



FIRST SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

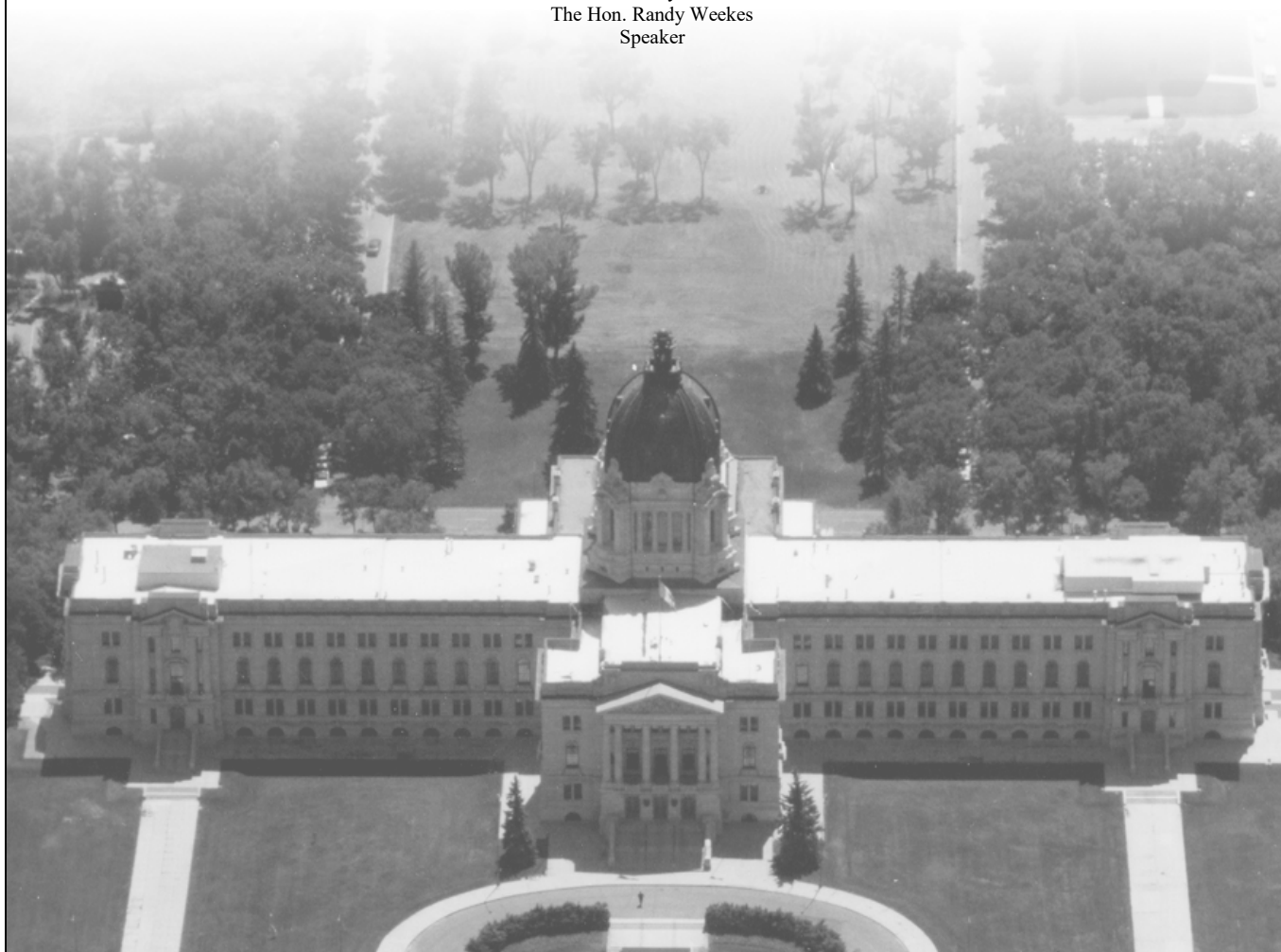
of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of
The Hon. Randy Weekes
Speaker



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
1st Session — 29th Legislature

Lieutenant Governor — His Honour the Honourable Russ Mirasty, S.O.M., M.S.M.

Speaker — Hon. Randy Weekes
Premier — Hon. Scott Moe
Leader of the Opposition — Ryan Meili

Beck, Carla — Regina Lakeview (NDP)
Belanger, Buckley — Athabasca (NDP)
Bonk, Steven — Moosomin (SP)
Bowes, Jennifer — Saskatoon University (NDP)
Bradshaw, Hon. Fred — Carrot River Valley (SP)
Buckingham, David — Saskatoon Westview (SP)
Carr, Hon. Lori — Estevan (SP)
Cheveldayoff, Ken — Saskatoon Willowgrove (SP)
Cockrill, Jeremy — The Battlefords (SP)
Conway, Meara — Regina Elphinstone-Centre (NDP)
Dennis, Terry — Canora-Pelly (SP)
Docherty, Mark — Regina Coronation Park (SP)
Domotor, Ryan — Cut Knife-Turtleford (SP)
Duncan, Hon. Dustin — Weyburn-Big Muddy (SP)
Eyre, Hon. Bronwyn — Saskatoon Stonebridge-Dakota (SP)
Fiaz, Muhammad — Regina Pasqua (SP)
Francis, Ken — Kindersley (SP)
Friesen, Marv — Saskatoon Riversdale (SP)
Goudy, Todd — Melfort (SP)
Grewal, Gary — Regina Northeast (SP)
Hargrave, Joe — Prince Albert Carlton (SP)
Harpauer, Hon. Donna — Humboldt-Watrous (SP)
Harrison, Daryl — Cannington (SP)
Harrison, Hon. Jeremy — Meadow Lake (SP)
Hindley, Hon. Everett — Swift Current (SP)
Jenson, Terry — Martensville-Warman (SP)
Kaeding, Hon. Warren — Melville-Saltcoats (SP)
Keisig, Travis — Last Mountain-Touchwood (SP)
Kirsch, Delbert — Batoche (SP)
Lambert, Lisa — Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood (SP)
Lawrence, Greg — Moose Jaw Wakamow (SP)

Love, Matt — Saskatoon Eastview (NDP)
Makowsky, Hon. Gene — Regina Gardiner Park (SP)
Marit, Hon. David — Wood River (SP)
McLeod, Tim — Moose Jaw North (SP)
McMorris, Hon. Don — Indian Head-Milestone (SP)
Meili, Ryan — Saskatoon Meewasin (NDP)
Merriman, Hon. Paul — Saskatoon Silverspring-Sutherland (SP)
Meyers, Derek — Regina Walsh Acres (SP)
Moe, Hon. Scott — Rosthern-Shellbrook (SP)
Morgan, Hon. Don — Saskatoon Southeast (SP)
Mowat, Vicki — Saskatoon Fairview (NDP)
Nerlien, Hugh — Kelvington-Wadena (SP)
Nippi-Albright, Betty — Saskatoon Centre (NDP)
Ottenbreit, Greg — Yorkton (SP)
Reiter, Hon. Jim — Rosetown-Elrose (SP)
Ritchie, Erika — Saskatoon Nutana (NDP)
Ross, Alana — Prince Albert Northcote (SP)
Ross, Hon. Laura — Regina Rochdale (SP)
Sarauer, Nicole — Regina Douglas Park (NDP)
Skoropad, Dana — Arm River (SP)
Steele, Doug — Cypress Hills (SP)
Stewart, Hon. Lyle — Lumsden-Morse (SP)
Tell, Hon. Christine — Regina Wascana Plains (SP)
Vermette, Doyle — Cumberland (NDP)
Weekes, Hon. Randy — Biggar-Sask Valley (SP)
Wilson, Nadine — Saskatchewan Rivers (SP)
Wotherspoon, Trent — Regina Rosemont (NDP)
Wyant, Hon. Gordon — Saskatoon Northwest (SP)
Young, Aleana — Regina University (NDP)
Young, Colleen — Lloydminster (SP)

Party Standings: Saskatchewan Party (SP) — 48; New Democratic Party (NDP) — 13

Clerks-at-the-Table

Clerk — Gregory A. Putz

Law Clerk & Parliamentary Counsel — Kenneth S. Ring, Q.C.

Deputy Clerk — Iris Lang

Clerk Assistant — Kathy Burianyk

Sergeant-at-Arms — Terry Quinn

Hansard on the internet

Hansard and other documents of the
Legislative Assembly are available
within hours after each sitting.

<https://www.legassembly.sk.ca/Calendar>

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Fiaz	277
Young, A.	277

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Remembering Orme Asher	
Friesen	277
Appreciation for the Sacrifices of Seniors in Care Homes	
Love.....	277
Green Shirt Day Honours Logan Boulet's Legacy	
Hargrave.....	278
World Health Day	
Mowat	278
Business Owner Wins Fundraising Award	
Ross, A.	278
Hockey Volunteer Recognized	
Keisig	278
Saskatchewan Leads in Exports	
Francis	279

QUESTION PERIOD

Government Response to COVID-19 Pandemic	
Meili	279
Moe.....	279
Provincial Budget	
Wotherspoon	281
Harpauer	281
Staffing in Long-Term Care Facilities	
Love.....	281
Hindley.....	282
Support for Education during COVID-19 Pandemic	
Beck.....	282
Duncan.....	282
Job Creation and Management of Provincial Economy	
Young, A.	283
Harrison, J.	283

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY

(BUDGET DEBATE)

Wotherspoon	283
Beck.....	286
Cockrill	288
Hindley.....	291
Nerlien	294
Young, A.	296
Meyers	299
Fiaz.....	302
Jenson	304

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

Albert] Carlton . . . oh, Saskatoon Riversdale.

[Prayers]

Remembering Orme Asher

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Pasqua.

Mr. Fiaz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Nav Canada is currently reviewing the air traffic control tower at Regina and Saskatoon international airports. Though it is a private company, the federal government has three elected members on the board of directors and the minister of transportation will have oversight to the fate of these towers. The aviation industry has been one of the hardest hit during COVID-19, but will still play a vital role in the economic recovery of the province.

I'll read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on the federal government to advise Nav Canada to reconsider its position on closing these airports' traffic control towers at Regina and Saskatoon international airports and to halt any decision until the global pandemic has subsided.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by citizens of Regina. Thank you.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on Equal Pay Day to present a petition calling on the Government of Saskatchewan for pay equity legislation. As we know, Saskatchewan is one of only four provinces that does not have pay equity legislation, and this longstanding gap and inequity needs to be addressed. As we know, Equal Pay Day represents how far into the year women have to work to earn what men earned in the previous year.

And, Mr. Speaker, this is common-sense stuff, as much as it can be in this hallowed room. It should be a non-partisan issue, and I don't think NDP [New Democratic Party] stands for no difference in pay. I think we should all support this, because the more women able to actively participate and earn at an equitable level, the better it is for the provincial economy.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will read the prayer as follows:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on the Government of Saskatchewan to introduce pay equity legislation.

And this petition today is signed by residents of Regina. I so submit.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from P.A. [Prince

Mr. Friesen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1978 the Kinsmen Club of Saskatoon was in a pinch. They needed money to keep the club alive. One of the club's members, Orme Asher, thought of a crazy idea to raise the funds they needed: a home lottery. By buying a \$100 ticket — a very large expense at the time — you would have a chance to live mortgage-free in a brand new home. Orme and a few others sold all the tickets door to door.

Orme was a serial entrepreneur. At age 13 he delivered prescriptions by bicycle. Later in life he developed, captained, and managed the Northcote River Cruises on the South Saskatchewan River.

The home lottery concept worked so well that Royal University Hospital Foundation hired him to run what is now known as the Hospital Home Lottery. Soon other hospital foundations took note and wanted him to help them fundraise too. Today Orme's company, S.O. Asher Consultants, is a global leader in charitable gaming and has raised over a billion dollars for charities. That's right — over a billion dollars.

Sadly, in December 2020 Orme passed away in the arms of his wife, Shirley, son Andy, and daughter Anne. I had the pleasure of spending some time with Orme while running my automotive repair business. Orme would often come into the shop and we would chat about cars and life. Orme had a way of making everyone around him feel equal, important, and special. I'm honoured to have known Orme, and I know that I'm only one of many that look up to him to this day.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members join me in remembering Orme Asher for his honourable contributions.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

Appreciation for the Sacrifices of Seniors in Care Homes

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my great honour to stand and express my gratitude and admiration for all of the senior citizens living in Saskatchewan's care homes. As the COVID-19 pandemic raged in our province, there was no group more at risk than seniors and no group who endured greater isolation, who sacrificed more, who emphasized the common good more than senior citizens.

Mr. Speaker, to illustrate this point, I'd like to tell you a story about a constituent who's become a good friend of mine. He used to sit in the chair where you are now sitting. This past weekend, my friend and his wife celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. It was the first time they had been in each other's presence since the summer. You see, his wife requires a high level of daily care. She lives in a care home and has been isolated from her husband of 60 years to keep everyone safe.

We know that many seniors have made similar sacrifices, but many seniors have also had a front-row seat to witness the destruction of COVID-19 on their homes, their friends, and their

families. This pandemic has torn back the curtains on senior care across Canada, and the only right thing to do at this point is to make sure that Saskatchewan is a true leader in fixing what is broken.

I ask all members of this Chamber to stand with our masks on to show our appreciation to the seniors of this province for their hard work, their sacrifice, and their selflessness over the past year. Thank you.

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

Green Shirt Day Honours Logan Boulet's Legacy

Mr. Hargrave: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April is National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Month. People across Canada are marking today as Green Shirt Day to honour the legacy of Logan Boulet, the Humboldt Broncos player who inspired thousands to become registered organ donors.

Mr. Speaker, almost 4,500 Canadians are waiting for organ donation and that's why we need to keep the conversation going. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's donor registry, givelifesask.ca, has over 13,000 people enrolled. One organ donor can save up to eight lives, and one tissue donor can enhance quality of life for up to 75 people.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to work to raise awareness for organ and tissue donation and to support the families who face a difficult decision in the face of tragedy. This week we launched a segment of our public awareness campaign featuring Monica Goulet, a Métis woman from Saskatchewan who received a kidney from her nephew, Jim Searson of Lac la Ronge. Their stories shed light on the incredible gift of organ donation.

Mr. Speaker, I am proudly wearing a green shirt and tie today, and I applaud those who chose to wear a green shirt today in honour of Logan, in memory of those who have died awaiting a transplant, and to continue to raise awareness. I ask my colleagues to join me in urging the people of our province to visit Saskatchewan organ and tissue donor registry, givelifesask.ca, and enrol now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

World Health Day

Ms. Mowat: — Today I want to acknowledge World Health Day. The theme this year is "Building a fairer, healthier world." This is something the Saskatchewan NDP will continue to fight for.

Our province is an unequal one, and COVID-19 has made this very clear. People were having a tough time before COVID-19 hit, and the Sask Party's failure to show leadership in containing the pandemic means those families are even further behind. Under this Premier, Saskatchewan has led the country in COVID-19 cases throughout 2021. This government has taken no responsibility for their lack of action to prevent the second and third waves of COVID-19, and they have turned their backs on two other public health crises: the HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] epidemic and mental health crisis.

The government's inaction to protect our province's health continues to disproportionately impact Saskatchewan's most vulnerable, but this does not have to be the case. This is preventable. It's time for a government that provides opportunities for all people in our province to lead healthy, happy lives so every person in this province has access to quality health services when and where they need them.

To build a province that is fairer and healthier, we must put people first. We must protect the most vulnerable and build systems that work. It's time to invest in mental health supports, addiction services, and harm reduction programs. To build a fairer, healthier world, we can start by building a fairer, healthier province. Thank you.

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

Business Owner Wins Fundraising Award

Ms. A. Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Toffifee is a sweet confection that is enjoyed by many during the Christmas season. But in Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker, Toffifee is so much more. The Prince Albert Canadian Tire store, the owner, Malcolm Jenkins and family have been recognized as having the largest single-store Toffifee sales in the world during 2019 and 2020. A total of 58,000 boxes sold — quite an accomplishment.

Mr. Speaker, Malcolm Jenkins is well known for his generosity and his support of local charities in Prince Albert and area. Malcolm donates \$1 from each box of Toffifee sold to a local charity and \$58,000 was given to the Rose Garden Hospice foundation. The people of Prince Albert and area have applauded and embraced this fundraising event.

Mr. Speaker, in recognition of these record-setting sales and the fundraising event, the company that manufactures Toffifee presented Malcolm and the Prince Albert Canadian Tire store with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Mr. Speaker, today I ask all members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating Malcolm Jenkins and the Prince Albert Canadian Tire store for this achievement and thanking them for their spirit of generosity.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Hockey Volunteer Recognized

Mr. Keisig: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a fellow constituent of mine, Chris Petrichuk of Balcarres, was awarded Hockey Canada's Hockey Champion Award. Mr. Speaker, this award recognizes coaches, officials, players, or volunteers who go above and beyond to make a difference in hockey in their communities.

Chris Petrichuk has three daughters whom all love to play hockey. He is extensively involved with his local rink, and a minor hockey executive. Chris is a driving force in building three girls' hockey teams in Balcarres and a girls' team in Melville. These teams include girls from 13 different communities and seven First Nations communities. Female hockey teams are

essential in rural Saskatchewan, as they allow young girls to feel empowered and strong as society continues to advance in gender equality.

Mr. Speaker, volunteers like Chris are what keeps rinks in rural Saskatchewan thriving. Because of Chris's efforts, young girls from 20 communities can partake in living a healthier lifestyle. Thank you Chris for being supportive and encouraging to young girls in hockey.

Mr. Speaker, I would like now to ask all members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating Chris Petrichuk on receiving Hockey Canada's Hockey Champion Award. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Kindersley.

Saskatchewan Leads in Exports

Mr. Francis: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The latest merchandise export report released by Statistics Canada shows that Saskatchewan's exports continue to be strong. Year over year Saskatchewan's exports increased by 11.1 per cent, driven by a 33.3 per cent increase in agricultural exports. In the first two months of 2021, compared to the same period last year, Saskatchewan's exports increased by 13 per cent. Again, agricultural exports saw a significant increase of 35.1 per cent.

[13:45]

These numbers reflect an ongoing trend we've seen over the past year. In 2020 Saskatchewan had the highest increase in exports among the provinces compared to 2019 and was one of only two provinces to see an increase during that same period. They also show why our government continues to focus on the importance of international engagement. That is why as part of the '21-22 budget we announce that we will continue to expand our network of international trade and investment offices with four new locations to be announced this year.

We've said it many times before, but it's always worth repeating: Saskatchewan has the food, fuel, and fertilizers that the world needs, especially as the global economy continues to recover. While the NDP opposition continue to spout doom and gloom about the state of our economy, the actual numbers show that Saskatchewan continues to lead the national economic recovery. Thank you.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Government Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. COVID-19 has changed but this Premier has not. At the end of last year, he gave an interview. In the middle of a brutal second wave, he told people that when it comes to his COVID-19 response, he wouldn't change a thing. That showed an astonishing lack of insight and humility, even at that time. But since then, hundreds more have died, thousands have been sick, and with the prolonged public health measures necessitated by his lack of decisive action, thousands more are out of work.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: will he finally admit, will he finally admit that his choices have hurt Saskatchewan's health and economy, or would he still not change a thing?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday with respect to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Speaker, we've taken a measured and balanced response in this province. We have made every effort to yes, protect lives, but also to protect livelihoods, Mr. Speaker, and protect the personal freedoms that people have in their household, in their personal life, in their community, Mr. Speaker.

We have put significant measures in place, likely the most significant public health measures that have ever been enacted in this province, Mr. Speaker, in the province's history. We have put those measures in place, and in large part the vast majority of people in this province have adhered to those public health measures that have been recommended and put in place by our chief medical health officer, Dr. Shahab.

Mr. Speaker, has any response across this nation or around the world been perfect? Most certainly not, Mr. Speaker. We learn as we find our way through each of the last 12 months. Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue with that balanced and measured response. We're going continue to focus in the days, including today, and the days ahead, Mr. Speaker, on our vaccine rollout, ensuring that as we receive vaccines, we're making them available to Saskatchewan people. That's our way through the pandemic.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to read a quote for you. This quote says that "In the race between vaccines and variants of COVID-19, the variants are winning." Now that quote doesn't come from, as you might expect, Saskatchewan public health experts who've been critical of the Premier's response. No, it comes from a voice he actually will listen to, a voice from a fellow by the name of Jason Kenney. Even the Premier's pal recognizes that vaccines are only a part of the picture.

What did this Premier do instead? He saw that race going on between variants and vaccines and he said, let's give the variants a head start. He saw the modelling. He knew what was coming, and still he chose to reduce restrictions. Will the Premier admit he got it wrong in the fall; he got it wrong this spring? Will he finally admit that his choices have hurt our health and our economy? Or would he still not change a single thing?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, I have been discussing openly and publicly that we have been in a race between the variants and the vaccines for some period of time. And here is what we have focused on in Saskatchewan is providing the vaccines that we receive from the federal government to Saskatchewan people as quickly as we receive them.

As of this morning, Mr. Speaker, we're at about 235,000 vaccines have been turned around to the people of the province. Mr.

Speaker, as of just the last day or two, we have virtually all of our long-term care residents vaccinated, and we know the challenge that COVID presents in our long-term care settings, Mr. Speaker.

We have 80 per cent of the folks that are over 80 in this province have received their vaccines, 70 per cent of the folks over 70 years old. And, Mr. Speaker, we are over one-third of our way through those folks that are over 60 years old in the province. All have had access to those vaccines for a number of days now, Mr. Speaker.

And we're going to continue to turn those vaccines around as we receive them — finally receiving some substantial numbers here in the province — turn them around, provide them as quickly as we can to all Saskatchewan residents. This is our way back to normal. This is our way through the COVID-19 pandemic. This is our way back to the normal days that we all desire.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier talks about vaccines, and we agree they are absolutely key. They are the ultimate end to the pandemic. That's why I and so many health care workers across Saskatchewan have been doing as many vaccine clinics as we can. But those vaccines will not bring back the people we've already lost. They do nothing to console those who are right now praying that their loved ones will make it out of our overcrowded ICUs [intensive care unit]. And they're not doing anything to protect the over a third of health care workers who still don't have their first dose.

Mr. Speaker, when will the Premier stop downplaying the seriousness of the moment we're in? When will we get an honest assessment of the state of COVID-19 in the province today? And when will we see a plan to bring the third wave under control?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What vaccines will do is prevent people from contracting COVID here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. That's why we are making every effort, with a well-thought-out plan between ... The Saskatchewan Health Authority and the Ministry of Health have put forward a well-thought-out plan with well over 200 clinics that'll be operating across this province. Many of them are operating as we speak today, as we do have some vaccines on the ground here today, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we have about 235,000 vaccines that have been provided to Saskatchewan people on our age-based priority. We have a vaccine rollout plan that is leading this nation.

Mr. Speaker, we have delivered more vaccines per 100,000 people than anywhere else in the nation, approaching about 20,000 people per 100,000. It's a plan that I most certainly am proud of our Saskatchewan Health Authority and the Ministry of Health for putting together and putting into action. Mr. Speaker, I think it's a robust vaccination plan that's leading the nation, that all residents of this province can be very, very proud of.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier likes to talk

about balance. But I don't see any balance when we've had hundreds of people died, thousands more have been sick, and thousands more have lost their jobs. He talks about the economy. But you know what's bad for the economy, Mr. Speaker? COVID-19. You know what's really killing jobs in Saskatchewan? COVID-19.

And this Premier has been the best ally that COVID-19 could possibly have. The biggest threat to our health and to our economy is this Premier and his lack of leadership when it comes to addressing the pandemic. And in the race between variants and the vaccines, he said, let's give the variants a head start. That's exactly the choices that he has made. His inaction has given us the worst of both worlds. It's cost us lives and it's cost us jobs.

Will the Premier finally admit that he got it wrong? That yes, he would change a thing and yes, we need to change, we need a plan to address this growing third wave?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, in this province we have what are quite likely the most significant public health measures ever enacted in the history of the province, Mr. Speaker. As we have approached our response to COVID-19, we have enacted those public health measures on the guidance of our chief medical health officer, Dr. Saqib Shahab, who has served this province, I think, immensely well over the course of the past year, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to work with Dr. Shahab throughout.

The balanced and measured approach that we spoke to, Mr. Speaker, does ensure that yes, we are enacting those measures to protect lives here in the province but also ensuring that we are respecting people's personal freedoms and respecting and protecting, Mr. Speaker, their livelihoods in community after community.

We have reached out and supported many of the people, many of the jobs, many of the opportunities that we have in this province, Mr. Speaker, to the tune of about \$2 billion last year, \$1.5 billion in this current budget that was released yesterday. And, Mr. Speaker, in those supports, over \$160 million provided to the Ministry of Health, the Saskatchewan Health Authority, to ensure that they have the resources to deliver on the response that is required in our health care sector, Mr. Speaker.

We've done about \$155 million transferred to the school divisions to ensure our classrooms are safe, Mr. Speaker, and negotiated with the federal government over \$300 million coming into the province to ensure that, Mr. Speaker, we can keep people safe in this province and support people through some of these very significant health measures that have been put in place in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, as I say, these are some of the most significant health measures. This response compares to nothing since the Second World War, Mr. Speaker, and I'm very proud of the way that Saskatchewan people have rose to the challenge that's been before them the last year.

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

Provincial Budget

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, for years the Sask Party filled the airwaves with attack ads warning that there was a party in this province that would drive up your taxes, drive up the deficit, or both. It turns out, Mr. Speaker, that those ads were warning about this Finance minister's budget yesterday.

This Premier and that Finance minister, who have never balanced a budget and never will, sold the people of Saskatchewan a false bill of goods. And now we're stuck with the worst of both worlds — record debt caused by this government's failure to save during good times due to mismanagement, but inadequate investment in key supports people need in health care and classrooms, and a budget that fails to get this economy back on its feet. It's Saskatchewan people that are left to pay the price.

How can the Sask Party defend that record, defend their words, and defend this budget when it fails the people of Saskatchewan so badly?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — You know, it is very interesting and yet again the NDP need to pick a lane. I think I heard the member opposite saying that we didn't spend enough in any area. I don't believe they think we did, and they think we should spend more, but yet they disagree with the debt. Mr. Speaker, I don't know how they explain it. And any time anyone asks them — should we increase that spending, where would they find the money? — they duck and dodge. That's all they do is they duck and dodge. Yet today, as in last year, as any other day, I will not take advice from those members opposite.

Quite frankly, let's see what the RBC [Royal Bank of Canada] economists have to say about our budget. They say:

The government's medium-term path is prudent with the deficit set to decline over the next three years by containing spending growth and committing to balance the budget by . . . 2026-27. This careful approach to balancing the books is appropriate to ensure a sustainable recovery.

Mr. Speaker, that is what . . . And I would love to have more questions because I have a number of quotes from economists on what they think of the budget. I will listen to the economists, Mr. Speaker. I have no time when those members cannot pick a lane and they want to have no debt, but they want to spend more and they will not disclose to the public where they'll find the money.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, honesty matters. And we've picked a lane. We'll protect lives and we'll protect the economy, Mr. Speaker. The Sask Party is failing at both of those. Mr. Speaker. That Finance minister and the Sask Party has no credibility when it comes to our provincial finances. Now I understand that that minister used to stand in these benches presenting petitions saying, don't tax our food, but fails today to take the damaging PST [provincial sales tax] that they added, off of restaurant meals. Of course the same can be said about construction.

I also understand that that minister used to lead tax revolts with municipal ratepayers, but is now presiding over a \$15 million property tax hike that will hit families at a time that they can least afford it. In this past campaign that minister, that Premier, promised Saskatchewan people that there would be no cuts, no tax hikes, and that the budget would be balanced in 2024. Yesterday's budget shows that none of those promises were true.

Why would the people of Saskatchewan have any faith at all in the Sask Party government's word, when they're just so comfortable saying whatever they want during an election and then doing something else right afterwards?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, I find it rather interesting that that member opposite would reference the tax revolts. I was definitely around when the tax revolts happened, and by the way, it was an NDP government at that time. It's because they refused at any given time to address the property tax in this province. It disproportionately was difficult for the property owners. So the fact that he would even reference that is quite stunning.

[14:00]

What does the CIBC [Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce] economists say about our budget? They say "We also highlight that among Canada's three oil-producing provinces, Saskatchewan is the least reliant on oil production activity, as its economy leans more heavily on agriculture." It will do well.

Mr. Speaker, we also have BMO [Bank of Montreal]:

The Bottom Line: Saskatchewan is posting a larger deficit as it continues to roll out pandemic-related support, though the support is now geared more toward the economy rather than direct health care. While the path toward balance looks long and slow, the Province still sits in a relatively favourable position versus its peers.

Those economists, Mr. Speaker, have far more knowledge and wouldn't agree with tax revolts that happened under the previous government.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

Staffing in Long-Term Care Facilities

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 8th, the Premier campaigned on a promise that he would add 300 staff to the front lines of seniors care. At that point in the pandemic, we had lost 24 lives. As long-term care infections, outbreaks, and deaths started to rise in December, we called on this government to add those staff immediately to protect seniors in our care homes. The Premier told this House the staff he promised were, and I quote him directly, "actively being searched out as we speak."

Now, after dozens of long-term care outbreaks, hundreds of lives lost, we're learning that the Premier not only failed to deliver on his promise when it mattered most, he is breaking his campaign commitment and only funding one-third of what he promised.

There was one campaign promise the Premier could have kept to save lives, and he broke it. Why?

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

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for the question. With respect to the staffing in our long-term care facilities, we have made significant investments into that over the past number of years. Over the terms of our government, the number of staff working in LTCs [long-term care] has increased by over 700 since 2007.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the promise in the campaign to hire 300 continuing care aids, in this particular budget we are investing \$6 million to hire the first 108 care aids — 90 for long-term care and 18 in rural and remote home care. Mr. Speaker, we know that there is a demand for continuing care aids across Saskatchewan, frankly across this country, for the valuable work that they do in our health care facilities in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, we will hire those remaining care aids as quickly as we can. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, this minister can spin the Premier's words however he likes, but let's turn to his own words. December 1st in this House the minister said, "... the number of additional workers that have been committed to being hired ... in the next budget year, the 300 continuing care aids ...". Not just that, Mr. Speaker. The Sask Party's own platform costing document shows their actual promise in black and white: \$18.4 million promised in '21-22 and every year after that. That means the Premier's promise of 180 new care aids for long-term care is more like 60. That's only one-third of a care aid per home.

Mr. Speaker, it would be laughable if it weren't so tragic. This has been a difficult and deadly time for seniors, and this budget has failed them. Will the Premier do the right thing: keep his promise and provide the full 18 million in funding for staff that he promised in October and his minister promised in December?

The Speaker: — I would like to remind the member from Saskatoon Eastview not to display a prop. I recognize the Minister of Rural and Remote Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said previously, we have commitments in this particular budget year to hire 108 of the continuing care aids as part of our commitment to 300 new CCAs [continuing care aid] in this province as per what we talked about during the provincial budget, Mr. Speaker. And as I mentioned before, there is great demand for care aids across the country and across Saskatchewan. There is training that needs to take place. There's a number of unfilled positions, I believe, right now as well, Mr. Speaker.

So this is a challenge going forward, but this is an important commitment towards the seniors and older adults of our province, Mr. Speaker. And it's a commitment that we take very seriously to make sure that we're providing the best possible care that we can for senior citizens in our long-term care homes, our personal

care homes ... the home care commitment that this particular election promise speaks to, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we'll hire 108 this year and then hire the remaining care aids as part of that 300 election promise as quickly as we can. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Support for Education during COVID-19 Pandemic

Ms. Beck: — Yesterday the Sask Party government tabled their budget, Mr. Speaker, the final exam on an already failing report card in education. The budget right on page 9 says that Saskatchewan school divisions will receive a \$19.2 million increase over last year. And I quote, "This includes fully funding the 2.0 per cent salary increase as part of the teachers' collective bargaining agreement."

Mr. Speaker, this government is at best confused and at worst blowing smoke. Their own officials know that this year's contractual commitment to teachers is \$23 million. I didn't have to spend very long, Mr. Speaker, in front of the whiteboard to figure out that the difference there is \$4 million: \$4 million in cuts to our classrooms; \$4 million less for staff, for supports, and to keep the lights on. Why is the Minister of Education again cutting millions from our classrooms?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Well, well, Mr. Speaker, there that member goes again. She's busy handing out report cards. I know yesterday she was handing out F's and A's, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the member's incorrect. There is \$19 million, as she knows, in this year's budget. There's also a carry-over of \$21 million that school divisions have already received to help fund the fall session of the school year and carry on further than that.

School divisions are also going to save between 3 and \$4 million in SaskPower savings, Mr. Speaker. As well on top of that, the government has also reimbursed about \$4.9 million that school divisions would have taken out of their operating grants to pay for PPE [personal protective equipment] prior to a provincial procurement process, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, at the same time school divisions themselves are projecting a lower enrolment for the fall, and obviously we will confirm that in September, Mr. Speaker. But the bottom line is more money this year for school divisions for fewer students in the classrooms.

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

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, I call 'em as I see 'em, and they deserve every mark that they get. This government wants us to believe that they've made great investments in the K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] system. The truth of the matter is that there will be cuts as a result of this budget. Unfortunately school boards will have to wait a little bit of time, extra time, to find out just how much they'll have to cut.

Once again school divisions across the province will be faced with cutting supports, staff, and again in the midst of a pandemic. The SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association] president himself says, "It's important to note . . . that other inflationary costs are not covered in the increase and therefore school divisions may have difficult decisions to make."

Mr. Speaker, millions less, more costs, and more need in the classrooms. This budget won't make any of those challenges easier. They'll make them worse. To the minister: will you take responsibility for the pink slips that are sure to come because of the cuts, or is that another responsibility that you plan to offload to school divisions?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would note I had an opportunity to speak with a number of the organizations involved in the education sector yesterday, Mr. Speaker, including the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation who put out a news release saying that they're ". . . encouraged by the 2021-22 provincial budget and says it signals public education is a priority." It goes on to quote the president, Patrick Maze, saying, "Given the circumstances, this is a realistic approach," Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, we will work with school divisions as they plan for the upcoming school year, knowing that there is additional money this year. There is the carry-over money from the over 150 million that was provided by the province and the federal government, Mr. Speaker, in this last year.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day I would just say this. The only report card . . . And I would never even put myself in a position to give the members opposite a report card. I don't think that's my job, Mr. Speaker. At the end of the day, the only report card that matters is from the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and they gave a grade to both sides of this House, Mr. Speaker. And I think it's pretty clear the marks that each side received.

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

Job Creation and Management of Provincial Economy

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, someday, despite the actions and inactions of this government, COVID-19 will be behind us. And on that day, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan will want to see a plan to create jobs and get back to work, and that plan should have been in yesterday's budget. But amazingly, there's nothing in this budget that comes anywhere close to a jobs plan. And as Kevin Doherty used to say in this very House, hope is not a plan.

But that's all the Sask Party has on offer when it comes to creating jobs — hope that vaccines make up for their dismal management of COVID-19, and hope that the good times will be rolling again with one last boom. That's not much of a plan, Mr. Speaker. That's just wishful thinking, and Saskatchewan deserves so much better.

So why is there no jobs plan in this budget when over 23,000 people are looking for work?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I think this question period demonstrates the lack of credibility in a very stark way of the members opposite. On the one hand, every question they stand up and demand more spending. Then the member for Rosemont stands up and says, you're spending too much. The members opposite stand up and demand a lockdown to put 80,000 people out of work. The member then stands up at the end and says, there's 23,000 people out of work.

Mr. Speaker, this is exactly why, when the public of this province had an opportunity to pass judgment on who they believed to be best able to manage the economy, manage the pandemic, just a short while ago, why the House looks why it does.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY (BUDGET DEBATE)

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Harpauer that the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.]

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to enter back into budget debate here today, albeit more briefly here today. I feel that I was able to present my thoughts yesterday on sort of the broader perspective of this budget. I'll focus things a little bit more locally here today, Mr. Speaker. But certainly these are . . . It's a historic challenge that we're up against right now, Mr. Speaker, and a challenge that Saskatchewan people face. And as I said yesterday, this government has failed to meet the challenge, and their budget failed to rise to the occasion, Mr. Speaker.

Like many members will, I'd like to recognize briefly those that are important in our lives, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to recognize Stephanie and William and our families, Mr. Speaker, and thank them for their work. Of course these aren't easy times for any family, Mr. Speaker, and that's the case as well for ours at this time. But their love and their support is always so amazing, Mr. Speaker.

William was in isolation for a short bit of time, Mr. Speaker. He got out yesterday. He was thrilled to get out on his bike, Mr. Speaker, and have some freedom once again. I came home yesterday and Stephanie had put on the budget for him to watch, and I said, well what did you think, William? He said, well it was . . . You were mostly pretty boring, Dad, but not that bad, Dad. Certainly I know we draw strength from all of our families, and certainly that's the case for me, and I thank them for all their support.

I think of my sister as well, who's a front-line health care worker,

Mr. Speaker, a director, actually, in the health region, directly involved in vaccination and testing. And her and her team and her colleagues and all those working in health have just been remarkable, Mr. Speaker, stepping up and serving in such a selfless way, Mr. Speaker, and protecting all of us through their efforts.

And it's come at a great sacrifice for, well, I know my sister and I know so many of her colleagues and all those out on the front lines — not just in health, but all those working in other aspects of the economy: in grocery stores and in transportation and right across in the trades, in our classrooms, Mr. Speaker. It's not an easy time.

[14:15]

You know, I think of Stephanie, Mr. Speaker, as she goes into those classrooms every day, wears the mask. It's not comfortable, Mr. Speaker, but it's what we do to protect one another. And I know in her case, her skin broke out in all sorts of uncomfortable ways, Mr. Speaker, but of course, she continues to wear that mask because she knows what it means.

Well I knew what her response would be, Mr. Speaker, when I went home yesterday and she had observed the government members thinking that they were somehow above others in society, Mr. Speaker, and able to take their masks off. And I hear them, you know, making noise over there, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's simply just posturing that we've seen from this government, Mr. Speaker, simply just posturing. You know, everyone else has to wear a mask. It's not . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order please.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I'll be the first to say it's not comfortable wearing a mask. I'd love to take it off, Mr. Speaker, and be able to address us here. But I have enough respect for those in this room, I have enough respect for the people of Saskatchewan to show some leadership, Mr. Speaker, and to do our part.

The signal that this sends is just so weak, Mr. Speaker. And it's that kind of, you know . . . Well people see it for what it is. It's cavalier, sort of cowboy posturing, Mr. Speaker. But people see it for what it is, Mr. Speaker. All hat, no cattle. All chaps, no horse. All talk, no walk. And you know, really that epitomizes this government at this critical hour in our province. But no one else across Saskatchewan gets to choose to take their masks off. And you know, the Sask Party members shouldn't be putting themselves above others on that front.

And you know, the member from Meadow Lake can holler from his seat all he wants. What I would urge him to do instead is to go back in and dig into this budget and actually bring forward a jobs plan, Mr. Speaker, that will work for people and put them back to work. But he can heckle and shout if he wants about this.

I want to thank and recognize the amazing people that I serve and work with and learn from, Mr. Speaker, the people throughout the communities of Regina Rosemont, Normanview West, Prairie View, Dieppe, Rosemont Mount Royal. I work with amazing people, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've always known

that, but never has that been more clear than watching the efforts in this last year when the challenge has been on for Saskatchewan people.

I think of the Rosemont Mount Royal Community Association, Mr. Speaker, that organized a neighbour-to-neighbour program, and the efforts that they brought forward to make sure that people are connected and not too isolated, helping with practical things like, you know, boosting of batteries, shovelling snow, dropping off groceries, but also connecting people to supports that they may need, Mr. Speaker, making sure that they're not isolated.

And it's that spirit, Mr. Speaker, that just, you know, epitomizes the Saskatchewan that I know. And it's that spirit along with the hard work of Saskatchewan people and those on the front lines that we can all be so proud of, Mr. Speaker. And to all of those people, all those that I serve, and all those across Saskatchewan doing their part, I just want to say thank you so very much.

With respect to a bit more local lens on the budget, Mr. Speaker, without a doubt I can say the people I represent expect a government to act and do all they can to get COVID under control. This is critical. It's critical, as we say, to save lives. And that's real, Mr. Speaker, because the variant in COVID is costing lives in our province, stealing loved ones from many families across this province, Mr. Speaker, but it's also costing our economy and costing jobs.

And in the way that this government's gone at it and failed to act, Mr. Speaker, they've of course failed to protect lives in the way that a government should. I mean it's their basic duty. It's a sacred responsibility. But they've also failed in botching the response to COVID-19 and containing it. They've really failed our economy. They've failed workers. They've failed local small businesses, Mr. Speaker, across our province. And so that's critical, getting COVID under control.

In this budget I know they'd also be looking for measures and a plan to get our economy back on track, getting people back to work with jobs they can count on, Mr. Speaker, jobs that'll pay the bills, jobs that they can have faith in, Mr. Speaker. And that just isn't there in this budget at all. You know, there were some things that could have sent some signals and stimulated investment and created some jobs. This government chose not to act. They chose not to bring a comprehensive jobs plan as we have been calling for, Mr. Speaker. They've failed to take the PST off of construction labour and off of restaurant meals, Mr. Speaker, two sectors that have been hard hit and two sectors that are really important by way of those local businesses and those workers.

They failed to enact the kind of Sask-first procurement approach that we've been pushing, Mr. Speaker. We know that the Sask Party of course has relentlessly outsourced work out of Saskatchewan on public projects, out of province, out of country, shipping away those jobs and the hard-earned dollars of Saskatchewan people. And now more than ever, when we see a capital budget like we do and the kind of debt and deficit as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, we need to maximize those dollars to their fullest extent. We need the best return on investment that we can. And if we're going to be making these investments that are putting us into debt, we need to make sure they get our economy back on their feet and present the kind of value that they

should to the people of our province, Mr. Speaker.

This government sat on its hands instead of actively pursuing diversification of our economy. We know of course they've acted to erode diversification. We know that they've killed industries in the past, like the rooftop solar industry, like the film industry, Mr. Speaker.

And what we didn't see in this budget was an embrace of the exceptional economic opportunity presented through things like renewable power and clean technologies, Mr. Speaker. That's to the detriment of Saskatchewan people because these are affordable investments that are practical in nature, that can reduce emissions in a meaningful way, Mr. Speaker, and very importantly as well, will put people back to work. We didn't see that in this budget at all.

And we see a government that continues to think it's fair to let some of the workers in Saskatchewan, actually many workers in Saskatchewan, receive the lowest wage in Canada, the lowest minimum wage in Canada, Mr. Speaker, instead of a fair wage. And no action around ensuring paid sick days, Mr. Speaker, something that's, you know, important at any time, but it couldn't be more clear during a pandemic as to how important paid sick days are to make sure that people are able to not bring illness to work when they're not feeling well, to be able to stay home and stay safe, Mr. Speaker.

And I know the good people I represent, Mr. Speaker, will be looking for investments in the areas that matter most. They know what's gone on in our classrooms, Mr. Speaker. They know what's gone on in our long-term care facilities. They know how this current government has failed students and failed seniors, Mr. Speaker, and they would expect them to rise to the occasion.

The fact that we have a government instead that's actually walking away from their campaign commitments, modest campaign commitments, Mr. Speaker, around things like the continuing care aids, Mr. Speaker, and supporting seniors and supporting long-term care, just really says a lot about this government.

Because the fact of the matter when we're talking about long-term care, it's no surprise to anyone in Saskatchewan that those seniors across Saskatchewan were so vulnerable, Mr. Speaker. The reports have been done. The questions have been asked. The focus has been on seniors' care for a long period of time and the inadequate supports that this government has provided, the inadequacy in the measures to ensure our seniors are protected. So it should be no surprise, but it's absolutely shameful that they'd walk away from that campaign commitment.

As I said, you know, our classrooms need to be a priority. They were at a breaking point going into COVID-19 with overcrowding, Mr. Speaker, larger class sizes, complexity, and challenges and intensive needs, Mr. Speaker, that are just so hard to meet when classrooms are that large because of the impacts of the devastating cuts of this government.

Instead of stepping up and rising to the occasion on this front at a time where students have really experienced a lot of hardship this year, Mr. Speaker, and where things like learning gaps will

have only become more pronounced and more real, this government is bringing forward a budget that will cause more cuts in our kids' classrooms. So I know that's not on for my constituents, Mr. Speaker. For me, an adequate investment means that those students have the one-on-one attention and care that they need and deserve.

And ultimately we have an adequate budget that allows, on the local perspective, for schools like Rosemont School to be rebuilt, to be funded, Mr. Speaker, to enable the board to be able to do that important work. Or for a school like Dieppe, which was closed under the underfunding of the Sask Party, Mr. Speaker, to be reopened and redeployed, to allow the school board to have the resources to put that school back into use. And that school is very important to Dieppe, Mr. Speaker. The case for that school has been strengthened by the addition of Westerra next door to it, Mr. Speaker, and it would pull pressure off of McLurg as well. But these are decisions that the school boards aren't able to act on when they're forced instead to make more cuts because of the Sask Party's inadequate budget.

And, Mr. Speaker, I know my constituents would have fully expected this government to finally step up and make sure that mental health and addictions and the crises that so many are facing on these fronts would be responded to. We had a crisis on this front long before COVID-19. COVID-19 has only made matters worse. The response of this government is woefully inadequate, Mr. Speaker, and this, too, is costing people's lives. We need to do all we can to make sure that people have the supports that they need when they need them, Mr. Speaker. That includes treatment. That includes supporting harm reduction within this province, Mr. Speaker. And instead we see a government sitting on the sidelines.

Mr. Speaker, I went over the broader piece yesterday around our finances, around the choices of this government, about its failure to rise to the occasion. I won't go on much further here today on those fronts. It's my honour to enter into debate at this historic time in our province, and I'd like to close again with simply thanking the people of Saskatchewan who are working so hard and sacrificing so much to protect one another during this historic challenge, Mr. Speaker. And of course they all expect their government to do the same.

At this point in time I will move an amendment:

That all the words after "Assembly" be deleted and replaced with the following:

does not approve the budgetary policy of the government because it does nothing to contain or get under control, the damaging spike in COVID-19; fails to include a jobs plan; breaks key promises made by the government; and fails to invest in key services for people; and further,

that the Assembly has lost confidence in the government.

I so move.

The Speaker: — An amendment has been moved by the member for Regina Rosemont and seconded by the member for Regina Lakeview. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

I recognize the member from Regina Lakeview.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'm honoured to be able to later second the motion that has just been put forth on the floor by my friend, the member from Regina Rosemont, and to enter into this budget debate.

But before I get into my budget remarks, I do want to express my thanks for this amazing team: those who are with us in the Assembly today and those who are watching and following along at home. And I want to express, Mr. Speaker, my deep appreciation to our staff who have been working incredibly hard in less than ideal circumstances for a long time. And I want to say to each member of this team, thank you. It is an honour to work with you and serve with you.

[14:30]

I want to also thank my constituency assistant, Cory Oxelgren, for his patience, his hard work, his humour, and his adaptability in an ever-changing work environment. Thank him for embracing new technology and maybe, Mr. Speaker, just maybe, learning to enjoy Zoom, although we'll see if that's really the case.

Over the past year we've moved offices, shifted with the pandemic, and welcomed fantastic new officemates with the addition of the Douglas Park and Regina University crew in the office. And although we haven't been able to spend a lot of time together, when this is over I know that we will all greatly appreciate the opportunity to work together serving our communities.

And, Mr. Speaker, as is customary, but also because I think I have perhaps some viewers at home watching, I want to express my sincere thanks to my family. Like many families, we are juggling work and isolation, altered school schedules, online university classes, and navigating and negotiating bandwidth and time in the office. This time has certainly presented challenges but it's also afforded us extra time together and, Mr. Speaker, that is something that we can never take for granted. I want to say thanks to Guy, to Hannah, to Nolan and Maya for putting up with me and supporting me and allowing me to do the work that we do here in this Assembly.

And I also with that, Mr. Speaker, want to acknowledge that, as much as I like to rib about the unique challenges that being locked up in a pandemic together brings, I recognize sincerely that being a Regina MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] affords us some privileges that many members here do not have, and that is the ability to go home every night to our families. So I want to recognize all members, all those here who had the difficult task of saying goodbye over the weekend knowing that they would be in Regina for an extended period of time away from their families, and acknowledge those families back home who I know are also paying a price for their loved ones to serve in this Assembly. And I think that's something that we should never allow to go unacknowledged or unthanked.

And while I'm thanking, I'd like to say thanks to the Clerk, everyone who works in the Clerk's office for all of the accommodations and work that I know always goes on behind the scenes but of course, like everything else, is especially

difficult and important during a pandemic. To the folks at Hansard, the broadcast folks in the booth, all of the LAS [Legislative Assembly Service] staff, the Sergeant-at-Arms' staff, the commissionaires, and everyone who has a role to play here in making sure that we can do this important work that happens in this Assembly.

I want to thank the people of Regina Lakeview for putting me here, for trusting me to be their representative, but also for the tenacity and spirit and sense of community that they've shown throughout this pandemic. We've seen small businesses pivot and pivot again to respond to changing public health orders and to keep their neighbours safe. We've seen a full embrace of the arts and community in many, many ways in Regina Lakeview, be it from rock gardens to boulevards, impromptu guerrilla gardens on the boulevard, to light displays meant to liven up the neighbourhood in a time that I think was difficult for many of us over the holidays.

As our leader and the member for Regina Rosemont have already eloquently canvassed but it bears repeating, budgets are more than just about numbers. Budgets are about values. Made plain, what a government chooses to invest in or not invest in, who they choose to listen to or not reveals a great deal about them and way more than anything they say or anything that they promise. With this budget, this government again has shown us who they are and what they've again done. And the way that they've run this province for years is run up debt, fail to plan, reward a chosen few, and left the rest of us to fight for scraps. Mr. Speaker, this is their record and this is their legacy.

They like to crow about their fiscal prowess, but their self-congratulatory tone simply does not keep pace with the facts. Here are some facts, Mr. Speaker: people are leaving the province in record numbers. Last year Saskatchewan lost more people than any other province. More facts: Saskatchewan ranked the worst in the country for three years in a row on this measure. In fact last year was the worst year on record since World War I.

And on a not completely unrelated note, we have the lowest minimum wage in Canada, ensuring that many people who work full time still struggle to pay bills and provide for themselves and their families. This, coupled with the fact that many of the jobs that they like to crow about are low wage and do not afford benefits, this, Mr. Speaker, is especially troublesome during a pandemic when people are forced with the impossible decision to forego desperately needed wages when they need to follow public health orders and isolate, or when they need to stay home because their children have been sent home from school.

We have 23,000 people out of work, yet we see no jobs plan from this government. This is a government that has consistently and spitefully picked winners and losers. And if you need evidence of this, just go ask anyone in the film or solar industry.

This is a government that disproportionately relies on out-of-province contractors and suppliers to the detriment of local workers and those whose businesses and livelihoods rely on those contracts. This is a government who came to power and were handed a balanced budget with billions in a contingency fund, a growing economy and record oil prices, and they blew through every red cent. In fact despite their hype and

self-congratulations, this government has balanced only three budgets in the whole time they have been in power.

The record deficit and growing debt we see is not solely the result of this pandemic, far from it. It's a pattern well established by this government, and the evidence is in black and white, in fact in green in their budget document.

In addition to their record on the economy simply not matching their own hype, they have failed to govern in a manner that is empathetic and responsive to the needs and citizens of this province. There is no balance that the Premier is so fond of citing. There's ideology; there was reward for the base and backers. And there is always, Mr. Speaker, the short-term political interests of this Sask Party government.

We have a record number of children in poverty. We have three times the national average of mortgages in arrears. We have record numbers of people struggling with mental health and addictions, overdoses. Mr. Speaker, I live close to one of the fire halls and I hear those, I hear those sirens going all the time. And unfortunately we know from front-line workers and from families, that too often those sirens are responding to overdoses in our communities, yet we don't see meaningful investment despite the evidence that such an investment would save lives. All this, Mr. Speaker, and the Premier tells us that he wouldn't change a thing. This type of behaviour is damaging in the good times, and in a pandemic it is downright dangerous.

No one expects any government to have all of the answers. The world is going through an event that we've not seen in most of our lifetimes, and it is reasonable to not know immediately what to do. But people do expect leaders to be clear, to be transparent, and to be truthful. The people of Saskatchewan do expect decisions based on the best interests of the province, and they expect governments to do everything that can be done to protect lives and livelihoods. They do expect governments to be flexible, to respond to shifting and evolving events, and to shift when necessary to save lives.

Mr. Speaker, I think at this time we could all use some grace and extend grace to ourselves and others. But simply and stubbornly refusing to listen and shift course when dangers are so clear and the stakes are so high, Mr. Speaker, I cannot blame those who will lay the responsibility and blame for the consequences of that bullheadedness directly at the feet of that Premier and that government. Again there is no balance that that Premier likes to speak of. And while I have empathy that this has been a difficult year for everyone, as I've said, this deficit is not solely the result of the pandemic. They had no business promising a balanced budget in that election because it was so obvious then, as it is now, that it simply wasn't going to happen.

They could only rarely manage to balance a budget in the best of times, and there is simply no excuse for the other promises not kept, as recently as last October. They promised to hire 300 continuing care aids. And as we've heard today, they failed to meet that promise, despite the need to provide support to seniors, their level of care, to provide relief to those who've been toiling on the front lines under extreme stress and responsibility and workload in our care homes for over a year. Mr. Speaker, this is truly inexcusable.

Sure, Mr. Speaker, it is important that we all thank these and so many other essential workers. We all have the power — and I would offer, the responsibility — to acknowledge and thank every one of them in any way that we can. Those front-line workers who've exposed themselves to daily risk — be it in grocery stores or classrooms or child care workers or those on the front line of health care — they've shouldered great personal risk and we certainly should all be thankful.

But those in government, those who have the ability to draft legislation and formulate budgets, they have a special responsibility, a responsibility that they bear alone, Mr. Speaker. They have the ability to ensure that wage top-ups are paid to low-wage workers in a fair and timely manner. They have the ability and the responsibility to ensure that adequate sick time is afforded to people who need it to isolate, sometimes for multiple times, due to exposure. And they have a responsibility to ensure all those who have been promised the vaccination get one in a timely and priority fashion.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has the responsibility to lead, to listen to experts, and to do everything possible to ensure that the flow of younger and sicker people into our ICUs, a trend that has already put Regina at over capacity, that that trend does not repeat itself across the province. And yet the failure to do so is so obvious, and is as obvious as it is tragic.

Saskatchewan now has the terrible distinction of the worst COVID-19 rates in the country for over 80 per cent of this year. This cannot continue. The vaccines, while encouraging, they do not . . . And they do, Mr. Speaker, they do provide the light at the end of this long, long tunnel. They will not come soon enough for many with rates as they are and with the spread of the variants of concern.

Mr. Speaker, they must listen. They must lead. They must support other bodies, other leaders, and other levels of governments who have and are making necessary and tough decisions instead of undermining them.

And speaking of listening and leading, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank every person working in and around our schools and our child care centres doing everything they can to ensure a semblance of normalcy for our children and ensuring that they are not made to pay an even higher price for the decisions made during this pandemic.

I do see a great deal of leading and listening on the part of divisions and boards and senior administration. But I wish that I could say the same about this government when it comes to schools. And I wish I could say that I was surprised. But we know that many of the concerns that we face now were concerns long before the pandemic.

Declining per-student funding goes back almost a decade. Increasing concerns about complexity at the same time as supports have been shrinking have been the hallmark of my time as the Education critic. Mental health concerns were certainly present and alarming before the pandemic, and of course they haven't been made better. And for years, for over a decade boards have been asking for predictability in funding so that they might best equip our classrooms and give children every chance that they can to receive the education that they deserve.

[14:45]

Mr. Speaker, as I said, the pandemic has made none of this better. In fact there are new challenges. There are hundreds of students who are simply unaccounted for during the course of this pandemic. There are students who have gone without therapies and supports. There are students who have had limited access to internet and technology due to either socioeconomics or due to geography. There are staff, teachers, administrators who have faced increased risk, workload stress, and responsibility over this last year. They deserve our thanks. Of course they do. But they also deserve support and they deserve resources. And they desperately deserve the predictability that they've been asking for.

We don't know what the fall will look like, but I think that we all hope that it will be more normal. We don't know how many students will be in schools or how many will continue with online learning. But we do know, unfortunately, that boards will again be asked to do more with less and inadequate support.

Unfortunately this budget provides none of that. Again, Mr. Speaker — and I could cut and paste the same portion of my speech from 2016 and all the way through — this budget will not meet fixed costs in education. And again, like every year since 2014, boards will be dealing with cuts at the division level, at a per-student basis, and they'll have to struggle to find where to make up those funds.

Mr. Speaker, this says nothing of the struggles of those in our early learning and child care sector. I wish that every member in this Assembly could listen to some of the folks who have been trying to make ends meet and provide care for children during this pandemic. Remember our child care centres relied on bingos in many instances prior to this pandemic to make their budgets work at the end of the month. They are struggling and they need our support. Moreover, they need a plan for child care.

And I could go on, Mr. Speaker. As usual I've lost track of the time here, but the other lines within the Ministry of Education have not fared better. KidsFirst, early childhood intervention programs, their funding has remained flat since 2016. Libraries actually receive less money in this budget than they did in 2016. Good words are nice, Mr. Speaker, but this government alone has the power and the responsibility to make the decisions that back up those nice words, and again it is their responsibility to listen and lead.

It occurs to me that many of the sectors that I've talked about are female-dominated sectors, Mr. Speaker. And I'm running out of time, and I know that other members on this side will canvass this, but I need to say this. This pandemic has disproportionately impacted women, and we see no evidence that there is any understanding of that, let alone a plan to help support those women as they re-enter the workforce after this pandemic, Mr. Speaker. And that is a failure.

In addition to being the Education critic, I also recently took on — very happily, I might add — the critic responsibilities for Labour. And I have to say I have been impressed and thankful for the leadership of so many organized labour leaders in our province, not the least of which, Ms. Lori Johb with the SFL [Saskatchewan Federation of Labour]. And I can't wait to work

with her on campaigns to ensure adequate minimum wage, child care plans, sick time, and for fairness for working people across this province.

I know that many people like to dismiss politicians and the work that's done here, but I hold a different view. The work that we do here matters. The decisions we make or we don't make have the power to improve our province, the material condition of people, their opportunities, their natural environment, livelihoods, and potential. They also, or we also by extension, have the power to thwart or harm all of the above. What people are rightly, in my mind, cynical about is the particular type of leadership that we see on offer here: short-sighted, highly ideological, self-interested, and almost completely lacking imagination.

I respect the choice made by the people of Saskatchewan but, Mr. Speaker, we are hearing a lot of buyer's remorse from people around this province. Budgets tend to put tendencies and failings on full display. This government had the chance to lead and to make a difference to save lives and livelihoods. The government chose the path instead that they have travelled all along, and the people of Saskatchewan will continue to pay the price. As our leader has said, this budget takes the same approach as the government's pandemic response: weak half measures that don't get the job done for Saskatchewan people. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, more of the same.

For those reasons and more, that I'm sure my colleagues will canvass in the coming days, I will be voting against the budget, and I am pleased to second the motion moved by the member from Regina Rosemont. With that, I will conclude my remarks.

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

Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a special day. I'm wearing green today. I don't usually wear green, so before I begin I'd like to echo the words of my colleague from Prince Albert Carlton regarding Green Shirt Day and the Logan Boulet Effect. I will take this opportunity to encourage everyone in Saskatchewan to consider becoming an organ donor. If you don't have that little red sticker on your health card, please go to givelifesask.ca to sign up. And it might seem like a small thing, but it might save the life of another person. So please consider that.

Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure today to rise in this House to second the budget motion put forward by my colleague, the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Finance. For being involved in the treasury board process over the last number of months, I have been so impressed at her ability to ask probing questions, evaluate options, and help direct our group to make decisions for the good of this province. The people of Humboldt-Watrous are lucky to have her as their MLA, and I'm proud to serve this province alongside her.

I would be remiss if I also did not acknowledge the work of the many folks who presented to treasury board on behalf of all the ministries, as well as the fine work done by the team of treasury board analysts. The work done by the whole team at the Ministry of Finance is truly key to the budget development process but also to the success of this province as we position ourselves to grow into the future.

Now back in December when I first rose in this Chamber, I had the opportunity to thank many of the people who helped get me to this place and earn the privilege of representing The Battlefords. But today I would like to quickly thank those people who help to keep this place going: the Clerks, the whole LAS staff, the Sergeant-at-Arms and his security staff, as well as the people who maintain and clean this building so diligently. Some days your work may feel like it's taken for granted, but I speak for myself and my colleagues here. It's greatly appreciated, especially in these times.

I would also like to thank our caucus staff for helping us prepare for committee work and opportunities to speak here in the Chamber. I would like to thank as well the staff in the ministers' offices, and speaking from experience — just a few months of it — I know that I have found their assistance to be key as I work to address the various concerns of constituents in The Battlefords.

Now on that note, Mr. Speaker, I would like to quickly thank my two constituency assistants, Susan and Gail. They are the front line of speaking with and trying to help our constituents in The Battlefords. And back in November as we were setting up the office, we talked about what our goals were for the office and what we wanted to represent, and we all agreed that our aim was to have a responsive and resourceful constituency office. And I'm so grateful for their hard work to meet that standard. And I do believe that our approach will serve the people of The Battlefords very well in the coming years. I'm proud of the way they work and I'm proud to work and serve alongside them every day.

Now, Mr. Speaker, back in December I also briefly mentioned Herb Cox in my Throne Speech reply, but I would like to take a moment to thank him here publicly for his service to The Battlefords. Our communities saw quite a bit of investment throughout his time as MLA, including the new Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford and major upgrades to Highway 4. And I hope to build and grow on that legacy. And I can say that personally he has been very available and willing to take my calls and answer my questions. And as a new MLA it has been so helpful for me as I gain further context on various issues. So thank you, Herb.

I'll also quickly take the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to thank my wife, Meagan, for her support. I know she's watching at home, and I am so thankful for her grace and encouragements. And I am looking forward to seeing her again when we head home in mid-May.

Now, Mr. Speaker, recently our constituency office in North Battleford has been on a mission. We've been on a mission to reach out to as many businesses as possible in our constituency. We did that because we wanted to make sure that all eligible businesses were aware of the full suite of provincial business support programs in response to COVID. And whether it was the Saskatchewan small-business emergency payment or the strong recovery adaptation rebate or the Saskatchewan tourism support program, we were able to speak with hundreds of businesses in our community. And, Mr. Speaker, it was a great opportunity to check in with them, see how they're doing, and then encourage them to take advantage of the supports that were available.

The programs are incredibly simple to apply for, and I would like to commend the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Trade and Export Development for the quick processing times on applications. Small-business owners I speak to are very grateful for that, Mr. Speaker. And the Saskatchewan small-business emergency payment has been very successful in particular, and we have seen that same model used by provinces across Canada.

So now, Mr. Speaker, to the topic at hand, the 2021-2022 budget. This is a budget, Mr. Speaker, that is focused on protecting, building, and growing Saskatchewan. In the face of COVID-19, which has been one of the most significant challenges that our society has faced in recent decades, our government has been there to protect Saskatchewan. On the COVID-19 front, in this budget there is one and a half billion dollars dedicated to protecting lives and livelihoods here in this province. And this will help ensure that our health care system will continue to be ready to protect us here in this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, over the last year, protecting and serving our seniors has been highlighted, and this budget makes a number of significant investments to that end. We're going to be hiring 100 new continuing care aids in the next year, something that we committed to doing in the fall election campaign. Promise made, promise kept, Mr. Speaker.

We have reduced ambulance fees by over half for seniors in this province. Another promise kept. And we are making significant capital investments in long-term care facilities in this province, and that will help us protect seniors well into the future.

Now, Mr. Speaker, these two items didn't receive much attention yesterday, but I would like to highlight them. I'd like to highlight these two investments that I believe will go a long ways in protecting the people of this province. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, I'm thrilled to see the creation of another PACT [police and crisis team] team in Saskatchewan, this time in Estevan. I know from speaking with the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] in my home constituency of The Battlefords, having a PACT team makes local policing more efficient and helps to better address mental health challenges as police respond to calls.

There is also increased funding to enhance the provincial internet child exploitation units. This will help to support police as they seek to protect vulnerable children, and Mr. Speaker, I think that's money well spent in this province.

[15:00]

Now, Mr. Speaker, beyond protecting Saskatchewan people, I do believe that our province sits at a truly exciting point in its history. This House here has heard many times before about the food, fuel, and fertilizer that this province produces. The economic capacity we are building in this province is very exciting, Mr. Speaker, and some of the recent announcements in this province show some significant investments are being made here in Saskatchewan, investments that bring great jobs to our province. As one example, Mr. Speaker, I think of Richardson International who recently announced that it will be doubling processing capacity at its canola crushing plant in Yorkton.

And as these investments are made in Saskatchewan, our government will continue to tell the world about Saskatchewan.

We have already opened up four international offices to increase Saskatchewan exports and build relationships around the world. And in this budget, Mr. Speaker, we have announced plans to add four more international offices to further expand Saskatchewan's reach across the world.

But, Mr. Speaker, beyond the food, fuel, and fertilizer, there is exciting activity in other sectors of Saskatchewan's economy. Thinking of one in particular, with our commitment of \$15 million to VIDO-InterVac's [Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization-international vaccine centre] Saskatoon facility, Saskatchewan is going to become Canada's leader in developing and manufacturing vaccines.

And, Mr. Speaker, I was excited to see yesterday the five-year extension of the Saskatchewan technology start-up initiative. And we are going to see Saskatchewan-based tech companies continue to attract significant investment and become major players in their space. The STSI [Saskatchewan technology start-up incentive] has already attracted \$22 million of investment in this province, and we have seen many new, exciting companies benefit from this initiative.

And, Mr. Speaker, this diversification of our economy, paired with growing agricultural and manufacturing exports, is giving Saskatchewan that increased economic capacity. And, Mr. Speaker, what follows growing economic capacity? What follows is an increasing quality of the public services that we enjoy in this province.

It means new highways, an increased investment in a variety of transportation infrastructure across Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, it means new schools — 16 of them, actually — and it also means major renovation projects in school divisions all over Saskatchewan, including one in my home constituency in The Battlefords. And we are really excited, Mr. Speaker, to see the historic John Paul II Collegiate about to undergo a major renovation project.

And, Mr. Speaker, it also means more long-term care beds for improved care for our seniors and hiring those CCAs to staff those facilities. It means new hospitals in Weyburn and Prince Albert, and it means growing our government's investment in mental health treatment options across this province.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the budget that we have developed and that the Minister of Finance presented yesterday. I think she presented it eloquently. And, Mr. Speaker, I've tried to add a few helpful comments here today, along with a perspective on the budget for my area of the province.

Now I'm looking forward to hearing more from members on both sides of the House, Mr. Speaker. However, I am curious to hear from members opposite how their comments or feedback or criticisms will square with their repeated calls over the last number of months to shut down our economy. Most of the members opposite have called for job-killing, circuit-breaker lockdowns, all while criticizing the employment numbers in this province, which, by the way, Mr. Speaker, are some of the best in the country.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as someone who has worked their whole career in small business, it just doesn't make sense to me that

closing down helps small businesses. How do you plan? How do you schedule staff? What do you tell customers? And as someone who has employed people, I find the opposition's insistence on lockdowns infuriating.

And I know that hard-working small-business owners across this province and in The Battlefords agree. I know that because I've talked to them, Mr. Speaker. You see, small-business owners and entrepreneurs across this province have seen the adversity from COVID-19 as an opportunity to sharpen their business model and improve the way that they serve customers, but you can't do that if you're shut down, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, based on what the members opposite have said publicly over the last number of months, I expect that they will attempt to paint this province as lost. They'll attempt to paint this province as perhaps lacking hope for the future. And, Mr. Speaker, I just don't see it that way. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are currently in the throes of an incredible public health challenge, and I don't make my comments to minimize that reality.

And, Mr. Speaker, I don't say this to undermine the absolutely commendable work done by front-line workers across this province. They have answered the call for the people of Saskatchewan time and time again, and they continue to do that every day. And we thank them for that.

But I stand here today, Mr. Speaker, and second this budget motion with a deep sense of hopefulness about Saskatchewan. By and large, our government has walked the balance of restrictions and freedoms as best as we could see how, and the numbers bear that out in seeing the fastest vaccine rollout in this country.

Mr. Speaker, speaking personally, my father-in-law received his vaccine yesterday in The Battlefords, and that gives me a great sense of peace. I have another relative and a friend receiving their first dose today in The Battlefords, and after these constituents get their dose, they text me. They say, I just feel so much better. And I hear that sentiment from other people in The Battlefords.

Mr. Speaker, it is easy for us to let the fear and uncertainty of these times overcome us. The anxiety of the unknown is challenging even in the small things, let alone during a pandemic that has dominated our lives in the last year. Personally I've had many days in the last year where I've been worried about my health or my family or others in my community. Will I stay healthy? Will my friend's business survive? Will other businesses in town continue to keep people employed and eke out a profit?

And, Mr. Speaker, I recognize that I am fortunate to not currently have family members in long-term care or young children going to school. I know those two situations have added a lot of stress for people over the last year. And I speak with constituents who have family members in long-term care or group homes, and those conversations are emotionally heart-wrenching, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, as vaccines are becoming more widely available, there is hope. That's why I'm feeling hopeful. There is hope for family dinners together and visiting your loved ones and seeing your kids. And there is hope for vacations in sunny destinations and having your customers walk back through your

shop's front door.

And given that hope, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we must go forward boldly. And I think of my family who many generations ago settled in the Mayfair area and homesteaded, and I think, did they give up after a tough year? And, Mr. Speaker, I won't tell the full story, but no they didn't. They planted again and kept working. So we must, we must, Mr. Speaker, go forward boldly to continue building and growing this province, building the economic capacity that fuels opportunity for individuals and families across this province and ensures a robust set of public services in Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, I see this vision so clearly articulated in the 2021-2022 budget. I'm proud to second the motion made by the member from Humboldt-Watrous and I will be supporting the motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for the opportunity this afternoon to speak to this year's provincial budget. My thanks to the Minister of Finance for tabling yesterday's budget, and to the member for The Battlefords for seconding the budget and the speech that he just gave here in this Assembly hitting on a number of very, very important points. And, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to do some of that here this afternoon as well during this opportunity that I have.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to begin by thanking a number people of course, as we all do as members of the Assembly here. I'd like to thank the constituents back in Swift Current for their support, their feedback, their constructive criticism, their advice and ideas as we move forward each and every day. I'm very fortunate to be able to represent the city of Swift Current and the great people and the families that live there and call Swift Current home, and that's something that I will not take for granted, Mr. Speaker.

I'm thankful for everything that the people of Swift Current have done and been asked to do over the past year throughout this pandemic: following the public health measures, following the restrictions, and keeping their friends and families safe, Mr. Speaker, and most importantly, keeping that eternal optimism that they have that we will get through this pandemic and that we will return things on that path back to normal as quickly and safely as we can, Mr. Speaker.

And I thank the constituents as well for their uptake of the vaccine clinics in Swift Current. They started over the Easter weekend with a walk-in clinic that was on Good Friday that was literally lined up around the building, Mr. Speaker, and lined up all day. And then on Saturday there was a drive-through clinic and it was lined up blocks and blocks and blocks, people waiting to get in. And then the clinics carried on throughout the weekend and into this week. And I just want to thank the people of Swift Current for that and participating and getting the vaccines when it's their turn to do so.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of vaccines, I'd like to extend my gratitude to all of the health care workers who have been helping us throughout this, whether it's administering vaccinations or helping keep our health care system moving through such

difficult and challenging times. And, Mr. Speaker, I unfortunately had the opportunity to witness that first-hand, partially . . . well because of my own clumsiness and perhaps frailty, having to visit the regional hospital at the end of January and received just absolutely outstanding care from everyone there: the doctors, the nurses of course, the family doctor and residents at my own health clinic. But I just want to commend them for such an outstanding job that they do each and every day and continue to do throughout these challenging times.

Thank you as well, Mr. Speaker, to everyone who, in Swift Current and abroad, across Saskatchewan, who continues to work and do their jobs in a much different way than they ever have been asked to before. And they've had to do it for quite a length of time, Mr. Speaker, and they've done so diligently. I spoke about the health care workers. You look at businesses, for example, and large operations, those in the oil and gas sector, farm sector, mining, manufacturing sector, how they've had to change the way they do things.

Small businesses, Mr. Speaker, that are on the same block that my MLA office is located on, they've managed to adapt and use more of an online option for shopping and curbside pickup and all of these things that perhaps they might have done a little bit of before, but now, because of these changing times, have had to do even more of that. And I thank and I congratulate the business community of Swift Current for being able to adapt and to do that.

Mr. Speaker, just a couple other additional thank yous. I'd like to thank my constituency assistant back at the MLA office this afternoon, Nola Smith. She's been with us for a number of years. She's actually the longest serving constituency assistant in Swift Current for some time now, so I'm not sure what that says. I'm surprised she hasn't got sick of me and decided to go do other things. But she does fantastic work on behalf of the people of Swift Current, particularly answering the phone calls, the emails, the letters that come in, the walk-in traffic, and helping to do the work that I do when I'm not available and when I am available and have some busy days. And I would not be able to do it without Nola's support back at the constituency office.

[15:15]

Finally, Mr. Speaker, and last, certainly not least, as we all do in this Chamber, I'd like to thank my family for their continued support and love throughout all of this. You know, as other members have said and put on the record, we just simply would not be able to do it, any of us would not be able to do it without the guidance and blessing and support of our families.

Mr. Speaker, this is a significant budget for the province, with a key number of investments, and that's what I'd like to touch on this afternoon. The Finance minister of course touched on the major investments in her speech, a wide variety of them. The member for The Battlefords identified some very significant investments, and I have some there that I'll probably repeat, but others that I think also need to be on the record. I'd like to highlight some of those investments and then get a little bit more in depth into the investments specific to this portfolio: Mental Health and Addictions, Seniors and Rural and Remote Health.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that will protect, build, and grow

Saskatchewan. That's the theme this year, and we are focused on protecting the health and safety of all Saskatchewan residents, no matter where they live and what they do.

We will build a strong Saskatchewan by continuing to invest in hospitals, to invest in long-term care facilities and schools and highways and municipal infrastructure with our municipal partners. And as we work our way through this pandemic, Mr. Speaker, doing so as safely as possible but also while protecting people's livelihoods and their businesses, we'll continue down that path towards growth for Saskatchewan as we return to normal in this province.

Saskatchewan is well poised, Mr. Speaker. It always has been well poised to be a leader in this nation when it comes to the economy and when it comes to the prosperity that we are able to offer as a province in this country. These have been challenging times for sure, but the resilience of the people of Saskatchewan is something that I'm grateful for. It makes me proud to be able to say that I have been born, raised, and spent my entire life living in this province. And now I'm so very fortunate to have the opportunity to serve these people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, in this budget — speaking of protect, build, and grow — there are a number of significant investments. There is \$1.5 billion in response to COVID-19, building upon the \$2 billion last year and another 1.3 billion over the next two years, funding to stimulate the economy, Mr. Speaker, and support more than 17,500 jobs.

There's the active families benefit, Mr. Speaker, the community rink affordability grant, more child care spaces, Madam Deputy Speaker, support for children with autism and their families by expanding access for that very particular program, one that I've heard about from families in Swift Current in particular. And building upon the insulin pump program by expanding that program to support all people, Madam Deputy Speaker, with type 1 diabetes, no matter of their age. And as well, continuous and flash glucose monitoring systems for people under the age of 18 who are insulin dependent will also be covered.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are some significant investments with respect to the economy. You would have heard in the Finance minister's speech and from the Minister of Trade and Export Development that we are opening more trade offices across the world to support Saskatchewan businesses, to support the agriculture sector, the oil and gas sector, mining, small businesses, manufacturers — all very, very key parts of the provincial economy and key parts, frankly, for my constituency back home in Swift Current.

Mr. Speaker, in the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, Seniors and Rural and Remote Health there are some very significant investments being made in this budget year. And it's our goal with the dollars that we have available to try to provide supports and investments that will reach as many people as possible across this province, investments that will save lives, Madam Deputy Speaker, in Saskatchewan.

Mental health and addictions budget this year alone is \$458 million. That is another record investment by this government, Mr. Speaker. Of that 458 million, \$62 million directly for addictions, \$396 million geared towards mental

health, Madam Deputy Speaker.

With this year's budget we have now invested over \$73 million more on mental health and addictions since the 2019-2020 budget. Overall this year, Madam Deputy Speaker, it's an increase of 23.4 million over the past year, and of that, 7.2 million is new funding. The remainder is built upon investments from last year and previous years.

And if I could, I just want to touch on some of the specific investments on the mental health side and also on the addictions side. There's \$4.64 million for mental health, and of that, some very strategic and new investments there: \$2 million for three youth-integrated-service locations. And what these will do, Madam Deputy Speaker, as we get these up and running is we'll integrate mental health and addictions, physical health, community, social services and education for youth, partnering with local CBOs [community-based organization] to help offer these services in a coordinated, integrated way for youth in Saskatchewan. We'll start with three of these youth-integrated-service locations that are funded in this budget year. And we believe that will have a big impact on mental health for youth, Madam Deputy Speaker.

One million dollars, Madam Deputy Speaker, in this year's budget to support year-two actions of the Pillars for Life suicide prevention strategy; 500,000 this year, Madam Deputy Speaker, to expend the pilot with the RCMP that partners registered nurses with RCMP members to support mental health needs in rural Saskatchewan. And that is an important program, Madam Deputy Speaker. For those that aren't familiar with it, what it does is it allows for an RCMP member to have a registered nurse on the line as they are called to respond to a call that may be of a mental health or addictions nature and help provide some professional support from that registered nurse during the call. And I have heard from individuals across this province and including from my own RAMP — the Swift Current city and rural detachments who I met with earlier this winter, Madam Deputy Speaker — who spoke very highly of this rural pilot project and how it has been able to help them in their work and help save lives.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there will be additional funding in this year's budget towards mental health and addictions awareness campaigns, \$250,000 to address backlogs as a result of COVID-19 in the system, funding for another PACT team. And we heard about that in the earlier speech this afternoon, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is the police and crisis teams that are around the province. And now we are expanding into the community of Estevan in the Southeast, where they do not have a PACT team. So \$240,000 to launch that much-needed service down in southeast Saskatchewan.

One other item in the mental health budget, Madam Deputy Speaker, is \$150,000 to enhance support for health IM [information management]. And that's similar to the pilot project I spoke of before that works with rural RCMP and registered nurses. This is another innovative tool, a piece of technology that supports communication between hospitals and emergency rooms and emergency responders and police and RCMP, so that when they attend to a call of a mental health- or addictions-related nature, they have the ability to connect with the hospital and let them know what they're dealing with and

what they might be bringing in to the ER [emergency room].

Madam Deputy Speaker, with respect to addictions and harm reduction, there is \$2.6 million in new funding for addictions and harm reduction in this year's budget. 750,000 for mobile harm reduction buses, Madam Deputy Speaker, and what those will do, those buses will provide extensive support to people in a mobile way where there'll be professional support on the buses to help people with treatment plans and get into long-term treatment. There'll be harm reduction supplies. There will be vending machines also as part of some of this funding, and we're also working through right now how we can implement the drug-testing or drug-checking machines in these mobile buses. One of the things that we know is that the toxicity of the drug supply has become much more dangerous, particularly in the last number of months, and that is one of the challenges. And that is why we're investing in that particular initiative, these buses to be located in Regina, Saskatoon, and one out of the North based out of Prince Albert.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are expanding the take-home naloxone program, another \$440,000 into that program. And it, Madam Deputy Speaker, has been very highly utilized over the last number of years, particularly in the past year. And this additional funding will allow us to purchase more take-home naloxone kits and expand their availability, get them into more pharmacies in Saskatchewan, get them into more community locations. And something that we're investigating very closely is looking to try and co-locate these naloxone kits anywhere where there's an AED [automated external defibrillator] machine. The automated external defibrillators have a very, very good public presence in our province, I would argue, and in some of the consultations I've had with folks, they have suggested that would be an excellent location to have some of these naloxone kits located. So we are looking at that possibility and how we can again expand access, making it easier for people to access naloxone programs.

There is \$240,000, Madam Deputy Speaker, to support high-risk expectant mothers in that programming, and additional funding for addictions training, addictions medicine training for physicians in this province.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this funding is in addition to previous investments, so we're building on what we have done in previous years. On top of the naloxone kits that we have available in 45 sites in 30 communities, expanding upon the RAAM clinics, the rapid access to addictions medicine clinics, three right now: Regina, Saskatoon, P.A., and North Battleford is being worked on.

Peer services in the North are offered. Dedicated addictions workers at ERs [emergency room] in Regina and Saskatoon. Funding for Prairie Harm Reduction, Madam Deputy Speaker, where we support peer support and harm reduction case workers for that organization. And we support other organizations as well, Madam Deputy Speaker; as an example, the Saskatoon Tribal Council, we provide some harm reduction funding for them, and that is just one other area that we provide some support.

I should mention as well, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is funding geared towards the urgent care centres in Regina and Saskatoon, of which there will be dedicated mental health and

addictions support on an urgent basis. It will be built into those urgent care centres.

So very substantial investments, building on our record investments into mental health and addictions, something that we take very seriously, Madam Deputy Speaker, as a government, and trying to provide as much support as we can for as many people across this province with the resources we have.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to touch on some of the other highlights of the budget from this ministry's perspective for senior citizens and older adults in the province. We're continuing to build upon previous investments and make some new investments: the 300 continuing care aids, 108 of which we hired in this first budget year, and then we'll hire the remaining ones as quickly as possible. As I've mentioned, they are in great demand across this nation and of course here in Saskatchewan, and we're going to try to fulfill that as quickly as we can.

There's funding in the budget, Madam Deputy Speaker, to support the reduction in seniors' ambulance fees from \$275 per trip down to \$135 per trip, and also coverage for interfacility transfers. There's funding to help build upon the financial supports for seniors through the seniors' income plan by enhancing that. That will be staged over four years with the first increase taking place a little bit later this year.

There's new announcements, Madam Deputy Speaker, with respect to the replacement of long-term care facilities, something that we've done a lot of over our term of government. And in this particular budget, there was new dollars committed to the replacement of LTC facilities in the communities of Estevan and Watson. And these are both facilities that were very high on the list for replacement. And I'm pleased that we'll be able to get some funding going towards those much-needed replacement projects.

Operational funding is in the budget this year for the new Meadow Lake long-term care centre, which will open a little bit later this year. More dollars committed to the 33-bed new long-term care facility in Grenfell and the 80-bed replacement long-term care facility in northern Saskatchewan, in La Ronge. And finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, \$500,000 in funding for the planning of the replacement of long-term care beds here in the city of Regina. Madam Deputy Speaker, that will build upon the previous investments that we have made into the replacement of the Regina Pioneer Village and expand the scope of what it is that we need to do for long-term care in the city of Regina.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we continue to build upon our investments in rural and remote health. In addition to the LTC replacements I talked about, we're also funding the continuation of the project for the Weyburn General Hospital, the P.A. Vic Hospital. Melfort will have a new CT [computerized tomography] scanner operating a little bit later this year, and there's \$950,000 to support that much-needed piece of equipment in Melfort. There's a new STARS [Shock Trauma Air Rescue Service] helicopter that is being purchased, will be operational in May — \$1.4 million there. We thank STARS for their great partnership over the years and all it is that they do to support rural Saskatchewan.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, in addition to STARS, we're also

increasing some funding for EMS [emergency medical services] services in this province — \$6.6 million of an increase for additional ambulances in Regina and Saskatoon to improve response times not only in those cities but in the surrounding communities as well. And we'll also help reduce offload delays at Royal University Hospital, covering patient wait time fees, and supporting GPS [global positioning system] systems in the ambulances.

And I would note, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in addition to what's happening with EMS in the cities, in rural Saskatchewan I know that the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] has been working. And I as the minister have had a number of conversations with the SHA and with the ministry about an overall provincial EMS strategy that includes rural stabilization, because we do know there are some areas facing some staffing challenges. And we're committed to working with our community partners and with these communities through the SHA and the ministry to address these staffing challenges in rural Saskatchewan.

[15:30]

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I near the end of my time allotment here this afternoon, I just want to conclude by saying that this is indeed a budget that will protect, build, and grow Saskatchewan. We are proud of the work put into this budget. I would like to thank the Minister of Finance and her officials for the work that they have done, my cabinet colleagues for the work that they have done on their respective budgets, and their officials who have helped support them and their ministries, as well as the officials in my own ministry and the Minister of Health for the work they have put into this budget and helping to build and grow and protect what we do here in Saskatchewan.

Of course, thank you to my caucus colleagues for all of their support, ideas, and advice as we work our way through this and for representing their constituents with honour and doing so each and every day in this Chamber and each and every day back in their home communities.

So with that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will be supporting the budget from the Minister of Finance, seconded by the member for The Battlefords. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Kelvington-Wadena.

Mr. Nerlien: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. First I want to begin with a very brief thanks to my family, my wife Giselle, obviously my friends and colleagues, the staff of this Legislative Assembly and caucus office, and all the folks that work in this building who do an outstanding job. I want to thank my constituency assistant, Chris, who is doing a yeoman's effort back at the constituency office, and I'm very, very happy to have her working with me. I also want to thank my constituency executive, and especially I want to thank the constituents of Kelvington-Wadena constituency for their support and for their thoughts and ideas on an ongoing basis. I truly appreciate their contact each and every day.

Madam Deputy Speaker, today is Green Shirt Day in this Chamber, when we honour the legacy of Logan Boulet's organ

donation and lives saved as a result. The Humboldt Broncos crash is one of those events that is seared in our minds forever, and we will honour and remember those families together. I'd like to note and thank my colleague from Melfort who was involved on that day, and continues to act as pastoral care for first responders, specifically the RCMP. Our hearts are with them today as well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance rose in this Chamber and presented budget 2021-22. This budget is built around protecting the people we serve, building Saskatchewan today and tomorrow, and growing well into the future. Over the next few days the people of Saskatchewan will hear from their elected representatives about how the budget affects them and their communities. As a Saskatchewan Party government we have outlined our long-term vision for the province in a document called *Saskatchewan's Growth Plan: The Next Decade of Growth, 2020-2030*. This budget is essentially a second step forward in meeting those goals and objectives.

Despite unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID pandemic and a federal Trudeau government repeatedly and brazenly showing hostility to Western Canada, our government continues to show a level of confidence in the people of Saskatchewan, and we are responding with responses both in supporting people and businesses affected by the COVID situation as well as looking forward to a resurgent Saskatchewan.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't comment on the recent Supreme Court decision on behalf of my constituents in Kelvington-Wadena. As many rural Saskatchewanians responded, I have not received a single positive comment about the decision. Having read the decision myself and acknowledging that the justices have outlined their respective split decisions based on their perspective and legal minds, I cannot see it but as an overreach of epic proportions, and as Justices Brown and Rowe expound, a great concern for the democracy of Canada. We respect the decision of the court, but of particular concern is the encroachment on the principles of Confederation as defined in the division of legislative authorities in jurisprudence over the history of Canada.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to reassure my constituents that the affected ministers and Premier and all of our MLAs are working to find a Saskatchewan way forward in dealing with and responding to the appropriate balance of the environment and the economy. People are rightfully angry with the federal Trudeau government, and we respect that emotion and we understand their frustration.

Coincidentally, the subject matter of the Supreme Court decision, the pollution pricing Act, expressed as carbon tax in our lexicon, went up 33 per cent last week and within nine years will rise from today's \$40 a tonne to \$170 a tonne under the federal guidelines. Madam Deputy Speaker, our industries and our families simply can't afford this egregious, punitive taxation.

We, your Saskatchewan Party government, will do everything in our power to shield our residents from this massive tax grab from our industry, agriculture, farmers, and families. This is a matter of urgent attention as a budget and growth matter. We now grapple with the decisions impacted on industry, agriculture, families, and all elements of our economy. Madam Deputy

Speaker, I have every faith that this government will respond with great care and consideration for the families we serve.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will speak at some length about the Saskatchewan advantage. And because I represent largely a rural riding, I will speak to rural issues while making it very clear that rural and urban issues bear equal gravity, while perspectives may vary slightly.

With my colleagues I have often said that the economy of Saskatchewan is essentially rural, with the accumulation of wealth gravitating to urban centres. Please let me explain. Oil and gas wells and infrastructure, farms, mining infrastructure, forestry, commercial fishing, tourism, and much of our economy resides in and provides natural resource wealth from rural or very rural environments. The income generated from those resources accumulates to villages, towns, and cities through services provided to those base industries. Service industries, equipment manufacturers, dealers, transport companies, restaurants, research facilities, hotels, and so much more rely on a strong, stable rural economy.

My government recognized this since its inception. Budget after budget has respected the nature of Saskatchewan with supports for our schools, rural hospitals and health care, social services, law enforcement, highways, and most importantly, supports for the people of Saskatchewan through investments in communities.

I want to remind the citizens that we, your MLAs, are not the two-headed monsters that some pundits would portray. And despite what the NDP believe, we do not have our heads buried in the sand. Madam Deputy Speaker, like everyone else, we drive the same highways. We use the health care system. We have relatives in long-term care or home care. We have relatives dependent on seniors' income plans. We may have children or grandchildren in the school system or day care. We also have family members that are nurses, CCAs, doctors, teachers, farmers, business owners, child care workers, front-line service providers, single aging parents living alone, ourselves or our parents or our siblings actively using the health care system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are no less aware of the challenges faced by the people of Saskatchewan in this pandemic than anyone else. In fact on a personal level, over the past few months I and family members have dealt with the long-term care system, surgery and physician services in the health care system, the cancer centre, and the COVID vaccination process, and I must say each has been excellent. Our youngest son and a very young nephew both have dealt with COVID-positive diagnoses.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to address a few specific items in the budget that are of particular importance to the residents of Kelvington-Wadena. First a couple of things that might seem a bit remote: investments in twinning and adding passing lanes to highways. We are users of the highways to Saskatoon, to Regina, around Yorkton, to the Alberta border, and many others. While none of these are directly in my constituency, we are travelling people and these investments are significant safety upgrades that will save lives.

A hidden gem is the investment in the rare earth elements lab in Saskatoon. Mr. Speaker, this is potentially the next

Saskatchewan advantage, and I dare say that we can lead Canada and the world in these critical elements if some current modelling proves up.

Mr. Speaker, I'll touch base on campaign promises made and kept in a moment, but I want to thank our municipal leaders for their quick response in taking advantage of what I think was a brilliantly designed and executed program, the municipal economic enhancement program. The uptake was almost universal and extremely important municipal upgrades were made, often to those challenging items that kept getting pushed back for affordability reasons.

In my constituency there were 73 applications, and I'd like to just touch on a few of those that I think represent the range and scope of the approved applications. Foam Lake, water treatment plant upgrade, 49,000; water valve replacement, 20,000; playground improvement, \$65,000. Resort village of Leslie Beach, upgrade to the pump station, \$5,893. To the community of Kelvington, decommissioned landfill, 50,000; repair and pave roads, 50,000. To the community of Wynyard, a new tractor for 33,920; replacement of water pipelines, \$100,000. To the RM [rural municipality] of Bjorkdale, municipal shop, \$122,313.

The RM of Insinger, bridge replacement design, \$45,274. To the RM of Foam Lake, a gravel trailer, \$51,419. The RM of Tisdale, a grader, \$130,937. The community of Wadena, aquatic centre pool liner replacement, 155,000. To Porcupine Plain, community hall upgrades, 35,000. The RM of Elfros, tractor for \$56,000. The RM of Porcupine Plain, a grader, \$115,000. The village of Rama, water holding tank, \$11,498. As I've said, Mr. Speaker, this is just a sampling of the extremely important upgrades to municipal infrastructure as a result of our investments.

Mr. Speaker, when I first spoke with constituents as a potential candidate about their priorities, it was quickly evident that three things consistently rose to the top: one was highways, second was connectivity, and third, municipal infrastructure. That does not diminish for a second the issues around ag policy, forestry sustainability, water management, mental and physical health, security, and many other important measures in the constituency. I have been a strong advocate for those priority items and can announce that significant progress has been made.

On highways, we have significant investments in highways 5, 9, and 16. And this year No. 38 from Kelvington north will be completely resurfaced, and significant maintenance is assured for No. 23, which is a priority item for resurfacing in the very near future. In addition, a large-scale paving project will occur at Greenwater Lake Provincial Park this summer. In addition, significant funding is provided for both highway and municipal bridges, culverts, and safety initiatives.

On connectivity, as Legislative Secretary last year, I was pleased to be part of the rollout of over 100 rural cell towers and note that SaskTel continues to commit over \$300 million to improvements this year, including 42 macro towers in rural areas. I'm also pleased that both SaskTel and private internet providers step up to respond to current demands and note there is both urgency and opportunity to do so much more in this area.

[15:45]

On municipal infrastructure, I noted the significant investment of \$150 million to the MEEP [municipal economic enhancement program] program in last budget. But I also highlight the second-highest level of municipal revenue sharing in the province's history in this year's budget, as well as our participation with the federal government in the current iteration of the federal Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. A couple of examples of beneficiaries under this program are the Archerwill and RM of Barrier Valley lagoon expansion and water treatment plant upgrades in Theodore.

Mr. Speaker, we value an education system that prepares our youth for a 21st-century social, economic, and cultural environment. Learning from history is an important element that cannot be lost to attempts to rewrite history. Every society has made grievous errors in judgment, and we must learn from those examples and strive to be better people as a result. Our economy is not what it was a century ago and arguably not what it was a decade ago. New advances in sciences and technology challenge our education system to be dynamic and responsive and to focus on tangible outcomes, preparing our young minds to face a real, demanding, and sometimes confusing world.

In Saskatchewan our new reality is in multicultural diversity that enriches us beyond our imaginations a generation ago. Looking forward, using our historical grievances as learning experiences, and growing Saskatchewan together is an opportunity unlike any in our history. How will we face that opportunity? Will we have faith in collective goodwill? Will we re-establish our fundamental family and community values? Will we respect each other as individuals, capable of making each our own unique contribution to our new society?

Mr. Speaker, our record investment in our education system must help us to bridge understandings, build respect, and grow inquisitive minds without limitations. Our record investments in education, up fully 11.6 per cent this year to \$391.3 million, speaks to our commitment to classrooms in Saskatchewan.

I'd like to speak briefly to promises made and promises kept in this budget, which include: the home renovation tax credit, effective October 1st, 2020; the SaskPower 10 per cent rebate, effective December 1st, 2020; the increase to the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship fund by 50 per cent to \$750 a year, and this will come into effect following the passing of this budget; a reduction in small business taxes, effective October 1, 2020; the restart to the active families benefit program; \$6 million a year to expand autism funding; expanding the province's insulin pump program to everyone with type 1 diabetes; reducing the maximum cost of ambulance calls by 50 per cent to \$135 a call and eliminating inter-hospital ambulance costs, effective December 14th, 2020; increasing the seniors' income plan to a maximum of \$360 a month; hiring the new continuing care aids; restarting the community rinks affordability grant. Mr. Speaker, these are all critical investments in our province, and they were campaign promises, and they are promises kept.

Mr. Speaker, on Monday this week, I caught the CTV [Canadian Television Network Ltd.] local news and captured the following quote, which I thought was apropos. I quote:

A deficit in the current conditions of a pandemic is understandable, but it's all about choices. It's all about

values, and that's why it is critical at this time that the Sask Party rise to the occasion and make the investments that are to save lives and, of course, beat this pandemic and secure an economic recovery that lets people back to work.

Mr. Speaker, let's take a look at that statement. Deficit in current conditions: check. Choices that are of value to the Saskatchewan people: check. Values — again, values of Saskatchewan people, not the NDP — check. Investments that are going to save lives and beat this pandemic: check. Secure an economic recovery that gets people back to work: check.

Mr. Speaker, who actually said that? I actually think, despite comments earlier today, the member from Regina Rosemont was prepared to vote for our budget because it meets all of his criteria, until, it appears, he was led astray by his leader and fed too much orange Kool-Aid.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support the long-term vision in Saskatchewan's growth plan and the budget put forward by the Minister of Finance and seconded by the member from The Battlefords, and I do not support the amendment made by the member from Regina Rosemont. Thank you.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And as delightful as it is to discover that the member from Kelvington-Wadena in fact has a beard, which I didn't know today, I am disappointed that people everywhere in this province going to work every day have to wear masks and that these members aren't choosing to do so in this House.

Yes, the members opposite can boo and heckle, but personally, in the past two weeks, I know seven service industry people personally who contracted COVID, and yes, it's scary times here in the city. And you know, we had Plexiglas and masks back in December, and I guess it's curious that now apparently it's just Plexiglas that's being recommended.

But, Mr. Speaker, to begin I would like to first of all start by thanking our staff, thanking my wonderful constituency assistant, Marshall Burns, who started in the new year. And as a new MLA having a constituency assistant start is akin to what I imagine it feels like when your children get their driver's licence. He has been a wonderful help and is not only a Juno-nominated musician and much cooler person than myself, he is also kind and thoughtful and has done incredible work over the past couple months for the people of Regina University.

And I'd like to thank and recognize all those people in Regina University for their time and their engagement over the past months and day in and day out and the work that they do to make their community and my community a little bit better every day. There's health care workers, teachers, small-business owners. And I would not be here without them and I will endeavour every day to make them proud and earn the trust and support of every single one of them.

So without further ado, Mr. Speaker, I'll begin my remarks on the budget proper. And I'll open with a quote: "Only a great society can produce great men." And this was the belief that some

of the greatest leaders of this province held. And this should be the belief that guides all of the members in this House on both sides of this Assembly — great societies produce great people. And governments should contribute to this greatness by expanding the opportunities and freedoms of the people of this province.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, this budget does nothing to build for the future. For a government that championed 20 actions for 2020 and 30 goals for 2030, this budget does little, if anything, to move towards their own goals. This government trumpets the Saskatchewan plan for growth — 30 goals for 2030. And yet what we see time and time again is an unwillingness or an inability to plan. And this budget eliminates our ability to grow.

This budget is a miss for the people of Saskatchewan and most confusingly, a miss on their own goals. One of the goals, Mr. Speaker: 1.4 million people living in Saskatchewan, and now we lead in people fleeing the Sask Party's province. One hundred thousand new jobs. Well we're down 23,000 and there's no plan to add any more in this budget.

Enhanced oil recovery; carbon capture, utilization, and storage; and to position Saskatchewan as the best place in North America to test, commercialize, and scale new oil and gas technologies — wonderful goals, Mr. Speaker. Meanwhile the government is decommissioning Boundary dam and, as per SaskPower's most recent annual report, only spending enough money to host one meeting with the hundreds of families who will be impacted by their \$2 billion Boundary dam blunder.

Grow private capital investment in Saskatchewan to \$16 billion annually. Unfortunately, VC [venture capital] is down and there's no commitment to train or attract skilled workers, and post-secondary is facing yet another cut disguised as status quo.

Growing Indigenous participation in Saskatchewan's natural resource industries. Meanwhile some of the first jobs lost and the first supply chains impacted by COVID-19 in this province were northern jobs, resource and mining jobs, forestry jobs, Indigenous jobs. And the spinoff businesses impacted? Indigenous. And yet we hear nothing from this government.

Doubling the growth of Saskatchewan's forestry sector. And yet this government ignores the situation in P.A., holding up an OSB [oriented strand board] plant with investment lined up, allowing good, skilled, mortgage-paying, generational jobs in forestry to lie fallow while the entire community suffers for want of a livelihood. The people of P.A. wonder what's the holdup, and why they get sweet-talked during an election and broken promises after the vote. On forestry and for the North in general, the government seems to be entirely missing in action.

Delivering on Saskatchewan's climate change strategy, Prairie Resilience. But unfortunately it's less prairie resilience and more petty road warriors, because so far it seems like their flaccid plan is to simply cut the climate change allocation in the budget and backfill it by taxing the 403 electric vehicle owners in Saskatchewan for a whopping \$60,000.

Tripling the growth of Saskatchewan's technology sector. And meanwhile cuts, cuts, and more cuts to post-secondary, little attention to or investment in micro-credentialing, and refusing to

skate where the puck is going; instead shrieking at the ref when they don't like the call. High tech companies in ag, natural resources, water management cannot find the skilled workers that they need and this government refuses to even meet with them.

Growing the number of international markets to which Saskatchewan exports more than a billion dollars, and while here it's clear that the government is putting their money where their friends are. While K to 12 education is facing a cut, the government is spending nine and a half million dollars more to establish four international trade offices, cushy foreign patronage postings with little to show for the shrouded work. Instead of saving our money and simply operating out of existing Global Affairs Canada offices, the Sask Party prefers to waste money to ensure that these perk-filled postings abroad are theirs and theirs alone.

Increasing tourist expenditures in Saskatchewan by 50 per cent, laudable. And yet this budget, there is nothing for small business. In fact, if you remove the SaskPower rebate, which sees the vast majority of dollars flow through to companies rather than people, they have cut economic development, a bold choice during a pandemic and a recession.

When the WHL [Western Hockey League] came to town, did this government suggest that they spend their money in the struggling hotel sector? No. Universities housed the teams. And festivals, musicians, artists, and performers — cultural sector entrepreneurs who contribute four times more to this economy than sports — have been out on their own for over a year. And these people have one of the longest runways to recovery. When seasonal businesses are begging for help, has this government put a penny more towards accessible and adequate assistance programs? No.

The members opposite can heckle, but I field calls from struggling business owners day in and day out, advocating for them to the minister. And how many responses have I received from the minister, advocating for small businesses? Zero. And keeping the budget balanced, well we all know this isn't happening and hasn't been happening for a while. Years of deficit budgets and we're looking forward to five more by their own numbers. If a decade of deficit budgets doesn't tell you that they've mismanaged the books, well I've got a second bridge in P.A. to sell you.

[16:00]

So this government has failed to develop and build people up during the best of times, and now in the worst of times the lack of vision is stark. This budget marks a turning point for this government — six years, six budgets, zero balanced budgets. And now if we're looking to 2026-27 for a return to balance . . . if and only if COVID-19 is completely under control by September.

They have failed in their COVID planning, failed in achieving their own goals, failed at presenting a budget that merits anything but a shrug, and failed at building a freer Saskatchewan. Our province leads in COVID, child poverty, infant mortality, foreclosures, and out-province migration. And if this is what the government has planned for, well they've succeeded but the people of Saskatchewan have been failed.

Growth has been stunted and economic development cast aside and democracy itself is threatened when such major economic decisions can be made by so few. And this government has become naught but the tool for the money powers. It's clear from the lack of planning in years past — planning to save, planning to invest, or planning at all — and from the lack of realism present in this budget, it's clear that as expected, this province is yet again being failed by its government.

True democratic economic planning should aim to increase human freedom, freedom from fear and freedom from want. A healthy society and a healthy economy should provide a secure and rising income for all people so that they may more fully develop their talents, their tastes, and that they may have greater opportunities to contribute. A free and democratic Saskatchewan needs freedom from fear and freedom from want.

Our current capacity as a society gives us the ability to eliminate poverty, and yet this government's patchwork of insufficient and feeble protections do little but churn the most vulnerable through and through. This government enacts policies — whether CERB [Canada emergency response benefit] clawbacks, the lowest minimum wage in Canada, or the abysmally low income support offered to those on assistance — that penalize and absolutely demolish human potential. And what a shameful, tragic waste.

Their policies and seemingly their approach to programs of social security seems centred on a worldview that any assistance, anything that makes people dependent on the state are shiftless and lazy. But you cannot think when you're starving, less so when your children are, and being socially mobile or bootstrapping requires time, grace, and thought. In order to bootstrap, you first need boots. Investing in the people of Saskatchewan, even those who don't just write cheques to the members opposite isn't just decent, it's good economic policy.

In a healthy and democratic economy, ability should be in constant demand, and today a lack of education, poor health, low wages, and long hours crush out so much of the initiative and inventiveness of Saskatchewan people. And this budget ignores the need to invest in skills training and development because hey, students and people out of work aren't their priorities. By their standards, out-of-work people must be lazy. And students, hey, well they don't vote anyways.

Tech companies can't find the people to hire, and those who immigrate to Saskatchewan or move here as foreign students quickly turn around and leave because they cannot find what they need to build a healthy, ambitious, and successful life for their families. Mr. Speaker, they don't see a society in which they can have the freedom to grow and achieve all that they can. And this is a government, Mr. Speaker, that's spent a lot of time talking about freedom: personal freedom, the freedom of businesses to elect to close without any support. Meanwhile this government does nothing to listen.

And now when it comes to COVID, this government has played free and loose with people's health and people's freedoms. The Premier says he doesn't want to limit people's freedoms, but the only people truly free are those who choose to behave with callous disregard for their neighbours. Free are the ignorant and the selfish intent on doing as little as possible to keep us all safe and to help us build back.

While most good, community-minded people in Saskatchewan choose to be smart, limit their contacts, and restrict their actions, the selfish and ignorant roam free, emboldened by this government. And by exercising this freedom, these modern-day pandemic highwaymen hold us hostage. They keep restaurants closed and they limit retail and businesses to 25 per cent capacity and ensure that the drudgery of this government's half measures continue unabated.

So we're not free right now. The selfish are free and they're emboldened by the government, showing just who this government truly cares about and what they truly stand for — freedom for the maskless, freedom for the selfish, and freedom for the conspiracy theorists.

And this is a government that loves to dog whistle and bark its separatism, free us from the shackles of Canada, and yet meanwhile economically they're doing everything in their power to keep us tied to this federal government. Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm new to this role but yesterday I learned that for every \$5 the members opposite spend, for every \$5, one of those dollars is an allowance that comes directly from the Prime Minister. Twenty per cent of our budget comes directly from Ottawa, directly from Prime Minister Trudeau. And while the members opposite take every chance to dog whistle and bark, they have failed to get a better deal from Ottawa. All the while 20 per cent of their spending comes from the Liberal government. They may be unhappy with the federal government, but it's hard to take their bluster as anything but while they keep one hand out, eager for a handout.

They have done nothing to secure this economy and nothing to build economic freedom for this province. While our economy falls, this government refuses to invest in jobs, in economic development, in a \$15 minimum wage, in innovation, and in saving jobs right here in Regina, whether it's Evraz workers, servers, women entrepreneurs, small-business owners and staff, or those in the cultural sectors.

They care so little about this economy that they didn't think to include a jobs plan despite pushing the budget back and despite knowing that nearly 25,000 people are out of work. And, Mr. Speaker, we had simple, clear, common-sense asks: remove the PST from construction labour, remove the PST from restaurant meals, try not having the lowest minimum wage in Canada, because maybe having an entire class of working poor people isn't a good thing. They didn't invest in long-term care, in classrooms, or in diversifying our energy future or energy security.

Youth employment. Mr. Speaker, every week I have people come in to my business desperate for work. And youth employment has been fully and roundly ignored by this government, and there is a crisis coming.

And not only that. Unsurprisingly, I suppose, they've ignored the need for accessible, universal child care and the need to empower more women to become economic catalysts and change makers. Yet all the while they're cutting in human service areas, knowing that women will pick up the slack.

Mr. Speaker, it's only the second day of session, and people feel already exhausted by this budget. It's more of the same and it's

nothing new. And for one, I am disappointed. I will be supporting the amendment made by my good friend, the member from Regina Rosemont, and I will not be supporting this tired, grey, feeble attempt at a budget.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Mr. Meyers: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's truly an honour to rise here today and to speak on behalf of the good people of Regina Walsh Acres. I'd first like to take a second to recognize the House leaders and the Whips on both sides of the floor for the work that they have done to be able to get us in here — just stop right there? — to be able to get us in here so we can pass this budget, debate this budget, and look at some very important legislation over the next six weeks.

At the same time, I'd like to thank the staff, the Clerks and all the people that work in and around this building for making it possible. And while I'm at it, I want to thank the health care workers. I want to thank Dr. Shahab, the grocery store clerks, the teachers, the students, the construction crews, and all the people of this province. The way that we've pulled together over this last year makes me extremely proud to be from Saskatchewan.

Now as has been touched on — and I'm very, very happy to see a number of House members today wearing green — today is Green Shirt Day, and I want to echo some of those comments. It's not only a sign of how Saskatchewan people can pull together, but how we can inspire others across our country and around the world.

Logan Boulet tragically lost his life three years ago in the Humboldt Broncos bus crash. But this young man, he has a lasting effect today, tomorrow, and in the future because Logan was an organ donor. Boulet helped six lives live on, and he inspired a nation to register as organ and tissue donors.

Now in my time, in the brief time I've been an MLA, I've had the chance to speak with a number of organizations. And one thing that really rang home to me was organizations really appreciate when MLAs and members of the House come to their events or take a picture and post something on Twitter, but what really matters to them is action and when they see action. Well I'm happy to say that Logan Boulet inspired me and this morning. In his honour, I went and I signed up online to become an organ donor.

Mr. Speaker, I want to move to the budget. Protect, build, and grow: that is the theme of our government's budget. It's a budget that I'm proudly supporting and I'm proud to stand next to the Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier because I think it is the budget that we need now, it is the budget we need tomorrow, and it is the budget we need for the future. It's a budget that will protect Saskatchewan people, build Saskatchewan communities, and grow Saskatchewan's economy.

This is a budget that sees 14 campaign promises kept. These are campaign promises that I was on the doorstep talking to people. They were excited to see these coming to fruition. It's a budget that sees record investment in health care, education, and social services. But this budget is more than just some graphics on a one-page handout. It's more than a headline looking for clicks on

Twitter. This budget is more than just a bunch of numbers in a spreadsheet. This budget is for people and it's about people, and it has a real impact on those living in Saskatchewan now and in the future.

One thing I want to highlight is the \$5 million investment for the people with diabetes. Now \$5 million in the grand scheme of this budget, it's a nice number. It's a lot of money. But what does it actually mean? Well it means our government is covering the costs for continuous and flash glucose monitoring systems for children and youth under the age of 18 who are insulin-dependent, young people like my friend Hartley. Hartley is a four-year-old girl here in Regina and for Hartley, her mom and dad, this is a game changer.

Imagine your little child . . . And we've seen children in the House and we know we have lots of young ones with members. I actually want to congratulate the member from Regina Lakeview having a new baby recently, so congratulations to her family. But imagine as a parent going to bed knowing that you won't . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No, sorry, Douglas Park. Sorry, Regina Douglas Park. Sorry about that.

But imagine as a parent — and many of us are parents — you wouldn't know if your child's blood sugar is too high, too low, trending up, trending down. Hartley's dad told me this the other night, that this is a life changer and saver, having this constant monitoring system. Now while Hartley might be too young to monitor her own sugar levels, one thing she is very aware of is her insulin needles.

Now my grandpa, Ervin Meyers, and my uncle Hilliard, they both had type 1 diabetes. They lived with it for over 30 years. I remember grandpa having to inject himself with insulin every day, and sometimes more than once. I can't imagine how their lives would have benefited from the Saskatchewan insulin pump program, where the cost of an insulin pump will be covered for everyone in Saskatchewan that needs one.

For four-year-old Hartley, she told me and I say this as a quote: "I don't get any more needles." Now for the parents in the room who've had our kids to take them to get shots, we know what needles mean. It's screaming that will tear your heart out. Imagine knowing that your child doesn't have to take a needle every single day on multiple times. That's the real impact of this.

But it also has an impact on adults. Meagan, a type 1 diabetic, emailed me this:

As someone with type 1 diabetes, it was like a weight off my shoulders when the government pledged to expand the Insulin Pump Program. I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes when I was 12, and have been an insulin pump user since I was 14. It has offered me flexibility, the tightest control of my blood glucose levels, and overall best quality of life I could have. However, insulin pump therapy comes at a tremendous monetary cost. Most months, my diabetes expenses total around \$1,000 and my private insurance only covers a fraction of that. Insulin pumps and the necessary supplies that come with it can be a deciding factor against insulin pump therapy for a lot of people who do not qualify for the . . . program because of their age. Because of these high costs, people have had to decide about going to

university, putting a down payment on their first home, starting a family . . . or their health.

Now that the Insulin Pump Program will cover . . . these costs for insulin pumps users of every age, people will no longer need to make this choice. It also gives people the freedom to make decisions that are best for their health, and not be restricted because of financial limitations. Making insulin pump therapy accessible to more people will also reduce long term complications, like blindness, kidney failure, nerve damage, and amputations. I'm so grateful and happy for the expansion to the Program. It will help me live my healthiest life.

[16:15]

That's from a young adult who this \$5 million has a real impact. It's not just some number. And it's less than a fifth of 1 per cent of the budget but it impacts these lives today and tomorrow and for the future.

Now this budget also fulfills some campaign promises like reducing the small-business tax and the home renovation tax credit, initiatives that will not only save the people of Saskatchewan money but it's going to help jump-start our economy as we recover from the global pandemic. Now, Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had a chance to speak with a tax specialist here in town about reducing the small-business tax from 2 per cent to zero from October of last year to July of next year, and it will not only save businesses over \$10,000 but it allows them to return that money into their business to grow their business. His words: "It's a decent opportunity that other provinces don't have." In these times, every dollar makes sense. So for the opposition members that were quick on social media, searching for anything for small businesses, well this is just one of the ways that we are supporting small businesses in this province with this budget, Mr. Speaker.

The new home renovation tax credit provides ten and a half per cent tax credit on up to \$20,000 of eligible home renovations, saving people money while increasing the value of their homes. But it's much more than that, Mr. Speaker. Again it's not just numbers. This credit will have an immediate trickle-down effect. I spoke with a gentleman named Sean yesterday. He works in the industry. He called it as this:

This is just one more reason for people to do things. It's a topic of conversation out there. It is making it easier for people to move things up and helps get money back into the system.

Again real consequences, real positive effects coming out of this budget.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this budget is the right budget for the people of Saskatchewan. It is definitely the right budget for the people of Regina, and I'm proud to say it is the right budget for the people of Walsh Acres. The '21-22 budget invests \$500,000 in planning for replacement of long-term care beds in Regina. Now this was one of the top issues that I heard when I was out on the campaign trail again last fall. Walsh Acres has a number of people who are going to be looking towards long-term care in the future, in the very near future, and this was one of their top

priorities. They want to see a plan, and our government is committing to that plan and starting to take that action right here because of this budget and in this budget.

This year's budget also provides \$5.7 million for urgent care centres in Regina and Saskatoon. Now when completed, the Regina-based centre will provide an alternative to emergency departments for illnesses or injuries that aren't life-threatening but they can't wait until tomorrow. It includes mental health and addictions supports as well. The centre will offer 24-hour, seven-days-a-week access. The centre is also expected to lower wait times for health care issues requiring urgent medical attention. And again, for any of us that have played sports, we've ended up in those emergency rooms. We have kids. Especially if you've got boys, you know that it's always a distinct possibility that somebody's going off a bed and cracking their head on a nightstand, maybe needing some stitches.

An Hon. Member: — Yup. Been there, done that.

Mr. Meyers: — Thank you for mentioning that. And we have daughters that play soccer who sometimes roll their ankles and need to go to the emergency department. All these things need immediate care. They need immediate looking after. But is a place like the emergency room, where we have cardiac patients coming in — real critical patients coming in — is that the place to put my daughter with a sprained ankle? No. These urgent care centres are going to make a real difference in our emergency room wait times, and it's going to give people the proper care and access to it in a quicker fashion.

This budget includes \$3 million for investment into our ag tech venture capital fund. This is an initial investment and a part of the \$15 million commitment previously announced in 2020. Now this is part of keeping Saskatchewan as a global leader in the ag tech sector. Now I grew up on a farm out by Midale, as I've mentioned in this House before. I used to think the city was the city and out on the farms was out on the farms. Well it's a lot different than that these days. The ag tech sector is dialed in right here in the Queen City.

In our province the urban and the rural are always connected. And that's no more evident than in this ag tech sector. I had the chance to speak with some stakeholders in the industry after the budget and they're calling this really big news for Regina's food hub strategy, and could even potentially launch another incubator eventually. That could amount to hundreds of jobs from dozens of new start-ups right here in the greater Queen City. So when the opposition wants to talk about no jobs plan, that sounds like a pretty good jobs plan to me, right here in the capital city.

Mr. Speaker, recently I've heard from the people that I represent in Walsh Acres about the speed of their internet from SaskTel. It's slow. This has been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic as more people are working from home or students are studying from home. I made it one of my top priorities to get the people of Walsh Acres faster internet. And I don't know a lot about running lines, but I do know that SaskTel is continuing to invest in connectivity right across the province, and Regina Walsh Acres will see part of that investment. This year alone, SaskTel will invest 323 million of capital into Saskatchewan, and that includes 85.8 million for fibre optic infrastructure. Again, a bunch of numbers, but what does it mean?

Well it means that we are very pleased that this investment includes installing fibre optic internet in Regina Walsh Acres. SaskTel expects that construction will begin in the coming weeks and will be completed by the end of the construction season. Now the constituents of Regina Walsh Acres will now have access to internet speeds reaching up to 300 megabits per second, allowing them to effectively work from home, study from home, surf from home.

Again, I don't understand 300 megabits, but I do know this: I talked to a university student, Luke, last night. Luke told me that his internet was faster at the lake than it was in the northern part of Walsh Acres. He was pretty pumped to hear that this is going to be going in because now he can take his online classes, his sisters can stream a movie off Disney+, his parents can do a little grocery shopping online, they can Zoom with grandma and grandpa all at the same time and no more lag for them.

Couple this with Saskatchewan drivers receiving a one-time rebate of \$285 from the Auto Fund, on average — and speaking for my driving record, that is very welcome; I've been putting in long enough — and a one-year 10 per cent rebate on electricity charges on power bills to support Saskatchewan's economic recovery, and Saskatchewan people will pay the lowest rates in the country on their bundle of utilities. Mr. Speaker, I've lived in Alberta. I've lived in British Columbia. I can tell you the overwhelming costs are burdening to families there. And I am happy that this budget, and proud of this budget, that we will have the lowest rates on our bundle of utilities in the country.

This budget has an increased funding of \$800,000 that will be used to respond to interpersonal violence and domestic abuse, including support for a public awareness campaign, a 24-7 interpersonal violence and abuse provincial call line in partnership with 211, the development of family intervention rapid support teams, and expansion of the victim advocate case review initiative. Now this is just one of the many areas earmarked for support for the Ministry of Social Services. It ties into something . . . And just bear with me, Mr. Speaker.

Where the biggest difference will be made though is the nearly five and one-half per cent increase to the record high \$458 million toward mental health and addictions. This year's budget will increase 7.2 million for targeted mental health and addictions services, including specific youth-focused initiatives, more investments in suicide prevention, and significant expansion in harm reduction and addictions treatment.

April 1st, last Thursday, just six days ago, my daughter Teigha would have turned 18. Now I know I've stood in this House and spoke about her before. Teigha had her struggles with mental illness, a battle that actually took her from us when she died by suicide last fall. It will not be the last time that I stand in this House and talk about Teigha.

The funding for the establishment of three provincial locations for a youth-focused initiative that integrates mental health and addictions, physical health, and community and social services can and will make a difference for our kids. Our youth, Mr. Speaker, are our future. I'm not saying anything we don't know. But by investing in them, we will see long-term changes in areas that are not only specific to just their mental health in the now, but they will make differences in areas like interpersonal

violence, like addictions, and all across the spectrum.

Teigha was a bright shining light, a recruited athlete. She was on the honour roll. She had teammates. She had friends. She had a family that loved her. Mental illness doesn't discriminate. This is a disease that people can be forced to live with — any one of us.

And when we hear of someone getting cancer, they go to the cancer clinic, the Allan Blair cancer clinic right here in town. Some of us have been there and are patients and continuing patients there. It is a wonderful place. It is outstanding because you have a disease, you go there, and they look after you. Well when our youth suffer from mental illness, they are now going to have a location to go to. This is important. This will make a difference. And this won't be the end of our commitments. It doesn't have to be the end for our youth. And I'm proud of our government for investing in them, and I know my daughter would be proud as well.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is an opposition NDP that just yesterday said, and I'm quoting here: "While the Sask Party MLAs failed to do their jobs, this budget will leave countless Saskatchewan people without a job." Well I think I've touched on this before but this is also an opposition that claims they put people first.

Mr. Speaker, when businesses were most hurt by COVID-19, I began reaching out to business owners in my constituency to ensure they knew that the government was there to offer support. Now if you've ever been to Walsh Acres, there's virtually no businesses within Walsh Acres with storefronts. There's a lot of business owners. So I began safely delivering packages and helping business owners navigate the supports that were becoming available to them, like the Saskatchewan small-business emergency payment program, or the strong recovery adaptation rebate. That is because as an MLA it's my duty to support my community.

I noticed though, in my conversations around town, that opposition members were not doing the same for businesses in their area, in the downtown area. And yes, I represent Regina Walsh Acres but every business in Regina is important, and many of them were not hearing from their representatives on the opposite side. So I handed out packages to those businesses who were struggling and needed direction, more info for supports. I sat down with them at the table and talked to them, how their new website was eligible to qualify for the adaptation. I sat down with them and talked to them about Plexiglas in the restaurants, how that could qualify. I talked to them about all of the supports that were available for them when it was coming towards training, or whatever it was.

Because, Mr. Speaker, supporting local businesses goes beyond posting a tweet. We need to reach out to them, listen to them, talk to them, make sure that they know that the support is available and that there is someone there to help them through this difficult time. I'm glad I made those connections, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's going to serve the people of this province well.

Mr. Speaker, as I wrap up, this budget will protect, build, and grow. The budget makes good on 14 campaign commitments. This budget has Saskatchewan as the best province when it comes to leading the country in the net debt as a per cent of GDP [gross domestic product]. This budget has the largest investment

in health in our history, the largest investment in education in our history, the largest investment in social services in our history, investing in the well-being of the people in this province, and \$450 million in their mental health; 3.1 billion in capital investments in new long-term care facilities, hospitals, schools, highways, and municipal infrastructure, many of which the people of Regina Walsh Acres and the entire province will benefit from.

Growing for our next generation, we continue to expand exports with four additional trade and investment offices abroad because we need to market our products to the world — because we certainly know that Ottawa is not going to do it for us — the extension of the Saskatchewan technology start-up incentive, and helping create jobs by supporting a new agriculture technology venture fund.

Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed things. It has changed how we look at the world. But I believe the vaccines are our way out the other side of this, a vaccine which I am very proud to say, because of my immunocompromised position, I'll be getting next week. And I encourage everybody to stick it to COVID when their number is called.

Mr. Speaker, I believe Saskatchewan is the best place to live in our country, and this budget is going to protect, build, and grow us for now and for the future. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the budget as presented by the Deputy Premier and Finance minister and seconded by the member from The Battlefords, and I will not be supporting the amendment. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Pasqua.

Mr. Fiaz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very much humbled and honoured to stand here in this Chamber to represent people of Regina Pasqua. I would like to say thank you to all people of Regina Pasqua for giving me this privilege, and I want to represent them. Mr. Speaker, it has been five years since I've been elected — about three days ago — and I would like to say thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to represent them and to serve them.

[16:30]

Of course I would like to say thank you very much to my colleagues, that I learn many things from my colleagues and I learn many things from caucus office and would like to say all that support, I had it in the past and now and in the future. I would like to say thank you very much to my two CAs [constituency assistant], Kristen Hill and Josh Fryklund, who are working in my office and doing an awesome job to keep contact with my constituents and keep me updated with my jobs.

I would like to say thank you to my family. My three boys, Ayaz, Kashif, and Arsalan, and would like to say thank you to my wife for supporting me especially in this difficult time, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to say thank you to my family, my brothers, my sisters, and my mom of course. I haven't met them since about almost two years. And we know that this pandemic is keeping us away from each other, but at the same time we are connected together. We are strong together, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, we can understand the severity of difficult times while you cannot meet your relatives, your family members, and your loved ones. Mr. Speaker, in this challenging time we are all together, we are facing it together, and together we will get through it.

Here is the big thank you to the people of Saskatchewan for their co-operation following the public health guidelines, steadfastness, and determination. Mr. Speaker, to face this challenge head-on, well, it's not possible without front-line health care workers. They are the true heroes who are saving lives while putting their own lives at risk. I would like to say thank you very much. Thanks to all essential service providers, uniformed services, cashiers, truck drivers, all people who are keeping the flow in essential goods and services, teachers, school staff, and all the volunteers who help their neighbours, their friends, and even strangers as well.

Yesterday it was the first budget of the 29th Assembly and it was the second during the pandemic, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are all in unexpected and unprecedented economic shock. During this unprecedented time our government tabled the 2021-22 budget, which ensures that we have a clear goal and clear path to recover our economy and ready for growth.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is protecting jobs, economic growth, building Saskatchewan, and making lives more affordable. There is no new tax. In fact this government's spending a record amount of dollars on many capital projects in this budget, also delivering many election promises. Mr. Speaker, this budget makes life more affordable. We removed 112,000 low-income people off the provincial income tax roll, and we are among the lowest personal and corporation income tax rates in the country.

Mr. Speaker, our Saskatchewan customers will receive a one-time 10-per-cent rebate on electricity charges on their power bills, and Saskatchewan drivers will receive a one-time rebate of 285 on average, calculated on the proportion of the vehicle premium paid in the previous three years. These rebates factored in, Saskatchewan people will pay the lowest rate in the country on their bundle of utilities.

Introduced the home renovation tax credit, which will save a homeowner taking full advantage of the program up to 2,100 on the cost of the home renovation.

Created and enhanced the low-income tax credit by \$1,000 per adult and \$40 per child. Mr. Speaker, a family of four in Saskatchewan pay no income tax on their first \$52,250 of income in 2021, which is the highest tax-free threshold in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, moving forward, fixing and recovering from the pandemic, this government announced many capital projects in this budget and announced record spending in all sectors. Committed to serve Saskatchewan people, create jobs, and protect their businesses, this government's response was \$4.8 billion in economic, health, and safety. This budget includes 1.5 billion in support, following nearly \$2 billion from the last budget which makes a total of 3.4 billion since COVID-19 started marching in the world. And we committed 1.3 billion over the next two years to continue to help Saskatchewan people and help the province's economy recover.

Mr. Speaker, in this '21-22 budget, we include \$90 million in the health sector response through the Ministry of Health to provide testing equipment, personal protective equipment, and to fund operating costs to address this pandemic. A total of 155 million will be invested under the Saskatchewan safe schools plan, including 134.2 million in this budget and another 20.7 million in this budget as well for the school divisions to continue to support the safe return to the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, this budget includes 6.8 million for a northern isolation support program as a part of an agreement with the federal government to help individuals at remote locations voluntarily isolated. The program will provide access to suitable commercial accommodations and mobile residential units as a part of the temporary community housing solution. Other measures include 4.2 million for justice and correction facilities and \$800,000 for expanding care to the youth during the pandemic who will otherwise age out of care.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, we are committed for economic growth. And to revive our economy, we announced 488.1 million in stimulus spending, in targeting infrastructure investment on needed maintenance, and on the major project described in this budget capital plan, and following \$405.4 million in the 2020 budget.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are committed to serving people of Saskatchewan, so in this budget we secured 6.12 billion for health, an increase of 261 million from last budget. And this is up \$2.7 billion or 78 per cent since 2007, Mr. Speaker. One can imagine what NDP government used to spend for health. This is the largest health investment in Saskatchewan history.

A further 90 million will support the province's comprehensive COVID-19 response. Major costs associated with this funding include mass vaccination delivery, purchasing more personal protective equipment supplies, supporting contact tracing measures, and expansion of testing and assessment sites and resources. This funding will also provide for additional provincial laboratory capacity as well as support for long-term care.

Mr. Speaker, the budget provides a historic 3.96 billion to the Saskatchewan Health Authority, an increase of 221.4 million over last year. I would like to provide a few highlights about Saskatchewan Health Authority funding in this budget. It is a 1.2 million increase to address wait time for diagnostic imaging service by adding capacity for these specialized services. An amount of \$950,000 increases for operation with the new CT scan program in Melfort, which will improve the overall wait time.

Particularly for the patients in the northern part of the province, \$869,000 increase for additional resources to the pediatric hematology program, including an additional specialist position in Saskatoon, nursing and other staff. An amount of \$549,000 increase to expand interventional radiology services in Regina, and \$334,000 increase for additional respiratory therapists in Prince Albert.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Health Authority will receive \$3.6 million to increase the four-bed intensive care unit expansion in Saskatoon: two beds at the Royal University

Hospital and two beds at St. Paul's Hospital. A \$5.1 million budget increase will further establish the Royal University Hospital 48-bed acute care unit. A \$2 million increase will also provide for an expansion of resources and operation for a neonatal ICU at the Victoria Hospital in Prince Albert to deliver the best care available for newborns.

The Saskatchewan Cancer Agency will receive their highest-ever level of funding with 7.6 million, which is an increase of 3.9 per cent, bringing the annual grant to \$204 million. This funding will include a 2.9 million increase for a new oncology drug program and the growth of existing treatment, and \$425,000 to expand treatment available in Saskatchewan regional hospitals.

Making life affordable, Mr. Speaker. A 5 million investment will increase the support for people with diabetes. Financial coverage will now include the continuous and flash glucose monitoring system for children and youth under 18 who are insulin dependent. The insulin pump program is also expanding to support individuals of all ages with type 1 diabetes.

Children between the age of 6 and 11 with autism spectrum disorder will be eligible to receive individualized funding of 6,000 annually in addition to children under the age of six who currently receive 8,000 annually. With this program expansion, up to 1,000 Saskatchewan children could benefit.

Mr. Speaker, this budget invests 162 million in health care capital, including 7.6 million for an 80-bed La Ronge long-term care facility and 3.6 million for the future Grenfell long-term care facility, planning-stage investment of \$550,000 for new Watson and Estevan long-term care facilities, and half a million dollars for the replacement of long-term care beds in Regina.

Mr. Speaker, this year's budget provides 5.7 million for urgent care centres in Regina and Saskatoon, 1.4 million for the Weyburn hospital planning, and 1.4 million for ongoing work on the program and designing the plan for the Prince Albert Victoria Hospital. That was the promise in the election campaign, Mr. Speaker.

Emergency medical services will receive a 6.6 million increase for initiatives such as staffing additional ambulances in Regina and Saskatoon, addressing delays when transferring patients to the hospital and to other facilities, covering patients' wait-time fees, and funding new ambulance technology to improve service, coordination, and protect Saskatchewan residents.

Mr. Speaker, additional emergency care includes \$1.4 million to add a new STARS helicopter to deliver emergency care resources faster to rural or remote sites. Total prevention funding for STARS in this budget is now \$11.9 million.

[16:45]

This budget includes 558 million towards mental health and addictions programs and services across Saskatchewan, an increase of \$23.4 million, Mr. Speaker. This budget will increase 7.2 million for targeting mental health and addictions services, including specific youth-focused initiatives, more investment in suicide prevention, and significant expansion in harm reduction and addiction treatment. The remaining 16.2 million increase is primarily for the hospital-based mental health and addictions

services, physician visits, and prescription drug costs also.

Mr. Speaker, in this budget, the Ministry of Education is the largest budget in Saskatchewan history. That is 2.66 billion to support pre-K [pre-kindergarten] to grade 12 classrooms, early learning and child care, and libraries and literacy. This represents an increase of 59.6 million over the last year's budget.

Saskatchewan's 27 school divisions will receive 1.96 billion in school operating funding for this budget, an increase of 19.2 million. This includes fully funding for 2 per cent salary increase as a part of the teachers' collective bargaining agreement.

And it's in addition to the more than 150 million COVID-19 contingency fund for last year to support the ongoing needs of the schools during this pandemic. Mr. Speaker, more than \$150 million is provided to the school divisions and independent schools with additional staff. Substitute teacher costs, IT [information technology] equipment, PPE, sanitation supplies included in the funding was 20.7 million in the provincial funding announcement on March 11, 2021 to continue to support the school divisions and independent schools with these costs as they work to ensure proper supports for the students are in place for the fall of 2021.

Mr. Speaker, this budget provides 189.9 million in funding for school capital as a part of the province's ongoing capital plan to grow the economy. This is an increase of 22.3 million from the last year's budget.

Mr. Speaker, here is the sum breakdown for 101.9 million to support 21 ongoing capital projects to build 16 new schools and renovate five existing schools.

Mr. Speaker, in Harbour Landing in Regina Pasqua, we had a joint school was built in 2017. And it is a very vibrant and very growing community, and they demanded another one. And I'm very pleased to share this news that this budget has \$40 million for a new joint school in Harbour Landing in Regina Pasqua.

Mr. Speaker, there's child care and early learning funding in this budget. That's about \$100.8 million, and this includes \$75.5 million for the child care.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to support this budget presented by the Minister of Finance and seconded by the member from North Battleford, and I'm not supporting the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Riversdale . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Martensville-Warman.

Mr. Jensen: — Mr. Speaker, I won't take offence with that; trust me.

I think I'll begin today by saying how great it feels to be back inside this Assembly and how honoured I am to represent the constituency of Martensville-Warman. I'm also truly blessed to work with such an energetic and passionate group of caucus colleagues and staff who all share the same vision for our province: a safe, prosperous, and caring place that we can all be proud of each and every day. So to all my colleagues and staff in

caucus, I have to say thank you for all your friendship, your wisdom, and all your professionalism.

I'm not going to go into a whole bunch of thank yous or list off names of people who to this day continue to support the work that I do. But I do want to say a very special thank you to my wife, Angela. She's back home looking after the fort, taking care of our two kids, Asher and Kolbie, and ensuring the family business runs smoothly.

It's definitely a tough time for all of us, and particularly for all the members who are now calling Regina home for the next five and a half weeks. Normally we'd all be able to head home on weekends, do work in our constituencies, and spend time with our family and friends before coming back to do it all again next week. But this isn't likely going to be a possibility as it stands now, so I think I speak for most of my colleagues on both sides of the House by saying thank you to the family and friends who are doing all the important work back home so that we can do the important work here on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

I've been in this Chamber a few times over the years on budget day, but yesterday was the first chance I had to be on the benches instead of in the galleries. I'd personally like to thank all the staff in the Ministry of Finance and really in all of our ministries, and all the ministers and all the members of treasury board. And of course the Minister of Finance herself for all the hard work and the long hours that go into putting together a budget of this magnitude under these circumstances.

I'd also like to recognize the dedicated and outstanding work that you, Mr. Speaker, our Clerk, and all the Assembly staff and legislature staff have done to ensure that this building remains a safe place in which we can conduct our business each day.

I'd also like to recognize all the health care workers around the province, front-line workers, teachers, everybody that has pulled together to get us through this pandemic to this point.

It also goes without saying that this pandemic has set many people back, unfortunately some more than others. I don't think I need to say it because everyone inside and outside this Assembly knows this, but the people of Saskatchewan are resilient, and we always bounce back with a sense of purpose. And we usually come back stronger than ever.

So when I look at this budget, the word "momentum" immediately comes to mind. I'm going to quote Chris Guérette of the Saskatoon & Region Home Builders' Association:

I have no doubt this was one of the most challenging budgets to compile. Kudos to [Finance] Minister . . . [and to the] Premier . . . & team for a solid plan forward. We are not out of the pandemic yet but the positivism and potential on the horizon is growing.

As more and more vaccines are administered, we can begin to hear the economic engines spooling up more and more. There is a real sense of optimism here. I've heard it from the people I've met with since last fall, that our province really is poised to rebound in a big way. And as we emerge from this pandemic, Saskatchewan will have what the world needs: food, fuel, and fertilizer.

Production and exports mean more jobs. Those new jobs result in even more jobs in other sectors of the economy. And while the pandemic has resulted in some job losses, this budget and our work as government will create the economic environment needed to bring those job opportunities back and then some, as we come out of this very troubling time in our province's history.

I look at things such as trade and export. We're nearly doubling our investment for international offices, with the sole mission of attracting investment and also promoting the products we grow, manufacture, and export from this province, while adding as much value as possible before those products are shipped.

And as we come out of this pandemic, and in the long term, Saskatchewan has the natural resource technology and manufactured products people around the world want. And we're going to make sure our province's producers and manufacturers are front and centre with those customers, because it's important in an ever increasingly competitive global marketplace.

Closer to home, this budget paves the way for additional economic activity. Over 17,500 jobs will be in play as we roll out our government's \$3.1 billion capital investment plan, with construction of new schools, hospitals, long-term care homes, and improved highways and roads.

When I was a kid I spent most of my summers on Lake Diefenbaker, boating, fishing, and just generally having the fun that kids have. So to see the preliminary work that's being done on the irrigation expansion project is something that really hits home for me and I'm obviously very excited about.

These capital investments by our government are all projects that will stimulate our economy and provide the quality infrastructure that attracts investment. It opens new doors for diversification and creates long-term jobs. These investments plus previous dollars injected into our towns, cities, villages, and RMs through the MEEP program last year touch every corner of this province and create new jobs, plus they provide key pieces of municipal infrastructure going forward.

I'm also proud of our government's commitment to many other investments that are being made in several areas that will foster a quick economic recovery across this great province of ours.

Just this morning the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities gave the budget a thumbs-up, and I quote:

Infrastructure is important in rural Saskatchewan and SARM appreciates the commitment of \$66 million for maintenance and upgrades to dams and canals and the \$18.9 million for phase one of the Lake Diefenbaker Irrigation-Westside expansion project.

SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] goes on to say:

We also are pleased with the commitments related to municipal infrastructure for the Rural Integrated Roads for Growth program as well as the \$530,000 earmarked for a new short-line rail infrastructure program to support the industry. We acknowledge SaskTel's investment of more than \$323 million this year to improve its networks and its

commitment to complete its \$107 million Wireless Saskatchewan program in 2021-22 as well as its investment of \$75 million to improve cellular services for rural customers.

Like our government, SARM recognizes that reliable funding models and key investments in infrastructure support economic growth and prosperity. We are providing \$92.4 million for the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency, an increase of 8.4 per cent over last year. And we're addressing emergency care by allocating \$1.4 million for an additional STARS helicopter that will help deliver faster emergency care to rural and remote areas of our province.

So when it comes to protecting, building, and growing this province, this budget takes the appropriate steps to provide the best possible climate for all of this to happen.

A couple of weeks ago, I was fortunate enough to be part of a chamber of commerce panel for the Prairie Sky Chamber of Commerce. It was lunch with the leaders, with our local MP [Member of Parliament], myself, and the mayors of Warman and Martensville. It was during that lunch with the leaders that I got to hear from some of the business people I hadn't spoken to up to that point.

The vast majority of those business owners are extremely happy with how this government has handled this pandemic and how we've been able to allow them to operate through the vast majority of this pandemic. They were happy with the way the business response team is in place. They're happy with the programs, such as the small-business emergency payment, the tourism sector support program, the Re-Open Saskatchewan training subsidy. I could go on with even more programs after that. But the message I got from the business community through that luncheon — as well as just being out and doing my work as a representative — the business community is very happy with the way we have approached this pandemic.

The question was put in front of voters last October about which party would be the best to lead our province's post-pandemic economic recovery. Not surprisingly, and voters didn't have to think about this one too long or too hard, since 2007, our government put Saskatchewan back to where we so rightfully . . .

The Speaker: — It now being 5 p.m., this Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 17:00.]

GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN

CABINET MINISTERS

Hon. Scott Moe
Premier
President of the Executive Council
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

Hon. Fred Bradshaw
Minister of Highways
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Water Security Agency

Hon. Lori Carr
Minister of Social Services

Hon. Dustin Duncan
Minister of Education

Hon. Bronwyn Eyre
Minister of Energy and Resources

Hon. Donna Harpauer
Deputy Premier
Minister of Finance

Hon. Jeremy Harrison
Minister of Trade and Export Development
Minister of Immigration and Career Training
Minister Responsible for Innovation
Minister Responsible for Tourism Saskatchewan

Hon. Everett Hindley
Minister of Mental Health and Addictions,
Seniors and Rural and Remote Health

Hon. Warren Kaeding
Minister of Environment

Hon. Gene Makowsky
Minister of Advanced Education

Hon. David Marit
Minister of Agriculture
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation

Hon. Don McMorris
Minister of Government Relations
Minister Responsible for First Nations,
Métis and Northern Affairs
Minister Responsible for the
Provincial Capital Commission

Hon. Paul Merriman
Minister of Health

Hon. Don Morgan
Minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety
Minister of Crown Investments Corporation
Minister Responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Government Insurance
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Power Corporation
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Telecommunications
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Water Corporation
Minister Responsible for the
Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board

Hon. Jim Reiter
Minister of SaskBuilds and Procurement
Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission
Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Liquor
and Gaming Authority
Minister Responsible for The Global
Transportation Hub Authority

Hon. Laura Ross
Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport
Minister Responsible for the Status of Women

Hon. Christine Tell
Minister of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety

Hon. Gordon Wyant
Minister of Justice and Attorney General