



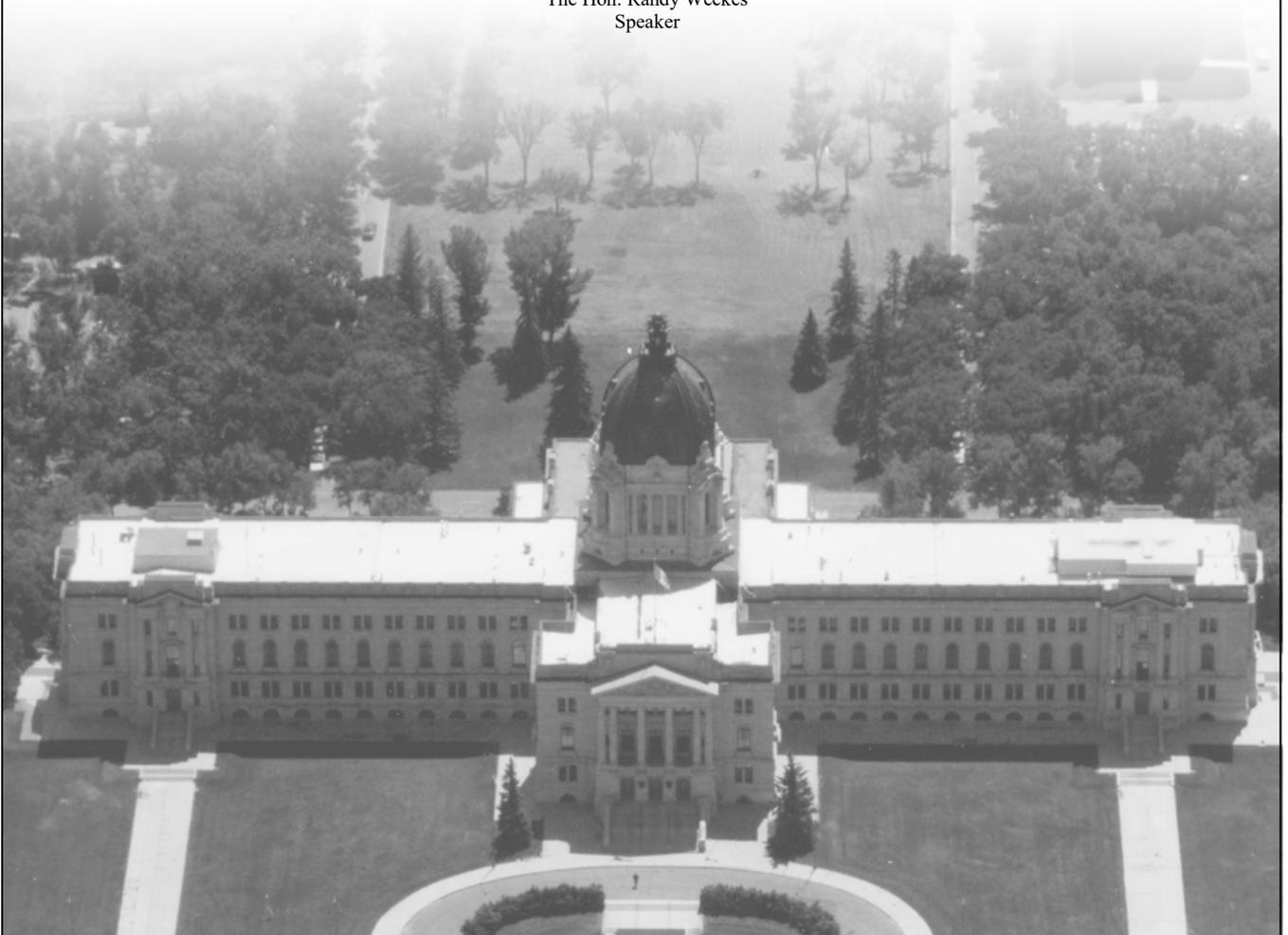
FIRST SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

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)	Love, Matt — Saskatoon Eastview (NDP)
Belanger, Buckley — Athabasca (NDP)	Makowsky, Hon. Gene — Regina Gardiner Park (SP)
Bonk, Steven — Moosomin (SP)	Marit, Hon. David — Wood River (SP)
Bowes, Jennifer — Saskatoon University (NDP)	McLeod, Tim — Moose Jaw North (SP)
Bradshaw, Hon. Fred — Carrot River Valley (SP)	McMorris, Hon. Don — Indian Head-Milestone (SP)
Buckingham, David — Saskatoon Westview (SP)	Meili, Ryan — Saskatoon Meewasin (NDP)
Carr, Hon. Lori — Estevan (SP)	Merriman, Hon. Paul — Saskatoon Silverspring-Sutherland (SP)
Cheveldayoff, Ken — Saskatoon Willowgrove (SP)	Meyers, Derek — Regina Walsh Acres (SP)
Cockrill, Jeremy — The Battlefords (SP)	Moe, Hon. Scott — Rosthern-Shellbrook (SP)
Conway, Meara — Regina Elphinstone-Centre (NDP)	Morgan, Hon. Don — Saskatoon Southeast (SP)
Dennis, Terry — Canora-Pelly (SP)	Mowat, Vicki — Saskatoon Fairview (NDP)
Docherty, Mark — Regina Coronation Park (SP)	Nerlien, Hugh — Kelvington-Wadena (SP)
Domotor, Ryan — Cut Knife-Turtleford (SP)	Nippi-Albright, Betty — Saskatoon Centre (NDP)
Duncan, Hon. Dustin — Weyburn-Big Muddy (SP)	Ottenbreit, Greg — Yorkton (SP)
Eyre, Hon. Bronwyn — Saskatoon Stonebridge-Dakota (SP)	Reiter, Hon. Jim — Rosetown-Elrose (SP)
Fiaz, Muhammad — Regina Pasqua (SP)	Ritchie, Erika — Saskatoon Nutana (NDP)
Francis, Ken — Kindersley (SP)	Ross, Alana — Prince Albert Northcote (SP)
Friesen, Marv — Saskatoon Riversdale (SP)	Ross, Hon. Laura — Regina Rochdale (SP)
Goudy, Todd — Melfort (SP)	Sarauer, Nicole — Regina Douglas Park (NDP)
Grewal, Gary — Regina Northeast (SP)	Skoropad, Dana — Arm River (SP)
Hargrave, Joe — Prince Albert Carlton (SP)	Steele, Doug — Cypress Hills (SP)
Harpauer, Hon. Donna — Humboldt-Watrous (SP)	Stewart, Hon. Lyle — Lumsden-Morse (SP)
Harrison, Daryl — Cannington (SP)	Tell, Hon. Christine — Regina Wascana Plains (SP)
Harrison, Hon. Jeremy — Meadow Lake (SP)	Vermette, Doyle — Cumberland (NDP)
Hindley, Hon. Everett — Swift Current (SP)	Weekes, Hon. Randy — Biggar-Sask Valley (SP)
Jenson, Terry — Martensville-Warman (SP)	Wilson, Nadine — Saskatchewan Rivers (SP)
Kaeding, Hon. Warren — Melville-Saltcoats (SP)	Wotherspoon, Trent — Regina Rosemont (NDP)
Keisig, Travis — Last Mountain-Touchwood (SP)	Wyant, Hon. Gordon — Saskatoon Northwest (SP)
Kirsch, Delbert — Batoche (SP)	Young, Aleana — Regina University (NDP)
Lambert, Lisa — Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood (SP)	Young, Colleen — Lloydminster (SP)
Lawrence, Greg — Moose Jaw Wakamow (SP)	

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

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

Deputy Clerk — Iris Lang

Clerk Assistant — Kathy Burianyak

Sergeant-at-Arms — Terry Quinn

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[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to present a petition once again today calling for pay equity legislation. Mr. Speaker, on average, women in Canada working full-time make just 75 cents for every dollar earned by men. This is unacceptable. Our society must stop undervaluing women's work. It is the responsibility of the government to take concrete action to see that this happens. What that looks like is this government implementing pay equity legislation.

I will now read the prayer:

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

Mr. Speaker, the petition presented today has been signed by people from Saskatoon. I do so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Nav Canada is currently reviewing the air traffic control tower at the Regina airport. Though this is a private company, the federal government has three elected members on the board of directors, and the Minister of Transport will have the oversight to the fate of this tower. 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 our 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 the airport traffic control tower at the Regina International Airport and to halt any final decisions until the global pandemic has subsided.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the citizens of Regina. I so present.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Pipe Ceremony Held in Honour of Legislative Session

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — miigwech, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted

to share with you that ceremonialist and elder Peter Nippi held a pipe ceremony in honour of the session we are now in. This pipe ceremony was for all of us in this session. And as COVID-19 continues to prohibit the gathering of these ceremonies, I was able to attend in spirit.

As a Saulteaux and Cree traditional woman, I understand the importance of pipe ceremonies. Pipe ceremonies are sacred and regarded as the way by which participants be truthful, respectful, and honour the agreements and decisions made.

Mr. Speaker, the pipe ceremony is sacred, and I ask this ceremony become a foundation to represent a new Legislative Assembly session going forward. In honour of our commitments to treaty and truth and reconciliation, our government must show respect and dignity to the ceremonies that are foundational to Indigenous peoples in this province.

As we gather here today to discuss the government's decision, I want to remind the government that Indigenous people in this province are a part of the past, present, and future. We are not going anywhere. We must honour the words we speak when we talk about reconciliation. I request the government implement the pipe ceremony as the signifier of a new session as we advance. miigwech.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport.

Remembering Sally Elliott

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sally Elliott was well known for her compassion for every mother she worked with as a YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] prenatal coordinator. She could take a group of quiet, anxious parents-to-be and transform them into confident parents ready to take on the next chapter.

But what made her so appreciated, Mr. Speaker, is that she understood that each mother would experience motherhood differently. And that is why she made it a priority to be available for every mother she worked with, especially those suffering from postpartum depression. Sally opened her heart to everyone she met and was well known for her words of encouragement when mothers needed it most. She even served as a mother figure for her colleagues, often helping them through challenging times they would face in their lives.

Mr. Speaker, the loss that many mothers and families are feeling across the city is incredible, as Sally played such an important part in many of their families. She remembered every single family she worked with and loved reuniting with the young babies she helped welcome into the year, many years after they were born. That was the Sally Effect — she made you feel special, loved, and confident.

And on behalf of this Assembly, we offer our deepest condolences to Sally's family as she will be so deeply missed. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

Safe Consumption Sites

Ms. Conway: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan saw 264 confirmed deaths by overdose in 2020, smashing the 2019 record. So far in 2021, we're already at over 100 deaths, up over 20 per cent from last year. This isn't getting any better, Mr. Speaker.

Regina has seen the lion's share of overdose deaths, many in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. More than ever before, COVID has exposed the many cracks in our society that continue unaddressed. But the community has stepped up in big ways, and today it is my honour to recognize the Nēwo-Yôtina Friendship Centre and the life-saving work it is doing in the heart of Regina Elphinstone-Centre as they move towards establishing the first safe consumption site in the capital city.

But the road ahead of them is not easy, Mr. Speaker. While they received preliminary approval to open an overdose prevention site, that commitment came with no dollars attached. And I'm holding the letter, Mr. Speaker, right here, they penned to this government, inviting the Minister of Health to engage in a discussion, a strategy, a partnership to combat addiction and overdose. To my knowledge, that discussion has not yet happened. This province is not funding harm reduction, and it's making others pick up the slack.

Just weeks ago the city of Regina voted to fund harm reduction to the tune of half a million. And so organizations like the Friendship Centre, Prairie Harm Reduction in Saskatoon, and many others continue to do the heavy lifting in harm reduction with no help from this government. Well good for them, Mr. Speaker, because in the words of Jason Mercredi, "We're not really apologetic about people's right to live." It is this government's job to protect people, Mr. Speaker, and the lack of support for safe consumption sites in this 2021 budget is not only a missed opportunity, it's an abdication of leadership.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cannington.

The Happy Nun Café Receives Tourism Award

Mr. D. Harrison: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge a unique local business in the community of Forget, The Happy Nun Café. Owner and chef Gayla Gilbertson has created an intimate experience for up to 1,100 guests each month. The café also collaborates with local businesses to create cultural experiential packages for overnight stays.

It was among the attractions recognized by Tourism Saskatchewan during their annual Awards of Excellence. This restaurant, Mr. Speaker, was named the Business of the Year for companies with under 20 full-time employees. Unfortunately due to the pandemic, the Awards of Excellence Gala was cancelled; however, the delayed announcement was made virtually, and The Happy Nun Café received the appreciation it deserved.

Mr. Speaker, this is quite an accomplishment considering nearly 90 nominations were received in the 13 award categories acknowledging quality in marketing, service, business practices, Indigenous tourism, human resource development, and other areas. Their local entertainment spot is a shining star in my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, Gayla Gilbertson and her staff have handcrafted a visitor experience with the unique blend of local food ingredients, live music, and art. And although the awards were delayed, I wanted to stand today and recognize this great achievement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Arm River.

Chamberlain Curler Receives Multiple Honours

Mr. Skoropad: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to recognize a rising star in my constituency, Skylar Ackerman. As a fellow resident of the Chamberlain area, I've had the pleasure to witness this 19-year-old's contributions and accomplishments throughout the years. Be it at the curling rink, in academics, or in the community, she has always dedicated her time to her craft and others. It is fitting that her position on her curling teams was skip, as she assumed a similar role in her community as well.

Her accomplishments are impressive. To name a few: she was the 2018 provincial curling U-18 [under 18] girls' champion; that same year she was also the U-18 national silver medallist; in 2019 she received the Governor General's award with an overall average of 97.5 per cent; in 2020 she won the provincial curling mixed U-18 doubles championship; and lastly she was the recipient of the prestigious Sandra Schmirler Foundation scholarship in both 2019 and 2020. Now this is an astonishing feat considering the rigorous selection process that this involves.

Despite all of these successes, Skylar has remained humble and generous with her time and others. Mr. Speaker, I rise here today and ask other members to join me in recognizing and celebrating one of our province's young, bright, talented community leaders, Skylar Ackerman. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Kindersley.

New International Trade Offices

Mr. Francis: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned yesterday, the '21-22 budget provides funding to open four new trade and investment offices to continue to increase Saskatchewan's international presence. These new offices will complement the four we already have in place.

In her budget response yesterday, the member from Regina University made a number of irresponsible and outrageous accusations that attacked the professionalism, integrity, character, and work ethic of the professional public servants who serve our province abroad. She called them, and I quote, "cushy foreign patronage postings with little to show for the shrouded work." The individuals who've been hired to work in these offices are professional public servants who bring decades of experience in international trade and investment to their roles with no partisan ties and only a desire to serve the province.

Having an on-the-ground presence in our most important export markets is widely supported by our business community. They understand the central importance of engagement with our trading partners and the effect this has on our continued export growth, which clearly the NDP [New Democratic Party] do not.

The member from Regina University needs to do the right thing,

stand in her place, and apologize to these professionals who are serving our province. She can do it right now, but will she?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Yorkton.

Rollout of COVID Vaccines

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's vaccination rollout continues to lead the country, thanks to the great work of our dedicated health care workers and other support staff in every part of our province.

In fact today we are reporting a new record high for shots delivered in a single day — 10,437. That's more than 1 per cent of the Saskatchewan adult population who were vaccinated in a single day, bringing the total number of shots delivered to over 244,000. Fifty-seven per cent of all Saskatchewan residents age 60 and older have now received their first vaccination, and thousands more have their appointments booked in the days ahead.

Vaccination clinics are now running in dozens of locations throughout our province. Drive-through clinics are now open in Regina, Saskatoon, Swift Current, Weyburn, Prince Albert, North Battleford, Lloydminster, and Yorkton — where I'm proud to say my RN [registered nurse] daughter is working at the walk-up, drive-through vaccination clinic. All of these clinics are open to anyone 55 or older, and tomorrow the Regina drive-through will drop the age to 53 and older using Pfizer vaccine for 53- and 54-year-olds.

[13:45]

Mr. Speaker, I got my shot this week at the drive-through clinic in Regina, so I want to thank the workers at the clinic and all other vaccine clinics across Saskatchewan. And thank you to everyone who has taken the time to get vaccinated.

Mr. Speaker, the road to the end of this pandemic runs right through these clinics. So when it's your turn, make your appointment or visit a drive-through, roll up your sleeve, and stick it to COVID. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Government Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the last year, Saskatchewan people have been stuck trying to make sense of this government's mixed messages. We've had to get used to try and interpret the difference between what the Premier says and what the chief medical health officer says. But yesterday this hit a new low when the Premier floated some changes for certain workers to the vaccine rollout, only to be contradicted hours later by his Minister of Health, and then only to go on to contradict himself. Mr. Speaker, how are we supposed to get shots into people's arms if it's not even clear who's calling the shots?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, how we are going to get shots

into people's arms is to continue to encourage them to drive through one of those clinics that the member of Yorkton just spoke about, Mr. Speaker. The road to the end of this pandemic does travel through one of those clinics, Mr. Speaker. And there was 10,000 people that travelled through one of those clinics yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the largest number of shots that we have delivered here in the province of Saskatchewan to date. Mr. Speaker, that's 1 per cent, 1 per cent of the adult population here in Saskatchewan, whereas you see Canada vaccinating about half a per cent each and every day, Mr. Speaker.

And that speaks to why we in this province are leading the nation with the vaccine rollout that we have. That is our way through this pandemic, and that is why we continue to send a single message to the people of this province. That message is, make your appointment. Let's stick it to COVID and let's all get vaccinated.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Their plan goes against national guidelines, against local expert advice. It's left a third of health care workers still not receiving their first dose. And we see many of those drive-through clinics sitting empty, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier and his Health minister, they're in over their heads. They don't know what they're doing. And the Premier refuses to take any responsibility or show any leadership, to recognize his own failures. Instead he spends all of his time trying to pass the blame on to ordinary Saskatchewan people for our worst-in-Canada COVID-19 status, Mr. Speaker. How can this Premier expect others to take personal responsibility when he won't take any himself? How can he expect people to follow the rules when he and his Health minister can't get the story straight?

Mr. Speaker, health care workers, teachers, police officers, front-line workers in high-risk workplaces are waiting for their vaccines, knowing that they're at higher risk, Mr. Speaker. When will he and the Health minister get their story straight and get these at-risk people their shots?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, our province continues to lead the nation in ensuring that we are providing those vaccinations to Saskatchewan people. Over 1 per cent of people in this province were vaccinated yesterday.

Here's the clear message that we have: we continue, through every TV ad that comes on, Mr. Speaker, what we ask the people of this province to do is to go to a drive-through, make your appointment. Very soon you'll be able to visit your pharmacy, Mr. Speaker. And we're asking you to stick it to COVID and let's all get vaccinated. Let's find our way through this global pandemic, Mr. Speaker.

And the people in this province are most certainly responding. And we're going to give them an added opportunity to respond, Mr. Speaker, because on . . . actually just as of this week, we are going to lower the age to 53- and 54-year-olds here at the drive-through in the city of Regina.

Mr. Speaker, by April the 12th we're going to lower it to 50

across this province, Mr. Speaker. By April the 26th we're going to let the 40-year-olds in. By May the 10th, Mr. Speaker, the 30-year-olds and older — unless you've already been in if you're in the 40s, Mr. Speaker — by May the 10th we're going to allow the 30-year-olds to make their appointment and get vaccinated. And by May the 17th, Mr. Speaker, everyone over 18 in the province of Saskatchewan is going to have the opportunity to access a vaccine and get through this pandemic.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier doesn't know from one minute to the next what his own policy is. And a third of Saskatchewan health care workers who still haven't received their first dose don't know when they'll get it, but they do know that they're at higher risk at a time when this Premier has allowed COVID-19 to run wild in Saskatchewan.

He spent the last two days telling us that the sickness, the lives lost, the people who have died, that that was all an acceptable trade-off — balance, balance — that it was just the cost of doing business, Mr. Speaker. That the people who have lost loved ones or who are fearing for the lives of their loved ones in the ICU [intensive care unit] today shouldn't worry because vaccines are eventually on the way, Mr. Speaker.

This Premier made the callous, cold-hearted calculation that it was okay to sacrifice our health for the sake of the economy, Mr. Speaker, and in the process he failed us miserably at both, Mr. Speaker. What does the Premier have to say to the hundreds of families who are mourning a loved one, to the thousands of people who are out of work because of his actions?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate it if the Leader of the Opposition didn't paraphrase or say I said things that I most certainly did not say. Mr. Speaker, throughout this pandemic, myself and the previous minister of Health from Rosetown, the current Minister of Health from Saskatoon Sutherland, Mr. Speaker, myself, Dr. Shahab, and many, many others across our health care system work very hard to put health measures in place that will ensure that we can keep people in this province as safe as possible and ensure that we are, yes, protecting the personal freedoms that the people of this province enjoy, Mr. Speaker.

And in doing so and throughout the course of the past year, we have worked closely with our federal government and our colleagues, premiers across this nation, as well as health ministers, finance ministers across the nation, to ensure that we have the supports that are in place for the people that are impacted from these measures, Mr. Speaker, which are not in any way unique to Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, we've worked closely to ensure that, one, not only are we supporting a procurement plan in this nation — yes, we would have all liked to see vaccines sooner — but we've supported a delivery plan, a delivery plan that ensures that as we receive those vaccines in this province, we're not letting them sit on the shelf, Mr. Speaker. We're getting them in a person's arm. We're offering them to the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I agree again with the member from Yorkton. All roads out of this pandemic lead through one of our vaccination clinics. And let's all stick it to COVID together, Mr. Speaker. Let's make our appointment and let's all get vaccinated.

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

Mr. Meili: — Well, Mr. Speaker, for too many people, the road out of this pandemic has led to the hospital and to their death, Mr. Speaker. Too many people have died. And this Premier calls this balance. Why will he not accept that he has failed Saskatchewan? He's failed our economy and he's failed our health, Mr. Speaker.

Vaccines are great, but they will not bring back the people who've already died. They won't save the people who are in our overcrowded ICUs today. Two more deaths yesterday, three the day before, and two more announced just this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and tragically, more to come in the weeks ahead. Deaths this Premier saw coming; deaths he could have prevented. These are what he calls balance, Mr. Speaker.

I'd love to give this Premier one more opportunity, one more chance. Will he acknowledge his failures? Or will he at the very least show some remorse and some sympathy for the families who are mourning loved ones due to his inaction?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, throughout the course of the past year there are many occasions, many, many occasions, Mr. Speaker, where I have offered our condolences to all of those that have not only lost family and friends throughout the COVID pandemic, lost family and friends often due to many other illnesses and consequences here in this province and abroad, Mr. Speaker. And we most certainly, most certainly continue to offer our condolences to those and our thoughts are most certainly with all of those that are struggling with COVID here today, or may have some lingering effects from that virus, Mr. Speaker.

And the way for us to prevent to the greatest degree possible, Mr. Speaker, the future consequences of this virus that has arrived here in Canada and here in Saskatchewan over the course of the past year is to ensure that we are making vaccines available, Mr. Speaker. And it's clear — when you look at the statistics, look around the world, and just to the south of us — that vaccines are working. Vaccines are saving lives, Mr. Speaker, and that is why we have the most robust vaccine rollout plan in the nation. It's working here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And we're going to continue to prioritize people on an age-based criteria so we can ensure, so we can ensure, Mr. Speaker, that we don't have vaccines on the shelf; we have them in people's arms. And, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people are agreeing with that.

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

Management of Provincial Economy

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Canada's in the midst of a softwood lumber shortage and it's led to skyrocketing prices. Nationwide they've doubled and here in Saskatchewan close to tripled.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my husband's a contractor, a small-business owner, and I know that margins are thin at the best of times. With the cost of materials going up and extra taxes, margins are now razor thin. Contractors have to spend more to take home less, and homeowners get less by paying more. It's lose-lose, Mr. Speaker, the worst of both worlds. And the only ones getting ahead in this equation are the Sask Party, with this economy-choking hard-hat tax on construction labour.

After their nothingburger of a budget, here's a great opportunity for a good-news story. Kill the PST [provincial sales tax] on construction and jump-start the economy. Will the minister do his job so that more people don't lose theirs?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I've got to profess a bit of shock at the NDP complaining at how well the lumber industry is doing in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, this is a sector that has, you know, faced some pretty difficult times over the years, which we have worked as a government very, very closely, particularly with First Nation-led companies who are really the leaders in the lumber industry in Saskatchewan. Those partnerships have been incredibly successful, whether that be Meadow Lake Tribal Council, whether that be a whole list of First Nations who are engaged directly, Montreal Lake, the Agency Chiefs, Mr. Speaker. All of these First Nations have benefited tremendously from the lumber industry.

We've advocated strongly on the softwood lumber file. Those companies would be the first ones to tell of that very close partnership in that regard, Mr. Speaker. But I'll tell you, to see lumber prices up is a good thing for Saskatchewan. This means that our people are at work. And I can tell you first-hand for Meadow Lake's constituency, this is as good as we've had it in the lumber sector, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A total nothingburger of a budget and another response from the minister that doesn't cut the mustard.

So speaking of food, here's another area where the Sask Party won't catch up: yet another tax, Mr. Speaker, the PST on restaurant meals. Now we like it when the government borrows our ideas, and capping delivery fees is a great start to getting the industry back on its feet. Now fingers crossed, this summer will be a little bit more familiar and resemble something we know a little bit more than this chaotic Sask Party-induced closure that we're currently in. And this government can tee up summer and jump-start the economy by making dining out more affordable. Yet as it stands, people are going to have to pass on dessert to pay the PST that this government imposed on restaurant meals.

So here's another softball for the minister: will he listen to the concerns of restaurants and workers and finally axe the tax?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I have to admit to being stunned again from the

members opposite whose position is that not just restaurants but all businesses should be closed right now in Saskatchewan, and those 80,000 employees that work in those should be on the unemployment line, Mr. Speaker.

We have worked and have great faith in our small businesses to continue to operate safely, reliably, and they have done that through this entire pandemic. And we have a plan going forward, Mr. Speaker, our growth plan which we laid out, a big component of which, Mr. Speaker, is international engagement. And I'll tell you, I am very disappointed in that member who yesterday attacked the character, attacked the integrity, attacked the professionalism, and attacked the work ethic of professional public servants with decades of experience working in that sector, who are doing all they can to promote Saskatchewan's export interests abroad.

Mr. Speaker, she has an opportunity right now. She can do the right thing. She can stand in the House and she can apologize to those public servants for the characters of whom she impugned.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. 80,000 jobs. It's clear the member opposite is feeling a little bit more emotional today because much like this government's unemployment numbers, he likes to add 5, 10, 15,000 to that number every month.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there is so much more that this government could be doing to fire up the economy and create jobs. They could have implemented a \$15-an-hour minimum wage. They could take their damaging taxes off of construction labour and restaurant meals. They could invest in diversification, seize the opportunities of renewable power. But they're not interested in doing any of that. Instead they've decided to cross their fingers and just hope things turn around on their own, leaving Saskatchewan people out in the cold.

[14:00]

So again, how is it that this government has entirely failed to include a jobs plan in this nothingburger of a budget?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Mr. Speaker, this is a party opposite with precisely zero credibility on the economy. They stand up day after day demanding lockdowns, demanding a complete lockdown of the entire province. Then they stand up, Mr. Speaker, and say, there's too many people out of work.

Mr. Speaker, this is precisely why they have no support in the business community. This is precisely why they have no credibility with the business sector here in this province, Mr. Speaker.

But I'm going to give this member . . . If she won't take the opportunity for the characters of the public servants she impugned in an outrageous way yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, maybe the Leader of the Opposition will get up and do the right thing right now, withdraw those

comments, make clear that this is not the position of the NDP opposite, and apologize to these hard-working public servants.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And the hysteria grows. No answer to the question, so I think it's clear that this member opposite is out of ideas, tired, complacent, and not interested in creating jobs. If he did, he would have a jobs plan in the budget. But having a plan — that's not this government's MO [modus operandi].

They didn't plan for COVID-19 while the former Health minister stood in this Assembly and said that he had one last March. And just yesterday, the Premier and the current Health minister spent the day contradicting each other on what's next for vaccines. No plan for COVID, no plan for jobs, and some of the worst outcomes in Canada on both. While it's unclear who's actually in charge over there, will somebody in the Sask Party government stand up, start doing their job so that people can get back to theirs?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As it happens, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to table a copy of the NDP jobs plan which I came into possession of. And let me read what that NDP jobs plan is, and this is a resolution coming from the Regina NDP to the NDP policy convention upcoming. And it says, and I will quote:

Be it resolved that the NDP oppose all carbon-intensive energy projects, including those already in development, such as the Coastal GasLink pipeline.

Presumably, Mr. Speaker, this also includes carbon-intensive industries like Evraz steel or Federated Co-op, the upgrader, Mr. Speaker. These members have nothing but hypocrisy on the economy. On the one hand, they stand up, lament job losses. On the other, they stand up, they put resolutions forward to their convention denouncing our most important industries.

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

Staffing in Long-Term Care Facilities

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know the members opposite are clearly confused and reaching for straws here. You know, Mr. Speaker, a broken promise is a broken promise, any way you paint it. The Sask Party said that they would hire 300 care aids in this budget year. There wasn't any fine print in their platform saying some conditions apply.

What does that minister have to say to the seniors sitting in care homes right now, not getting the care that they need? What does the minister say to their family members, who maybe voted for his party because of their promise to staff up in long-term care, a promise that they have chosen to break?

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

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the question about the continuing care aids promise, and we had that question raised yesterday which I spoke to, where there's funding in this year's budget to hire the first 108 of those 300 continuing care aids here in Saskatchewan, and a commitment as per the election, Mr. Speaker, to hire the remaining care aids as quickly as is possible.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the question about seniors in this province, what I would say to the member's question is this, Mr. Speaker, and that is that this government has made very, very significant investments for seniors' care across this province over the last number of years that we have had the honour to be in government, whether it's the hiring of more doctors, more nurses, more continuing care aids, more long-term care facilities, Mr. Speaker, including two new long-term care facilities that were announced in this budget for additional communities, the communities of Estevan and Watson, Mr. Speaker. And we are proud of the record of the government with respect to seniors in this province.

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

Mr. Love: — Mr. Speaker, seniors in this province are continuing to be let down, and that minister references things that happened a decade ago. The pandemic is happening right now. Since that minister reaffirmed his promise to hire 300 care aids in December, we've seen COVID take a terrible toll on seniors in care. Dozens have died. Hundreds more have had to go without the care that they need.

Mr. Speaker, I've heard their stories, and I know that the minister opposite has heard them too. How is it that he can stand by his decision to cut the number of care aids promised in the budget after seeing the deadly impacts of short-staffing in seniors care?

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

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The deaths that have occurred during COVID-19 in our seniors facilities are tragic, and I extend my condolences to the families and loved ones of every senior citizen that passed away, anyone in this province, Mr. Speaker, that passed away as a result of COVID-19.

Throughout this pandemic, Mr. Speaker, the Government of Saskatchewan, through the Ministry of Health, has provided funding to our facilities, including to our affiliated facilities — \$17.5 million to help long-term care facilities, affiliated LTCs [long-term care] with pandemic pressures. Mr. Speaker, we have made sure that our long-term care facilities have had proper access to PPE [personal protective equipment], to the standards, to all sorts of things that are required in order to keep our residents safe in these facilities, Mr. Speaker.

And with respect to the continuing care aids, we're grateful for the work that they do in our facilities. We know that they're in great demand across this country. And we know that we want to increase staffing there, and that's why we have that election commitment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

Support for Health Care System

Ms. Mowat: — Mr. Speaker, this isn't a new issue. Short-staffing in health care has been the norm since that Seniors minister was carrying around Brad Wall's briefcase. This government has ignored short-staffing for years and failed to address the heart of the issue. We're not training enough of the right health care workers to meet our needs.

Last month we joined our health sector partners in calling on the province to convene a health human resources round table to help address long-standing recruitment and retention issues. Will the minister commit to that round table today?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, some of the terminology used in that question is extremely disappointing, Mr. Speaker. And I think in all fairness, I think we expect better out of all members of this House, Mr. Speaker. And I would ask the member to reconsider her comments as she continues to serve in this House on behalf of her residents.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to health care and with respect to the commitments that we made in this last campaign, Mr. Speaker, the introduction of the budget by the Minister of Finance earlier this week, we are now keeping all 14 of the commitments that we had made in the campaign, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, that includes hiring our continuing care assistants in our long-term care homes across this province, Mr. Speaker. That includes continuing to invest in long-term care infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, building new long-term care homes, new long-term care homes in La Ronge, Grenfell, in Watson, in Estevan, and in Regina, Mr. Speaker. And we would expect when it comes time to approve the budget that all of the MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] representing those particular communities would most certainly support the budget.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Promises made, promises broken, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the current plan isn't working. If it were we wouldn't have postings for more than 1,150 vacant health jobs posted online right now. You can't just post want ads and pray that the issue sorts itself out, Mr. Speaker. We need a provincial strategy that brings together health sector unions and organizations, post-secondary institutions, and the Ministries of Health and Advanced Education to come up with real solutions. Will the minister commit to this round table today? And if not, why not?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, no one in this province is questioning this government's commitment to mental health, Mr. Speaker, to health care, and to long-term care in this province, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, no one in this province is most certainly questioning the commitment that this government has, Mr. Speaker. We've increased long-term care staff across the

board in Saskatchewan. We've built new facilities, Mr. Speaker.

That's very relative to the members opposite. When they had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, they closed 1,200 beds in this province, Mr. Speaker. They sent doctors and nurses out of this province, Mr. Speaker. They told them to carpool with the teachers, because they were firing them as well.

Mr. Speaker, here today, here today what we have heard in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, is questions about COVID. Here's what the people of the province should know. We in this province have the strongest vaccination rollout of any province in the nation of Canada.

We heard questions about jobs, Mr. Speaker. Here's what the people of this province should know. Mr. Speaker, we have created 70,000 jobs in Saskatchewan since forming government that has created the opportunity for 175,000 people bringing their families, Mr. Speaker, to make home in a community here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, what the people of this province can expect in the future is more jobs, more opportunity. They can expect a government that is going to protect families, that is going to build our communities, and most certainly is going to continue to grow our opportunities for that next generation.

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, and the proposed amendment to the main motion moved by Mr. Wotherspoon.]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Martensville-Warman.

Mr. Jenson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did get this response started yesterday, but I think there was a few of my colleagues that weren't here, so I'm just going to refresh with a bit of a start from the beginning.

I think I'm going to begin today by saying, you know, it does feel really good to be back in this Assembly, and I'm really honoured to be representing the fine people of my constituency of Martensville-Warman. I'm also really, truly blessed to be working with such an energetic and passionate group of caucus colleagues and staff who all share the same vision for our province — a safe, prosperous, 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 your professionalism.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to go into a whole bunch of thank yous or list off a bunch of names of people who to this day continue to support the work that I do. But I really do want to

give a special thank you to my wife, Angela, who's back home looking after the fort, taking care of our two kids, Asher and Kolbie, and ensuring that our family business continues to run smoothly.

It's definitely a tough time for all of us, Mr. Speaker, particularly all the members who have to travel in from other parts of the province and are now calling Regina home for the next several weeks. Normally we'd be able to head home on weekends to work inside our constituency offices and with the people of our constituencies and spend some time with family and friends before coming back to do it all again next week. But this likely won't be a possibility as it stands right now, Mr. Speaker. And 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 this 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 for budget day, but Tuesday was my first chance to be sitting on the benches as it was delivered instead of being up in the gallery. Mr. Speaker, I'd personally like to thank all the staff in the Ministry of Finance and really to all of our ministers and all their staff 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.

[14:15]

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

And finally, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to personally thank all of our health care workers, our front-line workers such as grocery store staff, restaurant servers, retail employees, and all the other people that work with the public on a daily basis for everything that they've done to remain safe and keep everyone safe around them during this pandemic.

It goes without saying that this pandemic really has set some people back, unfortunately some maybe more than others. But, Mr. Speaker, I don't think I need to say it because everyone inside and outside of this Assembly knows it, but the people of Saskatchewan, we're resilient, and we always seem to bounce back from adversity with a sense of purpose. And we come back stronger than ever.

So when I look at this budget, the word "momentum" immediately comes to mind. And among the comments that we've been hearing since the budget was presented, Mr. Speaker, is one from the CEO [chief executive officer] of the Saskatoon & Region Home Builders' Association. They understand the challenge that came with presenting a budget during a global pandemic. The CEO gave us kudos — to the Premier, to the Minister of Finance — stating, and I quote, "We are not out of this pandemic yet but the positivity and potential on the horizon is growing."

Mr. Speaker, as more and more vaccines are administered, we

can hear the economic engines spooling up once again. There is a real sense of optimism out there when I'm talking to people. I've heard it. I've heard it from the people I've met with since last fall, that our province is poised to rebound in a big way. As we emerge from this pandemic, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan will continue to have what the world needs most: food, fuel, fertilizer.

Increased production and exports mean more jobs. Those new jobs result in more new jobs in other sectors of the economy. And while the pandemic has resulted in some job losses, Mr. Speaker, this budget and our work as a government will create the economic environment needed to bring back those jobs and continue to grow our economy as we come out of one of the most challenging times in our history.

Again I look at such things as trade and export, Mr. Speaker. We're nearly doubling our investment for international offices with the sole purpose of attracting investment, promoting the products that we grow, manufacture, and export from this province while adding as much value as possible before those products are shipped. Mr. Speaker, it's become quite obvious that our province can no longer rely on the federal government to carry this action out effectively. So we're doing it on behalf of the people of this province.

As we come out of this pandemic and in the long term, Saskatchewan has the natural resources, the technology, and the manufactured products people around the world want and, more importantly, need. We're making sure our province's producers and manufacturers are front and centre with those customers. It's important in an ever increasingly competitive global marketplace.

Closer to home, this budget paves the way for economic activity. Over 17,500 jobs will be in play as our government rolls out its \$3.1 billion capital investment plan, with construction of new schools, hospitals, long-term care homes. We improve our highways and roads and so much more.

Mr. Speaker, as a kid I spent many summers on Lake Diefenbaker, boating, fishing, and exploring and doing everything that kids do. So to see the preliminary work on the irrigation expansion project is something that really hits home for me, and I'm obviously very excited about it.

Capital investments by our government for projects such as this will stimulate our economy and provide the quality infrastructure that attracts investment, opens new doors to diversification, and creates long-term jobs. These investments, plus previous dollars injected into our towns, cities, villages, and RMs [rural municipality] through the MEEP [municipal economic enhancement program] program in 2020, touch every corner of this province, Mr. Speaker, and they also create new jobs. Plus they provide key pieces of municipal infrastructure moving forward.

I'm also proud of our government's commitment to many other investments that are being made into numerous and wide-ranging areas that will foster a quicker economic recovery across this great province of ours. Yesterday the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities gave our budget a passing grade:

Infrastructure is important in rural Saskatchewan and

SARM appreciates the commitment of \$66 million dollars for maintenance and upgrades to dams and canals, and the \$18.9 million for phase one of the Lake Diefenbaker Irrigation-Westside expansion project.

They went on to say:

We 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 that 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, Mr. Speaker, SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] recognizes that reliable funding models and quality investments in infrastructure support economic growth and prosperity.

In addition to creating investment and job opportunities across this province, we're protecting people and property as well by providing funding for several initiatives including \$92.4 million for the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency, which is a significant bump of 8.4 per cent over last year. And we're addressing emergency medical care by allocating \$1.4 million for an additional STARS [Shock Trauma Air Rescue Service] helicopter to help deliver faster responses to rural and remote areas of our province. So, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to protecting, building, and growing our province, this budget takes the appropriate steps to provide the best possible climate for all this to happen.

A couple of weeks ago, I was able to participate in the Prairie Sky Chamber of Commerce luncheon, Lunch with Leaders event. Joining me on the panel was Kelly Block, our Member of Parliament, as well as Kent Muench, the mayor of Martensville, and Gary Philipchuk, the mayor of Warman. Mr. Speaker, it was encouraging to hear how the business people at this virtual luncheon, as well as the other business owners I've been able to communicate with over the past several months, have pivoted and transitioned their businesses to not only survive this pandemic, but how they plan to use this experience to move into the future.

Since the fall sitting, I've spoken with numerous business owners of all sizes. And I've worked with the chamber of commerce to ensure they're aware and their members are aware of the supports our government put in place to augment federal programs. Whether it's the Saskatchewan small-business emergency payment, the strong recovery adaptation rebate, the tourism sector support program, or the Re-Open Saskatchewan training subsidy, our government has acted quickly last spring to get these programs in place and they have been very well utilized.

Mr. Speaker, the question was put in front of voters last October about which party would be best to lead our province's post-economic recovery. Not surprisingly voters didn't have to think about it too long or too hard. Since 2007 this government has put Saskatchewan back where it so rightfully belongs by

producing the third-best job-creation record in the country. The NDP, in their last seven years, limped along wringing their hands, increasing taxes, chasing investment and people away, resulting in the worst job-creation record in Canada. And the results speak for themselves in this House.

Mr. Speaker, our government has proven time and time again that job creation and economic growth is not only achievable, but it's an expectation. And we will continue to provide that stable, predictable environment that investors large and small need in order to be successful.

Our government's commitment to building good, solid infrastructure and maintaining a competitive corporate tax advantage creates a positive environment for the private sector investment and ultimately additional job creation as we exit this pandemic and return to our normal way of life here in this province.

We've also acted very quickly and fulfilled every single one of our election promises, and many of those promises are already benefiting the people of Saskatchewan. Whether it's reducing the cost of ambulance calls and eliminating inter-hospital transfer costs altogether for seniors or expanding autism funding or covering the cost of insulin pumps for everyone with type 1 diabetes, our government is making life more affordable for the people of this province.

I've spoken to many, many constituents who have or will be taking advantage of the home renovation tax credit. It's another way of making life more affordable while keeping contractors busy as we work our way through this pandemic. For homeowners, renters, and businesses, they are already seeing the SaskPower 10 per cent rebate benefits and are putting that money right back into our economy in most circumstances. It's these types of targeted investments that I'm proud to support, as it helps families, it helps individuals, it helps our business community get through to the other side of this pandemic and provides a measure of stability in the months ahead.

It should be also noted that before the SaskPower rebate is applied, Saskatchewan residents have the lowest utility rate bundle in the nation. Compared to the rest of the country, SaskTel customers can access the lowest prices for wireless and voice/data bundles. SaskEnergy provides the lowest heating costs, while SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] offers the lowest cost auto insurance.

Our province has fared much better than most others when it comes to finding a balance between protecting lives and protecting livelihoods. A sign of this is that our province now has the lowest debt-to-GDP [gross domestic product] ratio in the country while also keeping our employment levels high.

Housing starts have remained strong, and we've seen steady increases in wholesale trade and international exports. And while it's important to remain focused on the pandemic today and ensuring we get the vaccines into everybody's arms as quickly as possible, it's equally important that we look forward and take advantage of domestic and international opportunities that will benefit all of our residents in the weeks, months, and years ahead.

Economic indicators are all pointing to a projected 3.4 per cent

growth in real GDP this year and a further 3.2 per cent in 2022 here in Saskatchewan. Clearly our province is poised for a strong recovery in the months and years ahead, not to mention having a clear plan in place on how we're going to grow our economy in the years to follow.

As elected representatives we are always working for the people of this province to make it the best possible place for everyone to live, work, and raise a family. Brian Tracy coined the phrase once, and I quote, "Leaders think and talk about the solutions. Followers think and talk about the problems." Solutions sometimes don't come easy, and finding them for the benefit of our own people isn't an option — it's mandatory.

Mr. Speaker, I am so proud to be part of this team of leaders on the government side of the House, so I'll conclude with this: protecting our province and its people, building our province for tomorrow, growing Saskatchewan for the people, and ensuring the brightest most prosperous future possible. They're not just words, Mr. Speaker. These are the budgetary actions our government is taking today so that our province can emerge from this pandemic and experience a strong economic recovery. It's for this reason I'll be supporting the budget motion put forward by the Minister of Finance and seconded by the member from The Battlefords, but I will not be supporting the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are assembled here today on Treaty 4 territory and homeland of the Métis, and I reaffirm my commitment to the process of truth and reconciliation in my role as member of this legislature. I am honoured to represent the thoughts and concerns of the constituents of Saskatoon Nutana, who reside in Treaty 6 territory. My constituents look to their government to show respect for all its people, to be responsible fiscal managers, exhibit wisdom to prepare us for the future, and display discernment and true leadership in times of crisis.

But, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that as this pandemic continues to spiral out of control, the people of Saskatoon Nutana are worried. They are worried for their friends, their families, their co-workers, the elderly, those who are immunocompromised, and all those working so hard in the health care field and on the front lines in low-paying jobs without access to sick pay.

[14:30]

My constituents are gravely dismayed by the failure and inability of this government to present a budget that will chart a course through this pandemic in ways that truly protect lives and livelihoods. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, this government has failed them at both. Against all evidence to the contrary, from health experts across the country who tell us that our approach is failing, our government has doubled down on their failed strategy, refusing to implement restrictions that would limit the spread of the virus and its variants or to adjust their vaccination schedule.

This isn't the audacity of hope we all long for, Mr. Speaker. This is the audacity of lunacy. It is doing the same things over and over again and expecting different results. It is beyond

comprehension that a government would fail to act responsibly as infection rates continue to rise and the severity of the impacts due to variants has ever-wider demographics, putting all of us, and particularly those working on the front lines, under greater risk.

And I can't tell you how outraged it makes me feel to watch our Premier, his cabinet ministers, and MLAs doff their masks in flagrant violation of all common sense of duty, obligation, or solidarity. It's absolutely shameful, an appalling behaviour from a sitting government.

But, Mr. Speaker, the government has shown its true colours with this budget, a government that is blatantly partisan and places the personal freedoms of the most privileged members of our society before those suffering the most, while people who were suffering long before the pandemic even began are forced to cope under even more stressful circumstances. This budget doesn't go far enough to address their needs. Its half measures and stopgaps will only prove to prolong and deepen the gap between the haves and the have-nots, the privileged and the marginalized.

We see their true colours in their weak and inadequate funding choices across the wide expanse of the caring economy, whether that be in education, health care, child care, long-term care, or mental health and harm reduction. All of these areas are left woefully underfunded. It is these sectors of the economy where workers are under stress, underpaid, largely female, and quite simply undervalued.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that budgets represent choices, hard choices based on hard truths. As someone whose profession is to grapple with the hard science and the hard math, let me tell you these numbers don't add up, because the science and the evidence has consistently shown that when you underfund social programs, those things reflected in the caring economy, people get left behind in destitute circumstances. And we all end up paying more in the long run, both in terms of human suffering and in dollars. Mr. Speaker, this isn't a budget based on sound evidence. It's a budget built on partisanship and pandering to special interests.

It's a budget which promotes the lowest utility rates in Canada, but not on a means-tested basis. And let's remember it was social democratic governments who had the foresight and the wisdom to ensure that heat and power would be accessible to all of its citizens. We all know the Sask Party has schemed for many years to defund and hollow out these cherished publicly owned utilities. And yet they don't hesitate to take credit for the benefit of our Crowns, who have provided for citizens for over 80 years and now through these affordable rate schedules.

But regrettably the government is stuck in the past. Its policies reflect a government unwilling and unable to acknowledge principles of fairness and equity when it comes to affordability and wealth distribution. How else does one describe breaks on home renovations and rebates from SaskPower and SGI that disproportionately benefit high-income earners over the lowest paid? Even worse, there are no objectives attached to these measures. Where are the incentives to help homeowners focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions through promoting energy efficiency retrofits or renewable power? Not satisfied with failing but once, these measures fail on multiple fronts.

The Sask Party says they're focused on affordability with their policy choices, but really, for whom are they focused? Any sincere efforts to address affordability would raise the minimum wage, create more fully funded daycare spaces, legislate pay equity legislation, and mandate paid sick days. It is absolutely shameful that we continue to have the lowest minimum wage and the second-highest poverty rate in the country. In this government's Saskatchewan, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer because of the choices they've made.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that makes choices based on pure ideology instead of the evidence. We have the highest rates of HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] infection in the country which is known to directly correlate with intravenous drug use. In response to their funding decisions, the Finance minister vaguely explained on the morning news yesterday that they chose to allocate money for addictions services more broadly, ignoring all evidence to the contrary that has proven that harm reduction saves lives.

What's worse, they've chosen to ignore the suicide pandemic in Saskatoon while refusing to fund measures that have been proven to save lives and reduce harm. Let us not forget the fact that mental health and addictions affect all sectors of society, but disproportionately, Indigenous families.

Last year when the government refused to step in and fund Prairie Harm Reduction, private businesses and individuals were left to pick up the tab. They were aghast and appalled at this government's callous and heartless spending choices that are failing families and failing to put people first.

Mr. Speaker, this government's budget displays a government out of touch, unable to recognize the needs of everyday people like families who just want their children to receive a decent education but find the system buckling at the seams, students with complex needs that can't be met in overcrowded classrooms, let alone prepare them for the knowledge economy of the future.

Mr. Speaker, my family and my constituents value education. It is a foundational principle for creating a great society and remaining competitive in a rapidly changing and modern world. But this budget will not prevent many of today's and future wage earners from accessing good-paying, highly skilled work, and instead it will trap them in low-pay, precarious work situations with little hope of improving their circumstances.

Unless you can afford to pay out of pocket for tutors and special classes, your children risk being left behind in our underfunded classrooms. That is the type of personal freedom this government believes in. I hear from teachers and families every day, struggling to provide a quality education for their children in a system that has been hollowed out because of this government's spending decisions. Teacher-librarians, slashed; special programming, gone; class sizes, ballooning. And Indigenous students are the most poorly served. The graduation rate for Indigenous students stands at 44.5 per cent, almost half the rate for non-Indigenous students. And with the third-lowest literacy rates in the country, it's a proven fact that this government is failing families and it's failing its children, our most precious resource.

And the numbers don't lie, Mr. Speaker. Over 11 per cent of Saskatchewan people right now are living in poverty. Almost half of all children living in female lone-parent families are poor. These families need compassion, not simply your strength. But this budget will not lift families out of poverty nor offer our children a better future through a quality education. It does nothing to address the harm chronic underfunding is wreaking in the lives of Saskatchewan families who continue to be thwarted by this uncaring government.

As a mother, my entrance into politics was strongly motivated by my deep concern for the world which we are leaving our children, a concern of intergenerational justice shared by many parents in this province. But over the course of this government's 14-year tenure, they've shown an astonishing ability to pay lip service to addressing the climate emergency while failing to act even on their own legislation.

We all understand that change doesn't happen overnight and that fossil fuels will be with us for a while. But this government has chosen to run out the clock instead of taking action even though it had ample time to do so. Only when faced with the threat of federal intrusion by a Liberal government did they finally take action. Well their wait-and-see approach has left us as laggards while the rest of the country, and indeed the world, moves on with transforming their economies for 21st century realities. With this government it's always too little, too late. There are costs to such inaction, Mr. Speaker.

Based on a report by Navius Research, the clean energy economy in Canada averaged \$30.8 billion annually from 2010 to 2017, 56.3 billion in GDP in 2017, and 298,000 jobs. Saskatchewan has seen very little of that bounty and certainly none that wasn't federally mandated. This government refuses to see the writing on the wall. Take its outsized reliance on revenues from non-renewable resources at only 9 per cent of total government revenue, and that's half of what it was a decade ago.

Why is it that it has taken this government 10 years — a decade — to recognize the need for change? Over that period, this government has been partying like it's 2009. But sadly, denial is a powerful motive.

Let's take a look at its capital spending plans. This budget plans to invest 277 million on natural gas distribution, a prudent investment, one should think. But there is no thought or mention of how it's going to eventually decarbonize the system. These are sunk costs with 30-year time horizons. Need I remind anyone that we need to achieve net zero by 2050? That's less than 30 years away. How do these short-sighted investments address this long-term imperative? This budget clearly doesn't.

Where are the investments to undertake deep retrofits and move away from fossil fuels? I don't know, but I do know this government killed the solar industry and refused to invest in geothermal and biofuels.

Why hasn't the government committed itself to leading the way on energy efficiency and electric vehicle fleets? Instead they slap a punitive tax on electric vehicles in the name of fairness to their fossil fuel counterparts, that at current levels of EV [electric vehicle] ownership will only generate \$6,000 a year. But where is the reconciliation for carbon pollution that has gone unchecked

for literally more than a century?

What's next? A tax on bicycles and walking? There are some strange justifications being proffered up by this government, I have to say. I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that this is a government that won't admit that it is ideologically opposed to taking serious action on what the Supreme Court rightly labelled the existential threat of the climate crisis. Where is the ambitious plan to decarbonize the grid and create good, sustainable, green jobs across our economy? I see no evidence of this in this budget.

[14:45]

Let's take another example. The government has committed 3.1 billion for infrastructure spending. Over 550 million of this is targeted for transportation capital. Why is it that out of this entire amount there is nothing designated for public transit infrastructure or investments? This government is turning away millions of dollars from the federal government that has been set aside for this purpose. There are literally thousands of people stranded throughout the province because this government callously shuttered Saskatchewan Transportation Company, leaving people unable to get to medical appointments, receive commercial packages, or visit their loved ones. Not that you would want to during the pandemic, but certainly during normal times it is a justifiable expectation for the people of Saskatchewan to have of their government.

I guess in a land presided over by economic cowboys, those so caught up in their pursuit of personal freedoms, public anything is anathema. It is yet another example of how this budget continues to reinforce the current unfair and outdated status quo in Saskatchewan, one that deepens the divides between the haves and the have-nots, and between those who can afford to travel on publicly funded highways in their personal vehicles and those in our society who can't.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents, and indeed people from right across Saskatchewan, are concerned about the ways this government has gone about committing to a major water diversion project known as the irrigation project. This project, estimated to cost \$4 billion, has to this point undergone a shockingly low level of due diligence and consultation. Rest assured, Mr. Speaker, that I will be seeking answers to many questions regarding this major development.

The last thing the people of Saskatchewan need is another boondoggle investment like the Regina bypass or the Global Transportation Hub. The last thing that Saskatchewan people need is to go further into debt for projects that don't offer a reasonable return on investment, vastly exceed cost projections, benefit only the few, and could threaten our most precious resources — our water — during a time of increasing climate crisis, weather variability, and drought.

Mr. Speaker, this government would like people to believe that its ongoing failure to run our government at another massive deficit is due to tough economic times and the current pandemic. Let us remember, however, that when we still enjoyed good economic times the current administration inherited from the previous government, it could still not balance the budget. Let us not forget that the massive deficits and increases to debt, which we now see, started accumulating long before we ever heard of

COVID-19, long before this pandemic.

We don't see vision in this budget so much as excuses. We don't see choices to put the province on the right path. We see a papering over the results of this administration's choices. That is the sad truth.

So with that, I'd like to say that I will not be supporting the motion of this government due to its failure of leadership and lack of foresight. I will be supporting the amendment, however, as proposed by Mr. Wotherspoon and seconded by Ms. Beck. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatchewan Rivers.

Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's such a pleasure to stand in this historic Chamber to support the Saskatchewan budget. Now I've said my share of budget speeches, however never in these strange times of a global pandemic, but I have hope and strength in believing in better times.

Our budget will support people and communities to recover from the impacts of COVID-19. In these challenging times, it is imperative more than ever to position and manage our resources to address the health and economic challenges of COVID as required. Our government's first priority is the safety and the health of Saskatchewan people. Building a strong economy will build strong families, families in my communities and families in your communities, Mr. Speaker. This budget will show how we are to achieve a stronger Saskatchewan.

Investments in education, social services, and health funding. Investments in programs to ensure Saskatchewan is the best place in Canada to live for people with disabilities — an increase of over 27 million.

Investments in Saskatchewan highways, Mr. Speaker. The constituency of Saskatchewan Rivers will see investments in safety lanes and upgrades on Highway No. 2 North, and passing lanes and twinning between Holbein and Prince Albert will keep people safe in their travels, thus increasing capacity and a stronger economy.

We will continue to invest in and build infrastructure needed to grow strong communities. These improvements will protect, build, and grow — protect our people and grow our province. Our budget will include over 830 million to build and upgrade Saskatchewan highways. Saskatchewan Rivers constituency has many logging, farm semi-trucks, NRT [Northern Resource Trucking], tourism, all who utilize these roads every day. This is good news to these businesses and families impacted by infrastructure, and the funding is welcome. This is an investment of moving people safely to school, to work, and improving the traffic flow.

Mr. Speaker, I took the opportunity today to reach out to a former constituent and a friend, Brent Zbaraschuk. He had emailed me a lovely sentiment that I wanted to share with you, and with his permission I'll share it with you in the Assembly. It reads:

Dear Mr. Premier, Minister Bradshaw, and our friend Nadine,

Jody, Alexandra, Sophia, and I want to thank you for your dedicated work for the people of Prince Albert and Saskatchewan. It was a pleasant treat for Alexandra to see that Highway No. 3 was being twinned, especially as she just finished with her final medical treatment, eight-week fit for life program at City Hospital.

This project is more than just about public safety for our family. It has helped me and my girl heal, and I will always be indebted to you and the SGI ladies, Colleen and Lori.

Thanks,

Brent and Jody Zbaraschuk.

Mr. Speaker, these accidents affect so many families — the business owner who witnessed this accident, the semi-truck driver who collided with the car and is still in shock, the parents. On behalf of our Legislative Assembly, I wish to send best wishes for a continuing recovery to Lexi and hope we will meet again sometime soon.

Mr. Speaker, much has been discussed about mental health this past year. I myself didn't mind the solitude and silence so much after a busy election year. However our Saskatchewan strength, as I reflect back, is our collective strength. Most of us are social animals looking to gather together to discuss current events over a cup of coffee. And this is the crutch of the matter: we have herd instinct and we like to gather. This virus has shown our needs.

Our budget will help address mental health supports and services with a targeted increase of 7 million for initiative programs. Health funding includes over 458 million for mental health and addictions supports and services, additional funding for gang-violence reduction strategy, additional funding to protect . . . build good citizens.

A total of 2.5 million will be dedicated to the Saskatchewan firearms program, which supports the transition of the Chief Firearms Officer from federal government to the province. The Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency was provided in the budget. It protects people, property, and resources.

The province's wildlife suppression fleet will be modernized with Turbo Commander aircraft and an air tanker investment to protect our valuable Saskatchewan forests, which covers over half of our province, Mr. Speaker. Over 5 million hectares is productive forest land, available for commercial timber harvesting. These forestry projects are in consideration and the resource is constantly growing, harvested, and being replanted.

Mr. Speaker, defining moments in history and significant principles engage change in our life patterns and norms. Family, classroom, and community have been altered in the years 2020 and 2021. A major defining moment in Saskatchewan was the clarity of people's health and safety. The COVID pandemic brought about changes and profoundly impacted the history of Saskatchewan. Our government recognized disease as being not only an individual problem, but a community problem, which brought families closer together as we spend more time in our homes.

We were cautious with grocery shopping, airports. Holidays were much quieter. Financial support and immigration

information and resources were constantly surveyed. The slogan Be Kind to Your Mind appeared as mental health problems became more common.

We all experienced this year in many different ways. Throughout the months of the coronavirus disease, your Saskatchewan government kept working, seeking ways to alleviate, counsel, and meet the challenges presented by a global pandemic. We have found out what we always knew: that Saskatchewan people are strong; Saskatchewan people are resilient and helpers to each other.

Saskatchewan is positioned to provide the supports to see our economy recover and continue to build the schools, highways, and hospitals needed. In this budget, Mr. Speaker, there's health care capital spending. More this year to support our ongoing design and planning for the project for a renewed and expanded Victoria Hospital for Prince Albert and region. Also investment for the construction of a 12 additional bed provincial addiction treatment, more care aids to work in long term.

But I would be amiss, Mr. Speaker, if I didn't take the opportunity today to wish Mrs. Henriette Bilodeau a happy 103rd birthday. The exact date was March 29th. She currently resides in the Debden Heritage Manor. While Henriette had 12 children, six of them gathered to sing "Happy Birthday" under her window. So we do wish her the best.

Our province is meeting its commitments to increase benefits to seniors through an increase of 3.5 million for the seniors' income plan, over 6 million increase reducing ambulance for seniors, thus increasing funding for expanding treatment available at the regional hospitals.

This budget has 27.3 million invested for workforce development and employability assistance for persons with disabilities top-up. That's with the Canada-Sask Job Grant providing supports.

Mr. Speaker, in one of our virtual conferences this year, in which you yourself was a participant, on the Canadian presiding officers earlier this year, we found ourselves discussing jurisdictional updates. Speaker Murphy of Nova Scotia spoke on the huge challenges disabled persons have in other countries to even be considered equal for running for public office. Parliamentarians with Disabilities have now formed a committee that meets parallel with the international AGM [annual general meeting] of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Speaker Murphy was instrumental in forming this subcommittee which came to fruition in 2020. This will inspire more to seek public office despite visible . . . or those with a wide range of disabilities.

But here in our province, Mr. Speaker, our budget provides more funding to Saskatchewan health, including funding for mental health and addictions support, with improving provincial health care programs and planning new infrastructure right across Saskatchewan. Funding for autism spectrum disorder. Additional respiratory therapists in Prince Albert, near my community of Saskatchewan Rivers. A 2-million increase for the expansion of the neonatal intensive care unit in Prince Albert. Our budget continues to build and grow resources for better health. 3.8 million for the transit assistance program for people with disabilities.

[15:00]

Mr. Speaker, our province has more than 53 million in joint funding with the Canadian government for 24 recreation and green infrastructure programs in Saskatchewan. Our government is providing more than 22 million through the Investing in Canada plan. This provides our communities with reliable and sustainable infrastructure. Saskatchewan Rivers constituency communities are benefiting from this initiative. The district of Lakeland will be receiving over 300,000 in a project that will result in a properly capped landfill which increases capacity to reduce air pollutants. The cover for the landfill will return the site to a green area.

Our government is providing more opportunities to make communities more resilient in the long run and develop our renewable energy resources. More investments in wastewater infrastructure will improve capacity to meet future demands.

And in another community of Sask Rivers, Sturgeon Lake First Nation's project is developing three new playground structures which will provide substantive, accessible, and modern playground equipment for their children. These three sites were currently there but now will have concrete for playground equipment structures, accessible surfacing, and a safe place to play for the little ones. Modern and safe facilities will benefit all to stay active and interact with others. It has long been known the beneficial effects, both mentally and physically, of recreation and play.

Saskatchewan people have been remembered in our budget to ensure their health and their safety. Our way of life here in Saskatchewan has continued to show our resiliency and strength and that people are our greatest resource.

In my travels I did notice that a SaskPower infrastructure investment was happening right here in Saskatchewan Rivers riding. And this investment will focus increasing power grid reliability in Candle Lake area, in the Prince Albert rural area. As I was driving by Candle Lake I saw the wooden poles and the transmission lines being refurbished, and of course that is a very welcome thing to protect our system reliability.

I was going through some more papers for Saskatchewan Rivers, and I see our beautiful parks and campgrounds are being renewed. Saskatchewan Rivers is known for its wonderful beaches and tourism spots: Elk Ridge, Candle Lake, Anglin Lake, Waskesiu, Ness Creek.

So we have in Saskatchewan Rivers, at the Great Blue Heron Provincial Park, more campsite developments, more playground developments, park maintenance building construction, and at Candle Lake we have Minowukaw campground electrical system upgrades and campground access and internal road. So if any of my colleagues are wanting to enjoy our beautiful Saskatchewan parks, please come up to Saskatchewan Rivers.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, as Rudyard Kipling quotes:

If you can dream — and not make dreams your master;
If you can think — and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same . . .

Yours is the Earth and everything that is in it.

I wish to thank all of our families for their strength and support in the work that we do, not only Saskatchewan Rivers riding, but all our spouses and our families as we work here for the next few weeks. I wish to thank them for their opinions, their advice, and critiques to help make Saskatchewan a better place to live. For my colleagues, for their support and love and guidance. Without everyone's involvement, we would be much less.

And finally, thank you to our Finance minister for her dedication. May we all stand for Saskatchewan, built to last. I will support the budget, but I cannot support the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Keisig: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise in the Assembly and speak about the 2021-22 budget on behalf of the amazing constituents from Last Mountain-Touchwood. It is an absolute pleasure to serve them. This budget almost certainly builds Saskatchewan and assists in keeping life affordable for families.

Before I get too involved in talking about the budget, Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not discuss what is truly important to every member in this Chamber — our families. My wife, Sheila Keisig, is an administrator at the rural municipality of Tullymet. She is also the vice-president of the rural administrators' association of Saskatchewan. So needless to say, Mr. Speaker, she keeps me very well informed on the issues at a municipal level.

My oldest daughter, Shannara, is enrolled in the continuing care aid course at Sask Polytechnic. She also works part-time in Strasbourg at the Last Mountain pioneer care home. She will be delighted to hear of our government's commitment to hiring 100 more CCAs [continuing care aid] across this province at the cost of \$6 million. Continuing care aids are a cornerstone of seniors' health care in this province. They deserve recognition and gratitude for their work every day, providing care to all of their clients. With this budget, Mr. Speaker, this government understands the needs of seniors' care and is looking to assist in the best way possible, by hiring more staff.

My youngest daughter, Sharlize, was attending university a year ago and enjoying her education in Saskatoon. However like many other students across this province, she was struggling with online and distance learning due to the pandemic. She opted not to return after Christmas and has chosen a new career path. She is currently employed at a veterinary clinic in the city here, Mr. Speaker, and genuinely enjoys her work there. She is enrolled in the animal health technology course and begins her studies this fall.

I'm incredibly proud of my daughters and all the hard work they've put into their education. Both of them are studying and planning to stay in Saskatchewan once completing their education. Like many other students throughout the province, my daughters will be pleased to hear that the budget is building upon existing support programs for students, which includes the graduate retention program. The program provides up to \$20,000

in tax credits to eligible post-secondary students who remain in Saskatchewan and build their careers here.

Mr. Speaker, this is an excellent incentive for students. We need to ensure that our students continue to keep their roots firmly planted in Saskatchewan. They are our future. We will do this with the most aggressive youth retention program in Canada, as well as continue to build on our lakes, tourism, and job creation to keep Saskatchewan vibrant and appealing to our students. To date there have been over 75,000 post-secondary graduates that have claimed these careers in Saskatchewan.

I also want to thank my constituency assistant, Tina Knowles. She has been integral in my work as an MLA for Last Mountain-Touchwood. Her work ethic and effort does not go unnoticed by myself and all constituents of Last Mountain-Touchwood. The constituency is very fortunate to have her working on their behalf.

I also want to thank the Legislative Assembly Service, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Putz and Ms. Ursulescu and all the staff have been wonderful to work with. I know everyone in the Chamber knows what the Legislative Assembly Service is, however my mother is watching, Mr. Speaker, so I will explain for her benefit and all the people across Saskatchewan watching now about the operation of the Legislative Assembly Service.

The LAS [Legislative Assembly Service] is a non-partisan, impartial arm of the Legislative Assembly that assists members with their duties and ensures continuity of government from one legislature to the next. They've done an excellent job of putting on informational seminars for all newly elected MLAs. These seminars have been very interesting and very well attended by my colleagues. I would like to encourage all the new members opposite to participate in these seminars and broaden their knowledge base. This will assist every MLA in serving their constituents and ultimately the people of Saskatchewan. This pandemic has been challenging, but I would like to commend the LAS staff for ensuring that new MLAs like myself are well prepared to serve the people of Saskatchewan.

I want to thank our Finance minister for doing a terrific job on presenting the budget. COVID has provided its challenges and she has managed very well ensuring that the budget protects, builds, and grows Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan will recover from this pandemic and we, as a province, will come out stronger than ever. I've said this many times, Madam Speaker. Saskatchewan people are some of the most resilient people I know. We will recover and we will grow.

Madam Deputy Speaker, COVID is now a topic that is just as famous as the weather in Saskatchewan. Many people in my constituency are patiently waiting for their turn to receive their vaccine. The vaccine is a way out of the pandemic for us all. This budget includes \$4 million in operating funding to the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization, VIDO, which is in addition to the government's previous commitments of 15 million to support VIDO's centre for pandemic research.

Madam Deputy Speaker, 4.2 million is going towards vaccine development and construction of a new vaccine manufacturing facility. I'm looking forward to reading about all their upcoming clinical trials scheduled for this fall. We are seeing Saskatchewan

leading in Canada for research, development, and production of new vaccines. This production will help us in the future in protecting Canadians against pandemics. Even in pandemics, Saskatchewan people are thinking ahead, protecting, building, and growing this great province.

COVID has taken its toll on all of us in Saskatchewan, which is why I'm pleased to see this budget invest 458 million for mental health and addictions programs and services. This amount is up 5.4 per cent from last year. This investment will allow for youth-focused initiatives and investing in suicide prevention and addictions treatment. This is a needed investment to our province with the current struggles we are facing during these increasingly challenging times.

Our government has yet again fulfilled a campaign commitment with a \$5 million increase which will expand eligibility under the Saskatchewan insulin pump program. I know many people that have diabetes. It is very costly. I am relieved that the pump will now be covered for people in this province who need one. Funding will also cover costs for continuous glucose monitoring for children and youth under the age of 18. The expansion of the Saskatchewan insulin pump program has been well received throughout Last Mountain-Touchwood. I've had many constituents reach out to me to express their delight with the program. This is another promise, Madam Deputy Speaker. Promise made, promise kept.

I'm also very excited about the investment of \$1.4 million to add a new STARS helicopter. STARS is crucial to Saskatchewan, especially to our rural and remote areas. Thanks to STARS, emergency care is faster to rural areas. They save countless lives every day. I have so much respect and gratitude towards the STARS program.

I also want to commend our Minister of Finance for her foresight and courage. The charge on electric vehicles is very modest, but it's visionary. Governments must look into the future and see the big picture. Our gas tax revenue is critical for highway repair and maintenance. If consumers decide to purchase electric vehicles, we still require a tax collection mechanism to pay for the necessary services. Our highways are critical infrastructure, and it is a priority of this government to maintain, improve, and build new stretches throughout this province. Saskatchewan people have always been willing to pay their fair share of taxes to provide funding for required infrastructure. This will allow all owners of electric vehicles to do just that.

[15:15]

This budget provides 830 million into operating, maintaining, and building the province's roads and highways system. We are upgrading a section of highway in my constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker, Highways 322 and 220 from Glen Harbour to Rowan's Ravine. This section of roadwork is needed and will be an asset to all the people living there and allow all Saskatchewan people to truly experience Rowan's Ravine Provincial Park. All residents from the RM of McKillop look forward to the timely completion of this provincially funded project. We are also providing some upgrades to Highway 56 from Fort Qu'Appelle to Katepwa. Improved infrastructure is vital to communities, especially those that depend on tourism. These updates will allow for a greater appeal for tourist destinations near and throughout

the constituency.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to touch briefly on the weather. I know this is shocking, Madam Deputy Speaker, to hear a farmer wanting to talk about the weather in this storied Chamber, but we all remember that frigid February. As I sat in my nice warm home and watched the news coming out of Texas, I felt horrible for them. The blackouts, hardship, and bone-chilling cold had disastrous effects on the state. The numbers still have to be accurately documented; however early media reports state that close to 70 people tragically passed away, and early estimates predict a \$195 billion price tag on infrastructure repair. The images of people in their homes dealing with frozen and bursting water lines as the thaw began were truly saddening.

SaskPower, our publicly owned power Crown corporation, sent over 150 megawatts of electricity to Texas. While temperatures here were hovering at 40 below, SaskPower was able to keep Saskatchewan fully powered and help our neighbours. What a great Saskatchewan thing to do. But this is a sign, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we have to remain vigilant in our energy security. Our Crown corporation needs to experiment with different forms of electrical generation, but it is up to the government to maintain the big picture. It is absolutely critical that we maintain baseload power requirements for all citizens so that we never go through what Texas went through. This government is making a firm commitment through SaskPower of over \$900 million to improve our electricity system to meet growing demand and maintain reliability with this budget.

I also want to talk about the Saskatchewan economic recovery rebate, which is budgeted at \$174 million, which began providing all SaskPower customers with a 10 per cent rebate on their power bills. This is a simple, easy-to-administer program that sees real dollars going back into Saskatchewan people's pockets. This was a campaign promise, Madam Deputy Speaker. A promise made, a promise kept.

When all of us farmers are finished with harvest you can find us in the rinks during the winter, watching our local hockey teams compete, eating perogies, and you can probably guess the next part. We're talking about the weather. Rural Saskatchewan often consists of at least a school, grocery store, and a rink. When winter comes around, most people from a rural town can be found at the rink. By reinstating the community rink affordability grant and providing \$2,500 per ice surface, community rinks can sigh a bit of a relief during the pandemic.

The community rink affordability grant was very popular in my constituency. I'm excited to announce that 13 towns and villages are receiving the funding in just my constituency alone. Those municipalities receiving the grant are Abernethy, Balcarres, Bulyea, Lipton, Ituna, Kelliher, Lemberg, Dysart, Earl Grey, Strasbourg, Cupar, Fenwood, and Neudorf. This grant has been highly successful, and I'm happy to see that rinks in Last Mountain-Touchwood have taken full advantage of this and are able to benefit from this grant.

Last year Saskatchewan agriculture produced almost \$13 billion worth of exported product. Our farmers are the best in producing ethical, environmentally sustainable, and economically viable agri-food products. I'm a fourth-generation farmer, Madam Deputy Speaker, from the RM of Tullymet. I'm proud of that.

Our government representatives must champion all the good that agriculture does for this province, for both urban and rural residents.

That's why I'm excited to talk about the increase in funding for our international offices. We are increasing funding by \$5 million to a total budget of 9.3 million. It is vitally important that as a government we assist all businesses in this province with marketing what they produce. We are a small province but world class in the quality, quantity, and sustainability of the agri-food products we grow here. This budget puts out the message to all producers that we will support you in marketing your products on the global stage.

Our government is committing to assisting, enhancing, and strengthening communities throughout the province. Municipal revenue sharing has increased by 118 per cent since 2007. COVID-19 has had a huge impact on our local economies. It is crucial to work together with our local municipalities to create a strong Saskatchewan. Municipalities are best situated to know what their communities need. This budget outlines more than 465 million of investments into municipalities. This includes grants, revenue sharing, and infrastructure funding. Together, Madam Deputy Speaker, along with the local municipalities, we will create a strong Saskatchewan.

This budget is the largest health care, education, and social services spending Saskatchewan has ever seen. These investments are going to pay dividends well into the future. Our net debt as a percentage of gross domestic product remains one of the lowest in Canada, and that is a critical measuring point. Being a small-business owner, Madam Deputy Speaker, I understand the ramifications of deficit spending, but this budget has the right balance of spending and targeted tax increases.

One critical aspect that this budget addresses is something myself and all of my colleagues on this side of the House share. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is the desire to see a Saskatchewan where all of our youth have opportunities to stay at home in this great province.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it was outlined in the budget address that we had 14 campaign commitments that we made to the people of Saskatchewan. Outlined in the budget, our government fulfilled all of 14 of those commitments. The members opposite seem to believe that our government has failed the people of this province. Seems pretty clear to me that we did not fail. We set out and did what we said we would do. The people voted with faith that our government would follow through on those commitments. And guess what, Madam Deputy Speaker? Promise made, promise kept.

To conclude, I am pleased to support the budget that has been brought forward by the Minister of Finance, seconded by the member from The Battlefords, but I do not support the amendment from the member from Regina Rosemont. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport and Status of Women.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think it bears mentioning that our new members on

this side of the House are just to be commended. They've stood up and have clearly and articulately talked about what's important to the people of Saskatchewan. They talked about how we can protect, how we can build, and how do we grow this province. And the budget that our Finance minister brought down strengthened this province like nothing else.

It was a long, arduous journey putting together this budget. Each one of the ministers and their ministries had to deliberate, and everything had the shadow of COVID placed upon it. Do you know how hard that is, when you have wonderful ideas and you really want to see something really fruitful happen and COVID overshadows everything? But the best thing about our Finance minister? She's strong. She's capable. She was able to sort through so much of that and be able to bring forward a budget that each and every one of us can be proud of and can support.

The members opposite have brought forward an amendment and I would not be able to support that amendment. I support our Finance minister and her budget. This budget is for the people of Saskatchewan.

I would like to thank my husband, Terry. Terry's been just my biggest champion. And this has been a challenging year for all of us here, and especially now where we have to, you know . . . For myself living in Regina, it's not a stretch. But for the MLAs who have to come in from out of town and stay here, it's difficult because we all depend on our friends and our families to give us the moral support, the intellectual support to be able to do our jobs well. So I'm very lucky that I have my husband, Terry, who's my biggest, biggest champion.

I'd also like to thank my constituency assistant Kelly Zazula. Kelly's been with me since 2008, so we've kind of grown up together in this political circle, and she's been just an absolute rock star. She handles the constituency caseload — very capable. And she does it in such a respectful manner. Now during COVID, people phone and they're angry; they're anxious; they're fearful. She has the ability to reach out to them, make sure that their issues and concerns are being addressed, making sure that I have the ability to connect with those people who say, I need to talk to Laura and I need to talk to her right now. That's what they say. But you know, the interesting thing is they are so pleased with the work and the strength that our Premier has given the province. They're so pleased with the work of our two Health ministers and now our Finance minister.

I also want to thank my office staff here in the ministry. I have Carter, Sherry, and Ty. They have done an absolutely wonderful job of ensuring that all the meetings that we have . . . We've got more Zoom meetings than any of us could ever have imagined would happen. And we have the ability to reach out to stakeholders, but that takes a lot of juggling and making sure we have everybody organized. And they do it; they do it so well.

I also want to thank the ministry staff of Parks, Culture and Sport and the Status of Women because they had, along with us, a very tough job being able to put together a budget that would resonate with the people, but also to do something that really touched the whole province. And I think that was what I'm so proud of, the work that we've done.

Because in our election platform we made some promises, and I

know the opposition doesn't think that these are very important or that they don't really affect family life, but they do. We have the home renovation tax. That tax credit is going to mean a lot to a lot of people. Now maybe somebody needs a new furnace. They've got an old furnace the size of a school bus in their house, not very efficient. Well now they have the opportunity to be able to replace that furnace. Maybe they've got some old lights in that house that are absolutely using way too much energy. Well now they're able to maybe put in some LEDs [light-emitting diode], be a little more, you know, reasonable in making sure that their utility rates are being looked after.

And we did also do a 10 per cent rebate for SaskPower for this year because people needed a little help. COVID has had an adverse effect on individuals' incomes, their families. And so how can we help? Put some money in their pocket.

[15:30]

We increased the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship by 50 per cent to \$750 a year. Reduce small-business tax. Restart the active families benefit. Six million per year to expand autism funding. Expand the province's insulin pump program to anyone with type 1 diabetes.

Now I have to tell you, during the campaign I had a family come in and talk about financially how hard that was. Their little girl has type 1 diabetes. This absolutely . . . This changes their life. This makes their life so much better. So when we have members on the opposition saying that we don't care about families and we're not paying attention to families, this is paying attention to families. We covered the cost of the continuous glucose monitoring system for children under the age of 18. Again this is in people's pockets. It's helping them out.

And reducing the maximum cost of ambulance calls by 50 per cent to \$135 a call, eliminating inter-hospital ambulance. Now in my constituency we had quite a few calls on that, and so this really makes a difference. A lot of times it's seniors being moved from one hospital to another, so this really . . . This is real. This means something. Increasing the seniors' income plan to a maximum of \$360 a month: that is money in seniors' pockets. Hiring 300 new continuing care aids: it's a promise made, promise kept. Increase support for deaf, deaf and blind Saskatchewan residents.

And we're going to restart the community rinks affordability grant. And a member on this side of the House talked about how important that was to their community. So, Madam Deputy Speaker — and it just thrills me to say that, I have to tell you, that we have a woman sitting in the Chair — we made promises. We didn't make them willy-nilly. And we kept those promises.

Now the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport, we put together, probably it turns out to be one of the largest budgets for that ministry. And we know that during wintertime, during COVID, our parks were well attended. You know, the skate the lake. We had people lining up and they did it very respectful and very carefully, following all the COVID guidelines. We ensured we had food trucks out there, everything to ensure that families could have some really good active family time. But it also contributed to their mental health because we know that families who kind of play together, they stay together. It's really good for their

relationships.

So we know that our parks again this summer are going to be very well attended. So to ensure that people in Saskatchewan get to enjoy our great outdoors, we are investing in our provincial parks. We're building a new group pavilion for Pike Lake, Blackstrap, Echo Valley, Buffalo Pound provincial parks.

Develop new service campgrounds in Cypress Hills Provincial Park. I've got to tell you about Cypress Hills. Cypress Hills is just absolutely heaven on earth. It's one of the most beautiful places in this province, and I encourage each and everyone to take the time to go out to Cypress Hills. It's absolutely a gem. And so for us to be able to ensure that we have increased camping sites there, that's a real plus. Because I know that once our Saskatchewaner makes sure that people all know about that fabulous gem in our province, those campgrounds are going to be full.

We're also ensuring the interior and the exterior refurbishing of the historic Holy Trinity Church in Lac La Ronge Provincial. The best part about this is that the contractors are local contractors. Think about this building; it's the oldest building in Saskatchewan. And I'm going to encourage our members, if they've never been up there, you've got to go. It's another little piece of heaven, and that building absolutely is so inspirational. And when you walk in it, you realize that . . . just the vision that the people had to build that church in northern Saskatchewan. It's quite remarkable. So we're so pleased to be able to ensure that that heritage building will maintain its structure.

And you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, we ensured that we brought the active families benefit back. Now again what we did was to ensure that it's going to be used fairly is that we have a . . . it's \$150 per child, you know, up to the age of 18. And then children with disabilities, we've added an additional \$50 per child. So we anticipate that probably close to 34,000 children and youth in this province are going to be able to benefit from this active families benefit. And there is a cap on this in that the family total income is \$60,000. So we're making sure that this is very affordable and very doable for our parents with children, that they can make sure that they become active again. Because we know that children who spend time in organized sports, music, dance, all of that, it adds to their well-being. We know that studies show that young girls who participate in competitive sports are not afraid to take up leadership roles. So we want our girls to participate.

Another one of our promises that we made was the Saskatchewan veteran service clubs support program. And we increased that to a total of 1.5 million. Now I had the opportunity to talk to the stakeholders, and they're over the moon, because I think all of us heard last November during Remembrance Day that a lot of the veterans talked about their Legion halls, and how much, you know, they needed a little bit of help. They need maybe a new roof, new furnace, new steps, accessibility, all of that sort of stuff. So this is going to be able to allow them to access money to maybe replace that roof. And we know that those Legions — again, they're like the rinks — they're absolutely crucial to rural Saskatchewan. They are the cornerstone of our province.

And as I said, our community rinks affordability grant, we gave \$2,500 per ice surface. And so that was for a total of 1.7 million.

And we had more than 350 communities apply. So that was a well-taken-up program. In fact, I'd like to read a testimonial from a person who sent us a nice little email from Waldheim:

The grant helped us continue to run our community rink and provide a safe place for our kids and our families to skate and play hockey this winter. We appreciate how easy it was to apply through Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association, their helpful response to questions, and their quick disbursement of the grant funding.

You know, that's not the only email we ever got into our ministry. We had people sending us emails thanking us for organizing skates in the parks this winter. We had people sending us emails saying, thank you very much for setting up a toboggan hill out at another provincial park. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are paying attention to the needs of our communities and our families across this province.

One of the interesting things about my constituency of Regina Rochdale is that it's like a small town. Rochdale Boulevard runs right down the centre of my constituency. So it's like small-town Saskatchewan. There's hundreds of businesses lining both sides of that boulevard, and they contacted us and said, we're having a tough time.

And you know, we say that small businesses, they're the backbone of our province and our communities, and it's real. But they needed a little help. And so the Saskatchewan small-business emergency payment program phase 2 came out. And so we didn't just kind of, you know, put it on social media. My constituency assistant and I said, how can we make sure that every one of those hundreds of businesses have the information they need so that they can apply for this help? So we put together the full package — we didn't just send them to a website, no — put together a full package and delivered it to each and every business along that whole boulevard.

And that's what we are supposed to do as MLAs. We're supposed to go out there and make sure that our constituents' needs are being met because COVID has hit us hard. It's hit this province financially. It's hit this province emotionally and physically. I know myself, and I'll share with everyone here . . . It's a tough one. And I had a little mantra. I said I hated the cold weather; well thank heaven spring's here because the warm weather's here, so I don't have to gripe about that anymore. And I hated cancer because I was diagnosed with cancer. Guess what? I'm okay. And I hated COVID, still hate COVID, and we're getting through it.

Now there's another person, I'm not going to use the word hate because hate's a really strong word for this individual, dislike immensely — you cannot believe how much — and that's Justin Trudeau. Because I got to tell you, so I got rid of the cold weather, beat cancer. We're working on COVID. Now we got to get rid of Justin Trudeau. Things will be much better for the people of Saskatchewan.

So you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I must say I'm pleased to see a woman sitting in that Chair. We have the opportunity to be mentors and leaders for our women and girls in our province. Thank you so much for your leadership. Our Deputy Premier, our Finance minister is a woman. She brought forward a tough

budget but it was a good budget. It was a budget based on protecting our province, building our province, and growing our province.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not be supporting the amendment put forward by the opposition. I'll be supporting the budget put forward by this government. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Before I get into my speaking notes here, I just want to thank the member opposite for her speech, for wearing a mask while she spoke, for showing the kind of vulnerability and humanity that I think is often lacking from this Chamber. I appreciate it and I take your words to heart. Thank you for speaking so passionately.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, before I get into my response on the budget as many of us have done, I want to say a few thank yous. First of all, I want to say thank you to the legislative staff who have really gone above and beyond to keep these proceedings working during the pandemic. Thank you to all of the Clerks, the Hansard staff, LAS, our Sergeant-at-Arms, and all the facility folks who keep this place clean and safe. I've been impressed with how well the staff continue to work with our House leaders, and to change and adjust to the various demands of staying safe during a global pandemic while keeping this Chamber open and running smoothly. So a sincere thank you.

I also want to thank my teammates on this side of this side. The 13 of us here in our NDP caucus is an amazing crew. I'm proud to be on this team, I'm proud of the values that we have, I'm proud of our shared vision, and I'm proud of the character in each one of these individuals that I get to come to work with. I want to thank them for their friendships, I want to thank them for their mentoring, and I want to thank them for their personal support over the last five months.

[15:45]

And I also want to say a few words about what it means for me to be here in the legislature in Regina, one of the most COVID-dangerous cities in the country, while my wife and our three kids are home in Saskatoon, which is also experiencing a recent spike in variants of concern. I want to acknowledge the incredible amount of work that this leaves for my wife, Emma.

The work that our spouses and partners do is the unseen side of this job, and their work is multiplied many times over as we are forced to stay here. And you know, I think that that's unfortunate. And at the same time, I know that my spouse, Emma, is not alone. Many of our partners are holding things together at home, keeping our kids safe, caring for loved ones, and fulfilling their jobs back in the constituencies where we come from. I have so much love and appreciation for the work that she's doing there. I could talk the entire 20 minutes on the topic, but I don't think that that would go over very well here.

Finally what I want to say on this is what a shame it is, and I think really a disservice to family values, that our jobs are now in person while our family relationships are virtual for the next six weeks. I can't help but think that maybe we're getting this wrong.

This session will have a huge impact on my kids. My kids are aged 13, 8, and 3. I know that a few members opposite have young children and they're in the same boat, and I think that we'd agree that this isn't fair to them. Nothing about COVID is fair. I'm not whining, but I think that we need to recognize the impact on our kids is significant.

You know, at the same time, it's really hard for my kids to see that the cries of medical experts are being ignored by this government and that the Sask Party has changed the rules that we agreed to in December and are now removing their masks and shouting in the Assembly. How can you explain this kind of hypocrisy to a child? It just doesn't make sense. They don't care about bravado; they don't care about ego. They want their moms and dads to be safe.

And there's a big reason for that, Madam Deputy Speaker. And I'm sure that you and many of my fellow members here noticed that I'm not just wearing one mask; I'm wearing two masks. And I'll be doing that every time I enter this building. And the reason for that is that I am an immune-compromised person. The recent changes in my health status are deeply personal, but it's something that's given me a new perspective on what the last year has been like for other folks who are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19.

I want to thank the members opposite who choose to wear their masks in here. I see it, I notice it, and I think that's important. What message does it send for those who are choosing otherwise? What message does it send to the people of Saskatchewan when leaders in government don't lead by example? What message does it send when cabinet ministers go on warm vacations during the holidays while everyone else is required to stay home? What does it say when every indoor public space in the province is under a mask requirement but Sask Party members don't think that applies to them? What does it say when one of your own colleagues is at risk, for medical reasons, and yet you refuse to show the kind of empathy that people expect from their leaders?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I heard the Premier say several times over the last few days that he's concerned about protecting personal freedom. Perhaps the Premier is preparing to join my first opponent in Saskatoon Eastview who has now taken to speaking at freedom rallies and anti-mask rallies. We cannot have our leaders pandering to the most extremist views in the province. We all know that's exactly what is going on when we pit personal freedom against medical advice for the better good.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm a believer that we should love our neighbours. I believe that we have a responsibility to the better good. I believe that my personal freedom is interconnected with your personal freedom. And in a democracy we have rights, but we also have responsibilities. We have a responsibility to work for the better good. Now is not the time for dog whistling about personal freedoms. Now is the time to ask, who is my neighbour? Now is the time to ask, what am I responsible for to work towards the better good?

Now I want to move to sharing a few thoughts on the budget. And I want to do so with the imagery in mind of just those members who are choosing to take off their masks when they speak and shout in the Chamber. I find it interesting that our own

Minister of Health decided very intentionally to put on the record that he will not accept medical evidence that comes from outside the province. What a sight to behold, Madam Speaker. I honestly couldn't have imagined hearing or seeing such disdain for evidence, for facts, such anti-intellectualism from the very people who have the very real job of keeping us safe.

But then the budget that followed made a lot more sense. I'm seeing a trend here of a Sask Party government that is more concerned about how they look than what they do. The refusal of members opposite to wear a mask is the perfect illustration of what's going on in this budget. They are more interested in looking good than doing good.

Let's dig into some examples. First up, Madam Deputy Speaker, the big fat campaign promise that was repeated over and over again to win the votes of older adults and their loved ones. It was in the Throne Speech and, as I pointed out in question period, it was repeated right here by the Minister for Seniors on December 1st. The Sask Party promise to hire 300 continuing care aids in this year's budget year is a half-truth. It's a way to signal that they are taking action without actually taking any action. There are currently hundreds of unfilled positions already advertised. Many of these are casual. Many of these are part-time. Many of these are temporary.

This government hasn't done any of the proactive work to open up seats in training programs, to recruit and retain workers. Anyone who knows or who has any vested interest in long-term care, they'll tell you that the promise of hiring 300 people in a year was a pie-in-the-sky promise at best, maybe a little too focused on looking good instead of doing good. This is not a promise fulfilled, and there is no way to spin this in a positive way. This is a failure for seniors living in long-term care and their loved ones.

So what did the Sask Party do? They chopped that promise down to one-third the size and acted like it was mission accomplished. Let's be clear: the Sask Party's own documents costed their campaign promise at \$18.4 million annually. This \$6 million investment is a fraction of what is needed, and I'll add that these new staff for long-term care were needed badly a year ago. Had this government acted on evidence from other jurisdictions, which they've already decided to throw out, lives would have been saved. And that is a fact.

Let's move on to the plan to get people back to work, or more importantly, the lack of a plan to get people back to work. Twenty-three thousand people are looking for work, and I guess we'll never know how high that number would have been if we were not leading the country in out-migration. Quite frankly, driving people away from our province is a bit of a sneaky way to keep the unemployment numbers down — looking good, but not doing good.

Well in this budget there really was no mention of a plan for jobs. And I want to talk about a few key areas related to my critic responsibilities. The first is the performing arts. As critic for Parks, Culture and Sport I've been hearing from people all around this province who make their money through a gig economy, the creative economy, people who perform for a living or work with performers. Maybe they sing. Maybe they play an instrument. Maybe they dance. Maybe they act. Maybe they run

the light or the sound or maybe they own a venue. These people have lost all of their income in the last year. Maybe they get paid show by show or gig by gig. It doesn't show up as losing a full-time equivalent job but they've lost everything. And there's no plan and worse yet, there's no co-operation from this government to get them back to work.

Their concern is that when it's safe to meet again, our artists will have moved away. Our performers will have moved to other jobs. This is an economic driver in the province that employs four times the number of people that sports do. Now I love sports. Trust me, I do. I've coached youth sports for almost 20 years. But the folks who make their living through the creative economy have been let down and left out of this budget.

Next I want to move on to what might seem like a small-potato thing but the horse-racing community in this province has also been let down and left out. I've taken time to listen to these people. And I know it's a complex issue that includes different levels of government, different ministries, but at the end of the day, the Sask Party failure will be driving hundreds of people away from this province. This is an industry that employs between 500 to 1,000 people. It's going to affect veterinarians, breeders, trainers, folks in agriculture. Many of these people live in rural areas and many of these people are low-income earners. This is not some luxurious, you know, thing that they engage in in their free time. This is a job and for many of them it's a job that's been in their families for four or five generations.

We are the only province previously with a thoroughbred racing track that didn't receive provincial funding dollars. Tracks that do, in both of our neighbouring provinces, are thriving. And the people from Saskatchewan will have to make very hard choices about leaving the province where they grew up.

Well you know, yesterday I heard the Minister of Finance bring up several reports from major Canadian banks. I'd like to bring one up. It's from the TD Bank, Toronto Dominion. It's a report on oil and gas jobs in the country. It came out on budget day so many of us may have missed it, but this is what it says. This report predicts that by the year 2050, between 50 and 75 per cent of jobs in fossil fuels will disappear. It won't happen overnight, and no one in this room, on our side or the other side, is celebrating this. These are good jobs. These are hard-working people. But what they need is a government on their side.

The report was clear that there will be lots of jobs, including energy, for folks to transition to, but it's going to take three things. It is going to take planning, it is going to take effort, and it is going to take resources. So what is this government doing to plan for the future of jobs in Saskatchewan? Will they skate where the puck is going? No. The Premier is stuck in the past and they are selling out workers in our province.

It doesn't end there. Not only are they hanging our workers out to dry with no plan for the future, they are so stuck in the past that they decided to virtue signal to their base by imposing a tax on electric vehicles. What an embarrassing moment for Saskatchewan as literally the rest of the world is embracing new technology and moving forward with incentives for a sustainable future for our children.

One more comment on the state of unemployment in this

province. For nearly a year now this government has, you know, no doubt — and I'll be fair on this, okay? — this government has had to make difficult decisions as we navigate various impacts of COVID-19. But now, over a year into it, well, evidence and studies are beginning to emerge about what could have been done. Most importantly, these studies now indicate what could still be done if this government is willing to pay attention to the facts. These studies provide an evidence-based path forward as the third wave is fully upon us.

I'd like to read a short section from a recent opinion piece authored by three experts in epidemiology and public health. This piece is entitled, "Your money or your life? . . . [The Premier's] tragic miscalculation." In examining the dichotomy between economy and health, the authors have this to say:

This was an important theoretical debate at the beginning of the pandemic. After more than a year, the evidence to settle it is starting to emerge. It does not support . . . [the Premier's] assumptions.

The article references academically sound, long-term studies that prove that provinces like Saskatchewan got it wrong, leading to a "lose-lose situation" where our people and economy both suffer. In the end, the pandemic is bad for business, and allowing COVID to spread without strong, capable leadership is the exact reason more people are sick or dead and more people are out of work.

Again, these are not my words. This is not a study commissioned by the NDP. This is an academically sound study that gives us evidence that we can move forward with. Madam Deputy Speaker, the past is behind us. But if this Premier and this government are willing to look at facts and evidence, they might see it's never too late to do the right thing for people or the economy.

[16:00]

I want to make a quick comment on the massive provincial deficit. Much has been made about the fact that we were also advocating for several years of deficit spending. This is true. The difference between the Sask Party and the NDP, we both saw the road ahead. We both knew it was difficult and going to be difficult for years. We told the truth. The Sask Party sold the people of this province a lie to win their votes. There's no way to spin that.

[Interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: — I'll just caution the member for unparliamentary language, please.

Mr. Love: — Absolutely. My apologies. Yes, my apologies, Madam Deputy Speaker. Finally I'll make just a few comments about my colleagues and former students in the classroom. I've seen comments on this budget, and I agree that this budget does not represent the worst case scenario that many were scared of. And the reason they were scared of this is this government's atrocious track record on education.

There's a long history of provincial dollars not keeping up with inflation; growth in student population; increasing needs of

technology in the classroom; learning supports for students who need extra help, including having enough EAs [educational assistant] on hand; infrastructure needs. The list goes on and on. So yes, folks in education were worried about this budget.

But I want to pry just a little bit about some of the wording coming from this government. What cause is there to celebrate when you simply uphold your end of the bargain? Even when it's true that if you did fully fund the recent collective agreement, isn't that just the bare minimum? Isn't that just what's expected when you bargain in good faith?

What I don't see is I don't see teachers showing up at work and patting themselves on the back for showing up and holding up their end of the deal. That's what you do when you negotiate a contract: you follow through. And there should be no back-patting or any boasting about this. When will we move beyond this ridiculously low bar of success and truly invest in our students like they are the most important resource we have?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I cannot support this budget. I simply do not see it as the work of a government willing to move beyond ideology, willing to examine evidence, even new evidence, willing to listen to the people of Saskatchewan and to take action to get this province to a safe position with respect to the pandemic and then to get the people back to work.

I think the best example of this that's missing from the budget is funding for Prairie Harm Reduction in Saskatoon. You had the evidence. You had the reports. You asked for the evidence. It was given to this government and this government decided to ignore that. It was an ideological decision, not based on evidence, not based on facts — based on politics. And it's disappointing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not be supporting the budget motion and I will be supporting the amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Riversdale.

Mr. Friesen: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I just mention something interesting just about the whole mask talk in the House, when the Leader of the Opposition — and obviously his team doesn't converse — when he takes his own mask off in the COVID ward for a selfie. So I find that interesting.

I'd like to start with some thank yous. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for this time. I should mention something interesting is we write our speeches. We have our speeches just looked at and edited just to make sure that we actually got our wording properly. And it usually has "Mr. Speaker" in it. And so it's a little interesting to make sure that we remember that we have a Madam Deputy Speaker. So I thank you for your role.

I'd like to make some thank yous, starting with my family. My family has been an amazing support throughout my campaign, starting in 2014. This is something that I was approached by a friend of mine in 2014, and he suggested that I should run in Riversdale. And it's been a long journey and my family has been behind it 100 per cent, and for that I thank them.

The colleagues here. A lot of them became very good friends throughout even the first campaign in 2014 to 2016 and more so

in the days going ahead and into this campaign. Coming into this House, it's different. I get asked often, what's it like? And I had expectations that were up here. I believed in the government. I believed in what we do. I believed in our MLAs. And it's been by far exceeded. Colleagues, other MLAs in the House, ministers have been just amazing, open doors all the time, answering questions that us new MLAs may feel are dumb at times. And there's not a dumb question.

The member from Yorkton had kind of told me something in 2016 which was a really good analogy. He said, the lead-up to get nominated . . . Once you got nominated, then you're campaigning for the election. Then you campaign for the election, and then you win. And then what? And he referred it to the dog chasing the bus, and I found that a really good analogy. You chase the bus, chase the bus, chase the bus, and you catch the bus, and now what? And for that again I thank all the members on our side of the House for sure — I guess that's both sides if we're looking at it that way — just for helping through this process because it's been amazing.

Certainly can't go without thanking the Premier. The Premier has taken some time for me personally just to give me some advice and some words of wisdom going along the way in the path that I'm on now. And for that I very much appreciate it and thank you.

I'd like to thank as well the legislative staff. My goodness, I don't know how we would get through a lot of our days without all their background research, all the things that they do for us. One of the things that, I was fortunate to go for dinner . . . One of the first days coming down to Regina in the fall was to have dinner with the Minister of Health currently and the former minister of Health, and just went through a bunch of questions with them that I was not sure about — procedure, that kind of thing. And they were so helpful and went on and on and told me all the things that I should need to know.

And at the end of the discussion . . . I found this quite interesting because I was told, I get that I gave you a lot of information and you're getting information from everywhere. So if you forget everything, remember two things: where's the washroom and ask Karalee. And Karalee has been amazing in the caucus office.

As a first-time MLA and working to this end for six years, I can't begin to describe what an honour it is. I've mentioned in my first reply to the Throne Speech about my parents and how political they were and how interested and how much they worked in different election campaigns. And my parents have both passed, so it's even more personal to me, I guess. So every time I walk up those steps, every time I walk into this building — I don't believe there's a time yet that this hasn't happened — I just am overwhelmed with honour and graciousness to all the people that helped get me here, to the constituents that voted for me, just everybody in the surrounding community with that. So very, very appreciative.

I took on something really interesting in this time when we're busy. One of the goals I had set out to do . . . I lived on an acreage for almost 20 years and when I decided to run, one of my goals was to return to Riversdale as I lived there when . . . I was born in Riversdale and I lived there, bought my first house just outside of Riversdale but just surrounding community, and lived there most of my life. So went on an acreage for a number of years,

and when I decided to move back to the city that's where I wanted to go. Probably looked at 40 or 50 homes. And being a car guy — owned an automotive shop for 28 years — I had to have a place where I could at least build a garage that I could practise my hobby when there's time.

I was fortunate enough in the last number of weeks here, to find a place in the Riversdale constituency, and very proud to say that we're moving back in there. The timing was not wonderful because we only got possession a few days before I had to be in Regina. And so I ended up trying to get my garage and cars and parts and equipment moved. But I left my lovely lady, my fiancée, Robyn, to do the rest. And she was great about it. And my kids, Christopher, he's been helping Robyn move and my daughter Morgan has been right in there, getting in there and doing the same thing, getting it all cleaned up and taking care of Robyn. So as we're not going back, I really appreciate what they're doing and I felt that had to be mentioned.

I mentioned a little bit about the learning curve. The learning curve here is certainly vertical. I ran an automotive business for 25 years and, you know, it's pretty consistent what happens day to day in operations. You get curveballs every once in a while, but you know, you pretty much have an idea of what you're doing because you've been doing it so long. This is something completely different, and I thought I had a pretty good idea of what I was getting into, but I'm learning more and more by the day. And again, I have a lot of people to thank for that.

And I've touched a little bit on the ministries and ministers. I took it upon myself to try and meet some of the ministers in between sessions and just get to know them a little bit. It's been fantastic how the ministries have an open door and they just let us in to have those discussions and get to know them and certainly to rely on when we have concerns in our constituency.

I'm very fortunate to, Madam Deputy Speaker, to have come across my CA [constituency assistant]. Everyone here knows what a CA is, but for the people listening at home and you maybe don't know that, when we start, when we get the job as an MLA, we are to hire a constituency assistant to aid in our work, run the office when we're here in Regina or when we're in meetings or whatever it is, and look after as many of the concerns that we just don't get to right away.

My CA is Terry Bubnick and Terry has been involved politically for many, many years. I've know Terry and considered him a friend before I hired him. Terry actually reached out to me during the election, just before the election actually happened, and said should you win, you know, I'd like that position. And I was again very blessed and very fortunate to have Terry, as he has compassion and he really, really wants to do good in the community. And I'm very, very lucky to have Terry. So thank you, Terry.

In the last six months, it's been interesting. Many, many emails. I've tried to make myself very available for constituents. We've got many emails, calls, texts, lots of virtual meetings, some in person but lots of virtual meetings, and just trying to get involved. It's been very good in the last little while with community association meetings. And I will say that my constituents in Riversdale have deep passion for their beliefs. And I appreciate that and I really respect that. A lot of them have

fantastic ideas. I mean people bring forward to me, and I'm so glad that they reach out to me.

[16:15]

One of the unexpected responses, I guess, was an email that I received. I had spent a fair bit of time with this gentleman at the door when I was campaigning, and he had told me that he is not going to be supporting me; he's not voting for me. And my response to that was, well, I said, does that mean you don't have a voice? I believe that we should listen to everyone. When he sent me an email — he actually sent me a congratulatory email — and then asked if what I talked to him about at the door was real, and if I really wanted to make some changes. And I assured him that absolutely yes.

He did say in the email, "I didn't vote for you, so if you don't email me back or call me I'll understand." I was a little disappointed by that, but I guess I understand. This must've happened in the past, and it's too bad. I have since had several conversations with him and many others, and I'm very happy for that.

I'd like to take a minute as well and thank Dr. Shahab. I know he's been thanked in the House here several times, but I'd like to personally thank him. It's a tireless job; he's basically hit with people that are not happy if he does this or not happy if he does that. And I'm so grateful that we have someone with his experience to take the reins and help us, guide us through this COVID-19.

Also definitely want to make sure I mention the Health ministers, former and current, for their work in this and the amazing job. I think it's just absolutely amazing where we've come in vaccines and delivery and getting them out to the people. At the start it was slow and we've had trouble getting vaccines. But now that we've got them, and we're getting more access, we are ready for this. And it shows, with over 10,000 doses yesterday. Fantastic. So great job to the Health ministers and all their staff.

I'd like to talk a little bit about growing the economy. I found this interesting. It's been mentioned in the House a few times, and it was mentioned — I believe it was yesterday, could be the day before — from the member from Regina Rosemont, suggested that we're doing a poor job with the economy. And yet they suggest that we should have a shutdown or a circuit breaker. So I'm not really sure how those two work together. Yesterday he said he has picked a lane. I'm not sure what lane that is. I'd like to know. We have lost jobs, and any job loss is too many. But our job loss is certainly minimal compared to what a circuit breaker would have done. And as our Premier has said on numerous times, we want those jobs back and we're coming for them.

I hear often the opposition talk about education, this government's education cuts. And I've mentioned this before, but I feel it's worth mentioning again. I think they must be talking about us cutting ribbons, because we love to cut ribbons. We're going to cut ribbons again here soon with a \$189.9 million increase for education. 101 million of that is for 21 ongoing capital projects — 16 new schools and five major renovations.

One of those schools is in my community, in my constituency. I'll tell you a little bit about that school in my constituency. In

1997 the school division started advocating for renovations. They wanted renovations on three of the major schools. This continued year on year. And in 2020 this government has announced that we are going to build a brand new school for three communities and bring three communities together. And I'm very proud of that.

We are continually criticized from members from the opposite side, and yet here is a . . . I just find this interesting that here is a quote from Patrick Maze that I'd like to share. "It's a good news budget for education." And again, "It helps with inflation and helps with enrolment increases. We're looking at it as a positive." And that's the president of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. Since 2008 we have built 57 new schools and 28 major renovations. I'm so happy with that record. I'm proud of that record.

Let's talk a little about highways. I'm sure a lot of us in the House remember what the highways used to be like. I remember as a younger person, I guess, coming from . . . Every time I would come from Alberta, I would know when I was in Saskatchewan. Since 2008 we've spent over 10 billion repairing our highways. That's over 17 000 kilometres of highway. This year we're injecting over 520 million in new money, and I'm proud that we keep moving towards making this better. There's still things to be done, but we recognize that and we're making efforts towards that.

\$4.8 billion we're spending in COVID supports for lives and livelihoods — 2 billion last year and 1.5 billion this budget, 1.3 billion over the next two years. This support has kept many businesses alive. I know keeping the business support programs that we've had have been a major help for a lot of the restaurant industry, a lot of the small businesses. And I know this by talking to them personally. And we want those businesses back. We want them to stay. I certainly want restaurants, my favourite restaurants to be around. I've probably been to or taken out from more restaurants in this last year than I've done in three years. I want our local restaurants to be back.

I'd like to mention something that I don't know was brought up or not, but it's the Sawêyihotân pilot project with the Saskatoon Tribal Council, and I apologize if I said that a little bit wrong. The government is going to provide an additional 350,000 to continue this pilot project. This project with the Saskatoon Tribal Council has operated out of the White Buffalo Youth Lodge, and we were able to find either short-term or long-term housing for more than 75 people already. And that's incredible. Thank you for your project, and I'm glad what you're doing.

We're spending \$2 million to establish up to three provincial locations for a youth-focused initiative that integrates mental health and addictions, physical health, community and social services. This innovative approach will also emphasize community partnerships and youth and family engagement.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know I'm taking a little bit of time here, hopefully not too much, so I'm going to wrap up by thanking our Minister of Finance and all the people that work around her for all the hard work she's done to put together what I think is a great budget. We are able to still support business, support our communities, lives, livelihoods, and actually build towards growing our economy. And I'm very proud to support

this budget today, and I will not be supporting the amendment. Thank you.

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

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. When I was a young man, the only guy with a mask was the Lone Ranger or a bank robber, so things have changed considerably. But even, I'm betting, two years ago, if you walked to a bank with a mask, there would've been action.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the privilege of addressing this budget. The moves we make now will have huge ramifications on the future. Every budget has a great effect on the future, but this year even more so. For that reason, I would like to say a special thank you to our Premier, the member from Rosthern-Shellbrook. It has been under his leadership that our province is doing extremely well.

I see no other province that is doing as well and is already headed for recovery. I would also like to thank my friend, the member from Humboldt-Watrous, our Deputy Leader and Minister of Finance, for the strong budget I'm speaking to. The work done by her and her staff is amazing. To them I say a heartfelt thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank all the members of our caucus who worked on and contributed to this year's budget. Before I get to my budget reply, there are some very important people that I would like to thank. First, I would like to thank my CA, Mary Anne Telfer and her husband, Don, not just for their friendship but for the political wisdom they bring to the floor for me. I thank them very much. Last but not least, I would like to thank my best friend, my partner, my wife, my Valerie. I sometimes wish there was a better word than just thank you. But once again, thank you, my dear.

The budget is the plan for how this government is going to address the economy for this year. It is a plan to keep our economy going as we struggle through this pandemic and how we intend to rebuild and grow Saskatchewan's economy. The economy is what everything is based on. And I mean everything: wages, prices, margins, our resources, education, health care, etc. It's all tied to the economy. When we have a weak economy, everything suffers.

I would like to offer some historical evidence to prove my point about the economy. The event took place in Suffolk, England in 1939, and is documented in the book *The Dig* by John Preston. There were some very large mounds of dirt thought to be Viking burial sites. When they were finally excavated in 1939 it was discovered they were not Viking sites. They were Anglo-Saxon sites, burial sites from the 6th century AD.

There were a lot of amazing finds, ancient artifacts, but the most interesting was solid gold coinage. The head archaeologist said this was very amazing because this proves they had an economy, which means, he said, they had a civilization. The archaeologist who had studied civilization stated that when people have formed a civilization, part of becoming civilized is you have to build an economy. You do not have a civilization without an economy. Let me repeat that. You do not have a civilization without an economy.

So what was and is the economy of Saskatchewan built on? The answer is, of course, agriculture. Agriculture is our history, agriculture is our foundation, and agriculture is our future. Madam Deputy Speaker, I have stated it before and I will state it many times in the future: Saskatchewan has up to 47 per cent of all of Canada's cropland. This is what we are.

And it has been said many times in the past, we are Canada's breadbasket. We feed the world. We not only have a lot of grain; we also have the best grain in the world. We are also the home of canola. It was born here and it is now king here. It was at some meeting I attended down in the United States where the speaker was the CEO of The Quaker Oats Company. He stated that of all the oats Quaker Oats processes into numerous products, 80 per cent — 80 per cent — of that oats comes from Saskatchewan. Imagine that.

And I would like to share with you another true story, a true Saskatchewan story. It's a story of Belle Pulses pea plant at St. Isidore-de-Bellevue in the Batoche constituency. This story was related to me by Francis Gaudet, who's the boss and head of Belle Pulses pea plant. His father was determined to grow the best peas in the world. In the process of securing the best seed, he contacted a company in France. He asked them to ship him a bag of seed, the very best seed they could get, the best seed in the world. They assured him they would send him the best. When the bag of seed shipped from France arrived — the best pea seed in the world, Madam Deputy Speaker — the label on the bag said, produced by Belle Pulses, Isidore-de-Bellevue, Saskatchewan, Canada.

[16:30]

Once again, Madam Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan is the best in the world. Madam Speaker, hats off to the people of Belle Pulses. Once again, a piece of the puzzle that builds our economy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it doesn't stop there. We have livestock numbers second only to our sister province, Alberta. We also have pork, chicken, lamb, and the list goes on. If it can be grown in Saskatchewan, we grow it, and we grow it in a big way. Agriculture was indeed a hard, hard life in the early years.

I would like to read a quote from W.P. Davidson in 1927, and I state:

I have seen these freeborn men and women of the prairies work harder and more incessantly than men can be driven in a penal colony. I have seen their lanterns glimmer around the barn before daylight and after it. I have seen their season's effort withered by drought, have heard the machine-gun rattle of the hail, and felt the keen chill of the frost at the very threshold of harvest. I have seen the lights go out of these growers' eyes as their hopes failed.

This is a statement of the men and women who built this province. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude. Let us not forget our heritage. It was the men and women of agriculture. In fact agriculture is the major occupation of most of the residents of my constituency of Batoche, and I am very, very proud of that heritage.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I now ask: where does our opposition stand on agriculture? They say they are with agriculture. If so, I am wondering how many of them on the opposition side have ever farmed? I don't mean visiting grandpa's farm, or even raised on a farm. I mean, how many have actually lived on a farm and made their livelihood there? How many have lived through a drought or watched their crop beaten flat by hail? Or saw a newborn calf that was destroyed by predators?

Madam Speaker, I know that many of our members on this side of the House have lived through and felt that sickening pain. Madam Speaker, I remember when the former leader of the opposition Mr. John Nilson was speaking against the Saskatchewan Party budget. The press interviewed him and one reporter asked him, if he were the government, where would he have gotten the money to pay for his solutions to the budget? Mr. Speaker, he sadly said, I would take it from agriculture. Take it from agriculture, the foundation of our province. With that attitude, no wonder we were the wee province.

There is a word I've been using and will continue to use in this speech, and that word is economy. Webster's dictionary defines economy as the efficient use of our materials. I hear people say, we need more government services. Yet in the same breath they say, we need lower taxes. How can that work? Your government pays the bills with money they receive through taxes. You can't have both. We do not want to build a debt that our grandchildren are having to pay.

Madam Speaker, I'm very proud of the accomplishments of our government. There are many hurdles we as government have had to overcome, and the one I would like to highlight is equalization. From 1957, the start of equalization, and the chart goes to 2018, the numbers I have on equalization are as follows: British Columbia received 3 billion; Alberta, 92 million; Saskatchewan, 8 billion; Manitoba, 50 billion; Ontario, 19 billion; Quebec, 221 billion; Newfoundland, 25 billion; Prince Edward Island, 10 billion; New Brunswick, 46 billion; and Nova Scotia, 47 billion. These are the monies paid to the provinces by the federal government to equalize the wealth or the lack thereof.

So now let's break this down a little farther. Let's look at the years that the Saskatchewan Party is in power, from 2007 to 2018. Quebec is still the top of the list at 99.624 billion; Saskatchewan, zero. Zero. Madam Speaker, I can still clearly remember when I and my colleagues sat in opposition, and the then premier of this province Lorne Calvert stood in this House and called us the wee province and said that we will always be in and out of equalization. As you can clearly see, our province under this government has proudly stood on our own two feet, and we haven't received a penny of equalization.

This province has a great future, and I would like to list just a few, a few of Saskatchewan's attributes. We have, as I have stated, up to 47 per cent of Canada's crop land. We are the canola king of the world, and thanks to Mr. Wilf Chamney of Humboldt, we are now the mustard king of the world. We have over 30 per cent of the world's uranium.

Canada's only synchrotron is right here in Saskatchewan. The synchrotron manufactures medical isotopes, and they are manufacturing it out of Saskatchewan uranium. These isotopes are used for MRIs [magnetic resonance imaging], CT

[computerized tomography] scans, and X-rays.

We also have oil second only to Alberta. We are the leader in the world with clean coal technology. We have over 50 per cent of the world's potash, the main ingredient of fertilizer. When totalling Saskatchewan's highways, grid roads, and municipal roads, it would equal the same distance as four times around the equator.

We have more than 100,000 freshwater lakes. We have, here in Regina, Wascana Park, the largest urban park in the world. It's even larger than Central Park, New York city. Of course, if you meet a New Yorker, they might argue that point with you.

We have in my constituency the Batoche national historic site. It is the home of the annual Back to Batoche Days. This is a gathering of the Métis Nation from all across Canada, and it is a huge celebration. Another interesting fact in Batoche constituency: we have the point where the two Saskatchewan Rivers meet. It is a beautiful site, and you can walk down a neat switchback to get down to the rivers. And I would love to see a huge park there someday.

Now for sports fans, per capita, per capita, Saskatchewan has more NHL [National Hockey League] players than any other province in Canada. So you may ask, with all that potential, why were we the wee province?

A well-known fact is that Saskatchewan and Alberta are known as the sister provinces because they were born the same time. At that time Saskatchewan had more people than Alberta, and that's a fact. We had the larger population. But what happened? What happened was Alberta moved to a right wing government, and Saskatchewan went left. The result is now Alberta has a population of over 4 million, and Saskatchewan has finally, under the Saskatchewan Party government, broken the million barrier. Saskatchewan is now headed, now headed to be a major player in Canada's economy.

This budget also marks a milestone. The milestone is the completion of all our election promises from tax credits to reducing small-business tax, reducing ambulance costs, once again, once again, increasing seniors' benefits, hiring more care aids, to increased support for the deaf and the deaf-blind. Considering COVID, this is truly amazing. The former NDP government election promises weren't addressed in their first two years, without a pandemic. In fact the question is, some of them, were they ever addressed?

Madam Speaker, all governments around the world are going into debt to combat the effects of COVID on the economy. The factor to consider in Canada is not only the debt but how each province will be able to pay off that debt. In other words, what is the ratio between debt and the GDP, gross domestic product? In short, can we produce sufficient quantities of product to pay off that debt in a reasonable amount of time? The answer to that question is, we are the best suited in all of Canada to be able to pay off that debt. So once again, everything depends on the economy.

Madam Speaker, it is said that tax is a necessary evil. What about low-income people? We don't have a say in federal tax, but we do control provincial tax. Up until we became government, a family of four were allowed to keep their first 26,000 tax-free.

Our government has been moving that up and up, and now a family of four pays no provincial income tax on their first 52,250. Now that is truly amazing: 52,250. Isn't that amazing? Yes. That's real cash in their pocket. That's a true saving. This has taken 112,000 families off of the tax roll.

Consider where we started when we became government. The challenges were as follows: under the NDP, the self-proclaimed father — or mother — of health care, we had the longest surgical wait times in all of Canada; we were losing doctors and nurses by the hundreds; we had the worst job-creation record in all of Canada; taxes in our province had been raised 21 times in 16 years.

The people of Saskatchewan responded and changed the government. Now Saskatchewan has started to boom and is becoming a force to be reckoned with. Saskatchewan is no longer the wee province. When you give this budget a close look, you will see that it is the best budget possible under these conditions. In fact it's an amazing budget.

Madam Deputy Speaker, while on the subject of budget and taxes, I would like to make the connection of companies setting up shop in our province. Before they make a decision they look at a lot of factors. They look at the availability of product and how to get that product to market. They look at the availability of a workforce, and they look at taxes and government services. When a company looks at Saskatchewan, they also look at the surrounding provinces and states. They look at Alberta, Manitoba, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, and beyond. If a state or province has too high a tax structure and services, they're off the list. That is the way business is conducted.

The NDP's solution to financing more projects is to tax the companies higher. Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, it doesn't work that way. Companies are not loyal to any country, state, or province. They are loyal to their shareholders. If the company doesn't see a responsible government, they move on. In fact if an established company sees brighter opportunities at another location, they consider moving on also. That is what will kill the economy, take the products, take their taxes, leaving the workers with no jobs. There has to be a balance. Our province needs the taxes and needs the jobs. This is how we grow our province.

A company just recently announced that they're setting up in Saskatchewan to produce lithium, which is a key ingredient in the production of new-age batteries. Lithium is a by-product of the oil field. The company looks at their list that I mentioned before, and Saskatchewan won. We won the company. We won the workers for that company, and we won the taxes. Madam Deputy Speaker, the company estimates that within two years they will be one of the world leaders in the production of lithium. That is a huge, huge win for Saskatchewan.

[16:45]

My comments shall now go to our present situation and a word we didn't have in our vocabulary a year and a half ago. That word is of course COVID. I am truly amazed by the number of people who still don't think it is real, so many naysayers that find some obscure statement on the internet and take it as fact. I am sure we could all tell stories of the emails, texts, and phone calls we have

received.

We have been hit hard by COVID, as well as the rest of Canada, but the strength of the Saskatchewan spirit, first showed by our ancestors, is shining through. Our government is working tirelessly to help in many ways. We do not have a road map through COVID. We are sometimes running in the dark, but we can see the light at the end of the COVID tunnel. Let's stay strong. Let's stick it to COVID. Get vaccinated.

Our government and our budget reflect our commitment to the future of this province. May God bless the people of the beautiful constituency of Batoche, and may God bless the people of our beloved Saskatchewan. For all the above reasons and many more, I will not be supporting the amendment, and I will wholeheartedly be supporting the budget. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

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

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Madam Speaker, I know I'm going to make this error more than once so I'm going to apologize now for calling you Mr. Speaker, but I will make every effort.

I'm pleased to be here today to speak in support of our government's budget. This budget is right for Saskatchewan. It reflects the times we are living in. COVID-19 has been difficult for all of us, but we are looking to the brighter days ahead and planning for the brighter days ahead. This budget provides support and protection to Saskatchewan people by investing in priority programming that Saskatchewan residents are counting on right now today. And this budget also gives people hope — which can be often in short supply — with investments in building infrastructure and fostering growth for the future.

Madam Speaker, our government has led this province through a challenging, challenging time, and Saskatchewan people have showed amazing resilience and strength, albeit I'm really not that surprised. Although I know we are not through this yet, we can now be cautiously optimistic about our future.

Saskatchewan has one of the lowest unemployment rates in all of the provinces in Canada. Our government continues to have one of the lowest net debt-to-GDP ratios in the country, while providing \$1.5 billion in this budget to support the fight against COVID-19. Ninety million is being invested for testing equipment, personal protective equipment, and to fund operating costs to address the pandemic in the health sector. An additional 20.7 million will be used to support the safe return to classrooms for students, teachers. And 6.8 million is being provided for the northern isolation support program to help individuals in remote areas of our province to isolate safely if they ask for it or if they want it.

Mr. Speaker, our government has responded to each and every sector that is suffering from COVID-19, and provided them with many and varied supports. To help recover our economy, we are also investing 488.1 million in much needed infrastructure into our province. This budget protects Saskatchewan people, builds Saskatchewan's economy, and will allow us to grow as we come out of the pandemic.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to tell you about the many budget initiatives in the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. But before I continue, I have some people I must thank — of course my family, my constituency volunteers and supporters. And I would indeed be remiss if I didn't mention at this juncture an individual, a supporter . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No. The member from Yorkton thought I was going to mention him.

But on a much sadder note, a stalwart supporter of mine, of the government, of the party, an individual by the name of Jason Duke, who sadly last week lost his life to pancreatic cancer. It is indeed a sad story, but I'm telling you there's no one, there was no one like Jason Duke. Always a smile, always enthusiastic about this province and enthusiastic about the government. Rest in peace, Jason.

My constituency staff, Jackie and Kirsten; ministerial staff Shelley, Brayden, Drew, and Aaron.

I will now expand on how the proposed budget impacts our ministry, my ministry. Madam Speaker, our government is investing \$530 million into Corrections, Policing and Public Safety, an increase of \$23 million. This investment maintains our dedication to public safety and, like all other areas of government, addresses the challenges of COVID-19.

Public safety, of course, includes protecting our correctional system, the inmates housed in them, and of course our front-line staff. I also must make a comment at this juncture with respect to the front-line correctional staff. They have, the ministry officials and the front-line staff in our correctional centres throughout the province, have done yeoman's service. They have protected the institution as best they can and have continued to show up to work each and every day given the situation that they were facing a number of times throughout the course of COVID-19. I do want to say thank you to all of them for their hard work, their dedication to public safety in the province of Saskatchewan.

This budget invests \$76 million to support safety and programming improvements in our correctional centres. This includes much-needed capital investment to improve safety and security in our correctional system. This spring we will break ground on a new 432-bed remand centre in Saskatoon. This new facility will add 20 per cent additional capacity to a system that has been and continues to be overcrowded.

Many governments in the past in the province have faced these issues. This is a continuing issue and challenge for all governments currently across Canada — providing safer living conditions for offenders, safer working conditions for staff, and allow for more recidivism program delivery. As a part of building this remand centre in Saskatoon, there will be numerous construction jobs during the construction phase and long-term corrections jobs within the facility itself. Outside of the Saskatchewan Hospital in North Battleford, this is the largest investment into our correctional system in over a generation and will create lasting impacts on our correctional system itself.

Inmate overcrowding, as I said earlier, has been a long-standing issue, one that predates our government. While we have taken significant steps, including adding over 500 beds since 2007, major security enhancements, more needed to be done to address

this issue moving forward. We will never be finished addressing the needs of our system, our institutions in the province.

Our government will continue to make investments into areas to help divert individuals from the correctional system, such as continued record investment into mental health and addictions care. These two goals are not mutually exclusive. We need to recognize that the longstanding issue around high inmate counts requires continued investment before individuals enter the system, when they enter it, and when they leave it. We look forward to continuing to work with our partners in our communities, our stakeholders on these goals to help make Saskatchewan a safer place for all.

Our government has taken a number of measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our correctional facilities. While we have seen outbreaks at some of our facilities, they have been less severe than seen or witnessed in other provinces or in the federal correctional system. Our front-line correctional staff, and I know I've mentioned them before, have performed an amazing job — and I think it bears repeating — at keeping the inmates themselves and the public safe from the impacts of the virus in the correctional system.

The measures we have put in place to help combat COVID-19 include mandatory masking, isolating inmates upon admission, frequent cleaning and practising of hand hygiene, and limiting visitations to our institutions. These are very close to being the measures that have been taken by other provinces such as British Columbia. We have also added 88 additional beds to allow for greater inmate management during the course of COVID-19 and are providing \$3 million in this budget to operate these facilities and provide additional cleaning services and supplies to our correctional centres. This ensures that we are following recommended COVID-19 procedures and continue to do our very best to keep the staff and the offenders safe.

On the policing side, we continue to invest in protecting the public by funding programming that helps keep people safe. I'm happy to announce that we are making a \$110,000 investment into the police and crisis team program in this budget. This investment will fund a PACT [police and crisis team] unit in Estevan, Weyburn, and surrounding rural area. This unit will be the first dedicated to assisting the rural areas surrounding these two communities.

We know that police calls involving individuals suffering from a mental health crisis are not limited to only urban Saskatchewan. These teams are making a difference, a significant difference, in the communities in which they serve, including getting these individuals to appropriate care and diverting them from emergency rooms or jails, as the case may be. This investment in the expansion of the PACT program allows for more supports to those dealing with mental health issues, and our government looks forward to the continued work on this file as we go forward.

Another initiative that I'm very proud to speak on is our government's \$243,000 investment into Saskatchewan's internet child exploitation unit. The Saskatchewan ICE [internet child exploitation] unit does critical work in investigating internet crimes against our most vulnerable citizens, our children. It is unfortunate that the caseload within the ICE unit continues to

increase. It's a sad commentary on what we're dealing with. But this investment will assist in addressing this additional workload.

Last spring our government announced our intention to appoint our own Chief Firearms Officer, something that had previously been done by the federal government. This was and is to allow Saskatchewan citizens a greater voice in how firearms legislation is administered in our province. Our government is following through with a \$2.175 million investment into our new Chief Firearms Officer program. In the last few years, firearms rules and regulations have become increasingly more important to Saskatchewan citizens, especially firearms owners. The federal government has announced several bills.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 17:00.]

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