



FIRST SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

of the

## **Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

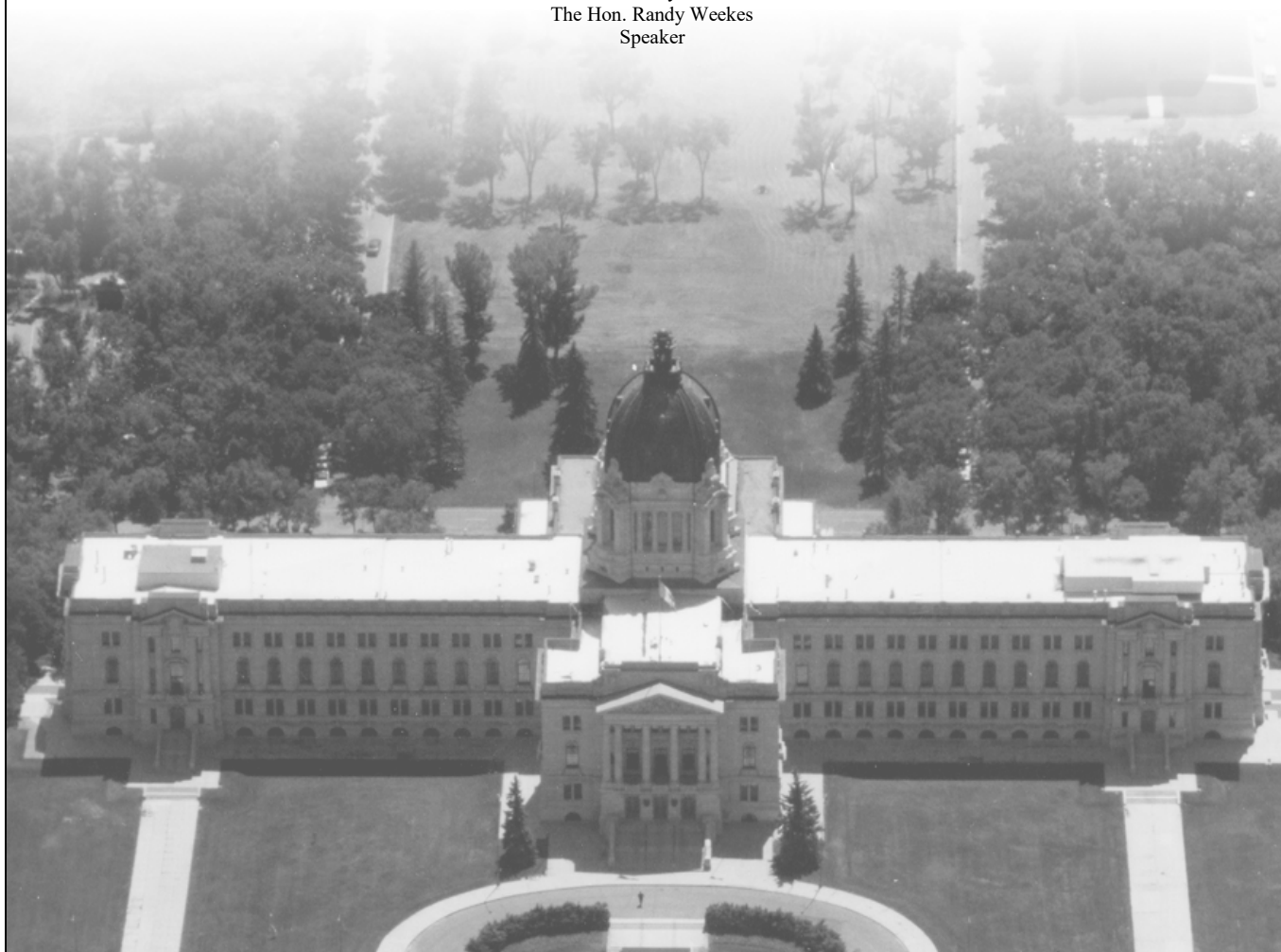
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# **DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS**

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(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.

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**Premier** — Hon. Scott Moe  
**Leader of the Opposition** — Ryan Meili

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**Wyant**, Hon. Gordon — Saskatoon Northwest (SP)  
**Young**, Aleana — Regina University (NDP)  
**Young**, Colleen — Lloydminster (SP)

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

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

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[The Assembly met at 10:00.]

[Prayers]

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition on the people of Saskatchewan calling for pay equity legislation.

We, the undersigned residents of the province, wish to bring to your attention the following: Saskatchewan is one of only four provinces that does not have pay equity legislation. Saskatchewan has one of the highest gender wage gaps in Canada, which is the result of systemic gender discrimination in compensation for work, that must be corrected with pay equity legislation.

The Human Rights Commission has recommended proactive and comprehensive pay equity legislation which has not been pursued by the Government of Saskatchewan. While *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code* prohibits gender-based compensation discrimination, the complaint-driven process puts no positive obligations on employers. And also, pay equity primarily seeks to address gender-based wage discrimination; it must also be mindful of ability-, age-, identity-, and race-based wage discrimination.

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

Signed on behalf of the residents of Regina. I present to you.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Regina Northeast.

**Mr. Grewal:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nav Canada is currently reviewing the air traffic control tower at the Regina airport. Though it is a private company, the federal government has three elected members on the board of directors, and the Minister of Transport will have 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 wider role in the economic recovery of the province.

I will 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 citizens of Regina.

## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

### Recognizing Health Care Workers

**Ms. Mowat:** — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize two health care heroes who've been working on the front lines in the fight against COVID-19. Deidre Wilson is a home care worker in Moose Jaw and a full-time continuing care assistant with the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority]. She deals with a lot of unknowns every day. She has no way of knowing whether anyone has been in her client's home since her last visit or if her client has been exposed to COVID-19 out in the community. She does medication assists, applies eye drops, full personal care and grooming, bathing, and assists clients with mobility. She knows that her clients need hands-on care to maintain their quality of life and she works hard to make this happen.

Dawn Russell is a security officer at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon and has worked there for 26 years. Dawn was working on the first day of the lockdown at St. Paul's. At first only staff were allowed in and Dawn's team had to monitor the entrance to enforce this, all without PPE [personal protective equipment], as officers had not yet been fitted for N95s. Dawn had to persevere knowing the risks of doing so. During this lockdown Dawn had several difficult interactions with family members who had loved ones in palliative care that she had to turn away. This was devastating for the family members and emotionally trying for her as well.

I ask all members to join me in recognizing Deidre and Dawn and the thousands of other health care workers who are working hard to keep us all safe in the fight against COVID-19. Thank you.

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

### Saturday Sitting of the Legislative Assembly

**Ms. Wilson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been many historic moments shared within in this Assembly, from record investments to unforgettable debates. It's hard to fathom just how much history has been made right here on this floor. And today we add to the history of our legislature in a more subtle but important way.

Mr. Speaker, today is the first time this House has sat on a Saturday since 1991. In fact between 1906 and 1991 the House has only sat on a Saturday 46 times. But we are here today to continue our work to pass a budget that will protect, build, and grow our province.

Now our jobs in this Chamber don't equate to the challenges facing our front-line health care workers today. They aren't the same as a teacher figuring out an online classroom or a police officer on patrol any day of the week. But the work in this Chamber ensures quite literally, through the budget, the resources to do their jobs. I don't agree with the opposition members on much, but the work in this Chamber through both sides gives the people the confidence their tax dollars are being

well used on their behalf.

So in a world with far too much cynicism and brutality to its politics, I want to say thank you. Thank you to all members for making this most unusual sitting of the legislature work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### **Tax on Electric Vehicles**

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this government is making life more expensive for Saskatchewan families and they're making it more and more difficult to reduce our emissions.

In this week's budget, the Sask Party brought in a new tax on electric vehicles of \$150. This spite-filled new tax on going green will only bring in \$60,000, a paltry sum that clearly lays bare the vindictiveness and insincerity of this government. It is hypocritical for the Sask Party to apply a tax on electric vehicles when it has done so little to encourage their uptake in the first place. What's next? A tax on bicycles and walking?

This government continues to deny the economic and climate reality by continuing to throw down obstacles in the way of Saskatchewan families who want to plan and take action for the future.

Mr. Speaker, the minister has suggested that this tax is visionary and justified. Well their vision reflects a dangerous and reckless future, not the kind of future the Saskatchewan people deserve. The Sask Party has chosen a punitive tax and punished those leaders in our province who are inspiring us and showing us the way forward. Those people are putting their money where their mouth is and making responsible choices, unlike the Sask Party government.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in calling on this government to strike down this spiteful tax and commit to supporting families investing in electric vehicles to reduce our emissions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### **Saskatchewan Distillery Completes Major Expansion**

**Mr. Grewal:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Founded in 2017 by Mr. Manjit Minhas from Calgary, Alberta, Minhas Sask is the largest distillery, winery, and brewery in the history of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, this state-of-the-art facility produces whiskey, vodka, rum, gin, ready-to-drink cocktails, moonshines, cream liqueurs, cordials, wines, craft beers, and more.

Their goal is to reverse the flow of alcoholic imports into the province of Saskatchewan from other provinces and countries. Minhas has started achieving this aim with a very large expansion project on October 1st, 2020, and is scheduled to finish next week on April 15th, 2021. This expansion project, with a budget of 5 million, will add 30,000 square feet to their distillery and increase production by almost seven times the current level.

Mr. Speaker, Minhas's commitment extends to using as many local Saskatchewan ingredients in their products as possible, including Saskatchewan-grown barley malted in Biggar, Saskatchewan; berries from Saskatoon; and honey from Shellbrook produced in Saskatchewan. And they have all their products being blended, produced, and bottled in Saskatchewan. This commitment helps the local economy sustain increased growth.

Mr. Speaker, I now invite all members to join me in congratulating Minhas on their upcoming expansion, and to thank them for investing in our province and their dedication to keep Saskatchewan strong. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

### **Telemiracle Celebrates 45th Year**

**Mr. Docherty:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to remind everyone across Saskatchewan about a very important event that happened in February — Telemiracle. This year Telemiracle celebrated its 45th year with a 20-hour telethon on February 27 and 28 that helped raise over \$5.6 million. This year's slogan was Telemiracle, Together We Are Family. As always, Mr. Speaker, all proceeds go towards the Kinsmen Foundation for specialized medical mobility assistance and medical travel.

Since 1977 talented artists, dancers, volunteers, and supporters have been showing up and helping ring those phones to help those in need, like young Adam, a young 8-year-old who happened to have his birthday during Telemiracle this year. Thanks to donations made to Telemiracle in the past, Adam was able to have a wheelchair conversion to the family van. The family was gifted just shy of \$24,000 for the conversion. The converted van has dramatically improved their lives.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage everyone in this Assembly to reach out to and thank those who helped during this annual fundraiser. I'd also like to thank the members on both sides who helped answer phones during the telethon previous.

Mr. Speaker, I now ask all members to join me in congratulating Kinsmen Foundation on another successful year and many to come.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Yorkton.

### **Yorkton Canola Crush Facility Expands Processing Capacity**

**Mr. Ottenbreit:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've said it many times in this House, Saskatchewan has what the world needs: food, fuel, fertilizer that our global market depends on. And that's why we are seeing continual investment in our agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, Richardson International will be doubling the annual crush capacity at the Yorkton facility. This project will be completed in early 2024 allowing the facility to crush an incredible 2.2 million tonnes of seed annually, making it the largest canola crush facility in Canada. Construction will begin

immediately with no disruption to the current operations.

Mr. Speaker, this will not only help us meet the global demand, but it will create great jobs and support our economic recovery. Expanding the processing capacity will also help Saskatchewan meet the goals outlined in our growth plan, including a target to crush 75 per cent of the canola in our province here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the expansion project will also feature three 3-kilometre loop tracks to facilitate shipping, as well as three high-speed receiving lanes for seed delivery. This expansion is a testament to the quality product and work ethic we have right here in Saskatchewan, and Richardson International has made the right choice to invest here.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in congratulating the Richardson International group on its expansion project. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Cypress Hills.

### **Boundary Dam Reaches Carbon Capture Milestone**

**Mr. Steele:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I proudly stand today to highlight a very significant milestone from the SaskPower Boundary dam station. Mr. Speaker, as of March 30th, the carbon capture and storage facility has now captured more than 4 million tonnes of carbon dioxide since operation began in 2004. This represents greenhouse gases emissions reductions equivalent to taking 1 million passenger cars off the road for one year. In fact the facility had its second-best year in 2020 to date with 729 000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> captured. That means that SaskPower is well on its way to meeting its goals to further reduce carbon emissions more than 40 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.

Mr. Speaker, our government remains committed to diversifying our energy sector and creating jobs by taking full advantage of opportunities and innovation such as our carbon capture facility. And it is a shame, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition fails to have the vision for our resource sector as they would walk away from the technology and cut thousands of jobs in the process. Regardless of the noise that we hear, we will continue to work towards targets such as in our government's growth plan and will continue to invest in innovative energy technology.

I now ask the members to join me in congratulating the carbon capture and storage facility on reaching this exceptional milestone. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[10:15]

### **QUESTION PERIOD**

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

### **Government Response to COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Mr. Meili:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a week, Mr. Speaker, a week of broken promises from this Premier. Promises like balancing the budget by 2024, which he knew he wasn't going to be able to do, but he promised people anyway. Promises like no cuts, when instead we see \$4 million less in our classroom

at a time when those dollars are more needed than ever, Mr. Speaker. Broken promises on hiking taxes when instead property taxes have risen for residents. And broken promises on investing in seniors fall far short.

But there's one broken promise we haven't talked about yet, Mr. Speaker. The Premier promised, despite seeing the modelling, despite knowing full well a second wave of COVID-19 was on its way, he promised no more lockdowns. Well how did that work out, Mr. Speaker? How did that work out?

Instead of taking quick, decisive action when it could do the most good, he waited. He waited until the situation was totally out of control. Now we've been stuck in his interminable slow-motion lockdown for months — November, December, January, February, March, April. No end in sight, businesses struggling, people out of work, and COVID-19 still not under control, Mr. Speaker. So much for no more lockdowns.

Now to the Premier: the broken promises are clear for all of us to see. The least he can do is say he's sorry. The question is whether he should apologize for breaking the promises or for making those false promises in the first place.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Premier.

**Hon. Mr. Moe:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A number of questions in the preamble to that question, Mr. Speaker. And we're very proud to come here to this Legislative Assembly and introduce a budget this week. The Minister of Finance introduced a budget that most certainly is going to protect families in this province, build communities in this province, and provide this province the opportunity to grow into the future.

Mr. Speaker, throughout this pandemic we have worked very hard with our chief medical health officer as well as others in the public health community and talked to folks across the province on, you know, what measures do we need to have in place in communities across Saskatchewan to ensure that we are keeping people safe, and ultimately how do we balance those measures with the personal freedoms and with the fact that we do want businesses and people to have the opportunity to go to work and our kids, the opportunity to go to school.

Mr. Speaker, I know we've had some larger numbers yesterday. I'm hearing unofficially that they're down significantly here today. However our vaccines, I'm hearing as well, are up significantly here today, Mr. Speaker, and I would again remind the people of the province that the path through this pandemic is through one of our vaccination clinics. And I would point out a tweet from Dr. Masri just yesterday, I believe, and I would quote, Mr. Speaker, of the importance of getting vaccinated. And it goes like this:

There has been zero cases of death or severe disease reported in Canada in those who are fully vaccinated. Zero. AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson — they all save lives. Let's get our jab on.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with Dr. Masri. Let's stick it to COVID. Let's all go out and get vaccinated when we can.

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

**Mr. Meili:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's some selective agreement with doctors from the Premier, including Dr. Masri, who had suggested and proposed that we change our vaccine strategy, make sure we get those vaccines to folks on the front lines, something this Premier has still refused to do, Mr. Speaker.

But here's the problem. Here's the problem, Mr. Speaker. This Premier is desperate to downplay what's happening with COVID-19 in Saskatchewan. We saw him do it again. We saw the Health minister under-represent the number of ICU [intensive care unit] admissions from COVID in March in a recent press conference, Mr. Speaker.

And I get it. I get why they want to do that. We all would love to go back to the way things were. We'd love to go back to where we weren't seeing multiple deaths per day, when our COVID numbers weren't among the worst in the country, Mr. Speaker. I would love to see our job numbers rising instead of having the worst job records in the country. We would all love that, Mr. Speaker.

But we can't get there by pretending. We can't get there by downplaying what's going on. The first step to recovery is admitting you have a problem. Admit you have a problem and make a real plan to address it, Mr. Speaker. Fourteen people have died this past week and the case numbers keep climbing. It's not going well. Will the Premier acknowledge the vaccines, as important as they are, are only a part of the answer, Mr. Speaker? And will he tell us what the plan is to get the third wave under control?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for the question. He is right. We want to be able to get back to where we were, Mr. Speaker. But the path to be able to get there, Mr. Speaker, is through the vaccine clinics, as the Premier has identified, as I've identified, as Dr. Shahab has identified, and experts across the country have identified.

Mr. Speaker, we have restrictions in place. We have had restrictions in place — the toughest restrictions that this province has ever seen. We've increased those restrictions when we needed to, Mr. Speaker. Right around Regina when we saw the variants of concern coming in and around this city, we increased it. We recommended to not travel in and out of the city, Mr. Speaker, which was a very tough decision to make. We also made the decision about restaurants and take-out, which we knew was going to have a challenge and put people and restaurant owners in a very difficult decision.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to be able to work with Dr. Shahab and his team to be able to find that balance of restrictions that will protect people's livelihoods, will protect their mental health, Mr. Speaker, but also being able to be allowed to get out when they can, to get outside and visit with their family members, Mr. Speaker. But at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, those are the temporary measures that we have in place until everybody in this province can get vaccinated. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Meili:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the path out of this is through vaccines, but because of this government's inaction, for too many people the path out has been through an ambulance or worse.

Mr. Speaker, front-line health care workers in this province are long past their breaking point. And I want to share a quote with you from Saskatchewan's chief medical officer, Dr. Susan Shaw. It was in the *StarPhoenix* today and she said, and I quote:

We're having to support young children who need to come into the intensive care unit to say goodbye to their parents. We're seeing parents that have to come into the ICU to say goodbye to their children. And we're seeing people lose more of their life ahead, and that's something that hits us all hard.

There are far too many of these heartbreaking stories, Mr. Speaker, and they were avoidable. This week over 300 doctors signed a letter calling for action from this Premier, pleading on behalf of their patients for this government to show some adaptability and include making sure that their vaccines were getting to the right people in order to stem the growing numbers of people who are sick. They've been joined with similar calls from the Saskatchewan Medical Association, the Canadian Medical Association, and the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses.

To the Premier: every day is an opportunity to change our ways, to make things better, Mr. Speaker. Will he learn the lesson of his failure from the fall and finally listen to doctors this time? Or will he stick his head in the sand once again and only act once it's far too late?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thanks, Mr. Speaker, and I want to first of all thank Dr. Susan Shaw for all the work that she's been doing in advising us up in Saskatoon and advising me personally, Mr. Speaker.

Also the doctors that penned that letter, Mr. Speaker, we understand their concerns. That's why we have been rolling out the best vaccination program in this country, Mr. Speaker. We have been able to get more people vaccinated faster than any other province in this country, Mr. Speaker.

And we've been able to do that because of our age-based sequencing, but also our mobile clinics, Mr. Speaker, that have gone around and targeted very specific groups, Mr. Speaker, such as the long-term care staff. These are people that are working with our long-term care. Personal care homes, Mr. Speaker. The medically fragile. Nurses, doctors, group homes, health care workers that are on the front line of COVID, pharmacists. The far North, Mr. Speaker, we targeted that first. We went up to the North and targeted it to make sure everybody over the age of 50 had an access to Moderna vaccine right away, Mr. Speaker.

We've also targeted people that are vaccinators, Mr. Speaker, not just in our age sequencing, but the vaccinators, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition should know that because he was one of those vaccinators that got done outside the age sequencing.



Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Meili:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been proud to be part of those vaccine teams, delivering vaccine in long-term care homes, the Lighthouse, Merlis Belsher, and will be delivering them here in Regina as well. And I think it's great to see the efforts put forth by our health care workers who are doing exactly that.

The reality though is the minister and the Premier say they've heard the doctors' message, but they're not showing that. Because the doctors' message and the medical health officer's letter showed that vaccines are not the whole story. It's not enough. It's part of the answer, but it's not everything, Mr. Speaker. And front-line workers are putting themselves in harm's way every day with a vaccine rollout that isn't properly targeted either. Not only are they at great risk to their own personal health, but they are in danger of passing it on to their loved ones and increasing the spread of the virus in our communities.

So when will the Premier recognize the reality we're in? That the story he's telling doesn't match with what people are facing on the front lines? What will he tell the people at greatest risk? When will teachers, police officers, the over a third of health care workers who still haven't got their first dose, when will they be getting their vaccine, Mr. Premier?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I'm pleased to inform the House, again the preliminary numbers, that we had over 1 per cent of our population, over 12,000 people were vaccinated here in Saskatchewan just two days ago, Mr. Speaker. This is not even counting that we've cranked up the drive-throughs in Regina. These numbers haven't even come through yet, Mr. Speaker. We are leading the country. And when we compare ourselves, Saskatchewan, to around the world, we are in the top 10 areas, jurisdictions in the world delivering vaccines the fastest.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that the teachers and the police officers and those other associations are very important, Mr. Speaker. But we want to make sure that we get everybody vaccinated as fast as we possibly can. Mr. Speaker, as it's been done and outlined by Dr. Shahab, the 50- to 59-year-olds are going to be able to book appointments next week, Mr. Speaker; a week after that, the 40- to 49-year-olds; the 30- to 39-year-olds on May 10th, Mr. Speaker.

These are the people that we are vaccinating, Mr. Speaker, because we've seen the highest attack rate in the people that are seniors. Plus we've been also targeting other areas like shelters, also personal care homes, long-term care facilities, Mr. Speaker. We are getting it across the board, and we're making sure that everybody can stick it to COVID. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

## COVID-19 Vaccination Strategy

**Ms. Mowat:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Health for keeping his mask on. But I will also say that that question was for the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, this Health minister and Premier can't get their messages straight. We've gotten used to the Health minister making things up on the fly and getting called out for it, but this week we got to see the Health minister put the Premier in his place for the vaccine rollout. We are in a new phase, the third wave of the pandemic, and this government's mixed messages on the vaccine rollout are not helping.

One-third of front-line health care workers in phase 1 haven't received their first dose of a vaccine, as variants take over and health care facilities are overwhelmed with younger patients who are sicker longer. Does the minister understand that there is a real need to adapt the vaccine plan to the new reality we are facing?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, these are the hard facts, Mr. Speaker. We're not making anything up over here. Mr. Speaker, 83 per cent of the people over the age of 80 have been vaccinated in our province; 74 per cent of the people over the age of 70 have been vaccinated in our province; and 43 per cent of the people over the age of 60 have been vaccinated in our province.

Mr. Speaker, this is extremely important to be able to roll this out in a very precise way. That's why we're leading the country, and I don't understand why the opposition over there doesn't recognize that we are leading the country in our vaccine rollout. If they want me to take the vaccines and put them into front-line grocery store clerks, who would you like me to take those out of the arm of, Mr. Speaker? The 60-year-olds? Maybe the 70-year-olds that haven't been vaccinated? The 50-year-olds? Would you like me to take those out of the arms of the 50-year-olds and start vaccinating?

We have a very limited supply of vaccines in this province, Mr. Speaker. We have 60,000 vaccines. At the pace we're going, that gives us five days, Mr. Speaker. Five days of vaccines that we have left in this province, and we're going to utilize them in the people that need it the most. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[10:30]

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

**Ms. Mowat:** — Because we're leading the country in case numbers, Mr. Speaker, that's why. And for those who are following along at home, in some bizarre move, the mask has come off now.

The Health minister had the opportunity in November, when the second wave was hitting our province, to take the right steps and introduce a short-term circuit breaker, but he ignored the experts then and he's ignoring them now. Mr. Speaker, just yesterday over 300 doctors signed a letter to the Premier and the Health minister. They echo what we are hearing across this province

from health care workers and families.

People are fed up with this government's approach, which has led to Saskatchewan leading the country in cases for most of 2021, and with that an unacceptable number of lives lost. Among the calls to action are expansion of the provincial vaccine rollout strategy to follow NACI [National Advisory Committee on Immunization] guidelines and include all health care workers, all essential service workers including teachers, early childhood educators, and other front-line personnel, and those at higher risk due to socio-economic factors and medical risk factors. Will this minister finally listen to front-line health care workers?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd encourage the member of the opposition to listen to my answers. We are doing shelters. We are doing long-term care facilities. Mr. Speaker, we've been targeting. We're targeting group homes, personal care homes. Is the opposition saying that those aren't people of importance, Mr. Speaker, that those aren't people that need this, Mr. Speaker? We've been able to do this very targeted, Mr. Speaker.

We have multiple ways of being able to deliver our vaccine. We have our mobile clinics that have been going out and doing mobilization in all of these targeted areas. We have our mass vaccination clinics. We have walk-in clinics, Mr. Speaker. We have drive-through clinics. Soon we're going to be able to engage the pharmacists in this, Mr. Speaker, to be able to make sure that we're getting as many vaccines out as possible. I cannot comprehend why the opposition is so upset that we are leading the country and challenging the best in the world in this province.

They should be proud of what our health care workers are able to deliver, Mr. Speaker. They should be proud of the vaccination process, but they stand up day after day slamming us because they're not hitting everybody that they want us to hit, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely shameful.

I want to take this moment to be able to thank the people that are doing the vaccinations, thank the people that are administering all of this and being able to supply those vaccines to everybody that needs it in this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms. Mowat:** — Mr. Speaker, that minister needs a reality check and a refresh on the NACI guidelines, which they've selectively chosen not to follow. It's not just these doctors who are calling on the vaccine rollout to be reconsidered. The CMA [Canadian Medical Association], SUN [Saskatchewan Union of Nurses] have also added their voices to calls for change. And the Saskatchewan Medical Association also criticized this government's approach.

The SMA [Saskatchewan Medical Association] clearly stated that this government has missed the mark. Specifically, they said that this Health minister's choice, with the Premier, to not immediately vaccinate essential workers, especially front-line health care workers, "will result in more deaths and long-term illness."

Mr. Speaker, why does this Health minister continue to believe that he knows better than public health experts and doctors in our province?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Again I would ask the members of the opposition to tune in what's actually happening in our front line. The first people that got the vaccine in our province were a doctor and a nurse, Mr. Speaker. Those were our front-line . . . We targeted front-line workers within the COVID wards, Mr. Speaker. We targeted all of our personal care homes and long-term care staff and residents there.

Mr. Speaker, it just goes to say that they don't like the vaccination program. They don't like . . . because we're leading the country, Mr. Speaker. We're also, Mr. Speaker, making sure that we get those vaccines into all areas of our province. The far North, Mr. Speaker, into rural Saskatchewan, into the cities. We've had walk-in clinics in the inner city, in this city right here, Mr. Speaker.

It just goes to show that they're extremely frustrated that we're actually doing well in Saskatchewan, where we're standing up and being proud of our vaccine program and the health care workers that are delivering it. They continue to slam these people and say that they're not doing a good enough job, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely shameful.

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

### Women and the Saskatchewan Economy

**Ms. Bowes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, from the women in essential and front-line work who still aren't vaccinated, to the women in the retail and service industry who have lost their jobs, to the women who have had to choose between their careers and caring for children who aren't in school, women have been disproportionately affected by this pandemic.

There are so many actions this government could take to ease the burden that women in this province are bearing. The majority of minimum wage earners are women; they could raise that minimum wage. The majority of front-line care workers are women; they could get them vaccines and hire more staff so people aren't burned out and at the breaking point. They could increase accessibility to child care. They could have better supports for servers and retail workers.

Mr. Speaker, could the minister commit today to even one thing, just one, that will help the women affected by the pandemic?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Mr. Speaker, it is very, very obvious the number one thing that will help women through the pandemic is to get their vaccinations. And so we're very proud of our record of getting those vaccinations done in a very rapid manner that's leading the nation.

But in 2019, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan had the second-highest

women employment rate in the country. And prior to the start of the COVID pandemic in February of 2020, women's employment has seen 20 consecutive months of year-over-year increases.

Mr. Speaker, there's always work that needs to be done, and we're very mindful of this particular issue, but it is something that we are seeing very tremendous progress on.

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

**Ms. Bowes:** — Mr. Speaker, this province has one of the largest gender pay gaps in the entire country. We are also one of the few provinces in the country that does not have pay equity legislation. Those two facts are very much related. The only recourse that women of this province currently have to fight for equal pay is to make a complaint to the Human Rights Commission which is woefully under-resourced.

This week, myself and my colleagues have been presenting petitions from people across this province to finally bring in meaningful pay equity legislation, and we will continue to do so until this government takes action.

Mr. Speaker, this government isn't training women. This government won't pay women a living wage. This government won't take any action to enforce the human rights violation of gendered wage discrimination. Is it any wonder there are so few women on their front benches? Mr. Speaker, when will this government take real, meaningful action to address the inequalities that are faced by the women of Saskatchewan?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Mr. Speaker, I recognize the member opposite is relatively new and may be not aware, but equal pay for similar work legislation does exist in Saskatchewan. Section 2-21 of *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* stipulates that an employee of one sex is not to be paid less than an employee of the other sex who (1) performs similar work at a same workplace, and (2) where the skill, effort, and responsibility is the same.

In 2013 our government expanded the provision so that the employer could not pay one employee a different rate of pay based on any of the prohibited grounds in *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*, and examples of that would be if there's race, colour, religion, or sexual orientation . . . cannot mean that they're paid differently.

So if the member opposite is aware of a situation where a female is being paid differently than a male co-worker who has the same seniority and is performing the same job, I ask her to bring that person forward to the Minister of Labour.

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

#### **COVID-19 Data and Vaccinations for First Nations and Métis People**

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — miigwech, Mr. Speaker. In December I stood here and said COVID-19 is out of control. If we only knew

where we would be today — out of control is an understatement. At that time, I asked about COVID-19 and how vulnerable off-reserve First Nation people are to this pandemic. Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party is not tracking COVID-19 among the tens of thousands of Saskatchewan First Nations people living off-reserve, never mind the nearly 60,000 Métis people in our province. Why, Mr. Speaker? Why is this government not keeping track of health outcomes for First Nations living off-reserve?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to talk about this. We have a very good working relationship with Indigenous Services Canada to be able to provide vaccines to people, to on-reserve registered members. We also have programs that are working off-reserve. We have an agreement with Saskatoon Tribal Council who's working out of Sask Place, formerly known as Sask Place, Mr. Speaker, to be able to deliver vaccines to the people that are in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, that's why we have this program, that we have 120 available vaccine clinics across our province. These are touching all areas on- and off-reserve, Mr. Speaker. That's why we continue to make sure that we work with Indigenous Services Canada. I've been on the phone with several chiefs from around the province to be able to make sure things are going well, Mr. Speaker. They're doing a great job administering the vaccines on behalf of their people, and they're showing great leadership in this area. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — It's pretty straightforward, Mr. Speaker. I asked this simple question in December: where is the off-reserve Indigenous health data? Other provinces keep track of this information. We sent in an access to information request. The response we have is, "The Ministry of Health does not have, track this information, nor do we have a way to find out." And that's exactly the quote I'm reading.

They don't have to and they don't want to. This government is scared of the evidence and scared of what the numbers might prove about their failings to First Nations people in Saskatchewan. What message does this minister think it sends about how little this government cares about First Nations people when his minister doesn't even track how many of us have caught or died from COVID-19?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you. To the best of my understanding, Mr. Speaker, there used to be on your health card an R that was designed for people that were on-reserve, Mr. Speaker. And that was asked to be removed, Mr. Speaker. We have engaged with FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations] several times in letter writing back and forth, working with them to be able to remove that, Mr. Speaker, or a choice for that to be removed, Mr. Speaker.

We're continuing to work with them, Mr. Speaker, but we want

to make sure that we get that vaccination out to everybody in the province. No matter what their race, religion, creed, sexual orientation — it does not matter, Mr. Speaker. We want to get that vaccine out to everybody as fast as we possibly can. That's why we're working on-reserve, off-reserve, rural, north, urban, in the suburbs, Mr. Speaker. We are continuing to do this to make sure that we have everybody vaccinated, no matter how they identify themselves. No matter where it is, Mr. Speaker, we want to be able to get to them and get a needle in their arm. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Point of order.

**The Speaker:** — Could you state your point of order.

### POINT OF ORDER

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During question period, the Opposition House Leader accused ministers of making stuff up. This obviously is unparliamentary. It's been ruled as such repeatedly, the most recent occurrence on March 25th, 2013. *Hansard* page 2872, I think you'll find the reference. I would call on the member, which she well knows she should withdraw and apologize.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

**Ms. Mowat:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was reviewing my comments here. My intention certainly wasn't to imply deception. It was to say that the government didn't have a plan and was cobbling together a plan as they went, which implies that there is a lack of competence, not that there is deceit, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — Thank you. I will take it under advisement.

### 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.]

[10:45]

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Government Relations.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "Building," Mr. Speaker, I think is exactly where I left off before the clock hit 5 o'clock. I do want to talk a little bit about what this budget does as far as building this province. It's certainly one of the tenets of the budget. And I want to start with First Nations and

Métis Relations and the money that will be going into that area, Mr. Speaker, of the province because I did hear from the opposition, and what they thought it was and really kind of downplayed it.

But I want to make sure that the public knows that the budget for this area, for economic development, is up \$5.7 million. This government is pledging \$193.7 million to economic recovery and growth for Saskatchewan Indigenous communities. That is not something to just slough off. That is a huge investment, Mr. Speaker, to help First Nations communities fight COVID. We heard that in question period. So hopefully the opposition members would look at this and at least have one positive word to say. Unfortunately that hasn't happened.

\$35 million specifically for emergency pandemic support to First Nations and Métis organizations. Mr. Speaker, with the pandemic on, we know that we've had to shut down the casinos, and there is a revenue-sharing program with First Nations and Métis communities. That hasn't been the case because we haven't been bringing any revenue in. But we are moving forward with just a pandemic support of \$35 million, Mr. Speaker, in the meantime.

\$28.1 million to target career training funding for First Nation and Métis institutions and initiatives. Mr. Speaker, our government is investing in the First Nations communities, investing in the Métis communities across this province, Mr. Speaker, and we're proud and glad to do so.

Mr. Speaker, there's a number of other investments. I used quite a bit of my time yesterday, so I'm going to really kind of condense it. But when you look at the investment through Government Relations through the ICIP program, the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, huge investment of about \$142 million. That money goes to communities like Saskatoon, for Shakespeare on the river, Mr. Speaker. It goes to Globe Theatre here in Regina to help support that, Mr. Speaker. It goes to Assiniboia, to a new rec facility in Assiniboia. And how important those investments are in communities across this province, huge investment to build this province, Mr. Speaker, into the future.

There is a Gas Tax Fund that the federal government collects that flows back through us. It's interesting, with the debate going on right now regarding — and I don't know if it's so much of a debate — but regarding e-vehicles and how important the Gas Tax Fund is from the federal government. It helps every community. Now I don't know too many of those communities would say, we shouldn't accept this money because it's from a gas tax, Mr. Speaker. They're certainly accepting that money because it's a gas tax.

It's really interesting though I do have to say. It will be the last time I get to say it's a gas tax, here in the province. Because the federal minister doesn't like the word "gas," and she's changing the word, the name of this fund to Canada Community-Building Fund. It is a gas tax. The only money that comes into that fund is through fuel consumption, but we don't want to call it that. We don't want to say that. So anyway, that's just a kind of a side note that you'll be hearing it as a Canada Community-Building Fund, which truly is the Gas Tax Fund because that's where the money comes from.

The other issue around the Building Canada Fund which is sunsetting this year. The last year of the Building Canada Fund, \$47 million going into projects in Yorkton and in Chitek Lake and across this province. Mr. Speaker, it really is a budget that talks about building Saskatchewan — very, very important.

The last tenet of the budget we've got is growth and how important growth is for this government and this province. And I would just say, after listening to the members opposite speak, I'm not sure too many people would ever want to invest in this province. After listening to their speeches day in and day out, who would want to invest? Thank heavens there's only 13 of them and we only have to listen to that 13 times. And there's 48 on this side that are a little more optimistic about the prospects of growth in this province, because it is so very important.

Now I can hear somebody mumbling over there . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Ah, that's what it is. I can hear some mumbling. But anyway, I would just ask one of the NDP [New Democratic Party] to stand up and have one thing positive to say about this province. It may help the growth. If you don't, it's okay. We certainly do on this side. Look, the future of this province is bright and we do expect growth into this province.

Mr. Speaker, just in closing, I'd be remiss if I didn't talk a little bit about COVID, directly about COVID. I just cannot say enough about the absolutely amazing work that our health care professionals are doing, absolutely. But I want to just single in on two people specifically, and of course one is Dr. Shahab and the other one is Scott Livingstone. Dr. Shahab is our chief medical officer through the Ministry of Health and has been a leader.

When the members opposite stand up and criticize — and that's their job — I want them to think about who they're criticizing. Yes, you can criticize the Premier and you can criticize the Minister of Health and you can criticize any of us. But I want you to think about who we are getting our information from and who we're taking our direction from. And I had said earlier yesterday when I was speaking that I know there's very few . . . There's only one on that side that has ever served in government, that would ever realize how important the bureaucracy and the people working in those files are. Because they're extremely important.

And so when we take advice and we say that, you know, the restrictions that are in place are fine right now; we'll see what happens into the future — that isn't political decisions. Those are based on information and advice given from the chief medical officer. So every time you criticize the Premier or the Minister of Health or anybody regarding the COVID response, realize who you're taking a shot at, Mr. Speaker. We are so well served by those people, Mr. Speaker.

And what is really interesting is, you know, I know they're critical of the advice that we're getting, obviously, and they're critical of Dr. Shahab, Mr. Speaker. He has served through one pandemic already. He was the assistant chief medical officer when H1N1, about eight or nine years ago, was in the province. He's already been through this once. Who would you expect to rely on? Somebody with that experience, or some of the opposition members and what they're claiming?

Now I can tell you — and I'm probably no different than any

other MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] — when we put on more restrictions, my phone rings in my office. And it is about 50/50. I get people saying, you should have gone further, and I've got people saying, you went way too far, Mr. Speaker. And that is continual. I haven't heard anybody on that side talk about the two sides of it, Mr. Speaker. We do often get people complaining because we've got far too many restrictions, and we've got people complaining because there are too few restrictions, Mr. Speaker. But I can tell you, I'm pretty happy with the advice that we've been given through Dr. Shahab.

The other is Scott Livingstone through the Saskatchewan Health Authority, and the great work that they have done putting together the vaccination clinics. And you know, I haven't heard a good word said from the opposition regarding that. But I can tell you that that just didn't happen overnight. That happened with a lot of hard work, a lot of communication, and it's serving the public very, very well.

So I know both of those gentlemen would be quick to defer the credit to everybody else around them, but they are the leaders of our health care system. They are the leaders through the Saskatchewan Health Authority and through the Ministry of Health — Dr. Shahab, Ministry of Health; Scott Livingstone through the Saskatchewan Health Authority. And what an excellent job they've done and how well we are served by that.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I will be supporting the budget. I will not be supporting the amendment, Mr. Speaker, put forward by the opposition because this budget truly does protect, build, and grow — exactly what this province needs at this time. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Education.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege and honour to rise and put some remarks on the record, on behalf of the constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy, on the 2021-2022 budget.

Before I do, I want to join with other members in first and foremost thanking and congratulating the Minister of Finance and her entire team on the treasury board, all the treasury board members and all the Finance officials, on what just must be a Herculean task in putting together a budget, and especially in the midst of a global pandemic. I'm, I think, a little bit more fortunate than the member from Indian Head-Milestone, who finally didn't duck low enough and ended up on treasury board. I've managed to duck low enough all these years, and let's make sure it continues that way. And so I just want to congratulate all the members that worked on that.

I want to thank the Ministry of Education. It's an honour to serve as the Minister of Education. Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to my time in this role and want to thank the deputy minister, Donna Johnson, and all of the ministry staff. It's kind of an unusual time, especially to be involved in a cabinet shuffle, because I haven't actually got a chance to meet very many of the officials, and mainly only by video. And so I'm looking forward to when the time ends, when the day ends, and we can get together with the staff at the ministry.

And honestly, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I've really missed, the opportunity that I've missed now as Minister of

Education, is actually getting to go to some schools and meeting teachers and students and getting to spend some time in schools. So I'm really looking forward in the fall — when the time comes and when that's appropriate — to getting around this province and actually visiting some of our schools personally.

I want to thank the staff here in the building. Mitch Graw is my chief of staff, and he does a great job. And we've had quite a bit of turnover in the office here recently, but I want to thank everybody that works in the office here for me.

And I want to thank Marcie, my constituency assistant. She has over 20 years being the constituency assistant for the people of Weyburn-Big Muddy. I think she's one of the currently longest-serving constituency assistants in Saskatchewan. And I think we've all learned first-hand especially in this last year, just how valuable . . . You cannot measure the value and just the good work that our constituencies do, and that certainly has come out this year. But I want to thank Marcie for all of her good work.

I want to thank my family, and I want to say hello to my family. I believe they're watching this morning. It's Saturday morning. You'd think they'd have something better like cartoons to be watching or something like that. You'd think I'd have something better to do, like watching cartoons, but I do want to thank my family. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Jack and Ephram, and I especially want to thank them for the painting that they did for me that now hangs on one of the walls here in my office. It's a big one.

I unrolled, a couple of months ago, a piece of canvas and just stapled it onto the studs in the basement. We have a partially finished basement, and so I stapled the canvas on the wall and brought out some paints, and Jack and Ephram, they did a great job. And it is typical of a painting that's done by . . . in the case of Jack, he's six, turning seven this summer; and Ephram just turned four. And it's got everything that a four-year-old and a six-year-old would want. There's a dinosaur in the painting. There's a volcano spewing lava in one corner. There's a meteorite coming to hit the Earth in the other corner. There's a lake in the front. And it's a big painting, and I'd invite members when they get a chance . . . It's got to be 5 feet by 6 feet.

And so I put it on some pieces of wood and brought it to the office here and hung it up on the wall. And I think it's a bit of a metaphor for our life these days. There's things spewing all over the place and there's things crashing all over. But I want to thank them for that and just to tell them how much I am proud of them and love them and how much they mean to me.

And I also want to say hello to Penelope. She turns two in 10 days. And I'll say this because I think it's probably needed: put your glasses on, Penelope. She got glasses here a couple of weeks ago and, like I think all kids, doesn't quite like wearing them quite yet. But I have to say, Mr. Speaker, you know, we're in such a fun age. I don't know if Amanda and I have the energy or the stamina to keep up with it most days

Penelope is starting to talk so much and just all at once. She just started saying words and then turned into sentences. She's a real go-getter. She wants to keep up with her brothers and so when she sees that, you know, one of them is wanting to go out in the backyard, she'll come racing around to the side door where our

garage is, where we keep our jackets and the rubber boots and everything. And she's pulling on jackets and, you know, she's pulling on an arm for the jacket, but she's trying to put it on her leg. And she's got a rubber boot on her arm, and she's all ready to go. And she's yelling, let's go, guys! Let's go, guys! And meanwhile they're already outside, but she hasn't even realized it yet. But, Mr. Speaker, I want to just say hi to Pippy this morning.

[11:00]

And I also want to acknowledge Amanda. Mr. Speaker, we had an opportunity . . . It's funny to say that because it's not really an opportunity. You're kind of told to. So we've had two times now this winter where we were isolating for 14 days. And fortunately both times everybody tested negative, so we've been healthy through all of this. But through close contacts, we spent some time together whether we wanted to or not.

And I have to say, you know, those 28 days were sure a window into what life is like when I'm not there. And I probably for the most part got in the way, more than anything. I kind of was getting into every . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well that's . . . Thank you.

But you know, Amanda just . . . Boy, our kids are lucky to have a mom like that. Mr. Speaker, she's juggling trying to teach grade one to Jack, and you know, she wants to make sure Ephram's ready for . . . He hasn't gone to school yet, but he'll go to preschool in the fall. And she's ordered books online. While Jack's doing grade one, Ephram's doing his lesson right beside him. And I tell you by the fall, Ephram's not even going to need preschool. He could be ready for kindergarten already, Mr. Speaker.

And at the same time she's juggling, you know, an almost-two-year-old little girl. You know, baby gates don't hold her anymore, and we've got stairs in our house and everything that comes along with that. And she's teaching piano lessons to Jack right now, too, and just juggles everything with such . . . She makes it look easy, and I know it's not, Mr. Speaker.

I think I've got the easier end of this bargain. But she really exemplifies, especially dealing with me, a 1 Corinthians type of heart. She suffers long and is kind, Mr. Speaker. And so when this is done we're going to have a picnic. We're going to go home. We're going to have a little bit of a picnic this afternoon, and I can't wait to see them. And I want to thank them for all their love and their support.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a couple of comments just before I get to the ministry that I'm responsible for, and then as well some constituency comments. But a couple of things that I kind of noticed just in listening to the speeches, and all really good speeches. Well, I think for the most part, pretty good speeches, Mr. Speaker.

You know, one thing I noticed for any new members that maybe are, you know, here listening to their first budget reply after an election. You know, I was here in 2000, and fortunate to be elected in 2006, and saw the end of the Calvert administration and then a new government elected in 2007. And I remember — and this has been, I think, said before — the theme from the

members opposite, the NDP, it's just really one of, at that time, 2007, it was just that well the people just got it wrong and we'll be back in four years.

And in fact I had a member and a good guy, Warren McCall, really good guy and I think this House, you know, misses Warren McCall. And I remember I was at a conference with Warren McCall, and he came up to me. And we're both history guys, and went to U of R [University of Regina]. A little bit different time period but had a lot of the same professors and did the same classes. And I remember him coming up to me and he said . . . This is in 2007 or 2008. It would have been 2008, I think. And he said to me, you know, there's been one one-term government in Saskatchewan history and it was the Conservative government, and I think you guys are going to make it two. And that was what they thought, you know, going after the 2007 election. We were going to be a flash in the pan, and people would just wake up. In 2011, you know, they'd make it right.

Mr. Speaker, but we heard it again in 2011. We heard it again in 2016. And we're still hearing it, Mr. Speaker. It's not that the NDP platform wasn't something that was agreeable to the people. It wasn't that their leader was agreeable to the people. It was that the people got it wrong, Mr. Speaker. And so I would say to new members that if you are listening to that and hearing that from the members opposite and kind of wondering, it's nothing new; it's nothing new. And I don't frankly think it's going to change, Mr. Speaker. So that's the first thing that I notice in listening to speeches.

The second thing that I notice, Mr. Speaker, and I heard it yesterday from the member from Melfort, and I really appreciate . . . I appreciate all of my colleagues, but I really appreciate the member from Melfort and how he speaks. Mr. Speaker, and I mean this in a good way and in all sincerity, Mr. Speaker. He reminds me of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. And I don't know if he knows the reference, but I hope he never loses that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, but he was talking about a mental health support group that I think he had something to do with getting set up in his home constituency in Melfort. And it's been running for, I think, six months. And it's people that he asked . . . And I don't know exactly all the details of it, Mr. Speaker, but it really was just people getting together and forming a volunteer type of service in the community, Mr. Speaker. And then after that a member of the opposition, the NDP got up and in reference to that said, well it should be funded by the government, Mr. Speaker. And you know, it reminded me . . . And not knowing the people involved, not knowing what the service really does or who the service is provided for or how it operates, but it should be funded. That's just the initial reaction. It should be funded by the government.

And it reminded me back to the 2018 Throne Speech when, in the Throne Speech itself, there was a reference to the story of Brian Williams from Milestone, father of three I think, who passed away suddenly, unexpectedly right before harvest. And the mayor of Milestone phoned up some people. Jeff Brown, the mayor, phoned up some people — and, you know, you've got a family in need; harvest has to get off; it's not going to wait — and phoned up some people and thought a couple of people would show up. And I think they had . . . [inaudible interjection]

. . . Oh, that's going to be a problem. Thank you. Thanks to the Attorney General for helping me out there. I hope it's the last time the Attorney General ever has to help me out.

Mr. Speaker, I think they had 20 combines show up. And so this has been spoken about by the Lieutenant Governor in the Throne Speech about this family needing help and 20 combines showed, 100 volunteers showed up to help this family out, Mr. Speaker. And the very next day, the Opposition House Leader stood up in her remarks and she said . . . And I want to give credit because, you know, she was touched by the story, Mr. Speaker, so I'll read that part of it. And she said, and I quote, "And I was quite moved by the beginning of the speech yesterday and the story about community coming together when times are tough." And then immediately after that, she went on to say, "And on this side of the House we believe that when times are tough the government has a role as well."

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't know who those 100 people that showed up were. I know some people from Milestone, and there might have been a few that I maybe know who they are, but I really don't know who those 100 people were. But I bet you not one of those people stood there, that showed up to help out, had any thought of, where's the government? You know, we'll get to work but where's the government? When's the government going to show up, Mr. Speaker?

And, Mr. Speaker, I just think that that really . . . Boil it all down, Mr. Speaker. I think that shows the difference between the government of the day and the opposition of the day. And I would just say, Mr. Speaker, under the NDP of 2021 and beyond . . . You know, Tommy Douglas used to talk about a vision of a new Jerusalem here on earth. And, Mr. Speaker, I think that vision is dead because there ain't enough money to fund that if it all has to come from the taxpayers and if it all has to come from the Government of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, so I'll talk now a little bit about education. Mr. Speaker, the education budget is historic in this province: 2.3 per cent increase; \$2.66 billion, Mr. Speaker; \$1.96 billion in school operating grants, Mr. Speaker. And through this, Mr. Speaker, I'll talk a little bit about how we're going to keep classrooms safe and what we have done to do that already, Mr. Speaker. I'll talk a little bit about . . . And yes, the federal government did provide funding to this, so I want to give credit to that, Mr. Speaker.

But \$100 million: \$26.9 million in additional janitorial staff, cleaning supplies, sanitation; 13 million in equipment and furniture; \$43 million to support immunocompromised students, which included hiring 531 teachers and additional staff; 6.6 million in technology upgrades. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on.

We're going to have \$21 million this year when the school year begins in the fall to help with interventions for grade 1 students who did not attend kindergarten this past year; for students in grade 1 to 3 who have fallen behind in reading levels; supporting students with their mental health; engaging with families and students who had attendance issues this year, Mr. Speaker. And the list goes on, but that's how we're going to work with school divisions to protect our classrooms.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to build schools in this province. And you know, I didn't clip it out here, but I know that there was a

member opposite who was in his Throne Speech reply, going through all the list of deficiencies apparently of this provincial government over the last 14 years, and included school infrastructure on the list. And I thought — you want to quote a former member — what are you talking about?

We put \$2 billion into school infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and I'll just go a little bit over the list: \$180 million this year alone, Mr. Speaker . . . 190 million, sorry. I've shortchanged ourselves, Mr. Speaker — 190 million. The budget includes 65.4 million to complete the design phase and begin construction of 13 school projects as early as the spring of 2022, including consolidation of Princess Alexandra, King George, Pleasant Hill elementary schools in Saskatoon; a replacement for St. Frances elementary school in Saskatoon, I think that's a Cree immersion school in Saskatoon.

A new francophone elementary school in Regina. A new joint-use facility in Regina Harbour Landing. Joint-use consolidation of St. Peter, St. Michael, and Imperial in north Regina. A joint-use facility in Moose Jaw to consolidate four existing schools. Consolidation of the elementary school and high school in Carrot River. A new elementary school to replace Ducharme elementary school in La Loche, and a new K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] school to replace Blaine Lake Composite, and a consolidation of the elementary school and the high school in Lanigan.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to see, I think pretty shortly, construction begin on the Argyle and St. Pius elementary school joint-use project here in Regina; 24 million to provide for major renovations at Yorkton Regional; John Paul II Collegiate in North Battleford; Holy Rosary High School in Lloydminster; Lloydminster Comprehensive; and Athol Murray College at Notre Dame. And, Mr. Speaker, that doesn't even touch the 76.7 million for maintenance of K to 12, preventative maintenance, and \$10 million for relocatables, Mr. Speaker. So we are going to build schools, Mr. Speaker.

And we're going to grow our child care capacity. We are going to keep our commitment this year of 176 new licensed home-based spaces and 51 centre spaces, Mr. Speaker, as well as increasing the grants for equipment, nutrition, as well as the start-up grant as a part of the commitments that we've made in the most recent campaign, a campaign that the people of Saskatchewan supported, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about . . . And you would think after all these years I would organize my notes a little bit better than this. But, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about now my constituency. And I do want to note, as yesterday we recognized Vimy Day, Mr. Speaker, and I just want to say, put this on the record, at the time of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, Weyburn had a population of 3,050 people, and a few thousand when you add in the neighbouring hamlets and villages, Mr. Speaker. And 5 per cent of all the men from Weyburn ages 18 to 44 died in Vimy Ridge, Mr. Speaker. So my town paid a steep price during that battle, as much of the province did, Mr. Speaker. So I wanted to just join with members that acknowledged yesterday's importance on that, Mr. Speaker.

[11:15]

Mr. Speaker, in terms of this budget and my constituency, we have done significant work when it comes to Highway 39. And I just want to touch on three projects. Highway 39, Mr. Speaker, the twinning and passing lanes of Highway 39 are literally a lifesaver, Mr. Speaker, and the continuation of those projects are going to do so much not only . . . I think importantly, yes, for the continued commerce and economic development of southeast Saskatchewan and integrating . . . We're an important part . . . The entire province is important, Mr. Speaker, but southeast Saskatchewan is our link from the United States on through our capital city and beyond, Mr. Speaker. And so there's a lot of traffic on those highways, and sadly we've seen a lot of tragedy on those highways as well. And so I thank the government for this important project.

I'll say this, Mr. Speaker. When I was first elected I remember Ken Krawetz telling me — and I think he said this to everybody — what are the three things that you want to do? And Highway 39 was one of my three. The second, Mr. Speaker, is the hospital, and I want to thank the government for an additional \$1.4 million that is going to see continued work on that new hospital, Mr. Speaker. And we're going to get that hospital done. We're going to get that hospital done, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, the final thing I want to touch on from a constituency's perspective is, we are going to . . . And I am looking forward to this very much, Mr. Speaker. This fall we're going to open a brand new elementary school in Weyburn, Mr. Speaker. And it is going to consolidate three — I'm doing five but it's three — elementary schools, Mr. Speaker, in the city of Weyburn.

Queen Elizabeth II opened in 1958. That's where I attended kindergarten, Mr. Speaker. That's where Amanda attended her elementary years. And, Mr. Speaker, Queen Elizabeth, or as we affectionately call it in Weyburn, QE has served the students very well but it is going to be closed at the end of this school year.

Mr. Speaker, as well the second school on that list is Haig School. Haig was built in 1920. It's 101 years old, Mr. Speaker, and it's one of our landmarks in Weyburn. It's right on Coteau Avenue and it's one of the few schools that I think remain in the province where you can actually still, in the stone front of the building, see the boys' entrance and see the girls' entrance on the other side of the building, Mr. Speaker.

It is named for Douglas Haig. He was the first Earl of Haig. He was a field marshal in the British army. He commanded the British Expeditionary Force in World War I, and he was the commander during the Battle of the Somme, Arras, Passchendaele, as well as the Spring and the final Hundred Days Offensive. And so when the building was built in 1920, they actually wrote to the Earl of Haig, the city of Weyburn did, and asked for his permission to name the school after him. And just for history's sake, one of the luminaries that attended Haig School was the author W.O. Mitchell. And so that is the second school to be consolidated.

And the third school is Souris on South Hill, and it is a landmark on South Hill in Weyburn, Mr. Speaker. And it was built in 1910; it's 111 years old, Mr. Speaker. And so Legacy Park Elementary School is the new school that's going to be built in Jubilee Park, on the site of the old junior high, Mr. Speaker, that was demolished a couple of years ago. And I have to say, I was a St. Mike's Tiger and we played the junior high Cobras quite a bit,



and we lost a lot of games. So nobody was happier to see a wrecking ball hit that junior high than I was, Mr. Speaker. But that Legacy Park Elementary School — and it's a great name, Mr. Speaker — it's in the park. It's in Jubilee Park right in the heart of the city. And it is the continuation of a legacy of 275 combined years of education that those three buildings provided.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'll just say one more thing on that, and I know I'm probably drawing to a close. But I've got one more thing I want to say, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the city of Weyburn and the people of Weyburn. Attached to that new elementary school is the \$25 million Credit Union Spark Centre. And I know the Premier had an opportunity to tour the construction with me. It's a field house. It's going to have a walking track and an indoor soccer pitch, and it's got dressing rooms for the new outdoor hockey rink that's going to be built, being built adjacent to it with its own Zamboni. We're so blessed in Weyburn, Mr. Speaker, with companies like the credit union and others and the city of Weyburn, the people of Weyburn that have put in . . . And it's going to be I think a state-of-the-art facility for the kids of Weyburn, Mr. Speaker.

And finally I just want to touch on an area . . . And I know, and I kind of found it funny because I know the members opposite think that we'll never be doing enough. But the member, I think the member from Nutana, yesterday went through a list and made it sound like when it came to solar we're not doing anything, and wind we're not doing anything, and geothermal we're not doing anything. It's funny she didn't mention SMRs [small and medium-sized reactors], because there's \$625,000 to fund the SMR secretariat but that didn't make the list. But I do want to thank . . .

And so I was listening to that and I thought, well I'm pretty sure we signed off on that 10-megawatt solar project by Saturn Power. Yes, we did. And I'm pretty sure that we're building I think a 200-megawatt wind power plant in Assiniboia. I'm pretty sure that that's going ahead. And I'm pretty sure that SaskPower's going through another procurement process for I think 3 to 350 megawatts of wind power. I think that's happening, and I'm pretty sure that . . . in fact I think I was there, Mr. Speaker, what will be Canada's very first geothermal, utility-scale power plant, Mr. Speaker.

And if the members opposite . . . and I know they probably won't because in order to drill the geothermal wells, the company had to hire an oil-drilling company, and I know they won't come within a mile of an oil-drilling rig, Mr. Speaker. But if they ever wanted to, they could actually go on site. And actually I've toured it, and I know the member from Estevan has toured it as well, Mr. Speaker, just south of Torquay near the US [United States] border.

And I also want to thank the proponents of the Pesâkâstêw Solar Project, Mr. Speaker. George Gordon First Nation and Star Blanket First Nation have signed a 10-megawatt power purchase agreement in partnership with First Nations Power Authority and Guy Lonechild. You know, I want to give a lot of credit to Guy Lonechild. He's doing a great job at the FNPA [First Nations Power Authority], Mr. Speaker. And construction on that 10-megawatt solar project begins next month in the RM [rural municipality] of Weyburn, Mr. Speaker, in my constituency. So I want to thank them as well, congratulate them on that.

And again the member from Nutana mentioned it again today, the \$150 fee for electric vehicles to offset on the gas tax. And I just found it strange how they're, you know, criticizing the government for doing that. But then yesterday it was either the member from Nutana or perhaps the member from Elphinstone — I'm not sure which one — mentioned that, you know, because the Sask Party's got to get on board, you know. Don't you see? Because by 2035, even General Motors are going to produce an all-electric vehicle fleet. And I wonder if they kind of twig into that. Because you know, I asked my friend from PA [Prince Albert] and I think this is pretty accurate. You know, I'm sure it is because he knows his cars. And I think probably to his chagrin, but today in Saskatchewan about 43 per cent of new vehicle sales are GM [General Motors]. I would have thought it was Ford, and I'm sure he was wishing it was Dodge. But 43 per cent of new vehicle sales are GM.

Despite that fact, Mr. Speaker. Not of course but despite that fact, I wonder if the members opposite, if they actually took some time to think about that? Let's say GM's successful in doing that, and the other manufacturers are probably going to have to move that in line. What do you think happens to the gas tax revenue in 2035 and beyond if the number one selling vehicle in Saskatchewan, manufacturer, goes completely electric? You think that's going to have a negative impact on the amount of gas tax that we collect as a province?

And maybe this is hard for them to figure out because back in the day of the NDP, the gas tax that was collected was actually higher than they actually put in the highways. It's different now. We actually put way more than we collect in the gas tax into the highways. So either one of two things are going to happen. Either we're going to have to continue to collect from vehicles that when the rubber literally hits the road, their wear and tear on that, or perhaps they're going to go back to a day where they don't put that much into highways. Now that assumes that they actually form government, which we'll see if that happens.

But, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite kind of have to think a little bit about some of the things that they say. If we want to still have good highways in this province, Mr. Speaker, we're all going to have to pay for that. And you know, EVs [electric vehicle] are coming along. The last I looked, they're still literally the rubber's going to hit the road; they're not going to hover yet. Maybe that day's coming where they're going to hover, but that's not the case, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, with that I'll just say that I will not be supporting the amendment, Mr. Speaker, but I will be supporting the budget. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to join in my comments on the budget. You know, Mr. Speaker, I've heard lots of conversations back and forth, and I realize we say some pretty harsh things to one another. And I also want to join the member who just spoke before me in acknowledging the member from Melfort. I did pay attention yesterday to his comments. And I did do a little reflecting, as I did my asking for guidance last night and this morning, about how I should treat people. And I want to thank him for that. He made me think differently of what I had to say and wanted to say. He talked the way . . . And maybe I needed

to hear somebody say things need to be done and have more consideration for people in rough times. He talked about neighbours, taking care of our neighbours. So I did a little reflecting on that, being grateful to family, bullying. He said some good things I needed to hear, because I'll be honest with you: when I think about it, all the hurts and the people that I have represented, and tried to do my best. As a person with a disability, I've tried my best.

To articulate the challenges that people back home are suffering: our children are committing suicides, the addictions is out of control. Yes, pressure gets put on somebody to fix it and help. But I also want to give credit, and at the end of my comments I will give credit, because people keep saying, you all just criticize; you never, NDP, you don't do anything good; you just criticize, just want more. So I want to be fair and I will.

But I want to thank my wife, and my children, my 17 grandchildren, for always making me laugh, to know tough times get hard. I've lost a nephew to addiction overdose. I have my children who suffer. It's not easy, but I look to a government sometimes, saying, you have choices to make. And you will have those choices to make. I think about the challenges that I hear from the leaders back home. And I watch the leaders, whether they're First Nation, Métis, municipal leaders, or elders, tell their students to be kind to one another.

The member from Melfort talked about coming together, taking care of your neighbours. And I'm going to talk a little bit about that because on this side of the House now, you know, I have my family here with me. But I now have some neighbours with me, and I'm going to ask my neighbours to help me because I have a message I need to say. And I'm hoping my neighbours truly will help, especially the member from Melfort. Because sometimes when we're looking at all the issues and challenges and the pain that our communities are going through, it's not easy.

I know we went through an election. I hear it painfully, being laughed at, saying well that's why we've got this many members. That's okay. I understand it. I've said some pretty harsh things. I've heckled back, not always angry. I don't want to be angry anymore. So I thank the member again from Melfort for reminding me what our elders tell us, how we're supposed to treat one another. At the end of the day it's about the people.

We have a pandemic going on. I think about my family. I think about my cousins who just lost their dad, my father's brother, a day ago. We won't be able to join them to grieve and show them support and love, but they're in my thoughts and prayers as they bury my uncle. It's challenging.

[11:30]

You are the government, the ministers. You're appointed. Some are brought back into the minister, and the Premier has a choice to pick who he wants to bring into cabinet. And I'm going to talk about one minister that was upset yesterday. And when he was doing his response the minister got up, talked. And it was kind of a chuckle, because I did. I pulled out the minister's portfolios and the ministries he's responsible for. And some of the members, when he went through the list, chuckled and I kind of thought, oh that's a long list too.

And I want to say that that minister has a lot of responsibilities, but the two things that I really paid attention to was the Minister of Northern Affairs and the Minister Responsible for First Nations and Métis Relations. He followed the member from Saskatoon Centre, a very proud First Nations woman, a strong First Nations woman. And I was not happy with the way he showed, as a minister who's supposed to help Indigenous people in our province, advocate. So I'm very disappointed in the way that was done. So I say to our First Nations leaders, our Métis leaders, this is the gentleman. He will be the minister that we have to work with.

There's many issues. There's many challenges in our province. COVID's not easy. There's so many wants out there because people are going through hard times. And yes, you are the government with your 48 seats. You remind me lots. But I also say I haven't been friendly to some of my neighbours because I've been a little maybe angry.

I've been in opposition a long time. I came here wanting to work with the government. And when I got elected in a by-election in 2008, it was to work with the government to bring the issues from the North, from the leaders, from the elders, and the community members. That's what I wanted to do.

There are many issues back home, I'll be honest with you. And our leaders do what they can — our municipal leaders, our First Nations, our Métis leaders, our community members. I watch poverty. I watch the challenge of power bills, how a First Nation reserve gets charged more for basic power than the two neighbours, municipalities right next to them. I hear their concerns. Why do we get treated like that? We ask four questions. Why do we have to live the way we live and some of those challenges? Why can't the government work with us?

So when I say all the challenges, I think about COVID and the challenges that it's caused for so many of us. And yes, you were selected to govern this province, to take care of all citizens. I've heard the Premier say he's going to take care of all the citizens.

Well I'll tell you something. Education is important. And when you look at children's education, try to come and use the internet in my community of La Ronge, the tri-community. It's big. It's embarrassing. I won't leave SaskTel because I believe in it. I believe in the Crown corporation and the service it provides to the members. We own that. It's ours. We have to petition. And that's okay; I understand that. We will. We'll petition to get better internet service. We did. I've done that on behalf of the residents.

I do what I can. And I will work with the leadership to bring issues to this Assembly, to this Chamber, to the government to hear, whether it's cell service for emergencies along the Hanson Lake Road. I've brought that forward. Leaders have said that. So we say to the government, these are challenges facing us.

There are many challenges. Long-term care is one of them, and I'll get into that in a minute. You know, I've got a little bit of time yet. But I've got a list of all the challenges that are out there and people wants. And I know there's lots — housing. There are many challenges.

But I'm going to utilize not only the leaders to ask them to

continue working with me as the MLA. I'm one person. And I will work with the MLAs on my side of the house, as I said, with my family. And I'm also going to get help from my neighbours. And I'm hoping they can talk to the ministers and put pressure on the ministers, say hey, you've got to take care of people. You've got to do this. This is the right thing to do. So I'm going to do that.

There are so many issues facing our province. I understand that. And you are faced with challenges. This budget, however you want to present it . . . You can be very positive if you want. You can spin it the way you want; doesn't matter to me. At the end of the day, it's what do I do when I come here? What is my role? It's to bring the issues — suicide, the addictions, the overdose. How we could not find \$1.3 million for Saskatoon Prairie Harm Reduction is beyond me, to allow people to go wherever they go to use. And unfortunately they are using. They have an addiction; they're using. But they die there in a back alley, in an abandoned house because there's nobody to help them.

Yet we have an organization begging, begging this province, please, families asking, please, have a safe injection site place where they can go to be safe, so paramedics if something goes wrong. Maybe if we did that, they eventually will get, with families, get help and the treatment they need. And I say that to the Minister Responsible for Mental Health and Addictions, maybe funding these other community organizations that are trying to help people with addictions. Maybe they would give them the support. Maybe they'd make sure they're safe, that when it's their time, they'll get treatment and they can be with their family and their loved ones. So many people are burying their loved ones. It's a crisis going on.

There are a lot of challenges, but you have the government ministers. You talk about treasury board. You have decisions to make. You've got tough decisions. The people put you there. You've reminded me of that many times in this House.

And I'm going to try to do things differently. I will now, when I see my neighbours, acknowledge them and say, hi and hope you have a good day. I will not be resentful anymore. I was never told to be like that by my grandfather, by my family, by the people I represent. But they said, Doyle, speak for us; work with the leaders.

So I'm asking the leaders that I represent — First Nations, Métis, municipal leaders — work with me. I can't do it all. And let's work with the government and put pressure on them. You have, as a government, an obligation. When families are burying their loved ones remember — because of addictions, mental health, and the challenges — you have made the choices what you fund and what organizations get funded. There's a lot of problems in this province, but there's a lot of good neighbours in this province too. I know that.

I don't know how much more time I have. I'm hoping at the end of the day that we can deal with some of the challenges meaningfully. Yes, I'm not always the nicest person heckling. I realize that. And I said that. I'm going to try to change the way that on behalf of the people that I represent . . . And there's many challenges. I've got a list I could have went off. And I was going to do that saying, you need to do this, you need to do that.

And I heard some of the comments the members said. And I heard one of the members play a game. I didn't find the game funny. We're talking about people's lives and we're going to play a game. Oh, answer the question: who is the worst in this? Like, come on. That's a game. I could sit here and said well, who is responsible for the GTH [Global Transportation Hub]? Who is responsible for the bypass? I can go on with a list of things. Who is responsible for the '80s and the debt? I don't want to play a game. It doesn't matter to me anymore. We're dealing with people's lives. We're in a pandemic. I wear this mask, not that I want to, but I don't want to make anyone sick. I don't want to make my neighbours sick. It's time to get serious and deal with the serious issues as a province.

And you know, the member that spoke before me, you know, he talks about people need to work together. You know, there's challenges too. We're not all going to get along. But I'll be honest with you. You've got a lot of problems out there to deal with. It's going to take some seriousness. And yes, we can heckle back and forth; we'll continue to do that. I get it; I understand. For as long as this member will be here, he gets it, the heckling. I understand that.

But I want you to know something. When I come here it was to work on behalf of the people I represent. They're struggling and I'm hoping at the end of the day . . . Again I'll say this before I wind up my comments because I'm going to say a positive thing. Because I kept hearing you say, you guys say nothing positive, nothing positive about the budget.

We have worked hard, and I think about some of our seniors that have died fighting to get long-term care in La Ronge, in the whole region. And I'm going to say yes, there was an announcement. There's been a number of announcements: funding for planning, 500,000 this and that. And I even got criticized saying I voted against it, the budget, against the long-term care facility, which I never did vote against. But like I was an opposition member who was going to stop the government. And you're such a big government — 48 of you. Wow, it's amazing how strong you are. And this little MLA from Cumberland was going to stop the budget. And I thought to myself, are you actually going to go around saying that? Okay, that's fine. That's the politics of it.

But just remember this positive thing I want to say. Many petitions I have served in this House time again since I got elected to ask for long-term care — not for me, not to give me any brownie points. The people. It's a right for our elders to stay in their community and to be with their loved ones, the culture, the language, and to pass away when it's the time of the Creator's choosing and then they can be buried in their community.

So I want to give credit to all those leaders who wrote letters, who lobbied, my neighbours who lobbied, everyone who signed a petition, every family member. I think about some individuals I just want to give credit: Gary Veteri. I'm amazed at some of the people, the petition, the work that they did for their loved one. And you know, there's the time and effort.

Here's the positive thing you're going to get. I'm going to give credit to everyone who worked so hard to pull the government to say, come on. It's time to build this long-term care. It's time to make an announcement. You finally did. There is a very positive

thing for the people back home. They worked hard and it's a payoff for them. So I want to give you credit in that budget, that they pushed you. They had to drag you; I get it. They had to drag you but you finally did it. You finally have heard. So there's some credit. So don't say it was all negative from the member.

But I'm going to, you know, conclude my remarks here very quickly. I think I've taken up my time. But as I said before, I'm going to work with my neighbours. Some of you backbenchers will be my neighbours too, on that other side maybe. And we'll work with your cabinet, and maybe you can help me put some pressure on the ministers to make sure the issues that we face in the North come forward.

And like I said, there are many challenges. There's a long list. Cell service, internet for our kids so that they can do their education online. It's so hard. It's amazing. I watch my grandkids we're raising, and it's terrible, the internet, you know? Papa can't even watch a movie and them do their internet. It's terrible. But anyway, that's a joke.

But having said all that, I'm going to conclude my remarks. And I think I'll do things a little differently and I'll try . . . And I hope the ministers, when you're dealing with the North, our First Nations, our Métis, truly think about the duty to consult and accommodate. Industry coming in, we want to work with industry.

But I think about the money. And this is the last thing I want to say. We talk about the federal government. And last night I had a dream and it said . . . because my colleague had talked about 20 per cent of the provincial budget is coming from that guy you guys don't really care for. What's his name? He's the federal Prime Minister of Canada. You guys say his name. I'm thinking of his name. Justin, I think, Trudeau or something? You guys don't like him, anyway. But at the end of the day I think he's giving you 20 per cent of your budget. You don't like him. That's amazing to me.

I thought to myself, okay, you're getting that money to help First Nations and Métis, northern people, people in our province. Then why aren't we getting the benefit of it? So I thought to myself, hey, maybe it's time to tell him, hey, Justin, come on, help us. So I just want to say to you, if he's giving you that kind of money, I'd like to work with him too and say, hey, you guys, you guys better not forget about those poor people up there in the North, those in poverty, those that are having challenges.

[11:45]

Work with them. Have a true dialogue. Consult with them before you go on their traditional territories. Make sure you're sharing and you're hearing them. Don't give them mouth service and do whatever you want. Be meaningful and work with them. And I know our leaders will work with you, with governments. They want to, with industry, but they want to be a part. I know our trappers will.

So I've gone on quite a bit but I have to say, you know, there are challenges. And as a government you've got some tough decisions, but you're making the decisions. When you decide what you're funding, community-based organizations, like I've said, you've made that decision. You have to live with the

consequences. And families that are losing loved ones because of addictions, because of COVID, you made the decisions.

You will be held accountable one day. It may not be in the next four hours, next few days, but sometime you're going to look back on. You're going to ask yourself, and I've heard some of the members say, did we leave this place better? And I listen to some of the . . . Members have left and I've listened to what they say. Did you leave this place better than you found it? And you definitely have some work to do. Trust me, you do.

The last thing I will say, because the member brought this up again: however you want to say about the industry, but to me, to find \$60,000, to charge \$150 on an industry for . . . and then to say it's to help fix the road because they use the road. You know, I'll leave that with you. That was your decision and you can hold onto it. You needed \$60,000. But you had a lot of areas where you've had so much money in your coffers. It's unbelievable. You've had record revenue money for years. You've spent so much of it on your choices, and they weren't always the best choices for the Saskatchewan people. You thought it was the best choices. I leave that with you.

I wish you all the best as we go through this pandemic. Keep your families safe. I hope you don't lose your loved ones to the pandemic, to drugs, to the overdose, to the mental health, the suicides. I hope you don't lose any of your family and have to deal with what we're dealing with. So I share that. It's challenging. And I mean that with sincerity. I do not wish you and your family nothing but health, and the best that Saskatchewan can do when we work with our neighbours.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will not be supporting this budget and I will be supporting the amendment. Thank you. I conclude my comments.

**The Deputy Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Cannington.

**Mr. D. Harrison:** — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege for me to stand in the House today and represent the people of Cannington and provide my reply to the 2021-22 budget. Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Deputy Premier and Finance minister for preparing a budget for all the people of Saskatchewan, a budget that will protect, build, and grow Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would also like to say thank you to my wife, Cheryl, for her love, support, and encouragement. Thanks to all my family for all their love and support too. And I must say, my wife, my family at home are calving out the cows, taking care of business at home and I really must say thank you to that. Thank you to my friends and neighbours who will graciously lend a hand at any hour of the day to help her out. Thank you to them as well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank my constituency assistant, Trisha Schulhauser, for her hard work and dedication. She takes the calls and concerns from constituents and provides appropriate information and direction and keeps me well informed each and every day. Thank you, Trisha.

Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you to all my colleagues, and

indeed all the members of the Assembly for their hard work and dedication to representing the people of Saskatchewan.

The people of Saskatchewan are truly volunteers. Our province was founded on volunteerism; we're known as the volunteer province. We continually help our friends and neighbours. As my colleague from Weyburn-Big Muddy had suggested, whenever there's a need we were always quick to help. My colleague from Melfort, absolutely true, there is so many people that want to help anyone in need, and they'll volunteer and it's truly heartfelt.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd also like to acknowledge and thank the health care workers of Saskatchewan, including my wife and daughter working as RNs [registered nurse] and another daughter working as a pharmacist at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon. They have logged some long hours throughout the last year, and I am sure they are looking for some rest and relaxation in the coming summer months.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the teachers have juggled a variety of education delivery methods and altered school days, classrooms have been different, and yet they continue to educate our children. To the teachers and all the school staff, I say thank you. Thanks also to the bus drivers that have delivered our kids safely to and from schools throughout this year and past years as well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our small-business owners have been challenged this past year, and they've been resilient and adaptive. They have been very innovative and discovered new ways to conduct business. This government has reduced the small-business tax rate from 2 per cent to zero throughout this budget year supporting Saskatchewan business. Madam Deputy Speaker, small-business emergency payment program is forecast to provide \$70 million in grants for small- and medium-sized businesses directly affected by public health orders related to COVID-19, up to \$5,000. Small businesses in Cannington are very appreciative of all the support.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this year the Supreme Court of Canada ruled, in a split decision, that the federal government was allowed to impose a carbon tax on Saskatchewan people. Although I disagree with the decision, I do respect the decision. Madam Deputy Speaker, this carbon tax is a tax on everything. This tax impacts each and every Saskatchewan resident. Each year, the cost to heat our homes, schools, and hospitals will get more expensive. Each year, the cost to commute to work and drive your kids to their sporting events will get more expensive. The cost of running our community rinks and swimming pools will increase. The cost of producing and marketing food to feed your families will get more expensive.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a local feed mill, producing livestock feed for local livestock producers, saw the carbon tax portion equal 24.4 per cent of their natural gas invoice. This was prior to April 1st when the carbon tax increased by 33 per cent. Madam Deputy Speaker, this government will continue to work to make living and working in Saskatchewan more affordable.

Mr. Speaker, all SaskPower customers will receive a 10 per cent rebate on their power invoices for one year. These savings also impact schools, hospitals, community facilities, business, and individuals across the entire province. In total for 2021-22, the rebate will be approximately \$174.8 million.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the community rink affordability grant was reinstated and provided \$2,500 per ice service in about 400 communities across the province. I can probably say at least 18 of the communities in Cannington received this support. From Gainsborough to Fillmore and Maryfield to Alameda, this grant, along with the 10 per cent rebate on the SaskPower invoice, will keep our rinks accessible and affordable.

Mr. Speaker, through the Saskatchewan veteran service club support program, funds will be increased from 100,000 to 1.5 million. These funds will support service clubs, their members, and families in communities across the province. Cannington is home to many veteran service clubs, such as Camduff, Stoughton, Creelman, Fillmore, just to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, the active family benefit has been restarted, provided \$150 per child enrolled in sport, recreation, and cultural activities. The benefit provides an extra \$50 per child to families of children with disabilities. Mr. Speaker, those families really do appreciate the additional income.

Mr. Speaker, seniors will have ambulance fees reduced to \$135 from \$275 per trip, a reduction of more than 50 per cent. Many seniors are on fixed income and lowering their ambulance fees will be a huge help. Mr. Speaker, the budget increases funding for the seniors' income plan, increasing benefits by 3.5 million, the maximum payments increasing by \$30 per month, supporting our seniors with the sixth increase this government has made since 2008.

Mr. Speaker, beginning in May, SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] will be rebating a portion of the vehicle premium from the last three years to Saskatchewan drivers. The rebate will average \$285 per registered vehicle. The full rebate provided to Saskatchewan drivers will be 285 million, putting the money back into the pockets of the drivers in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, these rebates factored in, Saskatchewan people will pay the lowest rates in the country on their bundle of utilities, making life more affordable in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, also the Saskatchewan home renovation tax credit will provide a ten-and-a-half-per-cent tax credit, up to \$20,000 of eligible home renovations done between October 1st, 2020 and December 31st, 2022, helping homeowners make improvements to their lifelong investment.

Mr. Speaker, since 2007, personal income tax exemptions have removed 112,000 individuals from the province's income tax roll. We have reintroduced annual indexation of the province's income tax brackets, ensuring these tax savings are not eroded by inflation, making it more affordable to live in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, revenue sharing has strengthened communities, providing a stable and predictable source of revenue for rural, urban, and northern communities. This money will be invested locally for building and maintaining community infrastructure. Municipal economic enhancement program provided an additional \$150 million per capita payments, supporting infrastructure programs in communities across the province. My local and urban rural municipalities like the stable funding. They know they can invest in their communities and make improvements to help their residents.

Mr. Speaker, this budget provides \$200 million to continue the accelerated well-site-closure program. This will support more than 2,000 jobs with Saskatchewan-based oil-and-gas servicing companies. Mr. Speaker, I was speaking to a local oil-field business and the owner commented that this program kept the lights on at their shop. It made them able to retain their employees, their highly trained employees, and be ready when higher prices returned.

Mr. Speaker, we are modernizing and expanding the high-water-cut program, changing the royalty status on high-water wells. This change will make the wells more viable for producers and promote greater overall production, and it will provide producers with \$3.8 million in annual royalty relief to help them invest in new methane emissions, reduction projects, and help support capture and commercialization rather than venting and flaring.

Mr. Speaker, I was speaking with one Saskatchewan-based oil producer, saying this, along with the 10 per cent reduction in their SaskPower bill, is a breath of fresh air. With current West Texas Intermediate prices around \$60 per barrel US, I am looking forward to seeing several drilling rigs operating in southeast Saskatchewan. Drilling and exploration is a huge economic stimulus for the province, and it will keep Saskatchewan growing and keep Saskatchewan as a top energy producer in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan growth plan committed to introducing a moratorium on associated natural gas royalties at a rate of zero per cent. This moratorium started on April 1st this year and will continue for five years with a sunset clause on March 31st, 2026, once again helping out our energy industry.

Mr. Speaker, this year's record budget for Health of \$6.54 billion is an increase of 5.8 per cent from last year, including an additional 100 continuing care aids — the first year of a three-year commitment — CCAs [continuing care aid] that will work in long-term care homes and expanded care home services in rural and remote areas.

[12:00]

Mr. Speaker, I have three family members working in health care in this province. They entered health care fields because they had a passion to help people. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that each of the 300 new CCAs have much the same passion as my family members.

Mr. Speaker, \$110,000 has been allocated to create a new police and crisis team for the Estevan region. This will help address the increased volume of mental health calls, very serious calls that require prompt, professional attention. Mr. Speaker, this budget invests \$458 million for mental health and addictions, a 5.4 per cent increase from last year. Seven point two million of this has targeted mental health and addiction services, including specific youth-focused initiatives, investments in suicide prevention and addictions treatment.

It also includes \$850,000 for 12 additional provincial addiction treatment beds plus two pre-treatment beds at the addictions centre at St. Joseph's Hospital in Estevan. Mr. Speaker, the addictions centre in St. Joseph's Hospital has been a resounding success. These additional beds will allow them to help more

people from all across the province.

Mr. Speaker, investments of \$162 million into health care capital for long-term care homes and hospitals across the province, including funding for planning activities for a new long-term care home in Estevan and planning for a new hospital in Weyburn, which includes a helipad for STARS [Shock Trauma Air Rescue Service] transfers. \$5.7 million provided for the urgent care centres in Regina and Saskatoon, a very welcome addition to health care.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that STARS is a lifesaver, particularly in rural Saskatchewan. Your government will invest 1.4 million additional dollars to add a new STARS helicopter. Total provincial funding for STARS is now 11.88 million. Mr. Speaker, there is likely not one person in this province that has not known someone that has utilized their services. Mr. Speaker, STARS is a great service operating in a great province.

Mr. Speaker, the Cancer Agency will receive an increase of \$7.6 million, bringing the annual grant to 204 million. This funding will ensure Saskatchewan patients have access to additional oncology drugs, treatments, and medical resources to achieve the best possible outcomes. Many Saskatchewan families have been affected by cancer and the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency is there to help those families.

Mr. Speaker, the government is supporting the people with diabetes. Eligibility has been expanded under the Saskatchewan insulin pump program to include all provincial residents. The cost of an insulin pump will be covered for everyone in Saskatchewan that needs one, an investment of an additional \$5 million. This will include funding to cover continuous glucose monitoring for children and youth under the age of 18, providing peace of mind for parents of children with diabetes, reassurance that while their kids sleep or while they're participating in sports, their glucose levels can be continually monitored and allow the kids to carry on having fun with their friends and family.

Mr. Speaker, the 2021-22 budget provides an additional \$6 million to expand the autism spectrum disorder program to provide individualized funding for children ages 6 to 11. Mr. Speaker, we are investing in Saskatchewan families.

Mr. Speaker, pre-K [pre-kindergarten] to grade 12 education had a 2.3 per cent or a \$59.6 million increase from last year. Saskatchewan's 27 school divisions will receive \$1.96 billion in operational funding for the coming school year. This includes fully funding the two per cent salary increase as part of the teachers' collective bargaining agreement. Saskatchewan government investing in education.

Mr. Speaker, child care funding increased \$2 million, bringing child care funding up to 75.5 million. This will create an additional 176 new licensed home-based spaces and 51 new licensed child care spaces. Mr. Speaker, we are growing Saskatchewan and investing in our future.

The advantage scholarship, from 500 to \$750 annually per eligible student. Mr. Speaker, this budget builds on an existing support program, including the graduate retention program, providing up to \$20,000 in tax credits to eligible post-secondary graduates who remain in Saskatchewan and build their careers

here. Over 75,000 post-secondary graduates have claimed these credits by starting their careers in Saskatchewan. I have four kids living, working, and raising their own families in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, we are growing Saskatchewan, and investing in our youth.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture has long been the spinal cord of Saskatchewan. Apologies to the Premier for using his words from the other day, but these words are very, very true. There is over \$70 million in this budget for maintenance and upgrades to dams, canals, and 18.9 million for phase one of the Lake Diefenbaker irrigation expansion project, increasing the selection of crop and vegetables to be grown on additional irrigated acres, further increasing the value of crop production in Saskatchewan. The Lake Diefenbaker irrigation expansion project is a multi-year project expected to cost over \$4 billion. Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to listen to Dr. Red Williams speak at a Saskatchewan Stock Growers meeting several years ago. His speech talked about drought-proofing Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, this project is a huge step in that direction, an investment for generations to come to utilize and exploit, again growing Saskatchewan, truly growing Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, with the value-added crop production expanding, canola crushing capacity is growing and also increasing the value of canola oil by refining into a renewable diesel fuel, another ag value-added product right here in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan continuing to grow.

Mr. Speaker, the government is committing an additional \$15 million to the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization, VIDO, at the University of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, VIDO is conducting world-class research and in the future will be manufacturing vaccines right here in Saskatchewan. Domestic production is critical for national security and safety of all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say the Chair of the board of directors for VIDO grew up just south of Carnduff on a ranch and was a member of the Alida and district 4-H beef club. Mr. Speaker, Ryan and his wife Leanne live at Minton and own and operate their own feedlot, and they are truly a Saskatchewan success story. And for Ryan, I say thank you for your leadership with VIDO.

Mr. Speaker, to ensure the growth in export markets, we are increasing the funding for international trade offices by \$5 million. This will total \$9.3 million. Four new trade offices will be added this year, complementing Saskatchewan's existing offices in India, Japan, Singapore, and China. As an exporting province, having trade offices around the world will open many, many more opportunities to sell our products, truly growing Saskatchewan's industry. Saskatchewan is a net exporting province and we need markets opened to get our products into their countries, and these will do nothing but help grow Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, Highways budget was increased this year, investing \$830 million into operating, maintenance, building, and improving the province's roads and highways. This is an increase of 16 per cent or \$115 million. Investments have been made to improve safety and efficiency. We will continue to invest in Saskatchewan roads and highways across the province for years

to come. Our roads and highways are the lifeline connecting communities across the province. Mr. Speaker, 33.1 million included in the budget is transfer related to municipal infrastructure for the rural integrated roads for growth program, money that they will invest locally within their RMs and is much appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's Crown corporations are increasing their investment up to \$1.6 billion on major capital investments in this budget. SaskPower is improving the electricity system to meet the demand, and SaskEnergy is investing 276.8 million in the province's natural gas distribution system, including expansion of the transmission system to meet the demand. SaskTel is investing 323.2 million to improve its networks, dedicated to being the best, connecting people to their world, continuing to grow Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, traditionally the federal government has appointed our provincial Chief Firearms Officer. Mr. Speaker, this has changed. Saskatchewan has appointed its own Chief Firearms Officer to manage firearms within the province and give Saskatchewan citizens a voice as decisions about firearms are made. We will continue to work and enforce our provincial jurisdiction to ensure the federal government does not overstep into provincial affairs.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude my speech, I want to make it clear: I do not support the amendment as proposed by the member from Regina Rosemont. I support growth for our province. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to support the budget as presented by the Deputy Premier and Finance minister, seconded by the member from The Battlefords. I am proud to support it. Thank you very much. God bless Saskatchewan. God bless the Queen. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Cut Knife-Turtleford.

**Mr. Domotor:** — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to enter into this budget debate, and it is my privilege to rise in the House today to speak in support of this week's budget put forth by the Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, I would first like to take this opportunity to thank a few people: first of all, my wife, Noella, who looks after everything while I'm gone. I definitely could not do this job without her and her constant support. She's been so supportive of me and my role as the MLA for Cut Knife-Turtleford that I just wanted to publicly acknowledge and recognize her. She has had to make sacrifices to ensure that I can carry on with my obligations as an MLA, as well as be apart for what presently looks like for the next five weeks. This will be the longest time that we've been apart in our 27 and a half years of marriage and hopefully won't be something we have to repeat.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank and recognize my constituency assistant, Jackie Gallon, for all of her hard work and dedication in running a very efficient office. She is the first point of contact when it comes to dealing with constituents when I'm in Regina or away at meetings, and without her assistance, it would make this job much more difficult. I know that I can always count on her to keep me organized, more or less, and ensure that I'm kept well informed on what's going on back

home in my constituency. She has proven herself in a very short time as she became a new constituency assistant after the last election and has been an invaluable part of the team.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to offer my thanks to the constituents of Cut Knife-Turtleford for the confidence they've shown in me. I'm so honoured to be their representative, and I will do everything that I can to continue to present their interests in this legislature to the best of my abilities.

And last but not least, Mr. Speaker, as a newly elected MLA, I would like to offer my thanks and appreciation to the Clerks, the LAS [Legislative Assembly Service] staff, and Sergeant-at-Arms for their willingness to assist any time they've been asked. I would be remiss if I did not also thank our caucus staff, as well as the office staff of the ministers who've always been ready and able to assist when we've had questions or constituents' concerns.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this moment to talk a little bit about the budget. The 2021-22 budget is a budget that I strongly believe has the right balance to help protect, build, and grow our province, which I'll speak a little bit in more detail in a minute. First of all, I would like to start by thanking the Premier and the Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance for their leadership through this process.

Having to draft a budget to try and address all of the provincial interests, in light of additional health care costs due to an unprecedented pandemic, would be more than an overwhelming task to the say the least. However, she rose to the challenge with her hard work and dedication and has provided a budget that tries to address several ministries requiring additional funding to continue to expand on services provided, as well as investing and renewing our infrastructure to safeguard against advanced infrastructure deterioration.

Mr. Speaker, preparing a provincial budget is a long and trying task. The Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance, along with the treasury board members and all the ministers, have worked hard to ensure that we have the right balance between capital investment, infrastructure maintenance, as well as business and community support.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is providing for an additional \$359 million or a 5.8 per cent increase from the '20-21 budget for health care. The additional measures funded for health care will help protect our citizens for specific COVID-19 health responses, which includes a mass vaccination rollout, personal protective equipment, and additional physician costs just to name a few.

[12:15]

The additional dollars allocated to health care are not only due to the COVID-19 pandemic but also in providing for a record \$458 million for mental health and addictions funding for those in our society that are the most vulnerable. This, along with our commitment to improve and expand the insulin pump program by removing the age restriction and expanding the program to cover all ages, is another way that we are protecting our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to providing support for those that

require the use of an insulin pump, this government will be covering the cost of a continuous glucose monitoring system for children under the age of 18. Mr. Speaker, this will provide many individuals and children with comfort, knowing their diabetic needs will be looked after and their financial burden will be lessened.

Mr. Speaker, following through on another campaign commitment, this government will be providing an additional 6 million in expanding eligibility for individualized funding for autism spectrum disorder to children under the age of 12. This will be instrumental in providing parents with the flexibility to choose from a range of therapeutic interventions and supports that will most benefit their child. The expanded program benefits an additional 1,000 Saskatchewan children with autism spectrum disorder.

Mr. Speaker, making life more affordable for the seniors of our province has also been made a priority with this government. We will increase support by 6.7 million to reduce seniors' ambulance fees by 50 per cent, from \$275 per trip down to \$135 per trip, as well as provide for the elimination of charges to seniors for transfers between hospitals. This is so important and beneficial to those seniors residing in a rural constituency like the Cut Knife-Turtleford constituency. This benefit will assist the elderly in reducing the financial burden to those that have more health-related challenges and require additional care.

Mr. Speaker, this budget also addresses providing better care to those that built our province. In this year's budget we will spend an additional \$6 million to provide for hiring another 100 continuing care aids to work in our province's long-term care facilities, who will help long-term care clients with personal care, meals, and medication. This along with our commitment to provide for a total increase of 300 additional continuing care aids over the next three years will ensure the seniors of our province will have the best care provided to them that we can offer.

Mr. Speaker, we have increased the benefits to seniors with an additional three and a half million dollars to the seniors' income plan benefit for low-income seniors. This will increase the benefit by an additional \$30 per month for those who qualify, effective July 1st. To assist our seniors even further, we have committed to increasing the benefit to \$360 a month over the next three years, which will assist in making life more affordable for the seniors of our province and fulfill yet another commitment we made last fall. Once this has been realized, this will have quadrupled the maximum seniors' income benefit plan since this government took office.

Mr. Speaker, this plus investments being made in capital infrastructure, which includes long-term care facilities in La Ronge, Grenfell, Watson, Estevan, and hospital planning for the communities of Weyburn and Prince Albert, are just some of the highlights of how this budget will impact Saskatchewan residents who require additional care.

Mr. Speaker, another capital investment that I would personally like to highlight, which is an absolute must for rural Saskatchewan residents, is the \$1.4 million to add a new STARS helicopter to deliver emergency care faster to rural and remote areas to help save lives. This service is so important not only to the constituency of Cut Knife-Turtleford but every rural



constituency in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I personally have experience with the previous air ambulance system that we had in place prior to STARS. When my son Lyndon was just a little over a year old, he had a life-and-death experience where he almost choked to death. We were very fortunate that we lived in a community that had emergency services which were able to remove part of what was blocking his airway, resuscitate and stabilize him. The pediatric team had to fly out of Saskatoon so that he would be in the best capable hands during his travel to Royal University Hospital. What seemed like forever at the time — as the air ambulance had to land in Lloydminster, then travel to Turtleford by ambulance to pick him up, then take him back to Lloydminster to fly to Saskatoon — was very stressful for me and my wife to say the least.

The fact that in today's world, the STARS ambulance can land right at the Turtleford health care centre, to ensure speedy emergency care is received and timely transportation to a larger emergency centre is provided, has been a blessing for Saskatchewan rural residents and helped save lives. In the year 2020, STARS has flown 19 missions to Turtleford alone and 40 missions in total in the Cut Knife-Turtleford constituency.

Mr. Speaker, we know this pandemic has had a significant impact on people's lives, whether it be the loss of your employment, partial or total closure of your business, delaying your wedding plans, or the loss of a loved one. That is why this government has committed \$15 million to further support pandemic research by the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization at the University of Saskatchewan. This will ensure that this province is prepared if and when we have another virus that is so detrimental to our society.

Mr. Speaker, last night I qualified to go through the drive-through vaccination here in Regina. What an experience. I cannot say enough about our health care workers here in Saskatchewan. They were so helpful and friendly and made you feel at ease. They have gone above and beyond during this pandemic. I know this from personal experience, as my nephew is a respiratory therapy specialist at RUH [Royal University Hospital] in Saskatoon. He has had to make numerous sacrifices, which include not spending time with his young family, so that he could put in extra hours to provide care for those that need it most. Mr. Speaker, I got my shot last night, and I would encourage every Saskatchewan resident to get theirs when it is their turn to get vaccinated, so we can get through this and stick it to COVID.

Mr. Speaker, not only has this government invested in our health care system, we have invested in our education. In this budget, we are seeing overall spending for education of \$3.75 billion. This is an increase of 391.3 million or an 11.6 per cent increase from the '20-21 budget. This will assist school divisions in providing spending on pre-K to grade 12 education, post-secondary education, as well as career training programs and commissions. This also includes the safe school funding, which is to help school divisions during the pandemic.

As part of the education budget, there is a provision of nearly 90 million for education capital, which will support 21 ongoing capital projects that include 16 new schools and significant renovations of five more. These are just some examples of how

this government intends to support our education sector as we prepare for the future and educate tomorrow's generation of community leaders, labourers, and business entrepreneurs.

Mr. Speaker, to ensure reasonable affordability for education, this government has earmarked \$678.5 million for post-secondary institutions, which is a 4.4 per cent increase from the '20-21 budget. This along with student supports of 39.8 million, which is a 10 per cent increase and includes the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship rising by 50 per cent from 500 to \$750 annually per eligible student, is fulfilling another campaign commitment made by this government.

Mr. Speaker, while we know it is important to educate our schoolchildren, we also know how important it is to provide for child care to ensure that parents can continue to have the opportunity to work while having children. This is why this budget is providing 100.8 million in funding for child care and early learning. The additional funding will increase grants to both new and existing child care providers. This budget provides funding to create 176 new licensed home-based spaces and 51 new licensed centre spaces as part of this province's commitment to create 750 new licensed child care spaces as part of our four-year pledge, which will benefit our young families in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I know the opposition has been making accusations that they do not believe we have supported education enough in terms of funding. I would like my colleagues to know and recognize that my niece Jen Buettner, who is a vice-principal at Sutherland School in Saskatoon, was thrilled and excited to hear there was more funding allocated to education. She's proud of myself and the Saskatchewan Party for supporting teachers and the education system and said this will help make many students get the extra support they need.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to talk a little bit about our support for our business sector. This government recognizes that small businesses are an important economic driver in our province. This is why we have provided financial support through the small-business emergency payment program, the strong recovery adaptation rebate, and the Re-Open Saskatchewan training subsidy.

My CA [constituency assistant] Jackie Gallon reached out to small businesses to ensure they were aware of the various programs and what they may be eligible for. As a result, we made calls to 488 businesses, and we followed up with 194 emails providing them with additional links with program information. In those conversations, several business owners indicated they really appreciated hearing about the programs that could perhaps assist them while they either had to close or scale back due to COVID-19.

Although these were temporary measures to support small businesses during COVID, we have also followed through on our commitment to temporarily reduce the business tax from 2 per cent to zero per cent to further assist businesses over the next couple years.

Mr. Speaker, the introduction of the home renovation tax credit is just one more way that we are assisting small businesses. The anticipated participation in this program, which will provide a

ten-and-a-half-per-cent tax credit up to \$20,000 of eligible home renovations, has and will continue to help residents with their primary residence renovations, which will require various tradespeople and suppliers.

This program has already generated a lot of interest within our constituency, Mr. Speaker. Constituents have indicated that this program has been a major incentive in completing renovations that may have been long overdue, and which will now proceed specifically due to the program. Having the opportunity to make their homes more energy efficient are just one of the ways that residents can take advantage of the home renovation tax credit program, and help them reduce their utility bills.

Mr. Speaker, this budget includes nearly another 175 million to fulfill another campaign commitment, which is the 10 per cent SaskPower rebate. Not only will this help SaskPower customers in general, it will again assist in helping small businesses recover by reducing their energy consumption costs for 2021 and is just one of many supporting tools that we have provided to help small businesses during the pandemic.

Another way that we have given back to Saskatchewan residents is the one-time budgeted 285 million SGI rebate, which will amount to an average of approximately \$285 per vehicle. With this and the SaskPower rebate, Saskatchewan people will pay the lowest total utility rates in Canada this year, making life more affordable for our residents during these unprecedented times.

Mr. Speaker, to further assist young families, we are reintroducing the active families benefit. Our government is making cultural, sports, and arts activities more affordable by restarting the benefit of 150 per year, and 200 per year for families that have a child experiencing a disability. It is anticipated that 34,000 children will be eligible for this credit. This along with the reinstatement of the community rinks affordability grant, which provides \$2,500 per ice surface, will help communities keep ice rink activities more affordable across our province.

Community rinks promote and support health and wellness for all active age groups throughout the province. In our constituency alone, Mr. Speaker, five towns, six villages, and three clubs and associations took advantage of the community rinks affordability grant since its return in December of 2020. In rural constituencies such as Cut Knife-Turtleford the majority of the arenas and curling facilities are quite often run by volunteers and non-profit groups. The community rinks affordability grant has been re-implemented at a crucial time in our province in light of the pandemic. This will greatly assist towns, villages, and volunteer associations who are struggling to generate revenue when there can be no game activities with spectator support during the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, our veterans service clubs, like The Royal Canadian Legion, will see increased funding from 100,000 annually to 1.5 million annually. Our government understands how important these facilities are to our communities. In the constituency of Cut Knife-Turtleford, there are five Royal Canadian Legion branches. Our government values the importance of protecting the interests of our service clubs in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we know how important our Crown corporations are to the people in this province. That is why in this budget our Saskatchewan Crown corporations will spend \$1.6 billion on major capital projects. These will include 938 million by SaskPower to improve our province's electricity system to meet growing demands and maintain reliability. SaskEnergy will invest nearly 277 million this year to maintain and expand its natural gas distribution system to meet increased demands.

SaskTel will invest more than 323 million this year to improve its network, which will include completing its 107 million for Wireless Saskatchewan program in '21-22 with an investment of seven and a half million to improve cellular services to rural customers, which is important to rural constituencies like Cut Knife-Turtleford.

Mr. Speaker, we know how agriculture is such an important economic driver in this province, which really came to light during the pandemic. Although the pandemic had significant impacts to the business community, agricultural producers still put in a crop, purchased supplies, and harvested another successful crop. This is why this budget includes a 23.1 million increase to the Ministry of Agriculture, which is a 6 per cent increase from the '20-21 budget. This will help the industry grow and ensure Saskatchewan producers are able to continue to supply the world with safe, high-quality food.

Being able to fully fund business risk management programs and providing a record level of per-acre coverage under the crop insurance program is instrumental. This will ensure that our agriculture producers have the tools in place to mitigate their risks in poor crop years due to natural disasters, which is beyond their control. This along with \$2 million in additional coverage for the wildlife damage compensation program will help address crop damages sustained by wildlife and will assist in addressing stronger commodity prices.

[12:30]

The establishment of four new trade offices will complement the existing trade offices located in India, Japan, Singapore, and China and will help market our commodities to an even larger market than we presently have. Mr. Speaker, our natural resources are one of our key economic drivers and we intend to support this industry through this pandemic, which will in turn assist us in our economic recovery.

This budget includes 200 million for the federally funded accelerated site-closure program. This program will support Saskatchewan-based oil and gas service companies in the cleanup and environmental reclamation of inactive oil and gas well facilities. This will support the estimated 2,000 full-time equivalent jobs and reclaim up to 8,000 inactive wells and facilities over the next two years.

In our constituency, Mr. Speaker, I've already heard of companies benefiting from this program, as they are contracted to provide services to the oil industry in reclaiming inactive wells. This program has experienced strong uptake since it was first launched in 2020 and has recently had an Indigenous component added, which includes support to First Nations and Métis participation.

This budget, Mr. Speaker, also includes a growth plan commitment to introduce a moratorium on associated gas royalties, which will take effect as of April 1st, 2021. This initiative is part of the province's methane action plan and will provide producers with approximately 3.8 million in annual royalty relief over five years. This will enable them to invest in new methane emissions reduction projects and undertake capture of associated gases instead of venting or flaring them.

Mr. Speaker, we are also introducing additional measures to attract capital investment and create jobs by modernizing and expanding the high-water-cut program. This program is designed to extend the production cycle and improve recovery rates for wells that produce high volumes of water, which is quite common in our area with the development of heavy oil. Changes to the royalty structure will make these wells more economically viable, which will help warrant continual production.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is also simplifying and reducing royalty rates for sodium sulphate production as well as implementing measures to promote the diversification and competitiveness of the potash fertilizer sector. The 1 per cent royalty rate reduction on sodium sulphate production as well as the 10 per cent incentive credit for approved capital projects that diversify products to improve operating efficiencies are intended to help the sector navigate through current market challenges.

Mr. Speaker, our local governments are an extension of the provincial government and provide the basic services to their ratepayers on a daily basis. That is why this budget provides \$270 million in revenue sharing, which is the second-largest amount on record, and is why this government changed the formula when we took office. The funding, which is now tied to three-quarters of a per cent of the PST [provincial sales tax], provides reliable funding on an annual basis.

The funding, which increases during good economic times, also decreases when there is a downturn. However with the calculation always being provided based on PST collections of two years prior, it allows municipalities ample time to adjust their budgetary requirements accordingly with sufficient time for planning. This, along with the several infrastructure funding programs that are available through the province or jointly with the federal government — such as the rural integrated roads for growth strategic partnership program, the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, New Building Canada Fund — are just some of the grant structures available to local governments to apply for to help build their infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, in rural Saskatchewan, maintaining our transportation system is key in growing our economy and ensuring rural residents have access to services not provided for in small communities. That is why this government is investing \$830 million in Saskatchewan highways in 2021, which will help protect our citizens by making our highways safer. These improvements will consist of a mixture of new construction and the design of passing lane projects to increase safety in some of our most highly travelled corridors, with improvements being made to 1350 kilometres of provincial highways.

Mr. Speaker, although we have a budgeted deficit in the 2021-22 budget year, when you look at our net debt as a percentage of GDP [gross domestic product], we are the lowest in Canada at

18.2 per cent. We have the second-highest credit rating in all of Canada as compared to all other provinces. We have the highest employment rate in Canada in 2020.

In light of the global pandemic that has seen other provinces accrue massive deficits, I believe this government is on the right path and that this budget will support the economic recovery in the province of Saskatchewan and assist both businesses and residents during our economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance's budget and not the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Moosomin.

**Mr. Bonk:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my honour and my pleasure to rise and profess my wholehearted support for the motion that's now before the Assembly, a motion which recognizes the effort of the Minister of Finance and the many officials who played a part in crafting the sound plan that we see before us.

Before I continue, Mr. Speaker, I hope you'll indulge me as I make a few more personal remarks. I'll begin where I should by thanking my wife, Candace, and my daughter Emma. Without their unqualified support and daily efforts, I would not be here. Also I'd like to publicly thank my parents for keeping things running on the farm and for their steady guidance. Mr. Speaker, without the unqualified support of our families, none of us who have the privilege to serve in this House would be here. This has not been an easy time for anyone, and I feel that now in particular it is important to thank them.

I will start my reply to this budget as I should and as I feel obligated to do, and that is by thanking the many people of the province who've pulled together to help to see our way through this pandemic, the many people who are involved in keeping us not only safe but also keeping our province operating.

I especially want to thank those who are involved in agriculture. These are the people who not only keep us fed, but keep the world fed. To our livestock producers: in February when we were in the middle of a very cold snap and facing the second wave of the coronavirus, our livestock producers were doing what they do best. They didn't miss a beat while making sure their livestock were fed, bedded, and looked after with care and attention. To those who are finished or are in the middle of calving, I know that it can be long, exhausting hours. Please stay safe.

To our farmers: it is what you do that is the backbone of our economy. This province is very close to undertaking yet another megaproject that happens every year — that is seeding. Once again, to all our agriculture producers who will be putting in some incredibly long hours in the next few months, please stay safe.

As many of our colleagues have already stated, we simply do not have the words to express our sincere gratitude to our province's health care workers. They have made sacrifices that many of us cannot even imagine. They deserve our respect and admiration for the work that they do. We are forever grateful for your commitment to keep the citizens of our province safe and

protected.

And, Mr. Speaker, this hit home particularly hard for me today. About 30 minutes ago I heard the news that a very good friend of mine, Hans Mösenbacher, who is actually the godfather of my daughter, passed away, lost his battle with coronavirus. And I just want to mention his name publicly in the House today. He became more than a friend; he became family. So I just want to honour his memory.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide a response to the budget my hon. colleague delivered on Tuesday. The budget seems to have been summed by the novelist Ursula Le Guin when she said:

We must learn to keep balance. Having intelligence, we must not act in ignorance. Having choice, we must act with responsibility.

Our government's priority is to protect people and businesses by investing in needed support services and programs. By building and providing resources to needed projects, our government will help keep Saskatchewan growing and strong. It is the right plan to help Saskatchewan recover and grow and to plan a post-pandemic path to balance.

Budget 2021-22 is the second COVID budget our government has had to deliver. It's a budget that contained no surprises. It is a budget that delivered on the promises that we made during the election. And I believe it is the kind of budget that the people of Saskatchewan expected. It is a budget that doesn't promise too much or too little, but quietly goes about its business, making sure that the social and economic fundamentals are being taken care of and that Saskatchewan residents know that their future is secure. It does this without reckless cuts or large tax increases that would threaten both pandemic response and a strong economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, we are the hardest and descendants of the hardest people in Canada. We get up in the morning ready to put in a good day's work. When we are faced with challenging times, we don't look for simplistic solutions. The easy answer has never been our fallback. We have shared in the benefits of an economy built by Saskatchewan people with the encouragement of our government, an economy that took us from the wilderness of being a have-not province under the NDP to being the vibrant and progressive province that, as we have seen, Mr. Speaker, keeps attracting people to its promise. The challenge is clear and we will meet the challenge.

Saskatchewan people want to know, is there a plan? This budget shows them very clearly that there is. They know our government will continue to invest in programs, services, and infrastructure projects that are valued by the Saskatchewan people, because this government has built a strong foundation based on our guiding principles. We will roll up our sleeves. We will share in the hard work of getting this province back to a balanced budget, just as we have shared in times of plenty. This government has helped its citizens build an economy that will prove resilient of the shocks of uncertain resource revenues. We will meet the challenge that has been presented to us with the conviction and resolve that has characterized Saskatchewan people throughout its history.

When I think of the traits that exemplify the people of this great province, and who continue to live, work, and do business here, there are three that come to mind: practical, resilient, and perseverant. I believe that this budget embodies these traits. It is practical because it recognizes that because we are in a period of uncertainty, and it invests in the right policies and programs that will help this province and citizens get through the current situation we're in. It does this in a measured and pragmatic way, by not shocking the economy with new, increased taxes or by reckless spending. It's practical because it continues to make investments in the things that matter most to the people of this province, and in fact makes record investments in health care, education, and social services.

Investments like 1.5 billion to protect Saskatchewan lives and livelihoods in the fight against COVID-19. This follows a \$2 billion investment last year. A further commitment of 1.3 billion of support in place for the next two years to continue to provide the people of the province the support and assistance they need for a multi-year commitment of 4.8 billion to help get our people through this unprecedented time.

A record health budget of 6.54 billion, up 359 million or 5.8 per cent from last year, which will strengthen our provincial health care system and protect families and communities. This includes a \$90 million increase in COVID response for mass vaccination rollout, the purchase of more personal protective equipment, support tracing measures, expansion of testing and assessment sites, additional laboratory equipment, supports for long-term care, and coverage of added physician costs.

Mr. Speaker, recognizing that the past year has been a very trying time for the people of this province, this budget also provides record investment in mental health and addictions programs and services of 458 million, up 23.4 million or 5.4 per cent up from last year.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is practical because it makes investments in education so that no one, no person falls behind in these times. Our Education budget across government is 3.75 billion, up more than 391 million. This includes all spending on pre-K to grade 12 education, post-secondary education, and career training programs and commissions. It also includes fully funding the 2 per cent salary increase in teachers' collective bargaining agreements. The funding included in this budget will create 176 additional licensed home spaces and 51 new licensed centre spaces.

For the first time, the Government of Saskatchewan is providing a multi-year funding commitment to the post-secondary sector, which was developed collaboratively and is focused on shared priorities. This will help our universities, colleges, and Sask Polytechnic plan for the future knowing that they have stable funding.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is also practical because it invests in social services so that the least fortunate in our province have the help and supports they need. It meets our election commitment to increase benefits to seniors with 3.5 million in additional funding for the seniors' income plan, the sixth increase that our government has made to the seniors' income plan since 2008.

This budget will provide increased funding of 6.7 million to

community-based organizations, including a \$4.2 million increase for those working with people with intellectual disabilities and a \$2.5 million increase for those supporting at-risk children, youth, and families, recognizing the critical role that CBOs [community-based organization] play in protecting the province's most vulnerable during this pandemic.

[12:45]

It includes a \$1.6 million increase to PRIDE [parent resources for information, development, and education], a specialized training program that supports foster families to care for children with more intense needs. A \$3 million increase in this budget will support more extended family caregivers. A \$1.4 million increase for in-home family supports is aimed at preventing children from coming in to the care of Social Services.

Mr. Speaker, this budget also speaks to the resiliency of the Saskatchewan people. While it would be too easy to dwell on the pandemic and that the sky is falling, that is not the way of the people of this province. They know that they will get through this and come out stronger because of what we have had to endure. We recognize the resilience of the people of Saskatchewan and provide some immediate relief as our citizens cope with the pressures and costs of the current pandemic.

This budget delivers on another campaign commitment to provide all SaskPower customers with a 10 per cent rebate on their SaskPower bills this year, putting nearly \$175 million back in the pockets of the people of the province. Additionally, Saskatchewan drivers will receive a rebate on their vehicle registrations from the Auto Fund. These rebates will be about \$285 per vehicle, putting another \$285 million back into the pockets of the Saskatchewan residents. With these rebates, Saskatchewan people will pay the lowest total utility rates in Canada this year, making life more affordable and strengthening our province's economic recovery from the pandemic.

As Saskatchewan's economy recovers and we show our resiliency and our perseverance, our grit, this budget looks to make sure that we have the right people with the right skills in place to help our province grow and prosper as it emerges from the last few years. That's why this budget looks to the future when it makes investments in the workforce of the province.

This budget provides funding for workforce development of more than 39 million to strengthen Saskatchewan's recovery from the pandemic; employment assistance for people with disabilities; an \$18-million investment to remove barriers, provide supports, and develop skills that people need to fully participate in the labour force. This budget also provides 8.1 million, an increase of 700,000, for the Canada-Saskatchewan Job Grant to help ensure employers have a skilled workforce with the competencies to be productive and competitive.

It invests in agriculture. This provincial budget includes a \$23.1 million increase to the Ministry of Agriculture, which will help the industry grow and ensure Saskatchewan producers are able to continue supplying the world with safe, high-quality food. The \$386.9 million Agriculture budget represents a 6 per cent increase from the 2020-21 budget.

The Agriculture budget includes 20.6 million increase to

business risk management funding compared to 2020-21. This will provide \$265 million to fund a suite of business risk management programs, which are delivered as part of the federal-provincial Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

For municipalities, the 2021-22 budget includes more than 465 million in direct supports for Saskatchewan's municipalities. This investment will support communities as they continue to recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic, with a strong focus on local infrastructure. This budget's municipal investments include more than 275 million in municipal revenue sharing, the second-highest amount on record. Since 2007 municipal revenue sharing program has seen 118 per cent increase in no-strings-attached, predictable funding for Saskatchewan municipalities.

As part of this budget stimulus package, communities in the Moosomin constituency received funding from the municipal economic enhancement program, or MEEP. This will support the building and repair of infrastructure to stimulate the economic recovery and encourage local job creation by allowing communities to invest in much-needed infrastructure. I'd like to take this time to highlight some of the communities that have received MEEP funding thus far in the Moosomin constituency: Moosomin, 39,247; Wolseley, \$122,744; Grenfell, 157,958; Broadview, 79,338; Kipling, 154,364; Whitewood, \$123,894; and water treatment upgrades in Moosomin for \$4.58 million.

This budget invests in highways and transportation as well. The budget also includes investments in shortline railway and municipal transportation infrastructure, including 28 million to support economic growth and safety on rural municipal roads; including 13 million through stimulus; 6.6 million for the construction and maintenance partnerships with urban municipalities; \$800,000 in partnership funds for low-volume TMS [thin membrane surface] and gravel roads; 1.5 million, including 650,000 in stimulus funding, to support community airport improvements, that when combined with matching partner funds, will create a \$3 million investment; 530,000 in new funding and improvements for shortline railways.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's economy may currently have challenges brought on by a global pandemic, but the diversity that our government has built into the system continues to shield us from some of the worst impacts of the economic downturn. Mr. Speaker, we don't deny there's a revenue shortfall. We don't deny it's something that has to be dealt with. But again, our diversity will make the job of meeting the challenge more possible and less painful. This diversity has been built into the Saskatchewan economy, has helped at least in part to cushion the blow from the drop in resource revenue.

I cringe to think what would have happened if this challenge had been faced by our province during the dark, dreary days of the NDP. Mr. Speaker, this budget, it speaks to the perseverant nature of our province. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines perseverant as, "trying to do something or continuing to do something in a determined way, despite having problems." I think this word best sums up the essence of this budget, the essence of how we have faced the current pandemic.

In October 2012, Brad Wall, the former leader of the Saskatchewan Party and premier of the province, released the

first *Saskatchewan Plan for Growth: Vision 2020 and Beyond*, a document which provided the guidance for the growth that the province experienced in the previous seven years. In November of 2019, Scott Moe, the Premier of the province and leader of the Saskatchewan Party, released the second *Saskatchewan's Growth Plan: The Next Decade of Growth 2020-2030*, a document that creates the road map for Saskatchewan's future growth.

These documents charted a course for our province. And despite setbacks like bad crop years, floods, forest fires, falling oil and potash prices, carbon taxes, and unhelpful federal policy, Saskatchewan showed its perseverance, its persistence, its stick-to-it-iveness. And we achieved, with the help of the people of Saskatchewan, most of what we set out to do in the first growth plan.

The second growth plan has the same vision, the same goals, the same hopes and aspirations. With the help of this budget and future budgets to come, this government, guided by good fiscal policies and choices like my esteemed colleague, the Minister of Finance, has demonstrated in this budget, I know that Saskatchewan will continue to grow and prosper because that's the way we are as a people. Being fiscally responsible without undermining — and in fact increasing and supporting — the programs, services, and infrastructure that the Saskatchewan people have become accustomed to, has been the hallmark of our government.

We have become and will remain a province thriving with opportunities, especially for our youth, a province full of potential that was overlooked for so long, a province where all possibilities are explored and the best choices are made for all of the people of Saskatchewan.

In closing, I'd like to quote directly from the budget address the minister gave on April 6th. I can think of no better words that articulate what we are going through and my hopes for the future:

Throughout this pandemic, we have witnessed Saskatchewan's resolve as our people [have] made the sacrifices required to protect not only themselves but also their families, friends, neighbours, and co-workers. When this pandemic is over, we will witness Saskatchewan's resilience as our economy recovers and grows, as businesses reopen and more people return to work, and as Saskatchewan recovers to be even stronger than before.

For this reason, Mr. Speaker, it will be an honour and a privilege to support the motion:

That the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

And I will not be supporting the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms. Bowes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to at least starting to enter into this debate today to speak to the budget that's been presented. Before I do so, I would like to first take a

moment to thank my constituents in Saskatoon University. They are the reason I'm here and I will strive to represent them to the best of my ability.

Representing our constituents is of course not something we are able to do single-handedly as MLAs. There is an incredible amount of work that goes on behind the scenes and is undertaken by others so that we are able to fulfill our roles and serve our constituents effectively. Much of that work is done by our constituency assistants. I would like to recognize my constituency assistant, Vita Andersone, for her important work in our office in Saskatoon University. Vita is a strong and passionate advocate, Mr. Speaker, and I am so fortunate to have her holding down the fort in our office.

I also want to thank both my colleagues and our NDP caucus staff. They have been very patient and gracious towards me as a new MLA who's still very much learning the ropes. These folks are incredibly talented, kind, and compassionate people who I am lucky to have the benefit of learning from.

I would also like to recognize all of the staff who work in this building, Mr. Speaker. The level of professionalism, competency, and accommodation that is displayed by the people who work here is truly impressive.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to express my gratitude to my partner, Brian, for his love and support. He puts up with my moods, my bad habits, and with the demands of my work as an MLA, and is far too kind to so much as complain. As I'm sure all of us out-of-town MLAs are feeling, being separated for six weeks from those you love the most is not an easy thing, but here we all are.

On this note, Mr. Speaker, I want to echo the comments many of my colleagues have already made around this government's insistence on removing their masks while speaking. I find it outrageous at a time when variants continue to spike, in Regina especially, the absolute disregard for workplace safety and the simple lack of human decency demonstrated by this Premier.

Mr. Speaker, turning to the budget, there are a number of concerns I would like to take the opportunity to address. From this budget we have learned that we are facing a deficit of \$2.6 billion. The government is projecting deficits each year through 2024 to 2025. Our provincial debt will increase \$4.2 billion to bring us to an astronomical \$27.8 billion. In terms of this deficit and the incredible amount of debt that this government has managed to amass, Mr. Speaker, the fundamental question we are all left with is, what do the people of Saskatchewan have to show for it?

Mr. Speaker, perhaps if this government had a dramatically higher standard of living to show for their debt in this province, I would be inclined to be less critical. But here is what this government has saddled us with instead: one in four Saskatchewan children living in poverty, the lowest minimum wage in the entire country, the worst rates of COVID in the country, the highest rates of domestic violence in the country, and abysmal social assistance rates that leave the most vulnerable of our people to languish in abject poverty.

Mr. Speaker, setting aside what is doled out for shelter and utility

allowances to people on social assistance, the travel per diems we as MLAs receive for just three days of meals, \$285, is the same amount that a person on social assistance lives on for an entire month.

Mr. Speaker, this budget fails to support so many people in our province. It fails to address reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in a province that is rife with systemic racism. It fails to support women, who still today are left waiting for equal rights. It fails to support the poor and the working class, and it fails to support those who struggle with mental health and addictions.

Mr. Speaker, experts told this government in no uncertain terms that funding safe consumption sites not only saves lives but it saves money. This government's refusal to fund Prairie Harm Reduction in Saskatoon is shameful. Saskatchewan's addictions crisis has left 439 people dead from an overdose since January of last year. A hundred and three of those people have died in 2021 alone. The blood of those 439 Saskatchewan people is on this government's hands.

I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but I think you get my drift. These are not things that a government has any right to be proud of.

**The Speaker:** — It now being 1 p.m., this Assembly now stands adjourned until Monday, April 12th at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 13:00.]

# GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN

## CABINET MINISTERS

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**Premier**  
**President of the Executive Council**  
**Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs**

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

**Hon. Lori Carr**  
Minister of Social Services

**Hon. Dustin Duncan**  
Minister of Education

**Hon. Bronwyn Eyre**  
Minister of Energy and Resources

**Hon. Donna Harpauer**  
Deputy Premier  
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**Hon. Jeremy Harrison**  
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Minister of Immigration and Career Training  
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Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation

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Saskatchewan Government Insurance  
Minister Responsible for  
Saskatchewan Power Corporation  
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