a half weeks ago. The only budget to date since COVID that has been introduced in the nation of Canada, Mr. Speaker, and very shortly will be the only budget that has been passed post-COVID.

Mr. Speaker, that budget included increases in health care funding. Yes, we had those increases in the original document that we had put forward, but those increases continued into this document, Mr. Speaker, because they are important to the people and the people that we serve in this province.

We had increases in education funding, Mr. Speaker. Yes, those increases in education funding continued into the budget that was introduced here most recently because they are important to the communities and to the people and to, quite frankly, the next generation that's going to run this province, Mr. Speaker.

We had increases in social services budget, Mr. Speaker, and then a number of other increases to support our businesses, our families, and our communities throughout the response that we have been required to engineer with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know the Sask Party playbook and we saw it on full display in 2016 when they hid the numbers before the election, and then the cuts and sell-offs that followed very shortly after, Mr. Speaker. The only thing that's surprising this time is how blatant this Premier is being about hiding those numbers.

But then I guess it's not that surprising after all. This is the same Premier who has nothing to say to families who are worried about the struggles of seniors in long-term care, the same Premier who has nothing to say to families who have no idea how they're going to be able to access or afford child care, Mr. Speaker — nothing in this budget that speaks to those needs.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier refuses to come back in September and reveal the real numbers. What does he have to say today to those families that are squeezed, that are really concerned, about why he's chosen to hide the real information from them and all of Saskatchewan?

[13:45]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the real numbers were there earlier in March. They're there again in this budget, Mr. Speaker. There is nothing being hidden in this budget. As I said, it is the only budget that has been introduced and will shortly be passed here in . . .

An Hon. Member: — It's not very good. That's the problem.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, the difference between being forthright and transparent with the people of the province and being judgmental are two different conversations.

It's all right for us to have policies that differ in this House, Mr.

Speaker, and I would say that, quite frankly, that has been the strength of this democracy over the course of the now in excess of last 100 years. We can have policies on this side of the House; the opposition is going to have policies on their side of the House. And that's fine. They will differ and the people ultimately of this province will then have the opportunity to choose who's going to sit on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

That is why we are going to take this debate to the people of the province. We're going to take, yes, this budget, Mr. Speaker, to the people of the province. The opposition don't think it's very good. The people might think an investment in health care is pretty good. The people might think an investment in mental health care is pretty good. The people of this province might think a \$2 billion booster shot on infrastructure going directly into their communities and strengthening the economy in their communities is pretty good. We're going to find out very shortly, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, New Democrats are ready to do the work. But you also know that this Premier doesn't want to do the work, and he doesn't want to come back in September. And we understand that. We get why he wouldn't want to, Mr. Speaker. We get why he wouldn't want to give a true picture of his plans to the people of Saskatchewan. We get why he thinks he can get away with this cut-and-paste budget, with hiding the information, Mr. Speaker.

But this is crucial information — those projections, those plans to how to return to balance, those plans to invest in people. People need to know that. People need to know what this Premier plans to cut, what he plans to sell off, what ways he plans to make life more expensive for Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker. We get it. We get that he'd rather duck and cover, but what the Premier doesn't get is that the people of Saskatchewan expect us to do the work, Mr. Speaker. The people of Saskatchewan want full answers.

What is it that this Premier has in mind for after the election that he's so desperate to hide from Saskatchewan people?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, with respect to the budget that was introduced here, the Provincial Auditor is quite certain that it is a budget that is delivered to the people of this province. Mr. Speaker, not only is this the only province to introduce and very shortly pass a budget, this is the only province to come forward with their public accounts on time, as all of the other provinces are looking for delays to deliver the public accounts.

This is a province that is operating from a financial perspective as transparent as anywhere in the nation. Mr. Speaker, quite simply, I agree with the Provincial Auditor that there is nothing that is being hidden here. What is being hidden, Mr. Speaker, is the plan from the leader of the NDP [New Democratic Party].

Mr. Speaker, the NDP has put forward an economic plan, a so-called economic plan. It's not costed out. They're not telling the people of the province what this is going to cost. He isn't telling anyone how he's going to pay for it, whether he's going

to raise taxes. Quite likely will raise taxes on the people and the corporations that employ people in this province. And when questioned last Tuesday about his economic plan, he said, no, no, that isn't really an economic plan, it's more of a discussion paper, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's the members of this side of the House that have a plan to recover and grow the economy in Saskatchewan. We have the faith that the Saskatchewan people will be able to do it, Mr. Speaker. It's the members opposite that do not have faith in the people of this province.

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

Supply Management of Personal Protective Equipment

Ms. Mowat: — Mr. Speaker, the Premier is rewriting reality again, and he knows it.

Earlier this year the federal government came under fire for having disposed of millions of expired N95 masks from Saskatchewan stockpiles. For a government that leaps at every single opportunity to pick a fight with the feds, the Sask Party was strangely silent on this issue, Mr. Speaker, and now we have an understanding of why. Records from the Health Authority show us that as part of the costly lean experiment, this government threw away more than 160,000 N95 masks from the pandemic room in Regina.

To the minister: how much PPE [personal protective equipment] was leaned away from other facilities?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the former regional health authorities, before the health authorities were amalgamated across the province, I understand that there were a number of pandemic supplies that I think, when they expired, possibly were disposed of, Mr. Speaker. I think that's a number of years ago. I think the same process happened when the NDP were in government, Mr. Speaker.

Again that's one of the benefits of having an amalgamated health authority across the entire province, Mr. Speaker. There's more coordination. There's more planning. We're going to work on that for pandemic supplies moving forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Mr. Speaker, the lean initiative was all theirs. We have heard from health care workers across the province about shortages and difficulties accessing PPE. Meanwhile under this government's costly lean exercise, they paid US [United States] consultant John Black tens of millions of dollars to coach health care professionals in the life-changing magic of throwing away health supplies that are vital to our province's pandemic stockpile. These inventory reduction initiatives hurt our pandemic preparedness, Mr. Speaker.

We've learned that a lean event was held in the pandemic room

— by participants that called themselves Team Gone Viral — to declutter the space. Of the 588,000 items in that room, close to half were disposed of, including 166,000 N95 masks. They Marie Kondo'd our pandemic supply warehouse, Mr. Speaker, and it wasn't joy that was sparked with the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] after they raised the alarm about short supplies in March.

Of the hundreds of thousands of items that this government leaned away in that pricey exercise, exactly how many had to be replaced once the pandemic hit?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to first of all clarify the first part of the preamble that the member opposite had said. She's talking about shortages of PPE. Mr. Speaker, while many areas of the country and many areas of the world were concerned about shortages of PPE — indeed we were in Saskatchewan as well — there were no cases of shortage. Mr. Speaker, the SHA did a very good job in procurement and continue to do that, continue to build our supply in the event of a second wave.

Mr. Speaker, you know, as far as the members opposite, the Leader of the Opposition likes to use the phrase “cut-and-paste.” I find it interesting that now it seems that we're going to be running the next election on lean and on selling the Crowns. Mr. Speaker, I think they've cut and pasted their platform from the last election.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Mr. Speaker, that is not what front-line workers are saying. This government was caught asleep at the wheel when it came to the pandemic. The Premier, busy plotting a snap election, either didn't know or didn't care about the struggles that health care workers were facing accessing masks, swabs, and other PPE. Front-line health care workers were raising the alarm about extremely limited supplies of badly needed equipment and were scrambling to ensure that the health system had adequate supplies to keep people safe. It must have come as a slap in the face to these workers when the Premier denied there were shortages of supplies on March 16th.

And now we're learning that this government paid US consultants to lead nurses through a spring cleaning of our pandemic supplies, with the explicit goal of donating, recycling, or trashing 50 per cent of the inventory. Will the Premier apologize to the front-line workers he left scrambling because of supply shortages that his government created, while he himself was denying that those shortages even existed?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, there's just so much wrong with that statement. First of all, the member opposite is making it sound as if the masks from a number of years ago hadn't expired. She makes it sound like they were destroyed just shortly before COVID or something, Mr. Speaker, and to continuously stand up and say there was a shortage.

Mr. Speaker, were we concerned about more procurement

because supplies were tight around the world? All jurisdictions were concerned. Mr. Speaker, there wasn't a shortage. To my knowledge, I believe most supplies, there was a minimum at least 30 days at the lowest point. The SHA's done a very good job of procurement since then. We're going to continue to work on that. We're going to learn from this experience, Mr. Speaker.

But it almost seems like the members opposite are disappointed that COVID didn't hit Saskatchewan harder. Mr. Speaker, look at . . . Well the Leader of the Opposition's chirping from his seat again, Mr. Speaker, the man who . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order now. Come to order. No. Leader of the Opposition, come to order. I recognize the minister.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Finish up your answer.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, the person who said he was going to do politics different. Instead more drive-by smears, more down-in-the-gutter politics. That's how he does politics different.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Mr. Speaker, unbelievable. Unbelievable. The CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] found that expired N95 masks have use in emergency situations. And the fact is, it's this government's responsibility to replace and manage health supplies, not to spark joy by turning full warehouses into empty ones. Thousands of supplies paid for by Saskatchewan people went to waste on their watch, leaving us with critical shortages when it counted the most.

Mr. Speaker, in committee, the deputy minister acknowledged that the lean initiative's reduction of inventory and the move to just-in-time management wasn't working. The high-priced lean consultants' austerity model left our supply chain deeply vulnerable. The minister did not answer the question. How many other lean sorting parties were organized to throw out PPE supplies? And what is this government's plan to ensure that we never again fall prey to just-in-time shortages like the ones we experienced in March?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, understand the situation of what the members opposite are trying to do. They're trying to blur the lines between some supplies that were disposed of — I believe it was six or seven years ago — before the current structure of the Saskatchewan Health Authority, Mr. Speaker. And they're making that sound like somehow that had something to do with . . .

Mr. Speaker, are we going to learn from what happened in this case? Absolutely we are. Officials are working on how we can ensure that pandemic supplies flow through the process better. But, Mr. Speaker, the pandemic supplies . . . The member opposite in fact talks about the CDC saying that expired masks

can be used. In some instances that happened in Saskatchewan. There were some that expired. They were sent away for testing. They were still adequate to use. That's what we did. But for the members opposite to try to inflame the situation like something that happened years ago somehow had an impact today, Mr. Speaker. That's just not the case.

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

Rent Deferrals and Moratorium on Evictions

Ms. Rancourt: — Across the board, the Sask Party has failed Saskatchewan people throughout the pandemic. Another rent day has come and gone and thousands of people are still unable to pay rent, never mind the payments they've deferred to make ends meet during the pandemic. Renters in Saskatchewan were \$30 million in arrears in June, and it's expected that another \$10 million went unpaid at the first of this month.

The Minister of Justice says that he will allow evictions to resume before the end of the summer. It's hard to imagine in this economy that renters can come up with all they've deferred during this unprecedented time. Mr. Speaker, some hard-working families are bound to lose their home. What's the plan to keep a roof over people's heads?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, our province followed nearly every other jurisdiction in Canada in having a ban or a lifting of evictions during the period of time for the pandemic. What's happening right now, Mr. Speaker, whether the individuals across the way like it or not, people are starting to return to work. The economy is starting to rebound. Things are happening as they should and as we hope.

The pandemic is something we've never gone through before. I hope we never go through it again. Mr. Speaker, to the people that have gone . . . and been unable to pay their rent, I would urge them to contact their landlord and start to work with their landlord. Failing that, I would urge them to meet with the Office of Residential Tenancies who will develop a protocol on a situation-by-situation basis to ensure that people are appropriately treated and fairly treated, Mr. Speaker.

[14:00]

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

Ms. Rancourt: — The eviction moratorium was put in place on March 26th. It's been over three months and over 72,000 jobs have been lost, yet this budget hasn't allocated a dime to help renters get back on their feet and stay in their homes. This government has copy-pasted their pre-pandemic budget, and it's leaving Saskatchewan people down. It doesn't work for health, it doesn't work for education, and it's not working for renters. Will the government come up with a solution before people are faced with eviction?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, we're following suit with what took place in other jurisdictions across the nation. Virtually all of them are now lifting the moratorium. People are proceeding, and in our case the staff from the Office of Residential Tenancies are starting to go back to work, ramping up so that they can hear applications. And, Mr. Speaker, what I'd urge the members opposite is to let those people do their good work. These are people that are caring and compassionate.

People should work with their landlords. If people have chosen to take a rent holiday without good reason, the Office of Residential Tenancies will make decisions that way. If people have genuinely lost their jobs because of the pandemic or because of COVID, then the Residential Tenancies officers will make appropriate decisions on that basis. But I would urge everybody that has not been paying their rent for the last two or three months to sit down and work, make a plan, and start to come forward with something, Mr. Speaker.

That's what we're trying to do and, Mr. Speaker, it's a reasonable approach. And we want to be fair to landlords and we want to be fair to tenants. There's a number of supports that are around for people that have lost jobs, that are getting federal income, and we're going to deal with it that way, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Rancourt: — Renters aren't the only ones in a bind. Landlords were seeing historically high vacancy rates before COVID-19. Unprecedented levels of eviction in an already precarious housing market doesn't work well for renters or landlords, and it's a recipe for further strain on an already troubled economy. The contingency slush fund has already been spent six ways from Sunday. We need cash in hand to ensure renters and landlords can rebuild their relationships and keep people in their homes. Will the minister admit they don't have a plan to avoid a housing crisis?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I would urge people that are unable to find accommodation to work through Saskatchewan housing authority, to work through the Ministry of Social Services. Mr. Speaker, we have a strong and vibrant economy. It's starting to come back and starting to get better and better all the time. We're not going to negotiate individual cases on the floor of this Assembly. What we do is we've got the Office of Residential Tenancies that will deal with that situation.

Mr. Speaker, we want to have a fairly rapid return to a normal situation where people start to pay their rent. They work through a repayment plan that will be set up through the Office of Residential Tenancies. And we're not going to void or try and take away the discretion that's found in the Office of Residential Tenancies, Mr. Speaker.

The members opposite would like nothing else to try and debate these things on a case-by-case basis on the floor of the Assembly. Mr. Speaker, we don't negotiate union contracts. We don't negotiate a lot of things on the floor of the Assembly, and that's going to be one of them, in spite of the noise that those people over there want to make and continue to chirp away because

they've got nothing else between now and October 26th.

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

Provincial Budget

Mr. Pedersen: — Mr. Speaker, over and over, people in my constituency tell me that they want to see a plan to address the suicide and mental health crisis in our province. They tell me how difficult it is to find affordable, quality long-term care for their loved ones. They tell me how much their children have been struggling in schools because of the Sask Party's failure to invest in education.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the things that matter — the people we care about, our health, our communities — there's only failure from this Premier. With the recycled and reused pre-COVID budget, we see another failure. We see a Premier presiding over the biggest deficit in Saskatchewan's history. We see a Premier who's hiding what their real plan is to deal with that. When will the Premier quit hiding behind his recycled budget and tell us what services he'll cut and what Crowns he'll sell?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have said on the floor of this Assembly, I have said to the media outside of the Assembly, we have no intentions to cut programs or sell off Crowns. That is . . . We are going to recover and build the province. That's what we're going to do, and that is because we believe in the people of Saskatchewan, and we believe that they will help build this great province just as they've done over the past decade, Mr. Speaker. We've seen our economy grow. We've seen our population grow.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to know what the members opposite's plans are because quite frankly they come up with these ideas that were cut-and-paste ideas from before. They have given no idea how they're going to pay for it. The Leader of the Opposition has said now's the time to borrow, and yet now they're criticizing borrowing, Mr. Speaker. They have not committed to how they're going to pay for it, and they have said that balanced budgets don't matter, Mr. Speaker. That's what that member opposite has said. The Leader of the Opposition has said it's just an arbitrary number, and it really doesn't matter.

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

Mr. Pedersen: — Mr. Speaker, once again the Premier sits on his hands instead of getting to work. The Premier's presiding over the biggest deficit in Saskatchewan's history, and he won't tell us what's in store for the good hard-working people of Saskatchewan. That's not leading. That's hiding.

Mr. Speaker, leaders need more than bluster, more than slogans. The Sask Party has spent millions of dollars sloganeering, but they couldn't find any money for homeless shelters. They couldn't find any money to make AgriStability work. Let's see the Premier stand up, quit hiding, and tell the people of this province what services he's going to cut and which Crowns he's going to sell.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, quite frankly I answered that question, so it's a cut-and-paste question yet again. I think they're getting very good at it. We have no intentions of cutting any programs. We committed to that certainty in this budget, Mr. Speaker. We committed to the certainty of not only the programs that were in place that the citizens of this province rely on and expect, Mr. Speaker, we added to them.

We added to the education budget. We added to the health budget, Mr. Speaker. We increased funding to our community-based organizations. We committed to mental health, something that that member opposite just raised as a concern. We agree. It is a concern. That's why we increased the budget significantly in this budget, Mr. Speaker, a budget they're not going to support, by the way.

We committed to building schools. We committed to building health care facilities. That's what we're going to do. That's what we're committing to. So to just stand there and say we don't answer the question. We keep answering. They just don't listen. That's the problem, Mr. Speaker.

Whereas they will not tell us how they will pay for their commitments, how their commitments are going to work. Who are they going to tax? What taxes are they going to raise? What are they going to cut, Mr. Speaker, and how much are they going to go into debt?

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

Ms. Sproule: — Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — What's your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Ms. Sproule: — Pursuant to rule 51(e) which prohibits the use of offensive, provocative, or threatening language, the Minister of Health in his reply to a question used such language when he intimated that this side of the House was disappointed that COVID wasn't more serious or didn't come sooner.

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

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Just to respond to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Go ahead.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Mr. Speaker, I was listening very carefully. I heard nothing that was unparliamentary that even came close to 51(e). They're upset at the way that the Minister of Health responded. It doesn't mean it was unparliamentary. I rule that you take this point not well, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — We certainly got rather personal. I know that it's the second-last day. We're getting dangerously close if not right onto the line on a number of occasions. Given the fact there was some leeway given in terms of some of the responses or the

questions from this side, we'll leave it for today. We're going to move on.

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 115 to 131.

The Speaker: — Ordered 115 to 131.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Clerk: — Committee of Finance.

The Speaker: — I do now leave the Chair for the Committee of Finance.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

The Chair: — I'll call the Committee of Finance to order. Pursuant to the sessional order of June 15th, 2020, there are two items of business before the committee today. The first are the estimates of Executive Council, and once consideration of these estimates are concluded, the committee will report back to the Assembly. Once that is done, the Committee of Finance will reconvene to consider financial resolutions.

General Revenue Fund Executive Council Vote 10

Subvote (EX01)

The Chair: — The first item of business are the estimates of Executive Council, vote 10, found on page 57 of the Estimates book.

Before we begin, I'll advise the committee of the process. First I will call on the Premier to introduce his officials. Then I will call Executive Council, vote 10, subvote 1 and at that time I will ask the Premier to make his opening comments. I have explained the difference in past years about this committee versus standing committee, and I think everybody is familiar with that, so we will dispense with that. So at this time, I would ask the Premier to introduce the officials that he has with him here today.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I'll just take a moment to introduce the officials, not the elected members that are in the House in this very unusual setting . . . sitting and setting, Mr. Speaker.

I have to my left the deputy minister to the Premier, Mr. Cam Swan. Behind Cam a couple of rows, Mr. Speaker, is Kristin Fry, the executive director of corporate services. Mr. Speaker, I have to my right Reg Downs, who is a senior advisor to the Premier. In the back here I have Michelle Lang. She's the executive director of House business and research. And, Mr. Speaker, right behind me and to my immediate left is my chief of staff, Shannon Andrews.

The Chair: — The first item of business is Executive Council, vote 10, subvote (EX01), central management and services. The Premier may proceed with any opening comments he may have.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you again, Mr. Chair. We are nearing the end of, as I said, what is a very unusual setting and sitting. It has now turned from a spring sitting into a summer sitting. And I should start by thanking members on all sides of the House for their patience and their co-operation during what is a very unique time.

I'm happy that we were able to introduce this budget in this Legislative Assembly, the first government in Canada to do so since the COVID-19 pandemic and the first province to give that budget a proper legislative scrutiny.

I'm also happy that we are able to complete our legislative agenda here, Mr. Speaker, to pass the bills that were before this Legislative Assembly.

This session in many ways is rather symbolic of what is going on everywhere else in Saskatchewan in this day and age. We in government are, yes, still getting things done, but we're going about it in a very different manner to keep those around us safe — our family, our friends, in particular those that are elderly and vulnerable in our community.

So before I begin, I want to take this opportunity once again to give thanks to the people of Saskatchewan, as I have done many, many times, for their hard work and for their sacrifice during this COVID pandemic, Mr. Speaker. Over the past months, we have asked so many to do so much. We've asked so many in this province to stay home, to limit or delay a visit with a family member or a loved one, and when necessary we've asked them to temporarily close their business. This has been and it continues to be an absolutely unprecedented situation that governments across Canada and around the world were required to respond to and respond to at an incredible pace.

So while I know in this province that our response and the plan that we have put forward, it's not always been perfect, but by any objective measure I think we in Saskatchewan are doing quite well. Our rate of cases, as I've said before, it's 76 per cent below the national average. And while we mourn the loss of each and every one of the 14 individuals who have passed due to COVID-19 — and we do mourn with their family and their friends — this province has a remarkably low fatality rate when you compare it with not only the rest of Canada but other areas of the world. We're 95 per cent below the fatality rate, the Canadian fatality rate, 97 per cent below the US fatality rate. Again, all of this is thanks to what the people of this province have done.

[14:30]

However I do want to extend some gratitude to a few others that have played a very, very important role in our Saskatchewan success. I want to take the opportunity to thank our chief medical health officer, Dr. Shahab, and his team. They have provided us with very careful, with very thoughtful and, I would say, very effective advice, and for that I thank Dr. Shahab.

Thanks to everyone working on the front lines in our health

system, everyone in the long-term care centres and the hospitals, but also everyone that is out doing the contact tracing, the testing at the Roy Romanow Provincial Lab, and keeping everyone safe in our health care facilities. Thanks to all those who continued to work to provide those essential services throughout this time. People in community after community that went to work each and every day during this pandemic, thank you to you for what you've done.

And a special note of gratitude to everyone who stayed home. Sometimes the most effective thing you can do is stay at home. The fact of the matter is that everyone in Saskatchewan has done their part, and it's working. It's working by the numbers that we see.

Now we understand that this pandemic is far from over, but Saskatchewan people have shown that we can continue to keep working. And we can keep our economy and our health care system and other important services functional and operating. We've done that. We've shown we can do that and we will continue to do it. So once again, to everyone in this province, a very large thank you.

Today's estimates are an opportunity for us and for everyone in Saskatchewan to see some different visions, two very different visions, I would put forward, of this province. There are policies from both sides that, they'll be different. And I'm here to say that that is okay. These differences are precisely what bring us, what have brought us to this Legislative Assembly for over a century now, and ultimately have brought us to a good place of debate, a debate that demonstrates the very importance of this democracy that we all support.

As this pandemic started, our government most certainly had confidence in the people of Saskatchewan to do the right thing. We expected they would. As a result, we did not close down as much of our economy as many other areas of the nation. While every province saw significant job loss, and we're no different, more people in Saskatchewan continued to work throughout this pandemic than in any other province. In fact 87 per cent of the jobs remained throughout our COVID-19 response in Saskatchewan. And today we do have the second-lowest unemployment rate in the country, much of that due to the courage of the people that went to work each and every day throughout this COVID pandemic response, Mr. Speaker, and the fact that they kept the people beside them safe.

Most importantly, at the same time we have been able to control the spread. In April our government released our Re-Open Saskatchewan plan, the first province in the country to do so, because we know how important it was to reopen our economy so quickly, as quickly as possible but also as safely as possible.

There are some in this Assembly that disagreed with that plan, Mr. Speaker. For example, the Leader of the Opposition stated that we should not move forward with phase 2, which was arguably the largest phase in terms of the number of businesses that were going to have the opportunity to reopen and the number of people that were going to have the opportunity to go back to work. So one can only assume that if it was up to them, Mr. Speaker, we would still be in phase 1 of our Re-Open Saskatchewan plan, with thousands of businesses still closed and thousands of people out of work.

That's fair enough, Mr. Chair, that's fair enough. That's their position. We accept that as their position. They didn't think that we could reopen safely. They didn't believe in Saskatchewan and they did not believe in the people of this province. That's the difference, Mr. Speaker, and we accept that.

And now the difference is even more clear as we have been talking about our budget and the Saskatchewan Party's plan for our economy to recover and to grow. The NDP simply doesn't think that's possible. They don't think it's possible to balance a budget without tax, without cuts and closures and raising taxes, Mr. Speaker, and of course that isn't very surprising to many people in this province because that's not how they operated when they had the opportunity, even if there wasn't a pandemic. They closed hospitals; they closed schools; they closed long-term care facilities; they let our highways fall apart, Mr. Speaker, in this province. They got rid of hundreds of doctors, nurses, and teachers.

Because that's what you do when you don't believe in Saskatchewan, when you don't believe that this province can grow. The Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Chair, believes something very, very different. We believe in this province. We believe in Saskatchewan. We believe in the people of Saskatchewan and we know that this economy, our economy can recover and grow, and we know that Saskatchewan is going to come back not just to the way things were before, but they're going to come back bigger and better than ever.

So that's a pretty clear difference between the parties that we see in this Assembly, Mr. Chair. You have a Saskatchewan Party that believes in this province, believes in Saskatchewan, believes in the people of the province, believes in our economy, believes in the fact that it can recover and grow, and then an NDP opposition that simply doesn't. That's the question that our province is facing today, Mr. Chair. Which party? Which party has the best policy to lead Saskatchewan's economic recovery — a Saskatchewan Party that has a plan for growth or an NDP Party that does not?

So I appreciate the opportunity for this debate, Mr. Chair. I'm looking forward to it, not only the debate that we've had over the course of the past number of days and weeks leading up to and including today's debate in this Assembly, but more importantly, Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to the debate that will continue in community after community from corner to corner of this province in the months ahead. Thank you.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it's good to see you in that Chair today, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We know this will be the last time you'll be presiding over one of these, and we want to thank you for your service throughout the years and the way you take that work on with a great sense of fairness and respect for this place. Thank you very much.

I also want to join with the Premier and thank the people of Saskatchewan for the support, for all of the members on both sides and our roles as representatives, and for the incredible way in which Saskatchewan people have stepped up in response to this really challenging time. People on the front lines in health care, people on the front lines in public service, in retail, in all

sorts of fields have had to see their worlds change and change so quickly, and people have been ready to make those changes and ready to make the sacrifices needed to continue to interact with each other, continue to have the economic activity, and most importantly keep people safe and save lives. And we are very thankful to the people of Saskatchewan for that work.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the people who do so much work around this building and in particular at this time that has been a great challenge — Sarge, the folks from Hansard, the folks from the Clerks' Table, all of the folks in security, and all of the really important roles that have had to be rethought and reimagined so that we could do this work safely now. I really do want to thank you for going above and beyond at this time. It really does mean a lot because the work in this House matters, and for people to have been flexible enough to make this happen is really a testament to their commitment to our democracy, a testament to the commitment to the people of Saskatchewan that is served by it.

I do want to thank the Premier for his remarks. It was a bit disappointing to see how little time it got into the imaginative, but oh well, this is a debate and we will debate. And we know that the Premier didn't want to be here today. This was not part of his summer plan. His plan was to leave the legislature shut down, not introduce a budget until after the election, as long as he possibly could. He did not want to get to this point and resisted every step along the way, Mr. Speaker. And you know, we understand why. We understand why he didn't want to do that because when we come back into this House, people are looking for a budget with a plan, looking for a budget that means something, that'll make a difference in people's lives. And he didn't have one.

They didn't have a budget that was going to work for Saskatchewan people, so they chose to bring in the budget they made before the pandemic — a budget that had nothing to do with today's fiscal reality, that they tried to sneak through before a state of emergency. But instead of actually taking the three months since then to write a proper, new budget, they just brought the same one back.

It doesn't make a lot of sense, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't make a lot of sense to see no investment in long-term care, no investment in child care, no change in the expenditures in education and health care which are under new and serious pressures, Mr. Speaker. And this is their pre-election budget. This is when they're trying to win us over and show us that they've got a big plan.

You understand why they didn't want to show us this, and we really understand why they don't want to show us what their plans are for if they get re-elected, Mr. Speaker. We know that despite what the Finance minister has said repeatedly, the idea of balancing this budget in three to four years without cuts, Crown sell-offs, and tax increases — under this government, it's never going to happen. Because that's what they know how to do as well.

We were all here in 2017 and, Mr. Speaker, we remember Bill 40. We remember STC [Saskatchewan Transportation Company]. We remember a doubling of the PST [provincial sales tax]. We remember all the ways in which this government chose to try to balance the books, never quite got there, but chose to try

to balance the budget on the backs of Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker. That's what the Sask Party knows how to do as their playbook, and that is why they are continuing to hide from Saskatchewan people their real plans.

Which brings me to my first question, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We've been clear that this budget isn't what we need at this time. It doesn't meet the needs of Saskatchewan people. It's not in keeping with the time. And it certainly doesn't share any outlook beyond March 31st, no projections on revenue and expenditure, Mr. Speaker.

And now when the Premier was asked about that, about that plan, how the Finance minister was going to balance the budget in three to four years, yet they didn't have any of those numbers, he said, and I quote, "The Finance Minister knows more than I do." So I'm wondering if since then he's had the chance to chat with her. He's refused to share what was shared with him, but I'd like to know what has been shared with him.

So to the Premier: during the preparations for this budget or since it's been released, has the Premier seen any briefing notes, any slide decks, or other information that contains those revenue and expenditure projections beyond March 31st?

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — The answer to the Leader of the Opposition's question is no, I have not. Mr. Speaker, what this budget is, and we had assembled a budget back in March, Mr. Speaker, and the Leader of the Opposition is correct: much of that budget did find its way into the budget that was introduced here in the Legislative Assembly two-and-a-half weeks ago, Mr. Speaker.

In that particular budget was a health care increase of about \$288 million, up about 5 per cent, Mr. Speaker. That held true through to the budget that we introduced, as we felt that was a necessary investment. Mr. Speaker, of that \$288 million, that 5 per cent increase, \$140 million went to the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Mr. Speaker, in that investment overall, that health care investment of \$6.18 billion this year in this budget, \$434.5 million went to mental health care and addictions, Mr. Speaker, up significantly over the last number of years and continues to climb. And we continue to focus on outcomes when it comes to mental health care and addictions. And I'm sure we'll talk about that as we make our way through this afternoon.

There's \$20 million to address some of the surgical wait times that we have, Mr. Speaker. That's the equivalent of paying for about 3,700 additional surgeries. \$142 million in capital spending in our health care system, Mr. Speaker, as well as just under \$16 million, including \$16 million for a new 72-bed long-term seniors' care facility in the community of Meadow Lake.

Mr. Speaker, those are just a couple of the investments that are in the 5 per cent lift in the health care budget that — yes, to his credit, Mr. Speaker — was in both the spending plan that we had put forward in March and the budget that we introduced the other day because we believed they're the proper investments.

Education, Mr. Speaker, up again, 2.4 per cent. \$1.94 billion was transferred to our boards of education, Mr. Speaker, a total education budget of \$3.36 billion. Yes, that was in our March spending initiatives, also in our budget. We feel it is a valuable investment, a worthwhile investment, Mr. Speaker, and it's an investment that we have many discussions about how do we increase it and increase our education investment with outcomes for that next generation.

In that investment, Mr. Speaker, was \$42 million to address enrolment growth, inflation, as well as to address the collective bargaining agreement that we recently signed with the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, as well as over \$130 million in capital. These are a couple of examples, Mr. Speaker, of some investments that were, yes, in the March budget that we introduced but were also in the . . . Sorry, the March spending intentions, investment intentions that we had released, but also in the budget, Mr. Speaker, because they're valuable investments that are required.

[14:45]

We added to this in the most recent budget, Mr. Speaker, added to these and many other investments with our capital stimulus plan of \$2 billion, taking our capital plan up to seven and a half billion dollars, Mr. Speaker. Three hundred and seventy-five million of that is coming in year one right now. In addition to that is \$150 million for some of our site closure programs, Mr. Speaker, the accelerated site closure programs that we are working with the federal government on.

We had our gaming grant, Mr. Speaker, an emergency response gaming grant, understanding the value that the gaming agreement that we have with First Nations and Indigenous communities across this province, how it's the best gaming agreement in the nation. It's also a gaming agreement, Mr. Speaker, that is the best gaming agreement because it actually benefits many, many communities in this province, Indigenous and otherwise, Mr. Speaker.

We had the small-business emergency payment, the most generous small-business emergency payment of \$50 million. We had a temporary wage supplement, Mr. Speaker, of \$56 million, again a partnership with the federal government — some provincial dollars, some federal dollars — to help those employers but also ensure that people can continue to work throughout our response to this pandemic. The commercial rent assistance, Mr. Speaker, again a partnership with the federal government, just under \$13 million there.

The self-isolation support program to ensure that if people are unable to go to work and do need their wage, Mr. Speaker, we would provide them with \$450 a week for up to two weeks so that they didn't have to make the decision to go to work if they're feeling under the weather, Mr. Speaker. Again, not many if any other jurisdictions across the nation have the self-isolation support program. Additional investments in enhanced court technology to function while we're in this response, Mr. Speaker.

As well as there is a contingency fund in here, Mr. Speaker, and we'll get to talk about that, I'm sure, as the afternoon goes on. But it is labelled as a contingency fund should we have need for additional funding, Mr. Speaker, for whatever this response to

COVID-19 may be. And we will decide where that contingency fund will go if it is required, Mr. Speaker, if we should get into a second wave, if we should have our numbers for some reason start to climb and we need to ensure that we're able to push those back down. So, Mr. Speaker, yes, there is a contingency fund in there but there are many other . . . In total, Mr. Speaker, we have \$910 million in direct investment. That is in addition to the investment intentions that we had put forward in March.

In addition to that, we have 675 million in deferrals for businesses, small businesses, and Saskatchewan people so that they can defer some of the expenses that they may have, Mr. Speaker. And as well we have a number, just under \$148 million of spending that is occurring within ministries where they have had some savings but are able to reappropriate those dollars to their COVID response. So, Mr. Speaker, all told we have an additional 910 million, 675 million, \$147 million that have been present in this budget that were not present in the original investment platform that we had put forward in March.

Mr. Meili: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, when those numbers are omitted, those important numbers beyond March 31st that are standard issue for every budget, it really causes people a lot of concern. What is the government's plan beyond that point?

And especially with this government, people remember 2016 when this government went to an election early without a budget. And they remember 2017 when this government doubled the PST, when this government eliminated STC, introduced their two-step sell-off plan for SaskTel, SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance], and other Crowns with Bill 40, and cut deeply in education and health and social services. Mr. Speaker, people remember what that was like. They remember the damage and they know that this is how this government operates, that this is their playbook.

Now the Premier has said, you know, that the Finance minister knows more than he does, and that's believable. But she has said that three to four years is when they will balance the budget, Mr. Speaker. The question for the Premier is, how does he intend to do that? What does he intend to cut, sell off? Or does he simply believe that the budget will balance itself?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Chair, with respect to decisions that were made a few years ago in a budget here in Saskatchewan, it's exactly those decisions that have fixed, have corrected the structural deficiencies that we had in the Saskatchewan budget. With a drop in resource prices — in particular, oil, Mr. Speaker — with that drop we had to make some changes to reduce our dependency on oil royalties and oil activity in this province.

Mr. Speaker, that industry has continued to create . . . continued to experience pressure, not only in pricing from some predatory price war, price action from other areas around the world, but from some domestic policy here in the nation as well, Mr. Speaker. Some of the regulatory policy, most notably coming out of and from our federal government, has been challenging for our energy industry, Mr. Speaker.

And it is that good financial footing that has provided us with the opportunity to enter into this pandemic, Mr. Speaker, enter into this pandemic with a financially sound set of books here in the

province, Mr. Speaker. What we are experiencing here today, like you will see across this nation over the course of the next number of months and years, is a pandemic deficit, Mr. Speaker. We are hearing numbers coming out of Alberta per capita much larger than what we have put forward here in this budget, Mr. Speaker. We're hearing numbers coming out of Manitoba as recent as this week that are much larger than what we are seeing, that we have introduced in this House, Mr. Speaker. So this is a pandemic deficit.

To answer the question about how we will balance the budget in the years ahead, Mr. Speaker, we will recover and grow the economy here in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, we are providing supports right now which are resulting in a pandemic deficit, Mr. Speaker. But in the budget itself, as we look at recovering our economy and then growing our economy beyond even where we were pre-COVID, I'm confident and convinced that we will be able to do that, as we were on that trajectory pre-COVID, Mr. Speaker, with the strong economy that we have had for over a decade here now.

But in the budget that we introduced, we reinstated the personal income tax indexation, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that people in this province are paying less tax. We introduced a PST new home construction rebate to do what we can to encourage new home purchasing, Mr. Speaker, and new home construction. We changed the PST exemption for mining and drilling, Mr. Speaker, to encourage investment in our natural resources in this province. We had an extension of the manufacturing and processing exporter tax for the same reasons. We introduced the Saskatchewan chemical fertilizer incentive to attract investment, Mr. Chair, to attract that investment into this province to create jobs. And we have the oil infrastructure investment program, again to attract investment, Mr. Chair, into this province.

Just today this government made an announcement, a generational announcement to reinvigorate a project that was shuttered in the early 1970s, Mr. Chair, and that's to do with moving water around this province to finish not only the west-side irrigation projects but also the Lower Qu'Appelle project. Mr. Chair, what that will result in is close to half a million acres of irrigable land here in the province. You'll see acres of agricultural land go from 4 to \$600 per acre gross income up to the many thousands of dollars, Mr. Chair.

This will take about a decade to not only get the work done but to develop the industry around this and to attract the investment, the investment not only in agriculture directly but the investment in the value-added food sector, Mr. Chair.

And herein lies one of the greatest opportunities that we have had this century thus far, and may have throughout this century, is to really to start with this initial investment to bolster agriculture directly, to bolster that investment into our ag value-added industry, to create that water security and climate resiliency, Mr. Chair, but that water security for the lower half of our province, in particular for the Moose Jaw-Regina corridors, and to create opportunities for investment in this area and in the Saskatoon area — investment in the agri-food industry, yes, but also other investment that requires water.

And when corporations and people are looking to invest in an area and employ people in that area, they need first of all the

people, and we have that in Regina, Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, and across the province. But they're also looking for the security of the resources that they will need to operate, such as water.

And, Mr. Chair, we have enough water security for the next number of years, but what this project will do, will ensure that we have the water security for the next century and beyond. Mr. Chair, this is truly a transformational project for this province, and it is an example of how we can not only recover the economy that we have here today, but we can grow it far beyond what we ever thought it could be. Mr. Chair, this is what members in this House believe.

Mr. Meili: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. One of the things that was I guess a little far from the mark in those remarks, and often from this government . . . likes to say that everything has been just fine with the exception of some pandemic problems.

This is a government that has tripled the debt, making it much harder for us to deal with a sudden fiscal crisis like this. It's also a government that had presided over a recession before COVID got here. We were already in a recession before anything to do with the pandemic, Mr. Chair, and people in this province were already living paycheque to paycheque. Over half of the people in the province said that an extra \$200 expense at the end of the month would be beyond their ability to pay. That was before things got really bad, before over 50,000 people lost their jobs, Mr. Chair. And since then, people are even more worried, even more stretched and stressed. And that's why for them it's so disappointing for them to look at a premier and see him say, no, I won't do my job.

When asked to present those numbers beyond March 31st; when asked to give some sense of what his true plans are, when he refuses to do so; when he refuses to return in September, it's really disappointing for the people of Saskatchewan who are stretched and stressed and really worried about what this government would do if they were re-elected. And you know, that's . . . I get it. I get why the Premier doesn't want to be here, doesn't want to answer more questions, doesn't want to reveal that information. But it isn't right and it isn't fair to the people of the province.

And unfortunately it's also a pattern of not wanting to be here. Didn't want to come. Asked over and over again throughout the spring until May 7 when he said that he hadn't even given thought to returning to the legislature. For weeks before he tried to deflect from the question, and then he hid behind the House leader, tried to sell people on four or five question periods and half the amount of estimates, as though that would be sufficient scrutiny. And then the budget they brought forward doesn't have all the information.

A return to the legislature this session in September would have answered a lot of the questions that were unanswered. We now know the Premier's unwilling to do the work that way. If he won't do that, when will he be releasing to the public those projections on expenditures and revenue and his plans for the coming years? People need and deserve that information before they go to the polls.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Chair, I guess what I would say is, as

soon as we're able. There's no province that is updating even this year's financials, Mr. Chair, and there certainly is no province or the federal government that is in any way putting out any projections for the future years. So you know, as we're able to recover not only here with our Saskatchewan economy but across the nation with our Canadian economy, and I think in fairness some recovery around the world, I think this will start to allow us to firm up, if you will, what some of these projections will be. Quite frankly, just right now those projections aren't available.

A couple other questions in the Leader of the Opposition's comments is about, is the Premier ready to get to work? I can assure the people of this province I've been in this building every week for at least the last six months, Mr. Chair.

[15:00]

I've been down here working with relevant ministers, with Dr. Shahab and his team, the Saskatchewan Health Authority, on the phone to people across the province, working with them so that we can ensure that together we are able to put together the best response that we are able, not only from a health care perspective when it comes to addressing COVID-19, but also put together a response from an economic recovery perspective, Mr. Chair. And I think we have achieved that, although not perfect. I think we have achieved both of those thus far. That being said, much more work to be done.

The Leader of the Opposition referenced that we were in a recession previous to COVID-19. That's news to me. Mr. Chair, I know there are some challenges with our energy industry with oil prices. They got worse as we went into the actual pandemic, actually into negative territory for a period of time, Mr. Chair.

We've had some challenging potash prices for some time. The uranium markets have not been where we would like to see them, although they are up a little bit here now, Mr. Chair. Thankfully agriculture has and continues to be the spinal cord of the Saskatchewan economy, and I would say with the recent weather that we have a reasonable crop, if not a good-looking crop coming again this year.

With respect to the debt of the province and the loans that the province has, Mr. Chair, we are, on a debt-to-GDP [gross domestic product] ratio which is the measurement that provinces and the nation are looking at, we're the third lowest in Canada, Mr. Chair. When and if the provinces that are first and second, Alberta and British Columbia, introduce a budget or release some financial information with respect to . . . and they haven't yet, but with respect to how COVID-19 has impacted their finances, we may find that we may not be third lowest. Maybe we would even bump up to being second lowest or possibly even first lowest in the country.

So we're third-lowest as we sit today, that is with introducing and what will hopefully today be passing the budget on behalf of the people of the province. It's a record that we're very proud of and it's a record that hasn't been easy. It has required difficult decisions at times, Mr. Chair, but it has put us on a good, solid financial footing, most certainly to deal with what we have had to deal with over the course of the last three, now four months here in the province, and quite honestly will need to deal with over the next number of months and few years to ensure that

we're able to recover and grow here in the province. We most certainly have faith in the people of this province that we'll be able to do so.

Mr. Meili: — You know, the RBC [Royal Bank of Canada] reported a contraction of 0.8 per cent of GDP last year. People across the province have been struggling to be able to pay their bills and make ends meet. The fact that the Premier says this very widely reported and publicly known recession in Saskatchewan prior to COVID-19 is news to him is a good sign of how out of touch he is with the reality of what people are facing in Saskatchewan communities.

You know, the last time we got into some financial trouble under this government — it's not that long ago but wasn't even as significant as the challenges today — the government came out with a 3.5 per cent decrease in wages throughout the public sector. That was their plan.

The minister was quick out of the gate with this budget to say that all the offers coming forward will be at zero per cent increase. That's now. And that's before we're in an election. This is when they're trying to win people over, Mr. Chair. What on earth will they be asking people to be taking after this? Will we be seeing another move towards a 3.5 per cent cut across the public sector?

And as well, we heard the Premier talk a couple of years ago about decreasing the public service by 1,200 jobs. How many jobs will be lost in the public sector and in Crowns as a result of this government's fiscal mess?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Chair, thank you. I'd like to thank the Leader of the Opposition again for the question. I still have not seen the articles that are stating with any credibility that Saskatchewan was in a recession pre-COVID. As I said, we had some challenges with some of our natural resource prices, some challenges with some of the regulatory environment coming from our federal government with respect to those resources, but I have not seen articles that indicate and have any proof that Saskatchewan was in a recession.

We most certainly believe that we do have an opportunity as we reopen our province, reopen our opportunity to recover the economy here in Saskatchewan and grow it far beyond where we were pre-COVID-19. I explained in a previous answer some of our reasoning for thinking just that with the investment leading up to and including the announcement today around expanding, over doubling the irrigation infrastructure and acres here in the province.

With respect to the public sector, I think what the minister was alluding to is that we will honour all of the public sector agreements that are in place. They are out for a number of years now. I know our public sector bargaining committee, who the Minister of Finance is the Chair, has been working very diligently throughout this time of a pandemic as well, much of it in this building in Regina, working very diligently in ensuring that we have been able to make multiple agreements — many, many agreements — in our public sector, Mr. Chair.

Most notably one of the more recent agreements that we came to was with this province's over 12,000 teachers, an agreement with

the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. We're thankful that we have a multi-year long-term agreement with our teachers. We have many other multi-year long-term agreements with many other organizations that work in the public service. So those are the agreements that we have shaped until now. They carry us in many cases well into the next term of government that we have.

I would just close with this: the public service here in this province provides a valuable service. If anyone thought otherwise, they should look at what our public service has done in particular — across the board, but in particular — in our Saskatchewan Health Authority and in our facilities in community after community in this province, and the testing and the contact tracing in our long-term care homes and ensuring that our family and our residents are safe. We look at what the people that work with our communities' most vulnerable have done, Mr. Speaker.

We are in a very, very fortunate situation here in Saskatchewan where we have a very loyal, hard-working, diligent public service, Mr. Speaker, and we have worked very hard to ensure that they have long-term security and certainty, Mr. Speaker, of contracts. And that's why in many cases the contracts have extended beyond three years, many of them four or five and some even six years.

Mr. Meili: — Again the question was about whether future contracts would see decreases in wages. We didn't get a clear answer on that. What we do know is that in this province people who earn minimum wage earn the lowest minimum wage in the entire country. Thirteen cents is how much that minimum wage went up a month ago. At the same time it reached nearly \$15 an hour in British Columbia.

People who we have been valuing greatly during this time of COVID-19, celebrating the work of folks who work in grocery stores or work in delivery, work in food services, we've been celebrating their commitment and their essential nature in our economy. But the way that this government recognizes them is to give them a 13-cent raise, Mr. Chair. That to me is a very insulting message to send about the value of this work, and it leaves people in a situation of poverty.

People are working full-time jobs and still having to access the food bank to be able to feed their family. And we also are missing out on that money being recirculated into the economy. This is an opportunity for us to grow the economy from the bottom up. We need to make sure that people have those dollars in their pockets so that they're circulating them in those local businesses we want to see revived.

Why is the Premier so committed to keeping people at a poverty wage in this province despite the importance of their work? And why does he not want to see more money circulating in local businesses in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Chair, we've worked very hard in particular in reducing taxes, in particular with those in the lower income brackets. In fact there are 112,000 people that are not paying provincial income tax today that were at one point earlier, Mr. Chair. So this is where our focus has been. And I'm going to provide a number of examples. The focus has also . . . Well first of all we do have the lowest personal and corporate income tax

in the country, among the lowest. Our child exemption amounts have increased twice in the last decade. These are all supports for these lower income individuals, lower income family households.

We've enhanced the low-income tax credit by \$100, \$40 per child, and tripled the seniors' income plan. Mr. Speaker, there's a number of examples when you start to compare other jurisdictions to Saskatchewan. And a single person in Saskatchewan making about \$40,000 pays \$712 less in income tax and in PST than they did in 2007. So they're down about 19.3 per cent on the income tax and PST that they are paying. That's on a \$40,000 income, Mr. Chair.

A family of four that's making about \$50,000 is actually paying about \$2,351 less in income tax and PST than they did in 2007. That's actually a 76 per cent reduction in the taxes that they are paying.

A family of four that is creeping up into the \$75,000 bracket of income is paying \$1,712 less than they were in 2007. That again is a 28 per cent reduction in the taxes that they pay. If you think about that, \$1,700 is 28 per cent. That means they're likely paying, oh let's say about \$3,500, \$3,600 in taxes in total, Mr. Chair.

A family of four making \$100,000 — so again we're going up 50 to 75 to 100 — again they're about \$1,784 less in income tax, provincial income tax and PST, again about a 19 per cent reduction, Mr. Chair.

We went through this last year. I quoted some of the same numbers, Mr. Chair, in last year's estimates, where people today in the lowest income brackets are earning about \$6,000 more than they were in 2007 and they're paying less tax. They're paying less tax than they were in 2007, even though they were earning \$6,000 less, Mr. Chair.

This is the approach that we have taken. It's an approach that I would say is working here in the province, but it's also an approach where I think it's fair to say across this province that there's more work to do, and we are committed to continuing to do just that.

Mr. Meili: — Thank you. Just before I get started with my question, I'll table a couple of documents. This is the report on the 0.8 per cent contraction in the economy in '18-19, as well as the article from the *Leader-Post* describing the recession, a mild recession but a recession nonetheless, from Dr. Joel Bruneau, head of the economics department at the University of Saskatchewan.

Now we know that despite the fact that we hear those numbers from the Premier, that life has gotten a lot more expensive. Those dollars, those minimum wage dollars don't go nearly as far as they did almost 15 years ago. Rent is more expensive; food is more expensive. And every year, as we get locked into the lowest minimum wage in the country, this Premier is locking people into making a poverty wage, no matter how many hours they're working. It's not fair, it's not right, and it's damaging for the economy as well as for those individuals.

Life would also be a lot more expensive in this province if we

didn't have our Crown corporations, those utilities that have been built by Saskatchewan people that offer key services throughout the province, keep rates low, employ so many people in good-paying jobs, and return regular revenue to our province. These are a legacy of which we should all be proud, not just for their history but for their current contribution to quality of life and affordability in this province.

[15:15]

Now the Premier's predecessor didn't tell the truth before the last election when he said that he wouldn't privatize any Crowns or eliminate any Crowns. When he said that STC was safe, that was not true. STC is gone. They introduced Bill 40, their two-step plan to sell off SGI and SaskTel.

And given that the Premier was on that SaskTel sell-off committee as far as we know; he's never denied that. Given that the Sask Party has been throughout their history circling our Crowns like sharks, slicing off every piece they can for sale or for outsourcing. We saw that as recently as last week with SLGA [Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority] when they introduced legislation to allow for the privatization of the entire distribution and wholesaling arm of that Crown, Mr. Chair. Given all of that history and the recent experience of how this government responds to a fiscal crisis — of their own making, I should add — a fiscal crisis that has been contributed to by their pet-project spending, by tripling the debt, by making sure that we are not able to borrow the same way we could because of their overspending in recent years and their commitment to making sure that it's friends and insiders who benefit the most. How does this Premier expect people, how does this Premier expect people to trust that our Crowns and the great value that they offer to us as a province . . . How can he expect people to trust him, just trust him — given that history of the Sask Party and his own government — that he won't be selling them off, come after the next election?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — I guess very quickly because we've had a number of elections and we just quite simply haven't done any of what the Leader of the Opposition has said.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to go through a number of questions here. First of all I think there's an '18-19 article that was tabled, but with respect to what the banks are saying today, TD Bank [Toronto Dominion Bank] most recently has revised its outlook for Saskatchewan's real GDP. Now must understand, during COVID all of the outlooks across the nation are in the negative zone. Ours has improved by 2 per cent, so negative 8.2 to negative 6.2. That's newly revised. They had this to say about Saskatchewan's situation in a quote from the TD Bank:

Despite facing the double whammy of an oil price shock [which I have spoken to] and COVID-related restrictions, Saskatchewan has been turning in a better economic performance than we had anticipated in our April Update.

This is positive on Saskatchewan's opportunity to recover and grow, Mr. Chair, and this is exactly the faith in the people of the province that I've been speaking about many, many times.

With respect to the questions around affordability and poverty, Mr. Speaker, I had addressed those in the last answer. I'd

mentioned that we have removed 112,000 people off the tax rolls in the province. We're very proud of that number, understanding that each and every one of those 112,000 people is likely someone that maybe has a family, Mr. Chair, somebody's family member, and we know that it is very much an impactful statistic, if you will.

Mr. Chair, on the poverty reduction efforts in this province, and some of that, yes, is tax reduction like I had alluded to in the last answer, but the percentage of all people in the low-income brackets in Saskatchewan has moved from 2007 to 2018. It's moved from 14.6 per cent in 2007 to 8.8 per cent in 2018. That's positive. And more important maybe than that even is the next statistic: the number of children that are in low-income households, low-income families, Mr. Chair, has moved from 21 per cent in 2007 to 8.2 per cent in 2018. This is a positive, positive statistic.

With respect to his comments around the person that used to sit in the chair that I am currently honoured to do, nothing could be further from the truth. Mr. Speaker, I think many, the vast majority across this province are quite proud of the 19, I believe it was 19 years that Premier Wall had served in this Assembly as a member of the opposition, as the leader of the opposition, and ultimately as premier of this province. In my mind one of the greatest premiers that this province has had, Mr. Speaker, and I think there's many that would agree with that. As there was many people . . . As Premier Wall continued supporting the Crowns, yes, so that we can have the energy, the access to energy, the access to telecommunications, the access to the services in this province for people, but also for the industry so that they're able to expand. And we saw expansions in the potash industry. Those didn't just happen. Those were due to policy initiatives that were put forward, led by the person that sat in this chair before me.

Mr. Chair, we're very proud of that and I know many in Saskatchewan are. With that investment came jobs, came jobs in community after community. Not just in the large urban centres, but came jobs in some of our smaller more rural-focused communities, more rural communities across this province, Mr. Chair. And people came from all over the world to fill those jobs. We saw 75,000 people move into the province, Mr. Chair. We saw . . . Pardon me, Mr. Chair, we saw tens of thousands of people move into the province from all over the world.

It's a statistic again, Mr. Speaker, that when you dig deeper into it and meet the individuals that have moved here for a career, moved their families here for a better life, Mr. Chair, I would put forward that that would not have happened had we kept on our current trajectory of 2007 and the 16 years before that. And for much of that we owe the leadership and we owe our thanks to the leader that sat in this chair before me. And I most publicly would thank Premier Wall for his efforts, for his service, and for turning this province around, Mr. Speaker, and ensuring that the people of this province once again believe in themselves.

Mr. Meili: — The information shared there is as clear as day. STC was free and clear. It was safe, wasn't going to be touched. A year later it's gone. Crowns were safe, pinky swear. And then in comes Bill 40 and in comes a secret cabinet committee to sell off SaskTel. This is just a matter of fact, Mr. Chair. These things are on the public record.

We're also hearing a lot, Mr. Chair, from individuals right now who are struggling within our health care system. People who've been told after understanding that their surgery was coming not that long down the road, are now being told, oh, they'll be waiting 18 months or longer to get that surgery. Thousands of others are in similar positions.

How was it that between a budget that was written in February for a completely different time and June, there was no increase for our health care system, recognizing that there are huge added stresses? There was no increase from the March budget to the June budget when it came to surgical capacity, no increase when it comes to addressing COVID-19.

This is a health system that has been redlined for years, overburdened and overstressed. Long-term care in hospitals, hallway medicine becoming the norm under this Premier. This is a situation that has now gotten acutely worse. How is it that the Premier didn't see that backlog climbing? And how is it that he chose to spend these three months not adding any new capacity and any new investments into health care beyond what was thought of before COVID-19 had even arrived?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The surgical initiatives — in a roundabout way I suppose I've likely answered this — had a 5 per cent increase in the health care budget. Proud of that increase, likely one of the larger increases that we've seen throughout our time. We may have been higher than that at one point in time. Most certainly it would be a larger increase than we likely ever saw under the members opposite, Mr. Chair. More work to do there, but most certainly we are addressing the needs in health care as we make our way through the years, Mr. Chair.

I believe we're up 57 per cent if I'm not mistaken over the course of our time in government. A dramatic increase, not only in health care operations but dramatic increase in health care capital expenditures and health care capital investment. We're seeing that. We've seen that for years now and we most certainly are seeing it again.

In that budget, in the budget that was introduced here, is an additional \$20 million for surgical wait times, Mr. Chair. That money is invested to ensure that we are able to advance and lessen the wait times that we have for surgeries in this province. I would remind the people of the province that we have achieved some of the best wait times in the nation of Canada under this government. There's more work to do admittedly, most certainly now with COVID-19.

Members opposite have no hill to stand on when it comes to this as they had the worst surgical wait times in the nation, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, there is more work to do there. Mr. Chair, the money is still there as well. And that money will become even more important now as we did have to slow our surgeries throughout our response to COVID-19. We are making every effort to ensure that we're able to get our surgical capacity back up and as high as we possibly can.

I don't know where we would compare across the nation but I would be interested to know because we are very aggressively, ambitiously, and safely reinstituting our surgical initiatives here in the province and I believe phase 2 will get us up to a 70 per cent capacity here in Saskatchewan.

This doesn't come easy because while we are doing this, the Saskatchewan Health Authority and all of these public servants, these public officials that we were talking about earlier, are doing the side-by-side work of ensuring that we're prepared should we have a second wave, should we have a significant outbreak of COVID in either a facility in the province or a community in the province or, more broadly, across the province.

So, Mr. Chair, my hat's off again and my thanks to everyone that is involved in ensuring that we are able to do both. We are able to be prepared for COVID-19 and whatever may come in the next number of months. We're also prepared and actively working on ensuring that we have some surgical capacity in this province, and that is admirable.

Mr. Speaker, to address some of the early comments as well with that answer and the last, as I mentioned, our Crown corporations in this province, they work very hard to manage their costs and keep our rates low for Saskatchewan residents and to attract investment into Saskatchewan so we can create jobs. They provide power, telecommunications, gas, a number of other services, and they work very hard at doing that. Mr. Speaker, there's no intent to divest of the Crowns here in the province before the election, after the election. The intent is just not there.

Mr. Speaker, to cast aspersions that there's something different, Mr. Speaker . . . I think there was a reference to Bill 40. Bill 40 was introduced in this House through many, many MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] talking to our constituents across this province. There was a decision made by this government to repeal Bill 40, which we most certainly did, because it was the will of the people, Mr. Speaker. The people had spoken to the members, the governing members, and we made a decision as to what we were being instructed by the people of the province.

It was a little different in 1998, Mr. Speaker, when the members opposite sold off the remaining shares in the Lloydminster heavy oil upgrader. It seemed to be all right to sell a Crown corporation or shares in what was a Crown investment at that point in time, Mr. Chair, but it's not all right now, Mr. Chair. And we agree, Mr. Speaker. We are not in the business of selling the Crowns.

Mr. Speaker, there's a number of investments that the NDP have made over their course of government that maybe haven't turned out very good. Mr. Chair, they just haven't turned out very good. And they start in the very nearby locale of . . . I don't know if it's the RM [rural municipality] of Guyana or if it's Guyana the country, but it's a South American power company where the NDP invested and lost \$2 million of Saskatchewan taxpayers' money. They got a little closer to home in Chicago where they invested in a fibre optics company, Mr. Chair. They lost \$16 million there; 9.4 in Persona in Newfoundland — made it into Canada finally — a cable company in Newfoundland; 24.7 million they lost on a company called Retx in Atlanta, so back down. Still in North America, which is admirable. They moved on then, Mr. Chair, to Nashville into tappedinto.com. Who could resist investing in a company called tappedinto.com but the NDP — another 6.7 million lost there. Clickabid. Who could resist investing in Clickabid, is a failed internet auction business, Mr. Chair, \$3 million of hard-earned Saskatchewan taxpayers' money lost there. 90.8 million lost in Navigata, Mr. Chair. They got to the West Coast investing in a BC [British Columbia]

telecom. And \$10 million lost in Craig Wireless, Mr. Chair. That was the closest investment that they lost money in, being right next door in Manitoba.

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's hard not to chuckle a little bit at a Premier who's talking about what happened in the '90s when he's part of a government that has proceeded over the debacle at the GTH [Global Transportation Hub], tens of millions of dollars lost there; the bypass that ballooned to over \$2 billion, all that money leaving the province to out-of-province companies. It's an impressive exorcism in whataboutism, exercise in whataboutism . . . Yes, we could use an exorcism from that side, Mr. Chair, very fun.

You know what? Just the other day we asked about the Premier's failed experiment in user-pay MRIs [magnetic resonance imaging]. We know that it has introduced an unfair element into our health care system where individuals with money can jump the queue for the same publicly funded surgeries that others are on many-months-long waiting lists for. It has increased the waiting list for MRIs in the province.

This Premier is so committed to that failed model that he's missing the opportunity to make investments within the public health care system that would actually decrease wait times. This is a failed experiment. And when asked about that, he said that, to paraphrase, that there would be opportunities for us to keep an open mind about future investments in user . . . or investments isn't the right word. It's experiments and voyages down the path of privatization of health care.

[15:30]

Mr. Chair, the evidence is clear. When you have parallel user-pay systems, you increase the wait times, you decrease access for regular people, and it costs more and you get worse results. Will the Premier let us know, as part of his plans coming out of this election if he gets a chance to be re-elected, down what roads will he go to more patient-pay, user-pay private health care in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I guess one of the, just first of all, one of the differences between the investment in the bypass and traffic safety around the city of Regina by this government, Mr. Chair, one of the differences is investment in infrastructure. It's not an investment in an online auction company or Clickabid or anything like that. That's one major difference.

The other major difference is, not only is it an investment in infrastructure, but it's an investment in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, of which none of those investments I referenced earlier are.

With respect to the MRIs here in the province, Mr. Chair, this is not a failed experiment. It is an experiment that, yes, started under the NDP, and yes, I give the NDP credit for putting this experiment together. I don't think it's a failed experiment. They put it together for the Saskatchewan Roughriders and those that were on Workers' Compensation. What we did is we expanded that experiment that the NDP had to make it available to all Saskatchewan residents.

Mr. Chair, we have invested \$141 million in medical imaging services in this budget, in 2020-2021. It's a 68 per cent increase since 2007. We are doing many more scans here in the province than we have . . . in fact we're up 12 percent in our capacity since 2016. And the challenge we have — and this is rightfully noted — the challenge that we have is that the demand is up 18 per cent. So we need to do more in this area, Mr. Chair. We do.

And we will be looking at all options as to how we can do more, Mr. Speaker. The two-for-one system that the NDP had come up with for the Saskatchewan Roughriders and those on Workers' Compensation that we expanded and made available to all Saskatchewan residents, it's allowed to date 2,300 scans, secondary scans that have been bought and paid for. As well it's added the equivalent amount, 2,300 additional scans, into the public system.

So I guess the question I would have at the end of this, Mr. Chair, is if the Leader of the Opposition had the opportunity, would he cancel these? Would he cancel these scans?

Mr. Meili: — I would 100 per cent get rid of the user-pay MRIs. We'll recognize the existing appointments, but they have no place in our health care system. That's queue jumping, and it's been shown to lengthen the wait times. It doesn't work. It doesn't work, and there's so much within the public system that would work, that this government won't do because they're stuck on a failed experiment that they won't give up on.

Now this Premier has some troubles with his short-term memory. It appears he's stuck back in the '90s, looking at what was happening decades ago, but he doesn't remember what happened with his own GTH. Mister no wrongdoing over there would have some additions to make to this debate, I'm sure. But you know what? The people of Saskatchewan don't have short-term memory problems. They remember. 2017 was not that long ago. This government doubling the PST was not that long ago. This government working to sell off SaskTel and SGI, not that long ago.

You know what else wasn't that long ago? Last year when the Saskatchewan economy shrunk by 0.8 per cent. How is it that this Premier doesn't know that his own province's economy shrunk by 0.8 per cent? How is he not aware there was a recession last year? And how can people be expected to trust him when he's saying that they should just trust him, that the numbers are going to be not resulting in the same kind of damage his government did in 2017 if he should — which we will do everything we can to prevent — but if he should be Premier again? How could they trust him?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Chair, I guess first of all to address the PST. The PST is 6 per cent here in the province. It was 9 per cent under the members opposite. We must never forget that, Mr. Chair.

With respect to the finances here in the province, here are a number of, some opinions from the major banks since our response to COVID-19. Mr. Chair, they start with RBC Economics. The opening sentence in the paragraph is, "Saskatchewan is largely a Canadian success story in the way that it handled the COVID-19 pandemic." It goes on to say that ". . . Saskatchewan is weathering the storm from a position of

relative strength, with one of the lowest net debt-to-GDP ratios among the provinces."

Mr. Chair, we have many of these that we can read into the record with respect to how we were with our fiscal footing going into the COVID-19 pandemic. I've spoken to it in previous answers, how we have managed through the pandemic. And I think that the fact that we're in here for three hours for estimates before having a vote on our provincial budget, the very first budget to be introduced in the nation, that it is also indicative of our great effort to ensure that we are as transparent with the people of the province, introducing and passing this budget with a full accounting for our response to COVID-19. Mr. Chair, we're very proud of the work that has occurred here.

Mr. Meili: — It's worth noting for the Premier that, while he likes to paint a picture that things are very rosy, month over month Saskatchewan's job growth in May was the second lowest in the entire country, with an increase of only 600 jobs or 0.1 per cent. We also need to understand that tens of thousands of people lost their jobs. And so as they're struggling to pay their bills, as they're struggling to make it through, it's cold comfort to them that perhaps compared to other provinces, things are going okay, when they're out of work right now and they're receiving no help from this government.

Another area that has been receiving lots of attention around the world but no help from this government is long-term care. COVID-19 has exposed the challenges in long-term care around the world, and in Saskatchewan those long-term care problems are a long-term challenge that this government has failed throughout their term to address.

We know that in Strasbourg, for example, they have a problem with the heat. It's so hot during the summer that residents are suffering heat exhaustion and skin conditions. In Outlook, we heard from a patient's family who was bathed twice in 53 days. These sorts of stories are coming out all the time about people's experiences. They don't come out in the SHA CEO [chief executive officer] tour because it's not an independent investigation. It's not made to discover these problems.

But even that flawed internal document showed that in every facility but very, very few, they came up with the same comment: understaffed, not enough people to provide adequate care. This is the constant throughout long-term care in this province, and the Premier, when asked about this, he says there's nothing, there's no concerns. He wouldn't even admit when asked by the media that there are significant problems in long-term care. Now the information, the evidence is quite to the contrary.

So my question for the Premier is this: do you really think there are no problems in long-term care? And are you really going to, at a time when the rest of the world is looking closely at long-term care, continue to refuse the opportunity for an independent investigation into what's really happening in those care homes?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Chair, to address the first question in that question around the employment stats in May, one of the reasons that our rebound of jobs month over month wasn't as high as one might have expected was people worked throughout the pandemic. I had quoted earlier that 87 per cent of jobs in

Saskatchewan continued to work throughout the pandemic. So we could all surmise then that there isn't as many that need to go back when things come back.

You know what else happened in May? It's interesting to listen to that question from the Leader of the Opposition because in May, actually on May the 4th — this particular quote is out of the Swift Current newspaper — the Leader of the Opposition had said that the:

. . . first phase of reopening the provincial economy began on . . . May 4, and based on what they've seen so far the official opposition doesn't think phase two should happen anytime soon. NDP Leader Ryan Meili called on the provincial government to delay the reopening plan . . .

Mr. Chair, so the ones, the individuals that did go back to work, under a Ryan Meili leadership wouldn't have went back to work, quite frankly. And I have a number of more quotes on the Leader of the Opposition asking us to slow down phase 2. And it's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, because I think that signifies the difference in the faith of the people of the province; that's where we differ.

With respect to long-term care homes and the commitment of this government to long-term care homes, this is a commitment I'm quite proud of. And not that it has anything to do with me personally, but has to do with many people that have sat in these government chairs over the course of the last 12 years, up to and including the individual that we were talking about earlier that sat in this chair for the first 10 or 11 years of a Saskatchewan Party government.

He was part of a cabinet and a caucus that supported investment in 14 long-term care facilities, new long-term care facilities across this province, Mr. Chair. One in the community where I live, of which we're greatly appreciative. One more, now 15, is being built in Meadow Lake. Couple more on the way: one in Grenfell, one coming in La Ronge, Mr. Chair. We're not letting up as we continue to invest in the infrastructure, the much-needed infrastructure that is required. We're investing in the maintenance of these facilities as well, Mr. Chair, to the tune of in excess of \$100 million this year. We're very proud of that investment.

Mr. Speaker, in those long-term care facilities . . . I might add, when given the opportunity to invest in long-term care facilities, it was an NDP government that closed 1,200 beds in this province, Mr. Chair. It's this government that has chosen to invest in new facilities, not close beds here in the province.

Mr. Chair, in those facilities there are 700 more front-line staff that are working, 700 more FTEs [full-time equivalent] that are working. This is an 11 per cent increase and it includes 346 more licensed practical nurses, Mr. Chair.

And I would like to take this opportunity, like I have frequently in the days, weeks, and months gone by, to thank each and every one of those individuals that is working in a long-term care facility for what they're doing. These are unprecedented times, in particular in our long-term care facilities, and I think the effort that they are making speaks for itself and bears itself out in the numbers that we are seeing in our long-term care facilities when

it comes to the COVID infection rate as well as, ultimately, the fatalities that we have seen all too often arise when COVID enters a long-term care facility.

I believe the stat is 82 per cent of the deaths, 82 per cent of the fatalities across this nation come from long-term care facilities, occur in long-term care facilities. That isn't happening in this province, and that is in many ways due to the effort over and above that the staff are making in those facilities, Mr. Chair. We're very proud of what they do, and I want to take the opportunity again to thank them.

Mr. Meili: — Well it's on those staff that we should be concentrating right now. There's fewer of them this year than there were last year or the year before, working in long-term care right now. We talk about new facilities. That's great. We encourage new facilities but (1) will there be enough people actually working in them, and (2) that's pretty cold comfort for someone who right now in Strassbourg is overheating or right now in Outlook is waiting for nursing care. This is not going to help the people right now.

[15:45]

The question that other jurisdictions across Canada are tackling right now is minimum care standards and staffing levels. When is this government going to go down the road of minimum care standards and actually have enough people working in long-term care that residents will get the care they need?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll come back to some of the precursors of that question first. But there is a document that is out there by the Ministry of Health that does determine the care standards in our province, Mr. Chair, and I would just go to the front of this 191-page document. This has been quoted in this House before. It reads, and I quote:

The standards set within this manual are considered minimum standards, and must be adhered to in publicly funded facilities that offer long-term care services to residents in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chair, that is in, I believe, the executive summary or the foreword on the minimum care guidelines that we have here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the investment that this government has made in infrastructure and in the people cannot go unnoticed, Mr. Chair. Quite honestly, the investment has increased since 2007, since we had the honour to form government, by 45 per cent; up to this past year, \$760 million. As I've said, our long-term care homes have over 700 staff, front-line staff, FTEs working in those facilities than in 2007.

We're very proud of this record. We're very proud of the investment that we've made in the new facilities. As I mentioned, 14 facilities constructed over the last decade, another one happening today in Meadow Lake, two more coming with our infrastructure stimulus in La Ronge as well as in Grenfell. This is an unprecedented investment, but I would also say that it's one that needs to continue into the future, as does the conversation around long-term care. It's a conversation that is occurring nationally as well.

I've talked with other premiers on our Council of the Federation call, Mr. Speaker, which really reinforces the belief that I have, that we do have for all intents and purposes a good system here in Saskatchewan. Yes, it needs work, it needs investment, it always has and will continue to. And we're open to those conversations. But the fact of the matter is, Mr. Chair, is that we have done very well, and nowhere is that more evident than during this COVID pandemic.

Mr. Meili: — In our education system, Mr. Chair, per-student funding has decreased by \$313 per student since 2015. Counting for increased enrolment, K to 12 education has been shortchanged by nearly \$60 million since that time. The fear out there in the public is that these numbers will only get worse.

Our classrooms are more crowded than they've ever been and more complex — more kids with special needs, more kids for whom English is a new language, more kids struggling with mental health challenges, more kids living in poverty. And yet from this government what do we get? Less. We get less dollars per student. We get less investment in our classrooms. And now we're going into a time where there are added challenges, and this is what we get.

Now when it comes to education funding, what we hear from teachers, from parents is there's a lot of concern, given the history of this government. In 2017, a \$54 million cut from our education system with a deficit not even half of what we're facing this year — that's what they chose to do. How can the people of Saskatchewan, the parents and families and teachers be certain that that's not where this government will go again should they get a chance to bring in another budget?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you. Thank you, for that question. Mr. Chair, it's appreciated. I'd just start with, in this province since 2007, which is the time that we had the honour of forming government, we're up about 38 per cent in our education operating grant. That's the grants that go to the school divisions. During that same period of time, the student population is up about 15 per cent, Mr. Chair, so we have surpassed that, over doubled, not quite tripled but over doubled that, Mr. Chair. But what that has left us with, the reference was to the per-pupil financial transfer to the school divisions. We have one of the highest per-pupil transfers in the nation of Canada.

We're very proud of the investment that this government has made in education, has made in our next generation, Mr. Chair. And I think it's fair to say that that is going to continue. It continues in this budget with about a 2.4 per cent increase in funding to ensure that we are fully funding the contract for our teachers, our educators across the province, but also fully funding the enrolment growth that we will have.

Mr. Chair, we're also working quite hard with respect to what school will look like this fall through our education response planning team which includes, you know, all of our partners in the education sector. We're working hard with them to ensure that when children do return to the classroom, understanding that they haven't been there for the last few months due to this COVID pandemic, but when they do return to the classroom, that it's safe. So we have been working very hard with our education partners, including the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation as well as the Saskatchewan School Boards Association.

We have asked the Saskatchewan School Boards Association to compile the savings that they have experienced over the course of the last few months, understanding that it isn't of course 100 per cent savings. We still have educators that we continued to pay through this as they were doing some of the distance learning, which in many times was very challenging.

I could share a couple of personal stories from teachers in my home community, where one high school teacher would put a whiteboard on the back of his truck, which he would drive first of all to wherever he needed to, wherever his students were, and he would park in the driveway and then take out a whiteboard, put it on the back of his truck with a bungee cord and proceed to teach some of his students at a distance, Mr. Chair. Very important as these were grade 12 students, grade 12 students anticipating going to post-secondary this fall. It's an example of an individual that I think is just going above and beyond the traditional Zoom meetings and offering his students the opportunity to not only participate in the curriculum but to do well and to engage in that curriculum.

I have more stories with other teachers that were doing exactly the same. I know there was an elementary school teacher with her whiteboard — in that case it was an Expedition, not a truck, Mr. Chair — as well as others that were travelling around the country ensuring that their students, whom they cared for very much, were having that proper, appropriate access and supports. And for that I thank them.

So there was costs that were occurring over the course of the last number of months. It wasn't turning the tap totally off on the finances. We were paying many of the bus drivers, paying many of the educators, as well as keeping the lights and the heat on in our buildings. But there was some significant savings as well. And we don't have all of the school divisions that have reported as of yet, but a number have, and we're just under \$40 million thus far in savings this spring by the school divisions scaling back some of their operations. And so those are dollars that will be utilized to ensure that we can continue with our education, continue with safe schoolrooms this fall as well.

Mr. Chair, you add to our investment in teachers, our investment in the per-pupil funding grant that we provide. In addition to that we built 57 new schools in this province, Mr. Chair, built or building 57 new schools in this province, many of them in Saskatoon, Regina here, as well as a new school going up replacing three schools, amalgamating three schools in the community of Moose Jaw, Mr. Chair. There's also 28 major renovations that are occurring across the province, in excess of 70 major renovations and new builds that are happening. This is unprecedented investment when you compare it to the days before 2007, Mr. Chair. It's unprecedented investment.

I would also say that it is some of the most important investment that we are making here today and it needs to continue into the future. So if past indicator is any indicator of future behaviour, Mr. Chair, people of this province can likely expect more schools. They can likely expect more hospitals and more investment in the people that are in those facilities.

Mr. Meili: — We've raised a number of times the issue of the return-to-school plan which had no dedicated funding. We've heard from the Premier the savings that are apparently out there.

It's very different than what we're hearing from school boards, especially given the added cost pressures that they already have with increased enrolment. So I'd ask the Premier — and the minister seems to want to join into the debate as well — if he could please table that \$40 million savings list. We'd like to see those numbers, Mr. Premier.

I'm still getting a lot of correspondence, and I know the Premier is as well as we're cc'd often on the same letters, about that unfunded school safety plan. Concerns about the lack of dollars and concerns about the lack of supports and the lack of ability and confidence of people that they can do this safely, that the classrooms that are already overcrowded with 30-plus students a classroom will somehow be able to manage physical distancing in the classroom and on the playground.

Mr. Chair, between March and June the same, exact education budget. Does the Premier recognize just how tone-deaf it was to have zero added dollars allocated to schools to get this return right? And can he tell me how much of the \$200 million contingency fund is dedicated to that school safe return?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Chair, the numbers I have are part of a broader document, but we will table the document with the savings that were provided to us by the education boards. A number of them have reported. There are still a few to report. Just under, I think, \$39.5 million is the savings thus far by those that have reported. So we'll table that document here shortly that will have those numbers. We just received it recently, Mr. Chair.

It leads to, you know, the broader question around finances for our boards of education and for our education sector. They did receive a 2.4 per cent increase in this year's budget, a substantial increase, Mr. Chair, when you look across the nation. We have \$40 million that they will have access to, savings that are available, that have accumulated over the course of the last number of months. That will increase from that number as the additional boards that have not reported will report. So I expect that it will be in excess of \$40 million. And the minister very diligently has put together the education response planning team to come up with the parameters on how we can ensure that we are back in school safely.

[16:00]

Mr. Chair, there is funding that is in the budget. There is funding that is in the boards of education's hands due to savings that they've had. And we will continue to work with our boards of education. If there's additional funding that is required, we will have that conversation. But, Mr. Chair, for us to surmise or guess in this Assembly that there is or isn't is not a proper process. And, Mr. Chair, what we are doing and are committed to doing, Mr. Chair, is to ensure that we have the people in the room that are involved, Mr. Chair. That's why the minister has brought together the education response planning team to do the work that's required, not to guess at it.

[Interjections]

Mr. Meili: — It seems like we're going to have a couple debates going on here. We'll try to keep it to you and me, Mr. Premier, for the most part.

Mr. Premier, there's something you said earlier, and I think it's fair to acknowledge. When the government was moving into phase 2 two weeks after the introduction of phase 1, I admit I had some concerns. You know, an incubation period of the disease is 14 days, and the very first, as the Premier so often points out, the first place to be going down that path without the time to see how things went, and at the time in La Loche, the largest community outbreak in the country — all of these led me to have some concern.

I'm really pleased to see that, despite those misgivings, the numbers didn't do badly after phase 2. I certainly hope — unlike what the minister seems to think — I hope that continues. I don't want to see more cases of COVID-19 in Saskatchewan. I want to see us continue to keep this curve flat.

But when we're talking about foresight — and you know, hindsight is 20/20 — there were some significant foresight issues when it came to COVID-19 that I do think it's important for us to address and to hear from the Premier on. On January 27th we had our first case of COVID-19 in Canada. I reached out immediately to the minister and had a briefing, and I'm grateful for that. That was on February 3rd. After that there was nothing in terms of public communication about COVID-19 that I certainly came across.

The first time I heard the Premier talk about it was on the 1st of March when he said, maybe that's a good reason to have this snap spring election that I've been planning. Maybe that was a good reason to do that. I mean he figured that out pretty quickly that that wasn't the smart thing to say.

But you know, it was March 9th in this House when members in this Assembly, some of whom are sitting with us today, laughed. They laughed when we asked the Premier why he would plow forward with a snap spring election knowing that we were very likely to see cases of COVID-19 as the pandemic spread around the world and spread more and more in Canada. The Minister for Rural and Remote Health yelled, what if, what if? This was the attitude on that side when asked why they would want to send people door to door, why they wanted to go door to door and have big rallies for an election during a pandemic.

On March the 10th the Minister of Health admitted that there was no COVID-19 plan, said they were tweaking old emergency plans from old health regions. That was reported in the *Leader-Post* the next day and showed just how little they understood the magnitude of this issue at the time.

On March 11th after that plan had been requested, they released a draft PowerPoint as an example of a plan. On March 12th we got the first case in Saskatchewan. And not until March 12th — all the way after January 27th when the first case arrived in Canada — not until March 12th did the Premier finally get it through his head that maybe calling a snap election during a pandemic wasn't the great move for his political career that he thought it was.

That's also the day that the government ordered more ventilators by the way. Not in February when we started to know this was coming, not even the week prior when we were asking questions about it in question period, not until there were already cases of COVID-19 in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, they didn't order

more hospital and ICU [intensive care units] beds until March 18th, the day after we asked about that in question period. We've still never had a straight answer on when orders went in for more PPE — the stuff they didn't throw away or destroy — or more swabs.

The fact of the matter is — and we all know this is true — things have gone well here, far better than many places around the world, and we're happy about this. But before this government starts congratulating themselves on how well they've done, before we get comfortable handling a second wave, there needs to be some honesty and some humility about just how unprepared and unwilling to recognize the seriousness this government initially was. Without some acknowledgement of just how much we've done well despite this Premier, not because of him, how unprepared we were, how can people possibly feel confident that this government will take a second wave seriously, that we'll be ready to respond then?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the Leader of the Opposition for that question. He's right. May 4th the Leader of the Opposition did not want us to move forward with phase 2 of our Re-Open Saskatchewan plan: "2 weeks isn't enough time [is what he said] to know if the curve stays flat." May 7th, "The Saskatchewan NDP wants the province to delay Phase 2 of its reopening plan." And then the quote I read in earlier from May 8th was also "NDP leader Ryan Meili called on the provincial government to delay the reopening plan today."

As I said earlier, Mr. Chair, we had faith in the people of the province that they would do the right thing. They most certainly have done the right thing. There's no one here congratulating themselves. We would take the opportunity to congratulate the people of Saskatchewan for what they have done, but very quickly ask them to continue in the days, weeks, and months ahead. We're not through this pandemic yet, Mr. Chair. And to the Minister of Health's point, he never said they didn't have a pandemic plan. They do have a pandemic plan and continue to operate on that pandemic plan. So I would congratulate the people of the province, but very quickly ask them to continue with what they're doing.

And I would thank Dr. Shahab and his office for the steadfast hand that he has guided not only this government but the people of Saskatchewan through the last, getting on to four months now. We will be relying on him to guide us in the days, weeks, and months ahead. As I said, there's more work for us to do to ensure that we don't have these outbreaks.

But under Dr. Shahab's guidance and the action of the people of the province, as I said, we have some pretty good results here in Saskatchewan thus far. We are 76 per cent below the national infection rate, 95 per cent below the national mortality rate. These are good results. These are very, very good results, and I think it speaks to the ability and the adherence that Saskatchewan people have had to the recommendations that Dr. Shahab has put forward.

Mr. Speaker, I have a document here that I want to read some into the record of the early days, if you will, of the COVID pandemic. March the 12th, as your leader referenced, was our first case of COVID in Saskatchewan. March the 13th we quickly restricted public gatherings under the advice of Dr. Shahab to 250

in any one room.

. . . no events of over 50 people with speakers or attendees who have travelled internationally in the last 14 days . . .

Any out-of-province travel for government employees on government business within Canada will be restricted and is subject to approval by the Deputy Minister to the Premier. [That's Mr. Swan who is helping us here today.]

It goes on. March 16th ordered that "visitors to long-term care homes, hospitals, personal care homes and group homes are restricted to essential visitors only," Mr. Chair. That is an order that is very difficult to make because we know in those long-term care homes there are family members, Mr. Chair, and we've since been working closely with those family members to adjust what our policy is with respect to allowing some access into our long-term care homes but ensuring that we are keeping our family members safe in those homes, as we all know the statistics when COVID gets into a long-term care home. So more to hear on that likely in the next 24 hours or so.

Mr. Chair, it's at that time that we took action with our casinos here in the province. March 19th the Royal Saskatchewan Museum was closed. March 18th, six days after the first case, a state of emergency was declared here in Saskatchewan. Public gatherings were restricted to 50 people or less. "All restaurants, bars, and event venues must limit their seating to 50 per cent of their capacity or to a maximum of fifty people, whichever is lesser."

All gyms, fitness centres, remaining casinos, bingo halls, ordered to close until further notice. ". . . licensed restaurants and taverns in Saskatchewan will be permitted to sell alcohol as an offsale according to SLGA regulations . . ." That was an indefinite recommendation. Residents are advised to limit any non-essential travel outside of the province with the exception of people who live in border communities or commuting for work. Many of these early actions in the first week, guided by Dr. Shahab's advice, have effectively kept our numbers to the numbers that I stated, and our numbers are very good.

March the 20th, just about eight days after our first case, we repurposed our child care facilities in schools to provide child care services to support staff in health care or essential service staff, in health care and other employees who were delivering services that were related to the pandemic response. Within eight days, we had freed up child care spaces for our essential workers.

Fourteen-day isolation we brought in on March the 20th, 14-day isolation for those that have travelled internationally. That was earlier than the nation of Canada did and we were if not the first, one of the first provincial jurisdictions to say, if you have travelled internationally, you need to self-isolate for 14 days.

March 23rd we went on to the full closure of restaurants and food courts, cafeterias, bistros, all other similar facilities. All daycare facilities at that point were limited to a maximum of eight children per caregiver unless they were able to configure their facilities in a little bit different of a way to allow for that.

March 25th, Mr. Chair, we went on to reduce the private, public and private gatherings, to 10 people. Pretty severe restrictions

that were put in place within a number of days — not a number of weeks but within a number of days of having a case here in the province.

We said from the outset, Mr. Chair, we have been very focused since the beginning of this pandemic, focusing on the restrictions that needed to come into place. And I've read through a few of them and time stamped them as to when they occurred. It then shifted to ensuring that we were providing the resources, the resources for families, for people here in the province, but also for our businesses that were impacted by COVID so that they could get back in the business of being in business, Mr. Chair, post-COVID.

And finally the recovery, the economic recovery, the recovery of our communities of which the first phase of that, the first initiative of that is our Re-Open Saskatchewan plan. Our Re-Open Saskatchewan plan is a very comprehensive document, again guided by the very competent Dr. Shahab and his team, ensuring that as we reopen not only the business community that was required to close in our communities but the other sectors of our communities such as the playgrounds, such as the recreation centres, such as the things that really we value in our communities. That is all within that plan, Mr. Chair, and that plan, the entire goal of that plan, is to ensure that we can do everything we can to limit or to postpone or to not have a second wave of any kind here in the province.

We're seeing that second wave, those increase in numbers, in many other areas of North America, most notably, I believe, over 30 states now are on the increase with their COVID infections. And we know as your COVID infections increase, shortly thereafter all too often your fatality rate starts to increase. And we just don't want that here in the province.

And that's why we have worked very slowly . . . well I wouldn't say very slowly; I would say very strategically, Mr. Chair, in formulating that Re-Open Saskatchewan plan so that our businesses can open and operate safely here in the province. We have proven that we can do this without spreading the COVID virus.

We're very proud of the Re-Open Saskatchewan plan. We're very proud of the fact that we have Dr. Shahab guiding us through this process. But we're most proud, we're most proud of what Saskatchewan people have done in ensuring that we are restricting the spread of the COVID-19 virus. We are allowing our economy to open up, and we are allowing our communities to up so that we can enjoy some type of what would be a normal for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Meili: — I appreciate the list of actions from March 18th, many of which we called for and then certainly supported those public health actions. You know, the question was to do with a lot of the time before March 18th however, the time during which the Premier, instead of preparing for a pandemic, was preparing for a snap spring election.

[16:15]

And folks on the front line in health care will tell you that things moved very quickly after the cases got here but that there was very little discussion and very little planning. So they had to work

so hard in a big hurry.

So we also received an FOI [freedom of information] from the Regina Public School Division which showed that they were having to make some pretty tough decisions during March as well. They were being asked both by Elections Saskatchewan for space at the same time as they were being asked by the Saskatchewan Health Authority for space for COVID testing or treatment.

We know that facilities were being booked throughout Saskatchewan, even though we had members on the other side trying to tell us that the snap election was an invention of the NDP. We know that space was being booked, money was being spent, more money being spent on that than any extra dollars for public health, as there were no extra dollars for public health throughout the first three months of the year prior to that period that the Premier describes starting on March 18th.

So my question to the Premier is this: we know that the province wasn't ready. We know that we've done well despite that lack of preparation, but does he regret planning a spring election? Does he regret focusing so much time on his political goals and not focusing more time on preparing for the pandemic?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Chair, I'm not certain with respect to the Elections Saskatchewan and them looking for space. That's a question I think would best be directed at the Chief Electoral Officer. With respect to the Saskatchewan Health Authority, without seeing the document that the Leader of the Opposition is referencing, I don't know what the Saskatchewan Health Authority would be requesting space for either, whether it would be for . . . I don't know, Mr. Chair, but without seeing a document and checking, I wouldn't be able to comment on the specifics of that.

However I would say this: we do have reason to be concerned when there are documents that are referenced in this House and concern to the validity of those documents, because all too often there are documents that are referenced, they're referenced; they're misrepresented; they're referenced out of context, quite honestly. Or they, quite frankly, just haven't done the research to check whether the documents are actually factual.

And I would just point back to one year ago when we were in estimates, there was a question around the number of legislative secretaries that we had in this House and whether we were breaking the law in having 13 when there was an Act in place that said you should only have six. Well we quickly checked that particular Act and found that that Act was repealed in 2005 by a then NDP government.

So, Mr. Chair, when these documents are referenced by the Leader of the Opposition or any of the members opposite, what we would ask is that they are properly referenced, ensure that they are not misrepresented, Mr. Chair, and that the questions are asked of the institutes that they're relevant to.

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Premier, that was a bit of a weird response to a very straightforward question. We'll be happy to table the document. Does the Premier regret spending most of the beginning of the year planning an election instead of planning for the pandemic as he ought to have been, as we had enough

information to know we should be doing?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Again, this is simply not the case, Mr. Chair. There was planning that was occurring, most particularly at the Saskatchewan Health Authority, within the Ministry of Health. I just reference first of all, the Minister of Health had offered a meeting for the Leader of the Opposition in February with Dr. Shahab to talk about just this issue, and talk about the planning that is occurring within government.

February 13th of this year, and I'll table this, is a news release put out by the Government of Saskatchewan, and I'll just quote Dr. Shahab's quote in this news release. "While the risk to residents in Saskatchewan remains low, we're working closely with the Public Health Agency of Canada on preparedness, procedures, and reporting to quickly identify and manage any cases that do present for care." That's from Dr. Saqib Shahab, who has been a steady hand throughout this crisis.

I'll also table, Mr. Chair, the action that this government has taken on a day-by-day essentially throughout the pandemic. All of the restrictions, some of the resources that have been put in place, some of the efforts that have been done, and the days that they occurred by this government.

So, Mr. Chair, the answer to the question is that the premise is just wrong, Mr. Chair. The Saskatchewan Health Authority, alongside the Government of Saskatchewan, was preparing for COVID-19. They continued to prepare and take action throughout the pandemic, Mr. Chair, and I'm very proud of what has occurred throughout the first six months of this year with respect to this. The numbers bear for themselves, Mr. Speaker. I'll table these now.

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Chair, the question of course was about why the Premier felt like, even with those conversations with Dr. Shahab, the best thing to do was to move forward with an election on March 19th. It wasn't until March 12th that he finally realized that that wasn't . . . to drop the writ on March 19th. It wasn't until March 12th that he changed that plan.

On March 10th, I'll point out, in response to calls to delay the budget and present something in line with reality, the Minister of Finance said a couple of things that I thought were pretty interesting. One, she said, "Mr. Speaker, what this budget will not have in it is a two-and-a-half-billion-dollar deficit." That proved to not be entirely factual. When we pointed out that plummeting oil prices and a global pandemic might mess with her predictions, she then went on to refer to us on this side as doctor doom and his caucus of gloom, Mr. Chair, which was an odd thing to say, especially as we now see how serious the issues were.

As late as March 16th, despite massive disruption in the world economy, this government planned to plow ahead with a totally out-of-date budget on March the 18th. Then for a day before that, the plan was just to table the estimates but not the whole budget till it was clear that that didn't exactly jibe with the need to call a state of emergency that day. How we got to that point is a whole other conversation. But where are we today? Where are we today? With the same budget, the same budget that the minister tried to slip through despite it being completely out of touch with reality on March the 18th. She brought it back on June the 15th.

Why did the Premier not use more of the time between March and June to come up with a budget that will actually meet the needs of the province now and not just try to come up with a communications plan to try to spin a budget that was already out of date back in March?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Chair, thank you for the question. Thank you for the question. And I had actually forgotten about the doctor gloom and the caucus of gloom comments. And I had a good chuckle on that day and it kind of reminds me actually, quite frankly, of a number of days between then and now, where I've maybe thought the same things: that there is, you know, an element of doctor doom and the caucus of gloom across the way. But I guess interesting, no doubt, that us on this side of the House think much differently, Mr. Speaker.

And you know, I had went through this in an answer earlier so I won't take up much time of these committee members on this particular answer. I went through precisely what was the same in the spending estimates, the investments that we had put forward publicly in March, and the budget that was introduced here a couple of weeks ago in this Assembly.

I also went through many of the investments that were made in addition to the spending estimates that were put forward in March. You can pile on that some of the revenue projections that we have put forward in this budget, Mr. Chair, that are significantly lower than they were in March, much of that due to . . . we saw an energy industry in this province that was faced with a number of weeks of negative pricing pressure. We saw many, many, many businesses in this province, Mr. Chair, that did have to shutter their operations for a temporary period of time. Thankfully we now have the opportunity to reopen, as I say, under the strategic and competent guidance of Dr. Shahab.

And I just say once again, Mr. Chair, we can rehash every decision that has been made over the last number of months. We can go through every day that has occurred. Most of those days I have been here in this building working with Dr. Shahab, working with the Minister of Health, the Minister of Finance, many of the ministers on this side, and the public service on how we best address our response to the COVID-19, which is a global pandemic. It's not a little Saskatchewan pandemic. It is a global pandemic.

How we address that response from a health care perspective, ensuring that we are providing health care for those that do have COVID-19 — or may have COVID-19 as well — ensuring we have the capacity, ensure that we are operating our health care system to the greatest level that we can for our surgical procedures, for the other parts of our health care system that people expect us to deliver. But also to ensure that we're able to keep one eye on how we're going to recover and grow the economy here in the province of Saskatchewan.

So I've been through our budget a number of times, how it differed from our spending investments that we had put forward in March, Mr. Chair. We're very proud of this budget. We look forward to the opportunity of putting it before the people of the province for their purview as it has been out for a couple of weeks now. We feel it is a budget that addresses the health care challenges that we have. We feel that it is a budget that most certainly addresses the recovery of the economic fortunes here in

Saskatchewan, and we feel it's a budget that invests appropriately in the people and the communities across this province.

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Chair, I'm just going to table the document I described earlier which clearly shows that Elections Saskatchewan was booking space and the Health Authority was booking space, and that that was posing a pretty big challenge to the schools as they're trying to figure out what they can do with that space.

It also shows that there was a complete lack of understanding that that wasn't the right road to be going down. If you've got schools being booked for COVID-19-related activities and you're booking them for an election at the same time, it shows that this government truly wasn't taking it seriously. This isn't a matter of one decision or another, one day's statement or another. This is a quarter of a year that this government wasn't paying attention when they should be. I'm just going to table those now.

And just go on to a question about something else that was really important in those early days of COVID-19 — and this was a discussion around the country, not just in Saskatchewan — where we had people being asked to stay home. And that was the thing that they were willing to do and the right thing for them to do. But we also wanted to make sure that nobody was without a home at that time. And that's why one of the things that we pushed for was a moratorium on evictions, and we're glad that that went ahead. We think that was the right thing to do.

Now that the talk is of ending that, we need to hear what this government's plans will be to make sure that nobody's losing their home coming out of this.

[16:30]

We also wonder about the choice of this government to not support folks living in homelessness in any substantial way. You saw tens of millions spent to help support those most at risk. We know, if we ever get a COVID-19 outbreak in the Lighthouse or one of the other shelters, what a huge challenge and risk that would be to the people there and to the entire community. This government completely missed the opportunity.

So the questions here are, one, why did this government say they would make hundreds of places available in social services housing but instead made 10, and didn't give any significant dollars to that sector? What is the plan now as we may see more people homeless with evictions, to make sure we prevent that? And where, going forward, will we see investments directly from this government to make sure that in the time of COVID-19, which is unfortunately still with us, no one who may be asked to stay home will find themselves without one?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — We'll address this question, and then I'm going to come back and address an earlier question in the preamble.

But, Mr. Chair, there's a number of initiatives that have been occurring by the Minister of Social Services and his team and Sask Housing over the course of the last . . . Well and the government more broadly as well. I'll get to some of the consultations that have been occurring because I think it's important to have this discussion about what have we done over

the course of the last number of months as a government. And we're very proud to put that information forward. But they're fair questions, as we have been very busy, but Mr. Chair, it's time for us to tell, as we have all along, what we have been doing, with the people of the province.

But with respect to housing, a number of initiatives. There's been a rent adjustment. If tenants request a rent adjustment, the housing authority will immediately reduce the tenant's rent for April and May, Mr. Chair. There's been late-rent payment options that have been put forward by the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation.

Rental arrears, if the tenant has a rental arrear and has not contacted their housing authority to make arrangements for an alternate payment, the housing authority is going to send a letter to the tenant, inform the tenant of their options for rent reduction or a payment plan, and help the tenant through these particular times. Fees for non-sufficient funds for cheques that may be deemed insufficient during this period, Mr. Chair, they will not collect those fees during this time. Security deposits, they'll have up to six months to pay their security deposit.

All of these in an effort to ensure that people that do need a home have the opportunity to have a home. We do have homes for those people. And we're working closely, as we'll see in a moment, with our partners across the province on this. Termination of tenancy, tenants are not required to give 30 days' notice if they wish to end their tenancy at the housing authority. They will not charge the following month's rent. All of these initiatives to help people through this time.

On the social services side — that was the Sask Housing side — we have our shelter support. Whether it's been dollars provided to our shelters . . . that's through consultation with the shelters of which I'll get to in a moment. The cold weather expansion, Mr. Chair, where emergency shelters are unable to meet the needs of individuals or families because of capacity pressures due to cold weather. In this case COVID is our cold weather. Social services will support those in need with funds and stays, emergency stays at hotels. We'll work to transition those clients to permanent housing.

Easing of reporting has been put in place to ease the administrative burden on third party service providers and community-based organizations, understanding that they as well are working their way through this pandemic response.

Support for children, youth, and families has been expanded, acting on the request from the Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network to delay transitions to independence for young people. This means that any youth that age out of care during this pandemic — and this was just extended the other day, I believe, until the end of the calendar year if I'm not mistaken — these youth will not be transitioned out of the current housing environment.

Mr. Chair, these are some of the initiatives that Sask Housing, Social Services has been working on, not in isolation, they've been working on with their partners across the province, which brings me to the first part of the question, the second part of my answer, Mr. Chair. And I'll table all of this immediately following this question. But what this is, is some of the

consultations that a number of ministers have taken part in throughout our response to this pandemic, some of what our ministers have been up to.

Throughout this the Minister of Social Services, for example, has been in regular calls with the Lighthouse in Saskatoon as well as in North Battleford; the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] My Aunt's Place in Regina; the Salvation Army in Regina and Saskatoon; the YWCA in Prince Albert and their cold weather shelter; Lloydminster Men's Shelter; as well as Souls Harbour Rescue Mission both in Regina and Moose Jaw; as well as many, many CBOs [community-based organization] throughout Regina, including the city; but the YWCA; John Howard Society; Namerind; Street Culture; First Nations Employment Centre; Community Wellbeing and Inclusion, which is part of an arm of the City of Regina, Mr. Chair; many more on here.

Saskatoon CBOs that the Minister of Social Services has been working closely with is the Saskatoon Open Door Society; the Egadz; Saskatoon Crisis Nursery; Sanctum; CUMFI [Central Urban Métis Federation Inc.]; Saskatoon Tribal Council and some of the initiatives that the tribal council is working on and intending to work on; SARC [Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres] of course; Habitat for Humanity; Saskatoon Food Bank & Learning Centre; SaskAbilities.

A number of MLAs have reached out to their respective food banks in Prince Albert, North Battleford, Melfort, Yorkton, Moose Jaw, Estevan.

The Minister of Government Relations has many, many consultations that she has undertaken. Just on the front is 20 meetings with different, various . . . City Mayors' Caucus; SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities], SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association], and the New North; individual meetings of course, 11 with the mayor of Regina, eight with the mayor of Saskatoon, mayors of Meadow Lake, Humboldt, a number of meetings with Gordon Barnhart, Mr. Chair. It goes on. Northern Saskatchewan municipal sector calls, there's 34 meetings with northern municipal leaders; there was 38 meetings with our Indigenous leaders across the province, namely in the North. As was referenced, we had an outbreak in the La Loche-Clearwater area, Mr. Chair.

The Minister of Government Relations also had nine meetings with some industry leaders that also have resources in these particular areas. And a number of federal calls. The Minister of Government Relations took part in 11 meetings with their provincial-federal counterparts, including Minister Bennett and a number of federal ministers.

So, Mr. Chair, I'll share all of this along with our day-by-day response throughout the COVID pandemic. And also the news release on announcing some of the preparations that the government and the Health Authority were doing back in February 13th, about the time, I believe, where the Leader of the Opposition had the opportunity to meet with our chief medical health officer and the Minister of Health. So I'll table these.

Mr. Meili: — Thank you for tabling the documents. That was a pretty long list and quite incongruous with the reports coming out

of the sector. We see Scattered Sites closing down right now in La Ronge. We heard many front-line advocates, and even the mayors of cities across the province, speak out and say that this government wasn't stepping up for people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness or involved in the shelter system throughout the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The minister shakes his head, but the news reports are there. This all happened.

There was no support of any significance for that sector or for food banks. You know, there was a request from food banks and the housing sector combined of \$3 million, 1.5 for each. This would have been for the food banks, matching the federal dollars coming in for the province. And there was just no interest, no interest from this government in going down that road of helping the most vulnerable at a really key time, which says a lot. It says a lot about the priorities of this government.

And unfortunately I have some pretty unpleasant news to share. We've learned today that since yesterday the Regina Police Service has responded to six overdoses, five of which resulted in death. This is a really shocking number over one day. But it's a number that builds on what's been happening in Regina and around the province for months now: 450 overdoses responded to in Regina this year alone. Upwards of 40 people who have died, at least half of those confirmed to be related to drug use. We're seeing large numbers of overdoses in Saskatoon and other parts of the province, in rural Saskatchewan as well.

This government has not been present when it comes to harm reduction. They chose not to fund the project from AIDS Saskatoon for harm reduction or any others. They are also not stepping up when it comes to the need for increased treatment and support right now. Many of the rehabilitation facilities were closed during COVID-19 and the government didn't come up with an alternate plan at a time when we know people are under greater levels of economic, personal, and social stress.

My question to the Premier: we know he's voiced resistance to harm reduction in the past, objections to that. We know this is not a government that has been eager to engage with the prevention of overdoses. Why is that and what is he going to do to change to invest immediately? People are dying right now on the streets of Regina.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair. This is an important topic and one that has been discussed in this legislature many times over the last number of years and, I suspect, will be for some time.

The investment by this government has been focused on, in mental health and in all-too-often subsequent addictions, has been focused on counselling and on treatment beds across the province, Mr. Chair. This year's budget is no exception to that. With \$435 million being invested in mental health and addictions here, 376 of that is going directly into mental health supports. That represents a 107 per cent increase in mental health, and overall mental health and addictions were up about 97 per cent. It represents about six and a half per cent of the overall health budget . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Seven and a half per cent, as it appears I have a typo, Mr. Chair. What is important with that investment is less about the percentage of the investment, more about what is occurring with that investment.

The Leader of the Opposition is correct. There's more work to do here. I mean in particular, when it comes to addictions, to do everything that we can to put the infrastructure in place so that it's our true hope that overdoses aren't occurring. They are occurring all too often today, Mr. Chair, and so what we have done with this investment into addictions services will benefit those that are . . . it will ensure that those that are accessing treatment will receive the benefits. For example, 1.3 million of those dollars is going into 20 addiction beds in Estevan. This is new investment. It's an innovative investment and it's directly targeted towards crystal meth treatment.

\$1.72 million is going to 28 additional detox beds in communities of Regina, Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, and North Battleford; \$825,000 is to increase the emergency addictions support and to extend the service hours in the communities of Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert. Just about three-quarters of a million dollars will go for crystal meth supports in existing detox centres across the province. Half a million dollars to expand the outreach and to increase the access to naloxone which was a debate in this Assembly in the year gone by, and a proper debate, Mr. Chair. \$413,000 has gone for the expansion of the RAAM [rapid access to addictions medicine] clinic specific to North Battleford to ensure that we have some additional supports there.

[16:45]

Mr. Chair, these are just a few of the initiatives and the investments that our \$435 million in mental health and addictions services, where that has landed. And as we said, we continue to focus on counselling as well as on addictions beds and treatment beds for those that need it.

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. I'm following the news during the conversation here and discovered that that's now six deaths, not five.

You know, to say we put lots of money into this so trust us, it'll get better, it's just not good enough. It's not good enough especially when, you know, a lot of that money is coming from the federal government. This government has been very reluctant to provide provincial dollars but the fact of the matter is, treatment beds are good. We want more. We need more. Too many people are wanting treatment and can't get beds.

But we also have people dying right now on the streets of Regina. You can't get through treatment if you don't survive the day. Will the Premier commit today to establishing immediately a harm reduction task force to tackle the huge spike in overdoses that is taking lives across this province every day?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — I said earlier and tabled a number of third party partners and others that we have consulted with over the course of the last number of months. The Minister of Health has also been busy working not only through the health care pandemic, but working with his partners as well in the area of addictions and where we need to expend our financial resources that the government provides in the way of harm reduction and addictions.

And as I said earlier, we are focused at this point in time on counselling services. We are focused at this point in time in

increasing access to the treatment beds that are available, and I read off a number of those beds that are becoming available with this year's increase in the budget. Yes, there is some federal dollars in there in that budget but, Mr. Chair, there are many hundreds of millions of provincial dollars in that budget as well, and there will continue to be into the future, as this is a conversation and action that needs to be taken in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

The fact is this: since 2007 we're up 77 per cent with our addictions beds. We went from 274 to 486 addictions beds. We do need more, unfortunately, in this province. That's why in this particular budget there is an increase of 58 beds. I read off a number of those in the previous answer. These include a variety of purposes for these beds, including detox, in-patient, out-patient, long-term residential for some of these beds, as well as transitional support beds. And they're located in communities across the province, throughout the province, as I indicated in my previous answer. This is where the focus lies. And the Minister of Health works closely with his partners within the Saskatchewan Health Authority, the Minister of Health, but also his third party partners in communities across the province.

Mr. Meili: — Of course, as I said, counselling and mental health, that's very important. Failing to act immediately with a task force to keep people alive means we're going to have many people who never get that support. The government needs to move on this now, and in a serious way.

We recently received from the Minister of Government Relations a Truth and Reconciliation Commission action tracker. We've been asking for some documentation of what actions have been taken, and there were a number of pages on Call to Action no. 1, which is about Indigenous children in care. But this actually failed to . . .

Sorry folks, I actually need Paul. You'll want the Minister for Social Services, not the Minister for Government Relations. It's just a lead-in. Not meaning to . . . just trying to help out.

Because this call to action fails to acknowledge that the number of children in care is actually going up. Deaths of children in care are on the rise again. The number of children, percentage of children who are First Nations and Métis is now at 86 per cent. It's on the rise again. The number of kids in care has risen, and the number of children being apprehended at birth has risen.

This government has promised child welfare reform since 2014. Where is that child welfare reform? When are we going to end birth alerts? When is this government actually going to take real action instead of just continue to see the number of kids who are separated from their families climb and climb every single year?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you for that question. And, Mr. Chair, another very important topic. First and foremost — I'm going to bounce around here a little bit — but we do have 18 child and family service agreements with 18 First Nations or Indigenous communities, tribal councils across the province. I was at the signing of the most recent one with the Saskatoon Tribal Council, which is actually a step beyond agreement, more of a partnership between the Government of Saskatchewan and the Saskatoon Tribal Council member nations.

In taking that step closer to ensuring that those children that may have to go into care are able to stay within their community, hopefully with a family member, we've had many conversations with a number of not just Indigenous leaders, but including Indigenous leaders on just this topic. There will be a 19th agreement coming, coming very shortly. The minister is working quite hard on that.

All of this is in an effort and a step to get to a place where Bill C-92, introduced by the federal government around child and family services, can be put into action here in the province, Mr. Chair, and we are supportive of the efforts. The federal government does need to come forward, take the lead, and provide funding to those entities in the province that want to take control, if you will, of the care of their children. The province supports this transfer. We will make sure and ensure that it is a safe transfer when it does occur. But there's more work to do between the member nations and the federal government on the federal initiative in Bill C-92.

So as I said, 18 agreements. There will be 19, as there is one more coming. Bill C-92 has been passed, Mr. Chair, and there's some work that needs to happen for that to become effective. We'll support that work and support the federal government moving into this space.

I would however say one, just make one comment with respect to children that are currently in care and the numbers that the children that are in care in this province. Sixty per cent of the children that are in care in Saskatchewan are in care in their own home and they're receiving support from the Ministry of Social Services, support in whatever may be required to ensure that that care is safe and is good.

So that number used to be 100 per cent were not in their own home; zero per cent were in their own home, I suppose. Mr. Chair, today 60 per cent are receiving care in their own home with supports from the Ministry of Social Services.

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Chair, in the last 15 years, we've lost 2,200 people to suicide in the province. First Nations girls: 29 times more likely to lose their life by suicide. Boys: six times more likely than the rest of the population to lose their life by suicide. This is a huge challenge. And we know today there's a group walking from La Ronge down to Regina to publicize their concern and their dissatisfaction with the choice of this government to not pursue a suicide prevention strategy.

Now we know in other parts of the world where we have seen suicide prevention strategies, other parts of Canada for example, we've seen significant reduction in the number of people who've lost their life, both youth and adults, to a suicide. And yet just the other day, this Premier chose to make Saskatchewan the first place in the country to reject a legislated suicide prevention strategy. Bills have passed federally and in other provinces. And you know, there were many offers to work together on that bill, to amend it, to make sure that it was something this government could work with. Our goal is to make sure there's a successful working strategy.

My question for the Premier is, what was it that was so out of line of that bill that you couldn't even work with the member for Cumberland, who's put so much of his heart into protecting the

people of his community, who's dealt with so much trauma? What was it that was so wrong with that bill that you felt the need to send this message to the people of Saskatchewan who have lost loved ones, that this government isn't serious about preventing suicide?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Again, Mr. Chair, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I understand that the Minister of Rural and Remote Health as well as the Minister of Government Relations have reached out to the individual that is walking to raise awareness for suicide and will be hopefully contacting him or meeting with him at some time in the near future. And I commend both of them for just that.

With respect to the bill that we discussed here the other day, the bill calls on a number of initiatives that are in action already, Mr. Chair. And you know, there is opportunities for us to work together, to work together not only as government and opposition on important issues that require action, require funding, require investments — such as suicide — but to work together on a number of important issues with other stakeholders around the province as well.

This particular year we are investing just over a million dollars to talk about . . . part of our investment of just over a million dollars. We talked about some of our mental health and addictions investments earlier to the tune of about \$435 million, but we are investing to improve the psychiatric consultations for patients that are accessing emergency rooms throughout our province's Northwest, Mr. Chair. That is an area that has also been impacted, as we discussed earlier, by COVID. Further expansion of our mental health and first aid training across this province and expanding the use and monitoring of a number of the protocols that we have in the province with respect to suicide.

Mr. Chair, these are some early steps, very, very early steps that adhere to the intention of what is another step forward in this province, and that is the introduction and release of our *Pillars for Life: The Saskatchewan Suicide Prevention Plan* that was released. I know the members opposite don't approve of that document as an early step for us to start to take action and to guide government's actions in the weeks and years ahead, Mr. Chair, but the Canadian Mental Health Association does approve of that document, says it is the right direction. So we're going to continue to working with partners like the Canadian Mental Health Commission of Canada, Mr. Chair. And we will continue to make investments, to take steps, and to advance this conversation, not only with this one particular individual, but with many organizations across the province and around the nation.

[17:00]

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Chair, the question was of course what was wrong with that bill. A suicide legislative strategy would take whatever work has been done with Pillars for Life, take other efforts, and move them forward much more quickly. It's a real failure on the part of this government to show courage and take some action. You know, it's just hard to understand why. It seems as though it's just because something came from this side of the House, they couldn't possibly accept it.

Mr. Chair, I do want to touch on a few more issues related to the

economy in Saskatchewan, an economy that was struggling considerably prior to COVID-19 under this government and more so now, obviously.

One of the choices made by this government that took an already struggling economy, slammed on the brakes, and threw it further into recession was the decision to add PST to construction labour. We know that this has been damaging to the economy, and we know that others have made that case as well, Mr. Speaker. The Saskatchewan Business Council presented some numbers to this government. It's noteworthy that those numbers have not been released, and we expect that probably means they were pretty bad.

We were wondering if the Premier would be willing to share what he knows about the impact of the PST on the construction industry and on the economy in Saskatchewan, and whether or not he understands that it wasn't a good decision in 2017. To continue to have a weight around the ankles of that industry at a time when we need to be building, what a poor decision that is? And will he move quickly towards removing the PST from all construction labour?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Again, Mr. Chair, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. Just to back up to the earlier question on the legislation, nothing really wrong with the bill aside from many of the initiatives in the bill are taking place either through the Ministry of Health or the Saskatchewan Health Authority and the flexibility of moving forward with policy versus the rigidity of legislation. I'm not aware of other areas that are moving in this direction with legislation, Mr. Chair. The policy of the government allows us to move as required to address the challenges that we have today as well as in the future. And there is more discussion that needs to happen on the topic of suicides and how we are addressing mental health, addictions, and ultimately suicide in our communities.

Mr. Chair, with the question on the construction PST, I haven't seen the document that he's referring to. I'm not aware that I've been presented that document. But I will say, however, the discussion around PST on construction or portion of construction that we increased — as it was already charged, I believe, on materials, and it's been extended to labour a few years ago — is precisely one of the challenging decisions that we had to make at a time to ensure that our budget would be structurally sound.

I know the members opposite at times have said they will remove that. They will have to backfill that in some way, shape, or form through cuts or selling off Crown corporations or something to that extent if they have any hope of balancing the budget. Maybe increasing the taxes on Saskatchewan people, that would be a decision if they're ever given the opportunity, Mr. Chair.

But that is one of the more difficult decisions that we had to make in that budget year to ensure that we had a structurally sound budget in this province and to ensure . . . and I think in part it has resulted in some of the quotes I had read to the record earlier from some of the major banks here in the province. With respect to this budget, with respect to this budget and the changes that we made in particular to new home construction, we have a couple of quotes that I think deservedly should be read into the record. Here the first is from Chris Guérette who is the CEO of the Saskatoon & Region Homebuilders' Association. The PST rebate, and I

quote, Mr. Chair:

The PST rebate in this budget is absolutely acting as a stimulus. It could not come at a better time. "I don't know if any other province can say that permits being pulled are actually higher this year compared to last."

Mr. Chair, I'd actually read that last bit in again: "I don't know if any other province can say that permits being pulled are actually higher this year compared to last." That's an important quote by the CEO of Saskatoon & Region Homebuilders.

Mr. Chair, the Saskatchewan Construction Association had this to say about the investment in this year's budget, and I quote:

The Saskatchewan Construction Association says that they are satisfied with the provincial budget laid out Monday. President Mark Cooper says that he understands the challenges of trying to plan a budget during a pandemic, adding he's happy to see the government stick to their promises.

The CEO of the Saskatchewan Chamber, Steve McLellan, says the number of 2.4 billion could have been worse, considering the way the economy has gone globally, understanding we are a global exporter. He's glad to see the province to continue investing in key areas like infrastructure, health, and education as the push to get the economy growing will strengthen with what was announced.

Mr. Chair, on the announcement of the booster shot, the \$2 billion infrastructure booster shot bringing our investment over two years to seven and a half billion dollars across government, again the president of the Saskatchewan Construction Association, Mr. Mark Cooper, had this to say, and I quote:

In the midst of a global pandemic that has severely challenged our economy here at home, this stimulus could not have come at a better time. On behalf of the industry association that represents construction companies and its employees in our province, thank you to the Premier and to government officials who decided to make this important investment for Saskatchewan.

Mr. Meili: — When we're talking about infrastructure spending, first of all we would get a lot more infrastructure built if we didn't have PST on construction . . . [inaudible] . . . infrastructure and building up this province. We also, you know, we'd have municipalities being able to spend more on their infrastructure if they weren't having to pay that tax to this provincial government, something municipalities have made very clear is a huge barrier to them making infrastructure investments.

And when we talk about infrastructure investment, we agree on one thing. We agree we should stimulate the economy and that a big part of that is investing in building right now. Where we differ is that we as New Democrats believe that when we're building our roads, our hospitals, our schools, our power plants with our dollars, we should be building them with our workers and our companies. That's the big difference.

And the record of the Sask Party is the \$2 billion going towards

infrastructure isn't so much an investment in the economy of Saskatchewan as it is an investment in the economy of Alberta or Texas or France. That's the record of this government where nearly every major project has gone to an out-of-province or out-of-country companies, where they put out press releases boasting about nearly 25 per cent of the money staying in the province or nearly half of the workers being from . . . for the Chinook power plant, as the minister knows well, Mr. Speaker.

So the question is this: first of all, the Minister for SaskBuilds had a really hard time coming up with a definition of a Saskatchewan company. Mr. Premier, you might just want to catch this question. The Minister for SaskBuilds had a really hard time coming up with a definition for a Saskatchewan company. I'd like to hear the Premier's definition for that. We'd also like to know not just what percentage of the contracts, but what percentage of the dollars invested in infrastructure in the last year went to Saskatchewan companies. And lastly, why has this government resisted year after year after year bringing in a Sask-first approach to procurement so that those jobs and those dollars stay here?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Again, Mr. Chair, thank you to the leader opposite for the question.

I will read in the same definition that was read in committee, the committee of SaskBuilds, the definition of a Saskatchewan business. And this is a definition based on the feedback from industry. And the working definition is "a business that is located in Saskatchewan, employs Saskatchewan people . . . and sources their supplies from Saskatchewan-based businesses based upon capacity, quality, and availability." Understanding some of those supplies can't always come from within Saskatchewan — we build a lot here, but we don't build everything, Mr. Chair.

Over the last year, 90 per cent of the procurement in the province has been awarded to Saskatchewan companies, Mr. Chair. We're proud of that. We're proud also of the investment that we are making in our communities that we referenced earlier, the seven and a half billion dollars that we are investing.

I think the Leader of the Opposition had referenced when they were building schools, when they were building hospitals. Well that must have been in the Allan Blakeney days, Mr. Chair, because it didn't occur in the last run of government they had. They actually did quite the opposite, quite the opposite, Mr. Chair.

But thankfully, again I'll reference the individual that sat in my chair, was honoured and humbled to sit in the chair for 12 years, was part of a government that moved forward with 15 long-term care . . . well 14 long-term care homes, and now the one in Meadow Lake that's being built now. Seventeen will be here shortly in Grenfell and La Ronge, Mr. Chair, long-term care homes that are much needed.

And 57 schools, 57 schools across this province, Mr. Chair. There are many, many communities that have been waiting for a school. Many of those schools were built back actually in the Ross Thatcher government days quite frankly, Mr. Chair. And we have outgrown a number of those schools, and they have served their useful purpose. So we are continuing to build those schools. And we're putting doctors, nurses, and teachers in those

facilities to provide the services that we know our communities want, need, and deserve.

Mr. Chair, we have also taken other action with respect to . . . not directly infrastructure funding but funding to our municipalities that is not tied to infrastructure or to operations. It's theirs to do with what they please, and that is record revenue-sharing funding, Mr. Chair — often promised under the members opposite; never delivered. Mr. Chair, it made for some very uncomfortable SARM and SUMA conventions in years gone by. But it's this government, this government that delivered on a municipal revenue-sharing formula that is predictable, it's stable, and it works for municipalities and it works for the government.

Mr. Speaker, last but not least, in addition to the seven and a half billion dollars that we're putting forward this year and next year for infrastructure across government, was the understanding that we had that municipalities also are stretched as they enter this season. They're also dealing with the effects of the response to COVID-19 as well as COVID-19 directly. And that's why part of the \$2 billion infrastructure stimulus that we'd put forward . . .

We understand the challenges that municipalities had. That's why we made for only the second time ever in the history of this province a \$150 million municipal economic enhancement program dollars available, \$150 million directly to the municipalities so that they can keep up with their infrastructure needs as well so that they can participate in the federal provincial infrastructure programs that are there, Mr. Chair. This never, never occurred under the members opposite. It has only occurred under this government. And now it's occurred for a second time.

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Chair, there's a thing in certain games of chance and skill called a tell. And you know when this government displays a fondness for memory lane that they don't have an answer for their current record. And the fact of the matter is the record of this government for years and years has been the choice to send major projects to out-of-province companies.

The carbon capture plan, the bypass, all of these power plants — these have been under this government and they've been built by out-of-province and out-of-country companies. You know, great examples like the North Battleford hospital, which needed a new roof and where you can't drink the water. That's the approach of this government and the success rate of this government when it comes to making sure that Saskatchewan companies are doing the building and doing the best job.

[17:15]

Now, Mr. Premier, there's one piece of that question that you didn't answer, and you never do. And neither does the minister. And I'm going to just repeat it again. You said that 90 per cent of the contracts, you said that 90 per cent of the contracts went to Saskatchewan companies. What percentage of the dollars? If that number worked well for you, I think you might share it sometime.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Chair, the number is 90 per cent on executive government side; the number is 90 per cent. As you go, \$410 million . . . Just over \$460 million was invested in executive government; 410 million of those dollars went to

Saskatchewan companies. Mr. Chair, it'll be a far larger number this year and next year as we are increasing our spend, in particular the investment on the executive side of government.

The \$2 billion, for example, is going to health care: 200 million for health care infrastructure, 103 million to large infrastructure and 100 million going into maintenance of our existing facilities to ensure they're kept up.

Same with education infrastructure: \$110 million going into new large-scale education infrastructure and just under 30 million going into maintenance infrastructure.

Highways, Mr. Chair: \$300 million going into our highways; 46 million of that is going to municipal roads directly, airports again, partnerships with our municipalities.

So just some of the infrastructure investments that we have made, Mr. Chair. And I say that because it's important for the people of Saskatchewan to understand these decisions that are being made, where these dollars are going, which infrastructure projects they're going into. And it is the responsibility of government to invest in our health care facilities, our education facilities, our highways most notably.

And there are governments in years gone by that have failed to answer the bell, if you will, on that investment. We have referenced earlier . . . And I'm not living in the '90s; I'll bring this much closer to today in a moment. But there was over 50 hospitals that were closed by the members opposite when they had the opportunity. That is a fact in this province. Mr. Chair, they were following the Fyke report that had come out, that had called for not only the closing of those 52 hospitals but the closure of about an additional 40 hospitals beyond that.

The Fyke report was referenced by the member from Rosemont actually much more recently than that, Mr. Chair: May 25th, 2016 in this House, where he — the member from Rosemont — said, and I quote:

Mr. Speaker, over a decade and a half ago, Dr. Ken Fyke [the Fyke report] was tasked with making important recommendations to change the health care system in Saskatchewan. Yesterday he said the government has "lost a tremendous opportunity in the last 10 years to make real change in the health system."

Well, Mr. Chair, if real change in the health system is closing 40 additional rural hospitals, it's no wonder we see the seat count of the members opposite in rural Saskatchewan where it's at.

Mr. Meili: — Not a member on this side has ever closed a hospital. That Premier's closed a dozen of them.

Now current days, let's — what does the minister like to say? — let's live in the now for a moment. I'm interested in those numbers, Mr. Premier, that you shared just now. You shared those numbers. I'd like to know, what does . . . you say through executive government. What's excluded by that?

But also you've shown a willingness to share some numbers today, which is novel. I wonder if you'd be willing to go back just a little bit and let us know on that over \$2 billion bypass,

what percentage of the money, not the contracts, went to Saskatchewan companies.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just at the outset would note I have the listed-out table on the savings, the \$39,518,000 of savings, by the school divisions that have submitted so far. I'll table that at the completion of this answer.

Just to correct the record, there actually was a member of the current caucus that was in government when they closed the Plains hospital. It was the member from Athabasca, so there is a current member of the NDP that has closed a hospital alive and well, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, with respect to the Regina bypass, I don't have the dollar number as through a P3 [public-private partnership] contract, how that works is the dollars go to the proponent. The proponent then disburses those dollars to the people throughout that do the work. As you know, a P3 is involved as a financial partner, design partner, and a construction partner, Mr. Chair.

I'm just getting a list on a number of Saskatchewan companies that did participate in that, but we have been informed, and I'm aware that 73 per cent of the work that did occur on the bypass was done, 73 per cent of the contracts were awarded to Saskatchewan companies.

This is not different to other P3s, like the bridges that were built in Saskatoon, other P3 projects across this province, I believe the city of Regina as well. Much of the P3 projects, quite honestly, have happened in the municipal sector in Saskatchewan and across the nation. So, Mr. Chair, this P3 project was no different. I will however say that throughout the construction of the project there was 9,200 construction jobs, and of that 73 per cent of the contracts . . . There was 106 Saskatchewan companies that were involved in the design and the construction of that bypass. And these businesses, as we said earlier, they have an office in this province, they pay taxes in this province, and they employ people who also pay taxes in this province, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Meili: — And once again, the question has been posed so many times, and the answer so studiously avoided, which it's pretty clear that many hundreds of millions of dollars, more than needed to, left the province with that bypass. That's the record of this Sask Party government.

Now with the reopening of phase 4.2, the small-business support measure that was put in place will no longer be having new applicants and it will remain 50 per cent unsubscribed by the business community. Business owners have said that the amounts per business in that plan really amounted to nowhere near what would be needed to keep their doors open, and there's no hint of any support beyond this for any businesses that might be allowed to open but still see major drops in revenue because of changes in consumer practices, etc.

Now we've all seen businesses close their doors and we hope we'll see them all open again but we know that won't be the case. They won't all open again, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business says that only 20 per cent of Saskatchewan entrepreneurs say their current state of business is in good shape; 36 per cent say their business is in bad shape. Eight per cent have planned to hire full-time staff in the next three months, but 32 per

cent foresee cuts in staff. Is the Premier happy to close down this already inadequate program and just roll the dice and hope that Saskatchewan small businesses just make it through?

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The small-business grant, as the minister has politely informed the members opposite that it's the most generous program in place in the nation of Canada. I believe Nova Scotia has a program similar to it, not near as generous or expansive. I believe Alberta has a program that is somewhat similar. I don't believe it is near as expansive, and Manitoba's most certainly is not.

We have designed this program shortly after Nova Scotia did. We did look at Nova Scotia's program. We did enhance our program here so that more would be able to qualify and so that it was a larger amount as well, Mr. Chair. So this program is one that I think has been received well, from businesses that were required and were eligible to apply for the program. My understanding is that we're just over \$30 million has been allocated to that program through the applications that have arrived.

[17:30]

Mr. Chair, I would just point out that we aren't quite finished with the response to the pandemic as of yet. We are prepared for what has occurred to date, but we're also prepared for what may be coming in the months ahead. There may be some choppy waters ahead of us, and we need to be prepared for that from a financial perspective, prepared to support the businesses and the people working in those businesses across this province, Mr. Chair. So we are well over half subscribed to that program, and there may be more. I hope not — in the days ahead — as that would mean that we have some challenging times.

We've also been there for our business community in a number of other ways. We talked at length on a \$2 billion capital injection that will help get people to work in communities right across this province over the course of this year and next. And we talked just about the small-business emergency payment that we have 50 million allocated, over 30 million prescribed.

We also have over \$13 million in conjunction with the federal government allocated for the commercial rent assistance program to help those that have commercial rent to pay here in Saskatchewan. The joint work with the federal government resulting in \$56 million being made available for the temporary wage supplement. We have also invested, as we said earlier, in the self-isolation support program for workers that may be feeling under the weather, may have symptoms. They don't have to go work, and they can still receive \$450 a week from the government.

We've invested in the agricultural sector through the AgriRecovery program, the western livestock price insurance program. Mr. Chair, the list goes on and on and on which is why I think it's important for us to discuss the differences between what the spending initiatives that we had put forward in March versus the budget that we introduced in this House, as one built upon the other but had many more COVID-related supports in this.

With respect to the last question on the bypass, and I'll table this, Mr. Chair, a list of the Saskatchewan companies, over 100

Saskatchewan companies that employ people, are located here in Saskatchewan, and did work on the Saskatchewan bypass which is part of the story. I think the larger part of the story is the safety that that road — I know you likely come in on that road from your home at times, Mr. Chair — the safety that it provides to residents in the area.

I think back just not that long ago, where we had very different stories coming out of the highway east of Regina. Happy to take these questions on the Regina bypass and not have to discuss some of the stories with respect to fatalities — fatalities of young individuals, young adults, Mr. Chair. I'll answer these questions all day long, because what we have at the end of the day is a safer road, a safer road that over 100 Saskatchewan companies were able to participate in the construction of. Mr. Chair, it's a piece of infrastructure invested in by this government that we're very proud of.

Mr. Meili: — Well thank you for tabling the document, Mr. Premier, but we've seen that one before. In fact you can take it back and fill in the numbers, and then we'd be very interested in reading it.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of filling in the numbers, Mr. Chair, we've had a lot of numbers thrown around by this government, including the number 200 million — a \$200 million contingency fund which we've seen ministers spend in everything from long-term care to COVID to health care to the education plan. Six ways from Sunday they spend this pre-election slush fund, and we could see how that's got some political utility but can't really see how that amounts to a good plan or responsible budgeting.

We've asked the Premier to come back, to finish his work and come back to show us where those \$200 million are going to go, where that was arrived at, and to show us the revenue projections and expenditure projections for the out years for this budget. This is standard information that is always included in budgets. The government has chosen to sit on that information this time around.

My final question to the Premier: will we finally get a real answer or are we going to be having to go to the public and have them understand that for this government, with its record, to balance a budget in three to four years, the only thing they can expect is more cuts to health and education, more sell-off of Crowns, more increases in taxes for regular people, more job losses, more wage cuts? This is the history of this government and that's exactly what we'll see. I invite the Premier to prove me wrong and provide those numbers immediately.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Chair, I thank you again for the question. It'll be a short answer to that question. I answered the revenue projections and when we have those revenue projections, for sure we will be providing those, Mr. Chair. With respect to the contingency fund for COVID, I maybe should have looked up the definition of contingency, and then follow that with the words "fund for COVID."

This has been referred to as a slush fund and all sorts of things. Nothing could be farther from the truth, Mr. Chair. We are preparing for what may come at us. That means we don't exactly know what that is, like no one else does. We're taking all of the

necessary precautions. We're investing in field hospitals to ensure that if we do have an outbreak we're able to manage that outbreak and still allow our surgical capacity and our health care capacity to operate. Mr. Chair, we're taking every necessary precaution to ensure that we are ready for whatever might arrive with respect to COVID. Part of that is ensuring that we have some dollars available should we need them to address some challenge that may come from our response to COVID-19.

I don't know what that challenge is today, Mr. Chair, but if it should arise, we would be sure to make an announcement, maybe even put out a news release. You can rest assured of that because we would want people to know that there's some dollars available to access for whatever that challenge might be. So the full accounting of the contingency for COVID will be made public as we invest those dollars if we are required to. I don't have the answer beyond that at this point in time.

I guess, Mr. Chair, one can be sure of this and all of the people across this province can be sure of this. As we go through the next number of weeks and months, we're entering election season here in Saskatchewan, and there's going to be promises and commitments made by both parties I'm sure, maybe even other parties.

The commitments that we will make on this side of the House, Mr. Chair, will be communicated to the public. We look forward to that. They will also be fully costed. They'll be fully costed to ensure that the public knows what the impact of those commitments will be on the bottom line of the finances of the government. Also what they will be on the . . . how they will impact the economy, the community, or whatever those commitments may be. But they will be fully costed, rest assured, as they always are. Mr. Chair, we have a history of being able to do this.

We'll also take the liberty of fully costing the opposition's platform as well, as they have missed that step in the process a number of times, Mr. Chair. So we'll be certain to fully cost the commitments that the opposition puts out as well so that Saskatchewan people are also aware of the money that they are spending of theirs as well, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, with that I would just close maybe with a . . . I'll leave it for my closing statements. I would just close with thanking everyone in this Assembly here for these estimates here today.

The Chair: — Members, I'd simply like to inform members that as per sessional order, the time has elapsed for the examination of these estimates. And so I will give both the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition to make a few short closing comments. And at that point then we'll ask the officials to leave, and we'll proceed to . . .

[Interjections]

The Chair: — Order. Only one person can talk when this mike is on.

Once the officials leave, we will vote the estimates and report them back to the House. And unlike other years, we have more work to do. So we'll try and keep our comments short and we'll move forward. So I'll recognize the Premier for some short

concluding comments.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you again, Mr. Chair. I do want to just express a number of thank yous and gratitude, first of all to you, Mr. Chair, Deputy Speaker of the House. I know this is your last estimates that you'll preside over, and I want to thank you for your service to not only your constituents but to the people of this Assembly and more broadly to the people across the province of Saskatchewan. You have served well, you have served with dignity, and you most certainly have served with honour. You're an example for many, Mr. Chair.

I would thank the Leader of the Opposition for his questions here today and for his questions over the course of the last number of weeks. This is how this Assembly works is by two parties — a number of parties in some years, but two parties these last few years — coming in with differing opinions but the same goal in mind, and that is to serve and improve our province.

Executive Council, I have Cam Swan; I have Kristin here helping us today — thank you so much for what you do; Michelle, our leader of House business; Reg, Shannon in my office. Thank you to all of the staff across this building in the ministers' offices that are so very helpful to the people in the province on a daily basis.

Our House leadership teams, it allowed and put together this House sitting that we have, on both sides of the House. Thank you very much. And to your staff that are helping you with the work that you were doing each and every day, and for how you agree 70 to 75 per cent of the time. That is appreciated. That's a joke, Mr. Chair.

Everyone that does have the opportunity to work in this beautiful building, this historic building, I want to thank them for what they do. We have of course the Sergeant-at-Arms; the commissionaires at the front; the Hansard, the folks that work in Hansard; in the library, which hasn't been operating the last number of months; but the committee staff, all of the committee staff that work so very hard when we get into budget estimates; those in the Clerk's office and the Speaker's office; the Pages, of which we very much missed this session and look forward to having them back at some point; as well as the maintenance staff that keep this building so beautiful and so majestic and ready to serve for yet another century as it has throughout the last.

Elected members — both sides of this Assembly. As I said, we agree maybe 70 or 75 per cent of the time. But we do collectively serve all of the people of this province and we do so, I think, very well. And whatever your duties may be in this House, whether you're part of formulating government decisions or whether you're part of keeping government accountable and taking government to task, I thank you for what you do in this House and in your constituency and representing the people. And together, collectively, how we represent all of the people in this great province of Saskatchewan that I know each and every one of us loves so dearly.

Last but not least, in some very short comments here, I just would take the opportunity to once again say that none of us serve in this Assembly alone, not one of us. We serve only with the sacrifice of our families. And it's without that sacrifice that we would not be able to do the work that we do wherever we are in this House. So to each of my colleagues in government and in

opposition, please pass on my appreciation to your family. Please pass on my thanks as they support the collective work that we are able to do here. I most certainly will thank my wife and my children when I get home.

To those that are not returning to this House — Mr. Chair, you among them — thank you for the immense service that you have provided to the people of this province and to your constituents. You have all been a role model for all of us, a friend, and a colleague for many of us.

And to all those that are vying for return this fall, I wish you the very best throughout the summer, and I wish you the very best as we enter the fall campaign season. Have a good summer.

The Chair: — I recognize the opposition leader.

Mr. Meili: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you for your patience with us today. I want to thank the Premier for this engagement and this debate today. And I mean this in all sincerity: I really appreciate this year you're quick to your feet and we got to get through a lot more questions. And I think that's a value to all of us, to be able to get to some more material. So thank you very much for that.

Thank you to the officials for their support through this so we get some clear answers. And thank you to members on the opposite side and the ministers for supporting through this process, and for you all for the roles you play representing your communities and working hard to serve the people of the province.

[17:45]

I do want to also say a few words about the members I get to work with. This is an incredible group that I get to be standing alongside and working with as a team, and they push me to do better and they support each other and give it their all every day. And to our retiring members from Saskatoon Centre and Saskatoon Riversdale and Regina Elphinstone and the member for Saskatoon Nutana, they'll be greatly missed on our team. And we look forward to getting to know their replacements, but it'll never be quite the same as this great group that we've had a chance to work with.

And I do want to follow the Premier's lead and thank my family as well. Mahli is on call this week. She's a pediatrician and that means I've got Gus and Abe with me in Moose Jaw. So I'm back and forth to Moose Jaw to my folks' house. And, you know, we all have our different ways of making this work, and I'm really grateful to my family for the support they give me, whether it's the days where this job is really fun or the days where it's less so.

And I do want to also thank the caucus staff on our side, all the staff who work in this building as I mentioned earlier, and in particular Ms. Adrienne King, our chief of staff, and the incredible crew who work so hard — and especially during this session, which has been topsy-turvy in so many ways. They've really stepped up and gave it their all. So I'm very grateful to them.

And once again, thank you, Mr. Chair, and continue on.

The Chair: — Okay. We can excuse the officials and we will

commence with voting the estimates.

Okay. We'll commence with voting the estimates. First subvote is (EX01), central management and services in the amount of \$5,590,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Communications office (EX03) in the amount of 1,435,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Cabinet planning (EX04) in the amount of 1,093,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Cabinet secretariat (EX05) in the amount of 503,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Members of the Executive Council (EX08) in the amount of 139,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . (EX06), yes. Sorry. We'll back up here. Members of the Executive Council (EX06). That's statutory for 139,000 so that does not need to be voted.

And then we'll move on to Premier's office (EX07) in the amount of 484,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. House business and research (EX08) in the amount of 248,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Intergovernmental Affairs (EX10) in the amount of 2,127,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Lieutenant Governor's Office (EX12) in the amount of 713,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2021, the following sums for Executive Council: 12,193,000.

Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. I would invite a member to move that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again. I recognize the Government House Leader.

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

The Chair: — Government House Leader 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. We will call in the Speaker.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Deputy Speaker and the Chair of Committees.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the committee to report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The Speaker: — When shall the committee sit again? I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Immediately, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I do now leave the Chair for Committee of Finance.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Motions for Supply

The Chair: — In accordance with the sessional order of June 15th, 2020 the item before the committee are financial resolutions. I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I move the following resolution:

Resolved that towards making good the supply granted to Her Majesty on account of certain charges and expenses of the public service for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020, the sum of \$369,100,000 to be granted out of the General Revenue Fund.

The Chair: — The Minister of Finance has moved resolution no. 1:

Resolved that towards making good the supply granted for Her Majesty on the account of certain charges and expenses of the public service for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020, the sum of \$369,100,000 be granted out of the General Revenue Fund.

Is the committee ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Chair: — Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I move the following resolution:

Resolved that toward making good the supply granted to Her Majesty on account of certain charges and expenses of the public service for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021, the sum of \$13,940,164,000 be granted out of the General Revenue Fund.

The Chair: — The Minister of Finance has moved resolution no. 2:

Resolved that towards making good the supply granted for Her Majesty on account of certain charges and expenses of the Public Service Commission for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, the sum of \$13,940,000,000 be granted out of the General Revenue Fund.

Is the committee ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. There being no further business before the committee, I invite a member to move that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again. I recognize the Government House Leader.

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

The Chair: — The Government House Leader 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 Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Finance has agreed to certain resolutions, has instructed me to report the same, and ask for leave to sit again.

The Speaker: — When shall the resolutions be read a first time? I recognize the Minister of Finance.

FIRST AND SECOND READINGS OF RESOLUTIONS

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I move that the resolutions be now read the first and second time.

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

[Yeas — 45]

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Clerk: — First and second reading of the resolutions.

The Speaker: — When shall the committee sit again?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Next sitting, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Next sitting. Pursuant to rule 32(1)(d), the Minister of Finance shall move first reading of the Appropriation Bill. I recognize the Minister of Finance.

APPROPRIATION BILL

Bill No. 213 — *The Appropriation Act, 2020 (No. 1)*

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I move that Bill No. 213, *The Appropriation Act, 2020 (No. 1)* be now introduced and read the first time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Finance has moved that Bill No. 213, *The Appropriation Act, 2020 (No. 1)* be now introduced and read a first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Clerk: — First reading of this bill.

The Speaker: — When shall the bill be read a second time? I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Pursuant to the sessional order and rule 32(1)(e), I move that Bill No. 213, *The Appropriation Act, 2020 (No. 1)* be now read a second and third time.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 213, *The Appropriation Act, 2020 (No. 1)* be now read a second and third time. Pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Recorded division.

The Speaker: — Division has been requested.

[The division bells rang from 17:58 until 18:10.]

The Speaker: — The question before the Assembly is the motion by the minister that Bill No. 213, *The Appropriation Act, 2020 (No. 1)* be now read a second and third time. Those in favour of the motion. I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The following members are in favour of the motion:

Moe	Beaudry-Mellor	Bonk
Bradshaw	Brkich	Buckingham
Carr	Cheveldayoff	Cox
D'Autremont	Dennis	Doke
Duncan	Eyre	Fiaz
Francis	Goudy	Hargrave
Harpauer	Harrison	Hart
Heppner	Hindley	Kaeding
Kirsch	Lambert	Lawrence
Makowsky	Marit	McMorris
Merriman	Michelson	Morgan
Nerlien	Nolaun	Ottenbreit
Reiter	Ross	Steele
Stewart	Tell	Weekes
Wilson	Wyant	Young

Total number of members in favour: 45.

The Speaker: — Those opposed to the motion. I recognize the Deputy Opposition Whip.

[Nays — 13]

Ms. Rancourt: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members that are opposed to the motion are as follows:

Meili	Beck	Belanger
Chartier	Forbes	McCall
Mowat	Pedersen	Rancourt
Sarauer	Sproule	Vermette
Wotherspoon		

The total number of members opposed to the motion are 13.

The Speaker: — I declare the motion carried.

Clerk: — Second and third reading of this bill.

The Speaker: — It now being past the hour of adjournment, this House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 18:12.]

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GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN

CABINET MINISTERS

Hon. Scott Moe

Premier

President of the Executive Council

Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

Hon. Tina Beaudry-Mellor

Minister of Advanced Education

Minister Responsible for the Status of Women

Minister Responsible for Innovation

Hon. Lori Carr

Minister of Government Relations

Minister Responsible for First Nations, Métis
and Northern Affairs

Minister Responsible for the Provincial
Capital Commission

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff

Minister of Central Services

Minister Responsible for Public Service Commission

Hon. Dustin Duncan

Minister of Environment

Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
Power Corporation

Hon. Bronwyn Eyre

Minister of Energy and Resources

Minister Responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated

Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
Water Corporation

Hon. Joe Hargrave

Minister of Crown Investments

Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan

Government Insurance

Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
Transportation Company

Hon. Donna Harpauer

Minister of Finance

Hon. Jeremy Harrison

Minister of Trade and Export Development

Minister of Immigration and Career Training

Hon. Warren Kaeding

Minister Responsible for Rural and Remote Health

Minister Responsible for Seniors

Hon. Gene Makowsky

Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport

Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Liquor
and Gaming Authority

Minister Responsible for Tourism Saskatchewan

Hon. David Marit

Minister of Agriculture

Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Crop
Insurance Corporation

Hon. Paul Merriman

Minister of Social Services

Hon. Don Morgan

Minister of Justice and Attorney General

Minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety

Minister Responsible for the Saskatchewan

Workers' Compensation Board

Minister Responsible for The Global

Transportation Hub Authority

Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
Telecommunications

Hon. Greg Ottenbreit

Minister of Highways and Infrastructure

Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan

Water Security Agency

Hon. Jim Reiter

Minister of Health

Hon. Christine Tell

Minister of Corrections and Policing

Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan

Gaming Corporation

Hon. Gordon Wyant

Deputy Premier

Minister of Education

Minister Responsible for SaskBuilds and
Priority Saskatchewan