

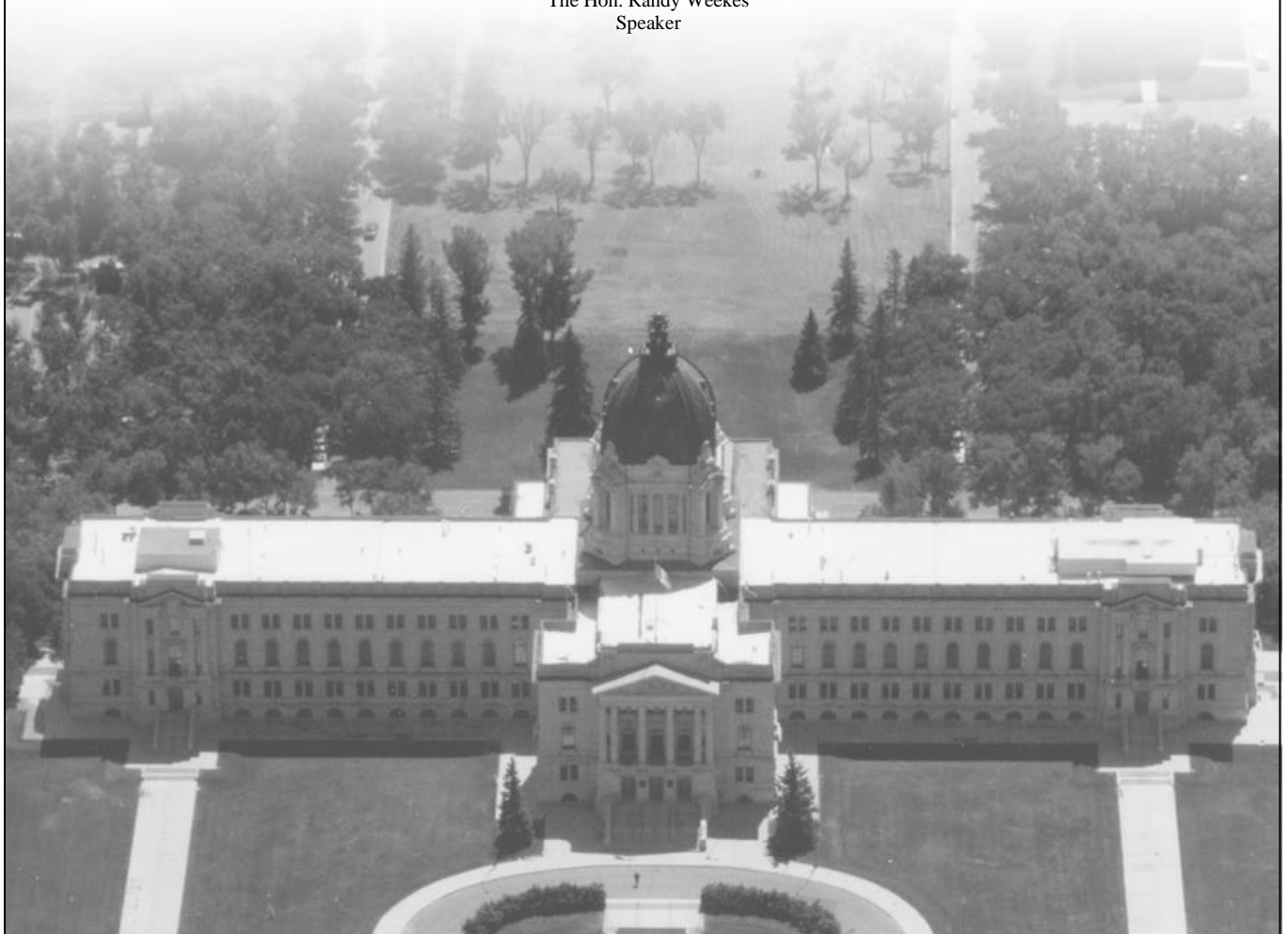
THIRD SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
AND
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)
Published under the
authority of
The Hon. Randy Weekes
Speaker



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
3rd Session — 29th Legislature

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

Speaker — Hon. Randy Weekes

Premier — Hon. Scott Moe

Leader of the Opposition — Carla Beck

Beck, Carla — Regina Lakeview (NDP)

Bonk, Steven — Moosomin (SP)

Bowes, Jennifer — Saskatoon University (NDP)

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Francis, Ken — Kindersley (SP)

Friesen, Marv — Saskatoon Riversdale (SP)

Goudy, Todd — Melfort (SP)

Grewal, Gary — Regina Northeast (SP)

Hargrave, Joe — Prince Albert Carlton (SP)

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Jenson, Terry — Martensville-Warman (SP)

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Nerlien, Hugh — Kelvington-Wadena (SP)

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Skoropad, Hon. Dana — Arm River (SP)

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Teed, Nathaniel — Saskatoon Meewasin (NDP)

Tell, Hon. Christine — Regina Wascana Plains (SP)

Vermette, Doyle — Cumberland (NDP)

Weekes, Hon. Randy — Biggar-Sask Valley (SP)

Wilson, Nadine — Saskatchewan Rivers (Ind.)

Wotherspoon, Trent — Regina Rosemont (NDP)

Wyant, Hon. Gordon — Saskatoon Northwest (SP)

Young, Aleana — Regina University (NDP)

Young, Colleen — Lloydminster (SP)

Vacant — Lumsden-Morse

Vacant — Regina Coronation Park

Standings

Government Caucus: Saskatchewan Party (SP) — 46; Opposition Caucus: New Democratic Party (NDP) — 12;

Independent: Saskatchewan United Party (Ind.) — 1; Vacant — 2

Clerks-at-the-Table

Clerk — Iris Lang

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

Deputy Clerk — Kathy Burianyak

Principal Clerk — Robert Park

Sergeant-at-Arms — Lyall Frederiksen

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CONTENTS

EVENING SITTING

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY (BUDGET DEBATE)

Goudy	3469
Jenson	3472
Harrison, D.	3475
Tell	3477
Conway	3479
Duncan	3483
Cockrill	3487
Lemaigre	3492
Merriman	3494

[The Assembly resumed at 19:00.]

EVENING SITTING

The Deputy Speaker: — It now being 7 o'clock, I call this House to order.

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY (BUDGET DEBATE)

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Harpauer that the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, and the proposed amendment to the main motion moved by Mr. Wotherspoon.]

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

Mr. Goudy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand in the House today and speak to our budget and a real privilege to represent the people of Melfort.

You know, I was listening to the member from Saskatoon Eastview earlier talking about his daughter over in Albania. And it's an interesting country, Mr. Speaker. You know, there's a clear connection between happiness and thankfulness. And I'll never forget the day I was in Albania and some Germans had sent a whole bunch of banana boxes to give, hand out to some villages.

And it was amazing, Mr. Speaker, after however many years of communism and socialism in Albania, you would take those banana boxes to the villages, and it's like they were mad at you. Because where have you been? It was difficult to give . . . I'll never forget the one day, Mr. Speaker, in Albania. It was out in a village outside of Pogradec, and people actually came with knives and stole the boxes of aid that were sent to support them in the villages.

There was so little thankfulness that I actually at one point I had said in Gjirokastra . . . We had all the people gathered around and they were saying things like, if you don't give me the right size shoes, I'm going to burn your house.

And so in front of all, the police officer was there and everybody was there and we'd have everything ready, and I said, you know what, everybody; I'm just at the place right now where some of you have told me that you're going to burn my house; some of you are going to do this; some of you are going to do that. But at this point, the only way for everybody to get what's fair is to gather all around tight, and we're going to light it on fire, and everybody take a deep breath. And that's the only way to be fair. Mr. Speaker, they had come through years of communism. I love those people. They became like family to me even though we could be hard on each other.

Thankfulness comes with joy and happiness. And when I look at some of the things across the way, it reminds me a little bit of those days when there was absolute just unthankful attitudes and

the expectation that the government and other people needed to provide everything for my needs. And if you didn't give me what I want, when I want it, I'm not going to be happy. You know, Mr. Speaker, thankfulness is such an important part of life. And I wanted to start off just by saying that I'm very thankful for this \$19 billion budget. And the first person that I want to be thankful to is to God.

And you know, I'll never forget, however many years ago it was but when my dad was alive, farmers as our member from . . . I guess we can say Lyle Stewart now. Lyle Stewart said, he's a farmer and he likes ag illustrations, he said, Mr. Speaker, at one point. You know, ag illustrations, you take one seed of canola, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you put that into the ground. And I've asked that of the last premier, Brad Wall, and our current Premier, you put one seed of canola into the ground, how many come out?

And it was interesting, Brad Wall didn't know the answer off the cuff, but Lyle Stewart was able to inform our current Premier, and he said there's about 700. So 700 seeds of canola come out when you put one in the ground.

So, Mr. Speaker, who do you thank for those 699 seeds of canola that we can then take and put in our bins and ship down to the crushing plant — wherever it might be — that's being built? And all the excitement that we have, we've got all this excitement around . . . You put one seed of canola into the ground and 700 come out, and all of a sudden we've got an economy.

And so a number of years ago in Melfort, Saskatchewan, we are kind of up in the colder part of the province. And the weather was not co-operating, and we were not getting the crops in. And it looked bad. It snowed. And I remember you'd go to the coffee shop those days, there wasn't a lot of thanksgiving going on.

But you know what happened, Mr. Speaker? That snow melted. Those farmers got those crops in the bin. And my dad talked to the bunch of farmers. My dad was a big ag guy. He was sort of a chemical manufacturer that was never a big farmer but friends with the farmers. And they all talked together, and they said, you know what we're going to do? We're going to take out a one-page ad, the whole centre spread of the *Melfort Journal*.

And you know what they put in there? It was a black . . . I'll never forget it because I was the guy who took the picture of Mr. South standing on his farm with his hands raised to heaven. And right across the whole top of that newspaper ad was, "Thank you, God." Because those farmers realized if we wouldn't have had the weather to get those crops in the bin, she'd have been a tough year for Melfort, Saskatchewan.

And so when I look at the economy, we got \$19 billion. I'm having a hard time with the guys on the other side not being thankful. You know, it's like trying to find a needle in a haystack of \$19 billion of something good to say about the economy or about the budget. You know, it's a tough one to see. So, Mr. Speaker, thankfulness. I am very, very, very thankful for our budget.

I'm thankful for our Finance minister and all of our friends on this side of the House who are part of the treasury board, and the

cabinet ministers that have worked so hard. And I'll mention a little bit about some of the different ministries and some of the good things that are going on in that budget.

But, Mr. Speaker, before I do that, I wanted to say something about a good friend of mine. His name is Rod Gantefoer. Rod Gantefoer was a past Finance minister in this province, past MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for Melfort. And he got a disease that took him down a little bit, and progressively it's got more and more difficult. But Parkinson's has been very tough on our friend, though he is still Mr. Thankful, and upbeat.

And I went to see our friend in the hospital the other day because he had fell and he had broken . . . And you know, when I went in to see him I had heard that the word to him from the doctor was, you know what, Rod, you're maybe going to have to go to Parkland and you're maybe not going to be coming out of Parkland.

He had just bought, with his wife, beautiful Carole Gantefoer, they had bought an apartment and they were going to grow old and enjoy their grandchildren. And yet now he's moving into our long-term care facility. So I went to see Rod in the hospital. And I asked Rod, I said you know, Rod, if you were to pass one thing on to the constituency and the people of the province of Saskatchewan, what would that be?

You know, I've loved to be mentored by all sorts of older men, and Rod was one of the guys that I've felt as a mentor in my own life. And he thought for a second and he said, you know what, it was from Mr. Leishman in Kelvington, Saskatchewan. And he was the guy who would show up before all the rest of the people showed up at church on a Sunday morning, and Mr. Leishman would have the heat on and the lights on, and everything ready to go.

And so Rod said he watched this guy week after week after week always be there, doing what he needed to do. And so one day he said, I asked Mr. Leishman — a Polish immigrant to Saskatchewan — and he said, Mr. Leishman, why do you do this? Like he doesn't get paid for it; it's not his job. And Mr. Leishman looked at him and thought for a moment, and he says, if I don't be do, who be do?

And so Rod Gantefoer said to me the other day, if you're going to pass on one thing to Saskatchewan, he says the words from Mr. Leishman I've found to be the most important in my life: if I don't be do, who be do?

So we're sitting there in that hospital together visiting. And here's the guy who was a lot of the impetus behind STARS [Shock Trauma Air Rescue Service] air ambulance. Now he's sitting there in the hospital listening to that helicopter come in and out of the hospital.

He had to go through for a CT [computerized tomography] scan. Isn't that funny? Rod Gantefoer got the Melfort CT. Rod had to use that CT scan. It's a good thing we have one. And it's a good thing Rod was there, and he promised and said we're bringing a CT scanner to Melfort.

You know, the things that these ministers do, Mr. Speaker, we need to be so thankful for the work that they put into the

provisions for the whole province. You never know if you're going to be that patient that's going to need that CT scanner or you're going to be the person, the father, or the mother who's going to be listening for that helicopter to show up when your children need it.

And Rod Gantefoer was sitting in that hospital. And he wasn't the person that said, it's somebody else's responsibility. He said, if I don't be do, who be do? And Rod Gantefoer accomplished . . . And he had friends. So there's George Sterner and the crew putting together the helipad, all the volunteer work that went on in the background to get all those things. Mr. Speaker, we need to see the many things that we need to be thankful for as the province of Saskatchewan and all of the good work that goes into this province.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to touch on a few things from our budget. You know, if you live in Naicam, Saskatchewan now — and the Hetland Seeds guy there — you drive down that highway past Naicam. It's a beautiful highway. There's all sorts of nice . . . If you're a Naicam guy, you should be very, very thankful these days. All sorts of money went into highways there.

You know, Mr. Speaker, Robert Miller, he's maybe not somebody that everybody knows, but he's a solid guy who would have the same attitude of Mr. Leishman. He's the reeve for the Star City RM [rural municipality], and he's taken me a few times to school me on things. I need to be schooled quite often on all sorts of things. But he said, Goudy, hop in the truck; we're going to have a look at bridges and culverts. And I'm wet behind the ear; I know nothing.

And so here's this friendly Robert Miller takes me in his truck, and he's showing me how to deal with culverts and bridges. And my goodness, I was educated on the need for culverts and bridges in the northeastern part of Saskatchewan. The majority of the water, the majority of the bridges and culverts are up in that area. What do I see? So I phoned Robert. Robert, do you see the money in the budget for culverts and bridges?

You know, to see the kinds of things that go on, we've got these people on the front line. You know, the Education minister, Mr. Speaker, I like the guy. He was the Minister of Environment back in the day. He came out with a quote. I think it was his. And I was sitting in my spot and I thought, did that guy just come up with that off the cuff? It was ridiculous.

He's talking about Justin Trudeau's new tax that he brought in. And he says, the job-killing, soul — and just the way he said it — soul-sucking, unconstitutional, inflationary carbon tax. And I just thought, what on earth? You can't hit replay. It's not like watching, you know, the CFL [Canadian Football League]. You can't, you know, see the replay.

But from there I'm thinking, what on . . . That is the escalator that just keeps on keeping our costs of living continually moving up, moving up, moving up. You know, people are saying, we need to have a look into what's causing all this inflation. Well my goodness, we got the job-killing, soul-sucking, unconstitutional, inflationary carbon tax that's continually raising the cost of living in Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker, education. We see the budget this year, best in

eight years, and the kinds of things that the Ministry of Education's comes out with. And you know, one of the things that I just want to say, that I'm super thankful to be a part of the government that comes out with this SDLC [Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation]. You know, opportunities for Saskatchewan.

You know, you might be a kid . . . If you're like me, I wasn't the big strong-in-English guy. Maybe math either. I don't know what I was strong in. But you know, Mr. Speaker, in education, all of us are different. Every one of us are a little bit different. You might be a rock star in one area of life, but you know, you're not in the other. And when we look at the SDLC and the opportunity that every kid across this province . . . And I think the Minister of Education coined the phrase "K [kindergarten] to career." And somebody else might have said K to jobs and he said, that's just lousy; it doesn't even sound nice. K to career. The guy who can come up with these sayings. K to career.

So we got these kids who are going into kindergarten, and sure you might not end up being a doctor. But you know, you might not fit that kind . . . you wouldn't even like to be a doctor. You wouldn't like to be, you know, an accountant. But maybe you'd like to be a plumber. Or maybe you'd like to work in the auto industry, like are working together with the SDLC to put together some curricular courses. Some of these things are pretty exciting, Mr. Speaker, that I'm seeing coming out of education these days. And I just want to say I appreciate our minister and his staff and all that they are doing.

You know another area, Mr. Speaker, that I'm pretty excited about is the mental health area. We've got all these doctors and nurses back in Melfort that are serving us faithfully. You know, they're all part of the budget. So they're always, across the way, looking for more expansion. But you know what? I appreciate the monies that we already have in place that we're spending in health care.

We have our Minister of Energy and Resources sitting here. And he used to be the Minister of Health back in the day when — I'll never forget — some people with cystic fibrosis came into our office and shared with us about the need for a new drug. And so I'll never forget. We went into the minister's office and he closed the door and it was probably the first time I've seen a minister — I was new — weep. And he said like, Todd, here's what we're up against.

So fast-forward to now he's the Minister of Energy and Resources. Fast-forward to when I'm sitting in my kitchen in my home and we're having a whole bunch of youth come over to our house for supper. And in walks eight young kids, and one of those young boys comes in. He shakes my hand. We're talking; we're talking.

[19:15]

And in our conversations he says, you know what, I have cystic fibrosis. And I look at him, and he's like just a picture of health. And I said, wow, you're doing awfully well for a young man with cystic fibrosis. And he says, you know, there's this new miracle drug. It's called Trikafta.

You know, that may not be a new announcement in this budget,

but that's covered from the last one. And we're building on these things. And we see what these ministers are doing. Like it's \$19 billion of great news. But we need to be thankful for these things. We need to see all of the good things that are going on in Saskatchewan. And if I don't be do, who be do?

We had a minister of Health back in the day who did it. He made it happen. And then we have the current ministers, and you see all that those men are doing. And one of those things . . . And the ladies, ministers that are doing such great things too. But our Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, I just want to mention a little bit of one of the things.

So one of the doctors that we have in our community is my doctor. And the guy's got a big heart for people. And I think I might have mentioned this before. But it's funny, if you use to see myself go into the backyard of a friend's house. He has this little 8-by-12 shed with a wood stove in there. Winter, summer, didn't matter, the three of us would meet in this back shed on a Sunday morning, and we would just share from our hearts.

And so one guy was a sales manager at a car dealership, one guy's a doctor, and then I was a pastor and now I'm MLA. So here we are in there, and I asked the guys one day, I said, you know, do you guys think you could put together a support group for mental health? And this was about three and a half years ago. And they say, you know what? And the doctor says, that's been on my heart for a while. And the car salesman, I'm in. So these two guys, they started two and a half years ago, a mental health support group in my community.

Wouldn't it be great if we could see a mental health support group sprout up in every little community across Saskatchewan so that when you go . . . And our health ministers have all of the treatment beds and all of the different levels of care for mental health, but then what do you have when you go home? You know, you've been to the Calder Centre. You've been to this treatment place. You've been to there. Now you go back to Kinistino, Saskatchewan. What have I got?

Well part of the budget of 2023 is going to help to set up a support group in the Kinistino and the Naicam and the Watson, Saskatchewan, where you can support one another in your mental health. It can be a mother with a daughter who's got an eating disorder and drowning. I don't know what to do. You can go to the physician and ask for advice and ask for help. Or you can go to the support group and find people who have come through those same kind of challenges that your daughter is facing. And they will walk with you. And that's what's gone on in Melfort.

It's crazy to hear what some of these people are saying. I've been to this and this and this and this and then I heard of this group. And ever since that day, I'm fixed. And now I'm not just better myself; I'm helping others in our own community.

We have a lady, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We had her over for coffee the other night, her and her husband, and I can't say who she is but she was, back in the high school days, my centre's mom. And so if you know who my centre's mom was then you'll know who this lady was. But anyways, well it's not that big of a deal. But she was over at our house the other day.

And she was an ex-nurse and she said, you know, it's interesting to hear how you're talking about supporting people in their communities. She said, "I moved into this apartment building, and I saw a lady there that didn't have relatives in the area." And she said, "you know what, I just gave her my phone number on a little card and I said, you know what, why don't if you ever need anything, you just give me a call." And she says, "as time went by I realized that maybe I should be checking up on her." So she said, "you know what, I'll check with you every day at 5 o'clock."

So I was at a 90th birthday yesterday, and this lady comes over. And she sits beside me and she says, "Todd, I just wanted to tell you that lady who I check up on every day at 5 o'clock, I saw her car was in the parking lot. I knocked on the door, no answer. And I saw her car was there, so I knocked again. And finally we broke in and I found her on the floor. And she had fallen and wasn't able to . . ."

But Mr. Speaker, this beautiful woman — who said, you know what, if I don't be do, who be do — she showed up at her door and then she went and checked her car is here, and then she went back and she knocked and she knocked and she wouldn't take no answer for an answer until they got into that apartment and were there to save that lady.

You know, Mr. Speaker, sometimes it's not "I be do;" sometimes it's "you be do." Or sometimes when you can't do it, me or you, then you come together as a province and you say, we be do.

And yet, you know, we all have the opportunities to serve one another in the areas that we can. And we can all be thankful for a \$19 billion budget that we all get to share. We all got some highways. We all got some, you know, infrastructure somewhere or the other. Like, Saskatchewan has to share. We can't spend everything at once.

I'm so proud of our minister who took a billion dollars and paid down debt last year, and took another billion dollars of profits this year. Let's not say profits. They keep on saying on the other side, windfall profits. It's like no, that's the labour of the Saskatchewan people.

Or a comment from one of the members was, you know, when we were going to look into, investigate our provincial taxation team, and it was like, we have the Canadian one and it's free. Seriously. No, it's not free, actually. They don't do things for free in Ottawa.

But we got to work together, Mr. Speaker. We got to see that sometimes we all got to pull together and do what we can. And you know, I'm so proud to be a part of a team on this side that's quite thankful. And you know what, I'm not saying you guys aren't thankful. Like you know, I hear the minister of Saskatoon Eastview talk about his daughter and like . . . The member — sorry, did I say minister? — the member from across. Like you know, they're thankful for certain things. But I would challenge the members on the other side of the House, you know, look in that \$19 billion budget and see, is there not something that you could encourage your people?

Because you know what? I just sometimes hear people angry. They phone my office and they're mad. And generally it's they

heard something that wasn't quite true. And they're mad and they're upset and they're stirred up, and they didn't have to get mad and upset and stirred up, because what they heard wasn't really true.

And you know the CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] and the CTV [Canadian Television Network Ltd.] and the different news media outlets will do what they want to do. But certainly the people who sit here day after day, week after week, month after month together, we represent the people from our constituencies. And I want my people in my constituency to hear encouraging things about their government, that they can be thankful for what's going on in Saskatchewan. Because today, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of good things going on in Saskatchewan. There's a lot of things that each and every one of us could be thankful for.

So with that — sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker — I just want to say I will be voting to support the budget that was put forwards by our Finance minister and seconded by our member from Kindersley.

And you know, I'd just like to leave these final last words from Mr. Leishman from Kelvington, the Polish immigrant from the past, that you know, if I don't be do, who be do? If you don't be do, who be do? And you know sometimes we can't overcome it on our own. But together if we do it, it'll be done. So thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Jenson: — Well thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And there's a lot of things — the member from Melfort is correct — there's a lot of things to be thankful for, but following him after a budget reply is not one of them. It was awesome. That's all I'm going to say. And to the member from Melfort, you're an inspiration every day that we get to come to work with you. Thank you very much for that.

So this budget, as the member from Melfort had said, this budget does so much in so many areas. There's investments that are in all the right places, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether it be health, education, helping those that need a hand up, or for those who are the most vulnerable in our society.

The other thing that I'm really proud of is the ability that we're able to pay down some debt, and I'll get into that in a minute. But like I said, there's so much in this budget to be thankful for. It's going to be impossible for me to cover this off in the time that I've got tonight. In fact this budget is so good, when I went home on the weekend, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my laptop bag wouldn't even close because there was so much documentation. It was truly difficult to get through it all.

But before I get into that I just do want to say a few thank yous. First of all — and I know that they're probably not watching tonight, but you never know — I want to say thank you to my wife, Angela, and my kids, Kolbie and Asher. As some of you may know, my son Asher plays hockey, and the member from Riversdale was there on Friday night when they won the city championships. And I just want to say thank you to my son and all of his teammates for making Warman proud, taking home the Saskatoon city championships in U18 [under 18] C.

There's a special anniversary happening in my constituency later this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that's my constituency assistant, Whitney Friesen. He's going to be celebrating his 30th year as a constituency assistant in Saskatchewan. Whitney started with Bill Neudorf back in 1993 I believe, and he's served a couple of other past MLAs — the late Ben Heppner as well as my predecessor, Nancy Heppner — and now me. And I fondly like to tell constituents when they ask, I am the fourth MLA that has worked for him.

And speaking of constituents, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say thank you to the good people of Martensville-Warman. We have a lot of great conversations in the office, and in my previous life as a small-business person with my staff and with my customers I always had an open door policy, and I continue that today. My door is always open to anybody that wants to come in and talk, no appointment needed. I'll drop what I'm doing if I can, and we'll have a chat. We'll have a coffee. We'll talk football. We'll talk things like budget, whether it be serious, whether it's just a nice friendly chat. So to the people in Martensville-Warman, I thank them for their support and will continue to work hard on their behalf.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's an empty seat on our back row, and that empty seat belongs to a gentleman that was elected with me and several of my colleagues in 2020. And he's one of the good ones, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He's one of the good ones. No, I mean he is truly one of the good ones with one of the biggest hearts you've ever seen. Derek is somebody who always takes the time to help others regardless of his own situation, you know. And he's got that wry sense of humour and that enormous knowledge of professional and amateur sports. He's an encyclopedia on two legs when it comes to sports.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Derek's wife and my wife really connected this past summer — the member from Walsh Acres — really connected this past summer and they haven't been able to get together as much as they had hoped to.

So I just want to say to the member from Walsh Acres, whether you're watching tonight or not, and I know I speak for all my colleagues in our caucus and our ministerial staff throughout the building when I say this, but we really miss your presence, dude. We're all praying for you and for Laurie and your entire family. And you've got a large, large circle of friends, and we're all here for you no matter what. So here's to you, good friend. Keep up the good fight, and remember, we're going to continue to walk beside you.

So on to the budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I said earlier, there's investments being made in all key areas that really need them. In health care we've got record level of funding overall. I'm extremely happy with the extra forty-two and a half million dollars set aside to reduce surgical wait times — I think that's absolutely huge — and the investment of over \$500 million for mental health and addictions programs and services as well.

And I just want to put this on the record. The two Health ministers have been accused of not listening, of not meeting with certain individuals. I'm here to tell you that these two Health ministers are probably the two hardest working Health ministers in the country. They've been in my constituency numerous times listening to physicians, listening to pharmacists, listening to civic

leaders to figure out what the best method of solving some of these problems are. So to the two Health ministers, on behalf of the people of Martensville-Warman, we say thank you for all the hard work you do.

[19:30]

Another individual that deserves a shout-out here is the Minister of Education. You know, our school divisions are responsible for the K to career, right? And the budget increase that our school divisions are going to be receiving is absolutely huge. You know, to see Prairie Spirit, which Martensville-Warman sits in, receiving operating funding of \$113.261 million, which is an increase of 1.1 per cent in addition to increases in their PMR [preventative maintenance and renewal], or their preventative maintenance and repairs. Greater Saskatoon Catholic school division, same thing. An increase of 2 per cent over last year to \$190 million, and an increase in their PMR as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a daughter that is in Greater Saskatoon Catholic division at Holy Trinity in Warman. My son is in grade 11 at Warman High School which is in Prairie Spirit. So we kind of see it both sides, whether it be Catholic or public.

And I know that they're getting a good education. I know those teachers that they have work hard. We just got done a parent-teacher interview with my daughter's teacher, and it was wonderful. She's a great teacher. And I know that all of our schools have great teachers.

So with that, something else that I'm really, really proud of that comes out of that Ministry of Education is the new daycare plan, the \$10-a-day daycare. In Warman-Martensville, those two cities are two of the fastest growing cities in the province and two of some of the fastest growing cities in the country, I might add. That growth is spurred by young families and young professional families that need that daycare. So to have the expansion of spots available in Warman in particular, and Martensville soon, is greatly being received.

On to the economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Over the weekend I attended the Martensville Business Expo. I spoke to a number of business owners, vendors, and customers that were there. And I asked them very directly on Saturday if they had heard the budget or read anything about the budget or knew much about the budget.

And to my surprise, a lot did. And the really interesting thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is not one person, not a single one had concerns about the things that our opposition keep talking about. Imagine that. People are very happy to see the investments our government is making in health care, the investments that we're making in education, in social services, in advanced education, in agriculture. They're very happy to see these investments. And our government was praised by nearly all for doing the right thing by taking a billion dollars and writing down our debt by a billion dollars again this year.

The billion dollars last year added to the billion dollars this year is going to amount in interest savings alone that can then be rolled back into future budgets to expand the services and the programs that the people of this province expect on an ongoing, sustainable basis. You know, taxpayers know that this is the responsible

thing to do and it's going to help in the long run.

The member from Melfort mentioned the — I can't remember how it goes — but something about the soul-sucking carbon tax. That carbon tax affects everything that we touch. It doesn't matter whether it's food or something that's manufactured or something that's built. The carbon tax applies to everything that we touch.

An example: so in the food chain, carbon tax is paid several times before it even hits the dinner table, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that's what's driving inflation in this country, absolutely driving inflation. That lunacy begins when the seed goes into the ground or the feed is transported for the livestock. It's then paid on the fuel and maintenance for the vehicle used to transport product to the processing facility. Those processing facilities pay it on utilities and the cost of operating that said facility, things like office supplies, maintenance, even into the operations of like sales and marketing.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that processed product then has to be transported to market. So the carbon tax is then paid again on the fuel to get it there. So tell me, if the carbon tax is being paid on every stage of production all the way to the grocery store or to the retail store, it has to be driving inflation. People cannot keep absorbing a carbon tax all the way through the chain. Somebody is going to be paying in the end, and that somebody is all of us, every single one of us that buys products. It's interesting that when that product leaves the warehouse for the retail store, the carbon tax is yet paid again to get it there.

So in fact I met the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood in the parking lot on my way back in from dinner. I had a delivery for him, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from my daughter. She's a Girl Guide. The member from Last Mountain-Touchwood ordered two boxes of Girl Guide cookies this year . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . She does sell them. I'm glad you asked. However the price last year for two boxes of Girl Guide cookies was \$10. In 2023, that price is now \$12. Inflation, carbon tax — that's where it's coming from.

So I know the members opposite talk about a generational affordability crisis. Well, Mr. Speaker, the last time we had inflation that was running away and we had interest rates that were high was a generation ago. And his name was Pierre Elliott Trudeau, right. So it is a generational thing with the Liberals in Ottawa. We had one Trudeau that did it in the '70s. We've got another one doing it now. History does repeat itself, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So when it comes to things like immigration . . . The biggest resource any jurisdiction has, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is its people. And we've got . . . And I hear the member from Elphinstone, you know, talking back like they always do, but I would encourage her to maybe just sit and listen tonight because there's going to be a lot of good information on this side.

So last night, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was India Night in Warman at the Brian King Centre, and I was really, really happy to be there, really happy to be invited. It was a celebration of Indian culture and food and time for great conversation. It was put on by the India-Canada Cultural Association or the ICCA. They're celebrating 55 years in Saskatoon and they do a lot of great work

in our province on behalf of their people. So Laxmi Patel is the president, and his executive and all the volunteers and members of ICCA, they do really give so much back to our province.

So with India Night last night, it's really interesting — and I mentioned this to them, to the crowd — that over the last five years India has been the largest source of newcomers in Saskatchewan, making up 28 per cent of all new arrivals. And in 2023 when we talk about immigration, we requested and we received the largest allocation in the SINP history, Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program, 7,250 nominations. That's going to result in an extra 18,000 newcomers to our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I'm very, very proud of that.

These new immigrants are coming. And I do the citizenship ceremonies on behalf of the province. I attend those and bring remarks on behalf of our government. And you see individuals coming from countries like Philippines, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Ukraine, Vietnam, United Kingdom, Romania, and many others.

And there's one thing when I'm at the citizenship ceremonies or even like tonight, this afternoon, when we were at the Regina International Airport for the newest Ukrainians to land, the one thing that newcomers see when they come to Saskatchewan are all the positive things. They see the positive things that are happening here: the opportunities, the safety and security, the promise of a future for not only themselves but also their children and grandchildren to follow them.

You know, our population is growing exponentially. We've seen the largest growth in our province in population in 108, 109 years, and that growth is going to continue.

So what are people really saying about our budget? Our \$19 billion, as the member from Melfort said, the \$19 billion thing that we're supposed to be thankful for, what are people really saying about that?

Well the Saskatchewan Motion Picture Industry Association had this to say: "Over 300 individuals attended our job explainer last fall and dozens have attended our department-specific introductory workshops." That came from Ken Alecxe, the executive director. He added, "We have the incentives, stories, locations, people, and infrastructure to be a competitive force." So I thank the SMPIA [Saskatchewan Media Production Industry Association] for their vote of confidence in this budget and their vote of confidence in our government.

Somebody else, you know, somebody else that I spoke to this past weekend is a gentleman by the name of Steve Halabura. And Steve is the co-founder and CEO [chief executive officer] of Buffalo Potash Corp. This is what he had to say about the budget that was tabled last week, and I quote:

The tripling of the mineral exploration tax credit will substantially assist small to intermediate exploration and development companies in overcoming their greatest hurdle: raising investment capital. I already have interest from Saskatchewan residents in investing in Buffalo flow through because of this change. Therefore we are revising our plan so we can accelerate our upcoming issue so we can be drilling right after breakup.

That's from Steve Halabura, the CEO of Buffalo Potash Corp.

[19:45]

So I know my time is starting to run out here, so I'm just going to finish with this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm going to conclude my remarks with another quote from the SMPIA:

Although small in population size, Saskatchewan is big in opportunity and sits well-positioned to supply content to the global market. Known for its hospitality, friendliness, and hard-working labour force, Saskatchewan is affordable and a less expensive province than the Canadian average. For outsiders seeking more balance and quality of life, relocation is a real consideration.

That's again from the Saskatchewan Motion Picture Industry Association. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this speaks to exactly what our government is achieving — confidence in our economy and confidence in our people to continue making Saskatchewan a leader here in Canada and around the world.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget is about more people, more jobs, and more opportunities. And that's growth that works for everyone. That's why I'm going to be supporting the budget as moved by the Deputy Premier and Finance minister and seconded by my good friend, the member from Kindersley. I will not be supporting the amendment as put forward by the opposition. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. D. Harrison: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand today and provide my reply to the 2023-2024 budget presented by our Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier, the member from Humboldt-Watrous. I'd like to thank the minister, her staff, treasury board members for their hard work putting this budget together for the people of Saskatchewan. Contrary to what the Prime Minister says and believes, the budget does not balance itself.

I'd like to take a moment to let the member from Regina Walsh Acres know that we are all thinking and praying for him and his family. Duke, we are thinking of you and want you to know we are on your team.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to thank two of my former colleagues. Mark Docherty, former member from Regina Coronation Park, his hard work and dedication to his constituency and the province was an example for me and a high standard for all future MLAs. Last but definitely not least, the member from Lumsden-Morse constituency, Lyle Stewart. He will always be known by me as the member from Thunder Creek. I have to say that I'm a better person for knowing and working with Lyle, and I'm honoured to be able to call him my friend. Thank you, Lyle, and thank you, Mark, for your service to the people of Saskatchewan.

I'd like to recognize and thank my constituency assistants, Trisha Schulhauser, April Junk, and Merilyn Lamport. Thank you. Just to reinforce with my colleagues, I do have the best CAs [constituency assistant] in caucus. Thanks to all the caucus staff. Ang, you and your staff are all top shelf.

To follow up with my friend and colleague to my right here, I must say that our past ministers of all ministries have been doing a bang-up job all the way along, and that shows why we're here in government today.

Mr. Speaker, as all members know, we do not serve here alone. It's particularly difficult for the ones that live further outside the Queen City. My wife, Cheryl, is my loving support through good and bad. Whether I am at home, on the road, or here in Regina, she is my rock. Many ranchers may refer to someone like Cheryl as their corner post, standing straight and true, keeping the wire tight and strong while keeping the business of ranching where it belongs. I'll have to add there might be the odd moose that plays havoc with the tight wires, and requiring some repair. And that reminds me, I should talk to the member from Arm River about that. I love you, Cheryl. Thanks for being you.

Mr. Speaker, the 2023-2024 provincial budget delivers growth that works for everyone, a budget that works to keep Saskatchewan the most affordable place in Canada in which to live. When you combine taxes, utilities, and housing, it is the most affordable in the country, and we need to tell our story. Saskatchewan is a great province in which to live.

Reduced provincial income tax has removed 112,000 low-income families from the tax roll, with annual savings for the citizens of Saskatchewan of over three-quarters of a billion dollars. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget has no tax increases and no new taxes. That's correct, Mr. Deputy Speaker — no new taxes and no tax increases.

Unfortunately the federal carbon tax will increase on April 1st. And that's no April Fool's joke, a carbon tax on fuel that will increase the cost of heating your homes and businesses, increase the cost of transportation, increase the cost of producing all the products we export and all the goods we import. Mr. Speaker, the federal carbon tax is virtually a tax on everything.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP [New Democratic Party] opposition members continue to support their federal leader, Jagmeet. Jagmeet continues to prop up the minority Trudeau Liberal government, and this sweetheart coalition continues to increase cost of living for Saskatchewan residents. That's justinflation. The April 1st carbon tax increase will not fool the hard-working people of Saskatchewan. The only ones being fooled are the opposition members, while they continue to support the Jagmeet-Justin coalition government. I won't call them fools, but their support of Jagmeet and Justin is foolish.

The federal carbon tax will continue to increase and continue to raise the cost of living and do absolutely nothing to reduce carbon emissions. Not once have federal officials shown one example, not one example, of how the carbon tax is helping the environment, or one federal study to determine the impact of the rising carbon tax on the cost of groceries. Just look to British Columbia to see if theirs is effective. It is not. Emissions continue to rise. Will the NDP opposition do one productive thing and help the hard-working people of Saskatchewan and end the federal carbon tax now?

Mr. Speaker, here in Saskatchewan we take pride in paying down

our debts and not leaving financial burden for our children and grandchildren. As we had last year, we are retiring \$1 billion in debt. With rising interest rates, this will save \$44 million in interest payments and allowing the government to invest these savings in people, programs, and projects. Combined with last fiscal year, debt retirement and lower borrowing have generated \$117 million in annual interest savings. That's growth that works for everyone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this year's projected surplus is largely due to increased resource revenue, resources like potash, uranium, and oil and gas, mining companies developing new potash mines while others are rapidly expanding existing mines to meet the global demands for fertilizer.

Uranium mines are being restarted while exploration continues to develop new mines. These mines are home to some of the richest deposits in the world, the source fuel to produce and provide some of the cleanest, most efficient power generation for ever-increasing world energy demands.

Oil and gas exploration companies continue to increase their production. Saskatchewan producers are the most sustainable anywhere in the world. Again, Saskatchewan punching above its weight with our resource production and exports. That's growth that works for everyone.

Mr. Speaker, our Saskatchewan farmers and ranchers are leaders in innovation, research, and production, and their record production is the most sustainable, not only in North America but anywhere in the world. Saskatchewan is leading the way with exports of our agricultural commodities: \$1.6 billion in ag exports to India, 1 billion in ag exports to Mexico. With the good work of Saskatchewan's trade offices around the world, we will seek out new markets with new trading partners, all the while growing our existing markets.

Saskatchewan has a great agriculture story and we aim to share our story around the world. We have the food, fuel, and fertilizer the world is demanding, and we are the most sustainable at developing and producing it. Unlike the opposition, I am proud of this Saskatchewan story and I am proud of the Saskatchewan people. That's growth that works for everyone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, agriculture is the spinal cord of the province, leaders in production, research, and innovation. Saskatchewan is home to 40 per cent of arable farm land in the nation. We know how to grow a large variety of crops and high volumes as evidenced in the 2022 harvest, returning a crop of nearly 35 million tonnes. This resulted in a record agri-food export of \$18.5 billion. That again is growth that works for everyone.

Supporting agriculture and our ag producers, this budget invests \$408 million for a suite of federal-provincial business risk management programs, including crop insurance and AgriStability. Average crop insurance coverage in 2023 is at a record high level of \$446 per acres. AgriStability compensation will increase from 70 to 80 per cent for the 2023 program year.

This budget has nearly \$90 million for strategic initiatives, including a record \$38 million for agricultural research and innovation, continuing the world-class research here in

Saskatchewan and ensuring we remain world leaders in cutting edge technology.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, municipal revenue sharing has increased \$35.3 million from last year's budget. That's a 13.4 per cent increase. Municipal revenue sharing has increased 134 per cent since 2007. A couple of examples in my constituency. The town of Carlyle received \$326,193, an increase of 152 per cent since 2007. The town of Oxbow received \$275,568, an increase of 134 per cent since 2007. Municipal revenue sharing allows local governments to invest in projects right in their own communities. And that for them is growth that works for everyone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, speaking about the town of Carlyle, guests of mine on budget day from Carlyle were ecstatic to hear about their community receiving funds to begin planning for a new pre-K [pre-kindergarten] to grade 12 school, consolidating the high school and elementary school in their community.

South East Cornerstone Public School Division will be one of the divisions sharing in the \$4.4 million in new school capital funding. The division has been preparing in anticipation of this day by securing the property on which the new school will be constructed. I know South East Cornerstone Public School Division and the town of Carlyle will work together to build a school the entire community will be proud of.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget has direct investment in local municipalities to assist with roads, culverts, and bridges. In a news release:

The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM), alongside their member RMs, is encouraged by the ongoing support for rural Saskatchewan in this provincial budget . . .

SARM looks forward to working with the province to provide input on what works best for rural Saskatchewan as these new budget investments and programs are implemented. "They will go a long way to support the continued economic growth and livelihood in rural Saskatchewan; and the entire province," . . . [says Ray Orb, president of SARM].

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Advanced Education is receiving \$764.8 million, a \$24.5 million increase from last year. Our universities, regional colleges, and polytechnic are receiving 638.5 million in operating funding; \$25.2 million to support the 550 expanded post-secondary training seats for 18 critical health occupations including nurse practitioners, nurses, CCAs [continuing care aide], and lab techs, to name just a few; also \$10 million to continue with the 150 nurse training seat expansion that began in 2022. Over half a million dollars was added to fund a five-seat increase to the Western College of Vet Med.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to assist students filling the existing and expanded seats, this budget includes \$34.5 million in student aid funding to support grants, bursaries, and loans. This budget offers \$8.6 million for the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship, plus another three and a half million dollars for other scholarships. That's growth that works for everyone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget includes \$776 million into operating, maintaining, building, and improving the province's roads and highways. This includes over 1000 kilometres of improvements to provincial highways, for a total of 4600 kilometres of highways improved in the last four years alone. Highway 33 from Fillmore to Stoughton has aggregate stockpiled, ready for when temperatures warm up. Highway 48 near Wawota will have a pavement preservation project completed this construction season.

There are several miles of highway in the province, and our government is committed to our 2030 goal of improving and building 10 000 kilometres of highways. Thanks to the Minister of Highways, this is growth that works for everyone. Mr. Deputy Speaker, your Saskatchewan government is working hard for the people of Saskatchewan. We continue to grow the population, grow the economy, and make Saskatchewan the best place in Canada to live and work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have passed *The Saskatchewan First Act* and the firearms Act to protect the rights of all the people of Saskatchewan. This budget supports health: \$7.1 billion or 38 per cent of the entire expense budget. Education receives \$4 billion or 22 per cent of the budget. Social services receives \$1.7 billion or 9 per cent. Agriculture receives \$1.4 billion or 8 per cent. Protection of persons and property receives nearly \$1 billion, or 5 per cent of the budget. For a grand total of budget expenses of \$18.7 billion, nearly \$19 billion. An increase of 1 billion, an increase across the board of 5.9 per cent. That's growth that works for everyone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before wrapping up I'd like to thank the Premier for his leadership and countless hours growing and promoting Saskatchewan. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not support the amendment from the member from Regina Rosemont. I will be supporting the budget presented by the Minister of Finance, seconded by the minister — minister? He's getting a promotion one way or the other, isn't he? — seconded by the member from Kindersley. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — Before I recognize the next member, I'll just caution the member who just spoke about doing and saying things indirectly that you can't say directly when you use the word "fool." And that's improper language in the House when recalling about the opposition. I recognize the member from Regina Wascana Plains.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be here tonight in support of our government's budget. But before I do, like other members have tonight, I must make mention of the member from Walsh Acres. You know, I talked to him, and you know, his optimism was in stark contrast with my complaining about something. He is always upbeat, willing to do anything, heart of gold. And love and prayers go out to the member of Walsh Acres and his family as they go through this very difficult time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[20:00]

The budget tabled last week by the Minister of Finance highlights a robust economy with a clear path forward with balanced and significant investments. This budget allows our government to invest in priorities that Saskatchewan people have been asking

for, including health care, education, social services, and increased protection of people and property.

It's a budget that builds on significant growth and ensures that this growth works for everyone. Mr. Speaker, I stand here today to proudly talk about the remarkable journey our government has been on since 2007 and about the amazing future we have to look forward to. Our province has experienced unprecedented growth and prosperity, and we have faced challenges that have indeed tested our resilience. Our government's vision is clear: to promote a strong economy, foster job creation, and ensure a prosperous future for all who call Saskatchewan home.

Our fiscally responsible policies combined with a focus on natural resources, agriculture enables Saskatchewan to maintain growth while other provinces faced economic stagnation. Mr. Speaker, not long ago this province was defined by a lack of investment, rural depopulation, and limited opportunities for citizens young and old. We were a have-not province led by a weak NDP government whose inability to address the economic and social issues of that time within the province led to an erosion of public trust.

Mr. Speaker, if I could, I'd like to talk a little bit about this trust and what was going on during these times under the members opposite. I remember my father, who was a business owner, calling me into his office and he had just read this most interesting article. And what this article was talking about was the abundance of natural resources that this province had. He said Christine, this province is rich — rich with resources and rich with people. And I can attest to the fact that during these times under the members opposite, business was tough. It was really tough, and you know, whether they would make it. There were times when there was bankruptcy on the horizon, and this is a hundred-year-old business. But anyway they persevered, resilient people, Saskatchewan people who are prepared to do what's necessary to succeed, and that's with hard work and responsibility.

Saskatchewan marks this budget with incredible growth in population, our country-leading economic growth, and impressive resource development. Development as opposed to sitting in the ground, which it was during the time the members opposite were in government.

This year we will see a budget of 18.7 billion, up 1.0 billion from last year's budget. It's a budget that will put 1.0 billion towards our debt, saving us hundreds of millions in debt interest payments. And the member from Stonebridge definitely talked about that. It's a budget that will put . . .

Saskatchewan's economy isn't expected to slow either, which is a blessing. In fact it's expected to lead all provinces in growth in 2023. This can only be achieved by strong leadership, commodity prices, solid job growth, increased private investment, and a rebound in crop production.

Before I continue, and considering what happened a few weeks ago in Edmonton, I would like to take a second to thank all the women and men in this province who have chosen to dedicate their lives to protect our way of life. Police officers and members of the Canadian Armed Forces deserve our utmost respect for the often thankless work that they do. I want to thank all of our armed

forces serving across Canada and across the world. And I especially want to thank all the police officers across the province protecting Saskatchewan residents. Before I continue . . . No, I'm not going to launch into that particular story.

Mr. Speaker, this year our government is investing 1 billion in public safety and justice initiatives. This budget sees new and continued investments in urban and rural and remote communities. It's building on investments we have made in First Nations communities, including the letter of intent we signed with the P.A. [Prince Albert] Grand Council and the federal government to explore self-directed First Nations policing options. And it continues to build on initiatives that reduce the criminal use of firearms while protecting the rights of law-abiding and legal and licensed firearms owners.

Mr. Speaker, last session we introduced the Saskatchewan marshals service to detect, disrupt, and deter criminal activity in our communities across the province. Our government is providing an investment of 7 million this year to establish and start the development of the Saskatchewan marshals service.

Initial support from Saskatchewan residents has been quite outstanding. Obviously I can refer to a CBC poll indicating that over 50 per cent support the creation of the marshals service. My office has been overwhelmed with CVs [curriculum vitae] and applications and résumés of individuals who want to come to join the marshals. This includes individuals who have left Saskatchewan or worked in other provinces as RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] members or members of a municipal police service who want to return to their home community and see this as a valued opportunity to return.

Mr. Speaker, even my federal counterpart, the Hon. Bill Blair, was quoted in saying that the marshals are entirely appropriate. The marshals are another tool in a suite of tools that are available to increase public safety across the province.

Mr. Speaker, in conjunction with the marshals announcement, we're building on some of our other already successful public safety initiatives. We are providing 3.2 million to expand our warrant enforcement and suppression team and our crime reduction teams to Prince Albert and The Battlefords area to address gun, gang, and drug crime. This brings the number of crime reduction teams we have to 10 and doubles the capacity of our warrant enforcement and suppression team's operation.

These teams have done incredible work over the past year. In fact this past month we saw our crime reduction team in Prince Albert make significant arrests and drug seizures by taking 31.2 kilograms of cocaine off the streets. This is in addition to the 113 arrests, 105 seized guns — illegal firearms — and \$311,000 worth of drugs and illegal goods seized this year by WEST [warrant enforcement and suppression team], CRT [crime reduction team], and the STRT [Saskatchewan trafficking response team] teams right across the province.

And I don't think we could understate or overstate the value of having these policing units in the province. We deal with addictions. You know, a person is requiring, you know, sort of detox, and then they're requiring rehabilitation and then community supports. But at that front end of all of it, if you have the proper complement of policing resources in the province, or

in any province, you can . . . With proper intelligence and working together, you can stop those drugs from coming in. So I guess, will we ever stop the number, the amount of drugs coming into the province 100 per cent? No, but we can certainly put a huge dent in it.

Of course we are providing funding for other very important initiatives. This includes 612,000 for deputy sheriffs' positions in the reopened Lloydminster and Weyburn courthouses; 337 for training at the Saskatchewan Police College; 229,000 to hire additional police and crisis personnel within Saskatoon and Regina — extremely valuable and timely, sort of, unit in the province — and we will continue to support these PACT [police and crisis team] teams as they are extremely valuable; 147,000 to enhance internet child exploitation unit in the province.

Mr. Speaker, we have many more investments in policing that I could continue with. But I want to also highlight the incredible work of our corrections, Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency, and Saskatchewan firearms officials. We are providing the SPSA [Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency] with 91.77 million in order to continue the great work they do by protecting Saskatchewan people and property by providing fire safety training, investigations, emergency planning, response recovery, and emergency communications. The SPSA operates Sask911, SaskAlert, provincial disaster plan, and the provincial emergency operations centre.

In addition, we are proud to partner with Parkland College this year to reopen the Provincial Firefighting Training Centre . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Whoa. Okay. Through the SPSA and the Ministry of Advanced Education we are able to provide 1.8 million to Parkland to purchase training equipment and deliver firefighting training programs. Mr. Speaker, our SPSA officials are the best in the business and serve the people of Saskatchewan with incredible pride and skills. We hope this next generation of firefighters will add increased capabilities to the SPSA communities across Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to fund necessary programs and projects in our correctional facilities. While every year we have a Correctional Services Appreciation Day in May — and that's coming up — every chance we get I always find opportunities to thank our corrections staff. And there's probably no one else that works in the province or any province, that gets less thanks than our correctional officers — nurses, doctors, teachers, elders, chaplains, and every person who works within our correctional centres across the province.

This year we are providing 75.4 million for the ongoing construction of the Saskatoon remand centre. Some of the most important projects are about our programs and tremendous success we have had with programs like Back to Basics at Pine Grove Correctional Centre, which we have supported with \$1 million this year.

In addition we have enhanced video conferencing in our provincial facilities with an investment of 150,000. On its own, on its face, video conferencing seems like somewhat of a benign investment. But it is not. The amount of staff and time required to transport prisoners or people on remand or whether they're going to have a conference call with a judge or with their lawyer, this video conferencing does indeed save us a huge amount of

time and human resources and makes it easier for people to make that contact.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we are dedicating approximately \$8.9 million dollars to Saskatchewan firearms program: 2.2 will be used to administer the firearms Act, which will include having jurisdiction over the licensing, storage, transportation, and carrying of firearms; \$1.3 million will be used to establish a firearms compensation committee to determine the fair market value of any firearms, ammunition, and related accessories being expropriated by the federal government; 927,000 will be for constructing the Saskatchewan firearms ballistics lab to support police services in their investigations and provide timely access to Saskatchewan-based ballistics and firearms expertise.

Mr. Speaker, as I come very close to wrapping up tonight, I must thank my minister's office staff: Dan, Shelley, Jalen, Debbie, and Michelle. My constituency office, my long-standing and loyal constituency assistant, Jackie, and Kirsten. So without them . . . We all know; we all talk about it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight some important articles from when the members opposite were in power. *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*, "NDP smells imminent demise." *Leader-Post*, "Why has the NDP not acted on declining population?" *Leader-Post*, "Same old NDP soap won't wash." Mr. Speaker, do you know what all of these articles have in common? A decrease in population, high taxes, high crime, and fewer jobs.

[20:15]

Mr. Speaker, the members of the opposition are stuck in the past — same today as they were years ago. Again looking in their rear-view mirror, this is what caused that look, that view. That thinking in the province caused people to not want to be here, and if they were able to, they got out. Mr. Speaker, we take no lessons from a boring and outdated party opposite, and we certainly will not be going back to the economic times that saw Saskatchewan as a have-not province and a place where no one wanted to admit where they were from.

Mr. Speaker, this budget will greatly benefit Saskatchewan people by providing an investment into crucial areas that will protect current and future generations. This year's budget reflects the times we are living in today and the ones that will reflect future growth and growth that we know will work for everyone.

I am proud to support this budget, and I will not be supporting the amendment put forward by the members opposite. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Conway: — Okay, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and then there was one. It's an honour to be on my feet and provide a response to the budget. We're having a lot of fun, as you can hear this evening in the House.

And everyone seems to be kicking it off by speaking about their loved ones. So I'm not always very good at all that sometimes, Mr. Speaker. I like to kind of get right into the issues. But I do want to give a shout-out to my partner, Nick. We have our own

love language. There's a lot of joking and sparring in our household, and as a dad, he is second to none.

My youngest, Lew, is turning four next month. And I think he and his dad got through almost all of *The Hobbit* this past weekend. I don't even know if that's age appropriate, but they were having a great time. And that was between taking him to swimming and cross-country skiing and baking a cake. They are inseparable, the two of them.

My youngest just turned one. Éamon, he's like a giant baby so he can't walk yet — I think it's because he's so big — but he's pretty close. He does this like sprint crawl when he sees you come in the house and just kind of, like, throws himself at you. And he's really the light of my life . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yeah, thanks.

An Hon. Member: — And then there's Nick.

Ms. Conway: — And then there's Nick, yeah. I already talked about him. I got it over with.

My parents, John and Sally, they're not getting any younger, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My mom, Sally, you know, I'm going to mention her just for a second here because she did retire at the end of 2022. We threw her a bash and it was lovely. It was really fun and it was a reminder of, for me you know, a life well lived, a life in service of others trying to, you know, leave things a little bit better than you found them, mentoring the next generation. It was really a thing to behold. So I want to wish her congratulations for that big step.

And then my dad. Like, he's been retired for a while but there's nothing I enjoy more than just sitting down with him and picking his brain. And he's my harshest critic and my biggest fan and all that. So my family for sure they are, you know, what I'm most thankful for.

And you know, I've got three older brothers and their partners are like sisters to me, and yeah, we're all still pals. I think we're heading to Winnipeg this weekend to take in a Winnipeg Jets game. I don't know if that's controversial, but yay, local sports . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . They're good? Okay, so I'm informed that the Jets are okay around here. I'm always worried about stepping in it, because I'm more of a basketball person, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But anyway, someone's turning 40 — I won't mention who — so me and my three older brothers, we're going to hit the road. Yeah, I don't know; I just wanted to kind of shout out to my family.

And you know, some days it's weird. You know, we have like one of the weirdest workplaces in the world here. Yeah, you know, I have some friends on the other side as well. But it is kind of the weirdest workplace in the world. And we all make sacrifices, perhaps no more than, you know, any working person in this province, any hard-working person in this province, a lot of shift work, weekends, folks that have to go and live on job sites. So not to say that others don't, Mr. Speaker, but it is a bit of a sacrifice.

I was reminded of that when I was getting texts from the member

for Regina University, who's at home nesting with baby Kit. But she can't help herself, sending us, you know, commentary and feedback. And I love it; it's wonderful.

And I also just want to say, you know, to the member from Walsh Acres, he's been here, he's been showing up obviously as much as he possibly can and I want to wish him all the best on behalf of the official opposition.

I also want to just take a moment to talk about my CA and my students this semester, Kaitlyn and Aiden, who are like astonishingly dedicated. They're here tonight. I told them they could have the night off. They were doing this big poster symposium at the university all day, but they're here in the Legislative Assembly. They've been wonderful. My new constituency assistant Avery has been doing wonderful work for the people of Regina Elphinstone-Centre. And you know, we're in here Monday through Thursday during session, and Friday I think a lot of us have a lot of meetings back in our home community.

And I was reminded this past Friday, you know, we had quite a day. You know, we had a few folks who came in needing our help: a senior woman needing housing assistance, a family with a child with disability issues. We had Ron Ewenin, a local Indigenous artist, drop by and visit. Dr. Thomas Jing, who lives down the street from the constituency office, who did his Ph.D. [Doctor of Philosophy] in African dance and Regina youth and was wanting to talk to us about starting an academy for African cultural education. Like I'd never met Thomas, didn't know he was just out there plugging away on a Ph.D., doing this amazing work just down the street.

And the folks in Regina Elphinstone just blow me away. And you know, I just was reminded this Friday of what an amazing community I serve and how lucky I feel to be doing this work each and every day. And it truly has been the honour of my life to do this work, Mr. Speaker. So I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that. You know, the member from Melfort wanted a little more thankfulness on this side, so I'm trying to do my best to talk about the things that I'm thankful for before I get into the things I'm definitely not thankful for.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, this budget. Wow. Folks were really looking for hope with this budget, you know, and I think they thought it was coming. A \$1.14 billion windfall profit surplus, Mr. Speaker, mainly due to, you know, the brutal and illegal war in Ukraine, most of it not due to production or risk or innovation on the part of industry, just this brutal and illegal war in Ukraine. Billions additional raised as a result of tax and fee hikes that this government brought in last year, a really historic increase to the PST [provincial sales tax]. Utility rate hikes, several back to back, just relentless, Mr. Speaker.

So really I think folks were thinking there's no excuse not to see the kinds of investments we so badly need in health and education especially, Mr. Speaker. These utility hikes came at a time when wages are largely stagnant in Saskatchewan, when regular people are asked to carry more and more of the tax burden, when folks on social assistance are asked to draw from their meagre amounts, their brutally short income assistance amounts to cover their utilities for the first time in decades.

But what do we see with this budget? You know, the Minister of Finance was bragging about the fact that there's no increased taxes with this budget, but people have not forgotten this historic tax increase that we saw last year. People were looking to see some of those rolled back — 32 regressive tax hikes and fee hikes, a residential property tax hike. We know that these taxes impact . . . They're regressive because they impact people on fixed incomes, struggling people, the worst, Mr. Speaker. People have seen their cost of living absolutely skyrocket.

And this was after a promise from this government not to raise taxes. That's what they, of course, campaigned on. Just a reminder — not to be a killjoy — but that's what they campaigned on. They will not raise taxes. Meanwhile big corporations in oil, potash, they made a mind-boggling sum of money, Mr. Speaker, due to the war in Ukraine as I mentioned. And this Sask Party government resisted our calls on this side to tax those windfall profits. We wanted just a little bit more during this historic, unprecedented event and one that may never repeat itself again. We just wanted a little more for the people of Saskatchewan. But that was too much for them, Mr. Speaker. That was too much for them. They resisted those calls.

So yes, this budget is a huge disappointment given the context particularly. They've, what, tripled the debt? They squandered a boom and they're missing out on this historic moment in terms of these windfall profits. And they slapped a tax and fee hike on all of the things that Saskatchewan families enjoy and, more importantly, need, Mr. Speaker.

So it's not just a disappointment; I would argue it's a betrayal, Mr. Speaker. This budget is a betrayal. And you know, what pains me is that the Sask Party government fails to see that social health and economic wealth, they go hand in hand. And this government, perhaps not surprisingly, are failing at both.

They are presiding over some of the worst social ills in the country: highest rates of interpersonal violence; highest child poverty rates. HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] rates that dwarf the entire country, Mr. Deputy Speaker; food bank use that is climbing. You know, we have outbreaks in diseases like syphilis that should have been dealt with generations ago. Some of the highest death-by-overdose numbers in the country and climbing, climbing, climbing, climbing every month, every year. Things are really bleak out there for a lot of people.

So to the member from Melfort, I'm not thankful for a lot of the decisions, the missed opportunities that this budget represents. I am not thankful. And it is my job to give voice to the people out there that expected more and deserved more. Because I've said this before: it is our sacred duty in this House to make decisions that recognize, to ease the hurt and the struggle out there. That is our sacred duty.

I'm so tired of seeing the strength of Saskatchewan people shine despite some of the decisions that are made in here, not because of them. And it's not just these social outcomes that have us flinching, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's the economy too. And we've been talking a little bit more about these factors. We have one of the worst performing economies in the country, so those economic indicators are no better. They are bad.

Under this Premier, Saskatchewan has created jobs slower than

every other province in the nation. We are dead last when it comes to j-o-b-s — jobs. Dead last. Meanwhile they're doing everything they can to kill good mortgage-paying jobs, and the privatization of the Liquor Board was just the most recent example.

Now the interesting thing about these economic statistics that I'm citing, they are all interconnected, Mr. Speaker, just like those social indicators are connected. It's all connected. We have the highest rates of out-migration in the entire country. The Premier will tout 1.2 million people, but the fact remains that fewer and fewer people see a future here for themselves, for their families. And if that isn't a damning indictment of this government's choices, I don't what is.

Saskatchewan families needed a budget that would offer them some relief, particularly on the cost of living, Mr. Speaker, a budget that would stop this brain drain in health care and other areas, a budget that would give them some hope to get a family doctor, to send their kids into classrooms that are properly resourced, that would meet the need for good-paying, mortgage-paying jobs, Mr. Speaker. Instead families, skilled workers, young people are literally voting with their feet and they're leaving.

And that young people piece is really concerning because, speaking of young people, they are going to see a tuition increase because there's no way that universities will be able to survive on this level of funding. There is no way. Watch it. Two, three months down the road, tuition will go up.

Meanwhile we have a labour shortage, a skilled labour shortage including, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where . . . Connection, these things are connected. Where do they think that skilled labour comes from?

[20:30]

A shrinking GDP [gross domestic product] under this Premier. Sask Party shrinkage.

Now I want to turn to focus to health care, Mr. Speaker, because this was an area of a lot of disappointment for a lot of people. And I'm shocked. This is such a missed opportunity. We're coming out of a pandemic, Mr. Speaker, and I really think that this budget will have reverberations for generations. This was a really determinative moment for our health care system.

They talk about the NDP closing hospitals. You had 37 rural communities with health care closures in one month . . . one week? One week. Wow. So I was wrong. One week. There is only one government under which we're seeing hospitals closing, and it's that Sask Party government. This is a fact. There's health care collapse happening across the board, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know how their rural constituents would feel about them heckling on this. There is no question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we're seeing health care disruptions and closures across the province and that people find this unfair and they find it worrisome, and they're worried that this budget isn't up to the task. We're facing a primary health care crisis and we haven't seen the kinds of investments in primary health care that we need, Mr. Speaker.

This budget goes no distance in building back from the Sask Party government's botched handling of the pandemic. I know they don't want to talk about the pandemic, but we did have the highest death rates, preventable loss of far too many lives. And thanks to an FOI [freedom of information] and some good investigative journalism by Global News, we now know that the Health minister wasn't being straight when he said that he was following Dr. Shahab's advice, wasn't listening to the experts . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I apologize and withdraw for saying "wasn't being straight."

The Health minister wasn't listening to the experts, despite the fact that he said he was listening to the experts. He wasn't listening to Dr. Shahab. It's not a game, you guys. This actually happened and people lost their lives as a result of it.

So I'm not thankful for a lot of decisions in this budget. It doesn't meet the moment. On the heels of all this, this health care budget barely keeps up with inflation. They have a four-point plan that the auditor says, even if they achieve every aspect of that plan, it won't be enough . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Maybe she should.

And we have a Health minister that is ignoring local voices. Speaking of health policy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government has again failed to fund safe consumption sites. And this will have tragic consequences for families who are looking to this government for help and for solutions. We are facing down an opioid crisis, an overdose crisis that is taking our loved ones at growing and alarming rates. Every month, as I said, we set a new record — every month.

This Premier ignores the evidence showing that safe consumption sites save money and lives. Now three years running they have refused to fund safe consumption sites despite their own internal memos that tell them they should. This is touching everyone across the province. This crisis has cut like a scythe through our communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we won't even . . . or I should say they won't even reward the demonstrated track record of nationally recognized CBOs [community-based organization] like Prairie Harm Reduction, like the Friendship Centre here in Regina for their efforts on the front line trying to do something to stem this tide of suffering. They won't even do that.

And it would be pennies, it would be pennies to fund 24-7 safe consumption sites in the scheme of things. I'm sorry, but it would be and it would pay for itself. If that isn't a perfect encapsulation of this government's callous disregard for lives, for common sense, their absolute entitlement, I don't know what is, Mr. Speaker. Their own internal memos tell them to do this — money and lives — and purely for ideological reasons they will not. They won't even do it just quietly and not talk about it. Like, don't tell your base or whoever you're worried about; just do it quietly. They won't even do that. And I don't know, it's this ideological obsession with personal responsibility I guess, Mr. Speaker.

Have they seen what crystal meth, what fentanyl does to people? Do they know the role of big pharma in pushing these addictive drugs making them maximally addictive, maximally available? Do they know that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Yes. Do they really think that people can overcome this alone? They need your help.

And in order to seek out help, they need to still be alive.

So many missed opportunities with this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and this is but one. Just do it quietly. Just don't talk about it. Fine. But do it.

On the social services front, because I am critic of that area, Mr. Speaker, I have a bit to say about this budget on that. They tout higher and higher budgets in social services, higher and higher each year, but the problem is they're pouring money into the wrong end of the system. They're pouring money into the wrong end of the system, an approach that will guarantee that addiction, mental health, homelessness, all of these things continue to rise.

How are the most vulnerable going to get back on track with an extra dollar a day? We've seen this movie before, just last year. That was their response to the global critique of the SIS [Saskatchewan income support] program — an extra buck a day. And here we are again. How many buildings have to burn down with people trying to keep warm? How many government units have to sit empty and neglected? How many families have to be evicted before we change the SIS program?

It's an abject failure. It undermines every first principal in poverty reduction. It's a master class in putting political ideology over people. And it's no surprise that we've seen the increase of tent cities and homelessness and death by overdose and mental health crisis and food bank use and child poverty rates under the SIS program. I mean what is the common denominator here, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It falls brutally short. It's a foolish waste of public resources, and it's cruel.

So no, I am not thankful for everything in this budget. Under this budget, we will see without a doubt the mental health, poverty, addiction crises — that feed our expensive and dead-end criminal justice system and social services system — increase and go unaddressed.

And you know, to hear the members pat themselves on the back for this extra dollar a day. The minister today was just talking about how these programs are built around the dignity of people on these programs. They're okay with the worst-in-the-nation child poverty rates. Do they know that children have to also live on SIS? Their parents have to survive off SIS and find a way to feed them and support them. There isn't even an extra amount per child that you get on the SIS program.

It's disappointing, this extra dollar a day. That's their response to the suffering out there, a buck a day. Budget better. Get motivated. Having a rough time? Toughen up. Can't hack it? Fix yourself. Fix yourself . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yeah. On that point, for all their talk of personal responsibility, they aren't giving people tools, tools to make better choices. In a province where food, fuel, and fertilizer should guarantee our collective wealth, this should be unimaginable. To the member from Kelvington-Wadena, who this evening said people want a hand up and not a handout, I couldn't agree more. But this budget kicks dirt in their face. An extra buck a day — it's insulting.

With this failure to overhaul the SIS program, this government continues to condemn children, many children, to poverty and to a second-class life by their fifth birthday. We know this. The Minister of Education knows this. These children will cost us a

lot. They will struggle to thrive in the classroom. They will struggle to stay out of trouble. They will struggle to find a good job. They will struggle to stay healthy. They will cost the public so much, to speak nothing of the cruelty.

Speaking of classrooms, cuts again to the classroom with a 2.5 per cent increase for operational funding when inflation is at 6.8 per cent. That's what we need to keep step with services, let alone make some investments, improve things, make up for nearly a decade of per-student funding cuts. So again education is another failed opportunity with this budget. Cuts to the classroom just when kids need investments more than ever, when we're coming out of a pandemic, Mr. Speaker.

There's simply not enough here for struggling community-based organizations that worked hard to keep the worst at bay at the best of times, let alone having to adapt to the realities of a post-pandemic, post-SIS, post-rental supplement, post-highest inflation rates in a generation . . . What we're asking of CBOs is truly unfair and impossible at this time, but I do want to thank them for their incredible service to folks of this province, their incredible work on the front line.

Next to no cost-of-living relief with this budget. Their big announcement on this budget was the \$10-a-day daycare, and of course that is something the opposition supports. We would have liked them to take their time to get it right. I'm hearing scoffing, but you know, this \$10-a-day daycare was announced two weeks ago to get a splashy headline and accidentally kicked a bunch of parents who rely on part-time daycare potentially out in the cold. So it's disappointing to see a failure to ensure that this \$10-a-day daycare is sustainable, and that comes with a plan to properly recruit and retain this profession, Mr. Speaker, this invaluable profession.

Yeah, I'm almost finished here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a premier feeding division using distraction techniques, passing stunt legislation, any opportunity to distract from the fact that far from being Sask first, Saskatchewan has fallen to the back of the provincial pack on so many fronts, social and economic. And we saw this on full display with the Sask first Act just a couple of weeks ago, and people filled these galleries. They were angry and they were right to be.

So what are the new priorities with this budget? What is this money being spent on? What are the new priorities that this government is championing? A new marshal service, an American-style marshal service. More jails, bigger jails, there's nothing a jail can't solve. A provincial tax collection agency that nobody asked for.

Despite windfall profits from our natural resources, billions raised by their historic tax and fee hikes, utility rate hikes, relentless utility . . . [inaudible] . . . and the fact that we're asking regular and struggling people to bear a heavier burden, tax burden, this budget did not represent the kinds of investment that people were expecting.

They're growing the debt. They're not spending smart. They're imposing regressive taxes when people are struggling more than ever. They're not positioning Saskatchewan for the future economy. Quite simply, they're not making investments in our future. And this approach, under this approach, we won't be

seeing growth that works for everyone any time soon.

[20:45]

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I won't be supporting the budget motion, and I will be supporting the amendment moved by the member for Regina Rosemont.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise this evening to speak on the 2023-24 provincial budget that was delivered so ably by the Minister of Finance, the Deputy Premier, the member from Humboldt, and worked on by so many hands, including members of treasury board and the caucus. And so first I want to thank them for their work.

But I do want to, as other members have done, certainly acknowledge and thank my family. Amanda, Mr. Speaker, it'll be 24 years this summer that we will have been married. Mr. Speaker, it's hard to believe, probably even harder for her to believe. And so I want to thank her for all of her support and her love over these years.

I want to thank our children, Mr. Speaker. Jack is eight, turning nine this summer. Jack is into all things dinosaurs right now. I'm learning more about dinosaurs than I ever thought I would care to know, but every day there's something new that I'm learning about them, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Ephram turned six last week. And Ephram, he's really keen on numbers, Mr. Speaker. In fact he's quickly graduated from junior Monopoly into the full version of Monopoly. And when his brother or perhaps one of his parents or both of us get tired of playing Monopoly, he'll just continue on with the game, and he'll play everybody's hand in the game.

And it's quite something, Mr. Speaker, because if the game is not finished to his satisfaction, even though he's the only one playing, at the end of the evening we have to leave the board out. And I'm usually the first up, but he's a little bit like me in that he's an early riser. And so I can usually get a few minutes with a cup of coffee before he's awake. But lo and behold, within a few minutes he's bounding down the stairs and he picks up right where he left off with the game, Mr. Speaker. And he will play this out for hours. The great thing is I'll come home, Mr. Speaker, after a day of work and he'll say something like, guess what, Dad; I played Monopoly and I won again, even though he was the only one that was playing, Mr. Speaker. So that's a bit of a snapshot on our boys.

And, Mr. Speaker, and then there's Penelope. Mr. Speaker, Penelope will be turning four next month, Mr. Speaker. She is our little ballet dancer, Mr. Speaker. I'll admit on the floor of the House, Mr. Speaker, if she doesn't have Dad wrapped around her little finger yet, we're quickly getting there. So I want to thank the three of them for just the love and the joy that they bring to our lives each and every day, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my staff that I get to work with here in the office at the legislature, Mr. Speaker. I want to as well

thank the ministry staff, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to say a special thank you to Donna Johnson. Donna, after a very lengthy career in government, will be retiring here in the next little while, Mr. Speaker. I've had the opportunity to work with Donna once before, the first time around when I was Minister of Environment. And I have greatly appreciated her counsel and her advice in both of those roles. And I want to wish her all the best and lots of projects around the home, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, and as well I want to thank Marcie Swedburg, who's the constituency assistant in Weyburn-Big Muddy. Mr. Speaker, she has been there longer than I have. Mr. Speaker, she does a great job each and every day in just helping the people that come to our office and keeping me informed, Mr. Speaker. And just everything that she does for the constituents. So I want thank Marcie.

Mr. Speaker, like other members that have spoken this evening, I do want to recognize as well a couple of now former colleagues. Doc — Mark Docherty — who has . . . I certainly hope Doc will be there for the day when we open the new school in what is now his former constituency. St. Peter, St. Michael, Imperial, and McDermid — it's a consolidation of those four schools. He worked tirelessly on moving that project forward, Mr. Speaker. And I know that is a project that has a special place in his heart.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank Lyle Stewart for his service, Mr. Speaker. Lyle was one of the MLAs that I actually got to work for before I was elected here, Mr. Speaker. And so I just want to wish he and his family all the best, Mr. Speaker.

And as well, as other members have done, I want to just send our good wishes and our prayers to the member from Walsh Acres — the Duke of Midale, as those of us who have known him a long time . . . or Hollywood, Mr. Speaker, was another one. But I want to express to the member from Walsh Acres our best to him and his family at this time, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to as well, while I'm saying thank yous, I do want to thank my Legislative Secretary, the member from Melfort, who does a good job in pushing me. And then he'll encourage me, and then he'll push me, and then he'll encourage me, and then he will push me a little bit more. And, Mr. Speaker, I think certainly he came around at the right time for me in this place, Mr. Speaker. And so I want to thank the member from Melfort.

Mr. Speaker, so I want to talk a little bit about . . . And I will try not to speak very long, Mr. Speaker, but I want to talk a little bit about my constituency and the way that this budget impacts the constituency, and then I'll talk a little bit about the portfolio that I have the privilege of being responsible for, Mr. Speaker.

So first and foremost I want to thank treasury board and the Finance minister and the ministers of Health and the Minister of SaskBuilds as well for the investment into a new hospital in the city of Weyburn, Mr. Speaker. So this has been something that the community has been looking towards for many years. We're going to actually have a fundraising dinner on April 1st, Mr. Speaker. They are continuing to raise money. They have done a tremendous job. Well over \$20 million has been raised to date, Mr. Speaker, and so they have done a tremendous job and obviously now turning their attention towards equipping.

It's an exciting time in Weyburn, Mr. Speaker. The site has been identified about a year and a half ago. A fence went up here just recently, Mr. Speaker. They got equipment out into the fenced area and they pushed snow out of the way, Mr. Speaker. I think we're just waiting for the ground to thaw, and we know that heavy equipment will be on the way, Mr. Speaker.

Wright Construction. I know everybody in the city is pleased that Wright Construction was awarded the contract, Mr. Speaker. They were the company that just recently completed the new Legacy elementary school, Mr. Speaker, as well as the Spark Centre that is a city-owned facility built attached to it. And they have just received rave reviews from everybody that has either been to the Spark Centre or has been to see the new elementary school or has a child in the elementary school, Mr. Speaker. And so we're really excited for this project to get rolling, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing, I want to thank the Minister of Highways. There's a number of, I think, important projects that are going to be undertaken either in my constituency or adjacent to my constituency. I know the member from Cannington mentioned Highway 33, and while that's not in the constituency, certainly a lot of our area traffic is on that highway, Mr. Speaker. There's a number of culvert programs — north of Pangman, Mr. Speaker, on Highway 6, as well as I think in the Radville area as well.

But, Mr. Speaker, especially I want to thank the minister for the work that's going to be done on twinning the sections of 6 and 39 highway, particularly Highway 6, south of Regina near Rowatt, just outside of the city limits, as well as Corinne, Mr. Speaker. Anybody that's travelled that highway knows that that's where the curve is, at Corinne, Mr. Speaker, and I think for us this will be culmination of pretty much this entire project that has been a long time coming, Mr. Speaker.

I have to say, when I was . . . not long after being first elected, there was unfortunately a number of tragedies on that stretch of highway. And it was at a time when the economy was really starting to take off, especially in the southeast part of the province, Mr. Speaker, and there was really a push on to twin that highway.

And you know, I think early on in government there was certainly some wide-eyed thoughts about maybe . . . and this was at a time and a significant resource revenue time, Mr. Speaker, for the province. I think there was, you know, perhaps an opportunity or the thought that this could be an opportunity we could take.

I heard from some people, in the first term of government, we could get this done. I think that was pretty ambitious, Mr. Speaker. Particularly when I know at the time when we were looking at beginning the project and looking at different options, and I think twinning the entire stretch, Mr. Speaker, if you can imagine, it was going to be a multi-year, 10- to 20-year project, and it was probably going to be a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker.

And so, you know, I really give a lot of credit to the people of the constituency who, you know, I think were pretty practical in their approach in terms of this issue and really looked at the options that were laid out by the Highways ministry and previous Highways ministers, Mr. Speaker, to look to see what could practically be done in the shortest amount of time, Mr. Speaker.

And I have to say, the passing lanes have gone over with the locals tremendously, Mr. Speaker. I think people see that it's a great way to ensure the free flow of traffic, Mr. Speaker, assure that there are designated areas where we can get around some of that slower truck traffic or slower people that drive from Estevan, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, so you know, just a real credit to the constituents for . . . and in getting behind this project, Mr. Speaker, and so thanks to the Highways minister for moving this important step forward.

And the third thing that I hear a lot about — and I want to thank the Minister of Justice, Mr. Speaker — is the decision to reopen the Court of King's Bench in Weyburn along with the courthouse in Lloydminster, Mr. Speaker. So I want to thank them for that, Mr. Speaker.

This is something certainly I know that I've heard a lot about since the decision was made a number of years ago to remove those services from the community, Mr. Speaker. And a lot of work went in behind the scenes by, I know, a lot of people, Mr. Speaker, in providing a lot of good information so that the government and the Justice minister could bring us to this decision that was announced.

And you know, I haven't heard it tonight, Mr. Speaker, but I know in times where we talk about that, there is a little bit of a guffaw kind of from the other side. And it's kind of a, "Well, you closed it anyways." And I can say this, Mr. Speaker: I'm proud to be a part of a government who can make the decision of changing a decision that we made, Mr. Speaker.

And you know, I think for whatever criticism there may have been of making the decision, Mr. Speaker, I'm pretty pleased with the response of my constituents, who realize and understand that we are a government that, we're going to admit when we make mistakes, or we're going to just frankly admit when circumstances change and we have to make certain decisions. But, Mr. Speaker, but when there is an opportunity to correct a decision, Mr. Speaker, that we have the humility to do so. And so I want to thank the Justice minister and the cabinet and the treasury board for providing the funds to fully reopen that service, Mr. Speaker. I think that was a great decision, Mr. Speaker.

The fourth thing, Mr. Speaker — just from a local constituency perspective, and it's only been obviously a few days — but is the debt reduction. Mr. Speaker, I know there's times where, you know, you get into the debate in this place and, you know, we can say all sorts of things about how, you know, when we're not paying down debt, we get criticized for not paying down debt. And when we don't spend as much as people say, we're being accused of blowing a windfall or not investing it properly, Mr. Speaker.

But I think that one of the things that has always been a hallmark for my constituents are those opportunities that we're able to pay the debt down, Mr. Speaker. That is, it is understood. And I don't know, you know, I can only speak for my constituents, Mr. Speaker, but certainly the different mix of businesses that we have in the community and knowing how important small business is in a constituency like mine, Mr. Speaker, we don't

have a lot of government jobs to rely on. We have a lot of sectors that are in cyclical industries, Mr. Speaker, like the agriculture industry, like the oil industry. And so these are, by and large, folks that understand the importance of when you have the ability, that you use the dollars to pay down the debt, Mr. Speaker. And so I'm pleased to congratulate the Minister of Finance to be able to do that.

[21:00]

Mr. Speaker, to conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I'll quickly turn to education. I won't go through I think all of the things that I've already been saying in terms of what this budget looks like with respect to the Education ministry, other than it is a 6.7 per cent increase, Mr. Speaker. We covered a lot of areas, not just K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] education. I think that obviously gets a lot of the attention, but the member opposite focused on, talked a little bit about child care in her remarks, Mr. Speaker. We do libraries. We do early childhood intervention programs and a whole host of other programs, Mr. Speaker. And so 6.7 per cent is a very healthy increase for the Ministry of Education.

And the same can be said, Mr. Speaker, for . . . I'll focus on the K to 12 budget, Mr. Speaker, a 2.5 per cent increase, although that certainly does vary for different school divisions, Mr. Speaker. And knowing that one of the largest cost drivers really isn't inflation or what the rate of inflation is, Mr. Speaker, it's what the teachers' contract is. And so I think everybody knows that we have a contract with the teachers currently, Mr. Speaker. That contract will be concluding in August, and so there needs to be and will be a time for a negotiation for what a new contract looks like, Mr. Speaker.

But in the interim, there is nearly \$50 million in educational operating grant increase, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and it's interesting a lot of that is tied to enrolment, and I find it really interesting to hear, which really doesn't . . . I don't think it resonates with anybody that I talk to, and I like to think I have a pretty large circle of people that I talk to, whether it be my constituents or whether it be my friends.

But this notion that the economy is not growing or we're like the, you know, a dumpster fire of an economy or something like that, or that the population of the province isn't growing, Mr. Speaker. And I know that that's been referenced in speeches. And, Mr. Speaker, if that is the case then we need to do an investigation. Because these people that are leaving the province, Mr. Speaker, I think they must be leaving all their kids here when they go, because our classrooms have never been fuller, Mr. Speaker.

Our schools have . . . We have not had this large of enrolment growth in 20 years, Mr. Speaker. And it's likely larger than that because frankly to get further back than 20 years in the records, it takes a lot more work to find those records, Mr. Speaker. So records are pretty relatively easy for us to find going back 20 years, and I don't really want to have a whole lot of ministry staff doing a whole lot of time looking for records when we have more important things to do, Mr. Speaker. But certainly that's the case, Mr. Speaker, and we are planning and have put in dollars for enrolment, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, so that's on the operating side. I do want to talk a little bit about the infrastructure side.

So \$147.3 million allocated for education capital, Mr. Speaker. And if the House will indulge me, I want to go through the list. Because frankly in question period I don't have enough time to go through the entire list, Mr. Speaker, but I do want to put it on the record. And I know there is some criticism from perhaps the members opposite, perhaps some stakeholders of . . . You know, when we use the use of the word "historic," Mr. Speaker, maybe people think we throw that around too often, Mr. Speaker. What we are doing in capital in this province, Mr. Speaker, is historic, Mr. Speaker. And I do want to put it on the record, Mr. Speaker.

So this year, \$4.4 million to begin planning five new major capital projects: a new kindergarten to grade 12 school in Carlyle to consolidate and replace the elementary and the high schools; a new K to 12 francophone school to replace École Valois in Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker; a new francophone elementary school in Saskatoon; renovations and expansion of Greenall High School in Balgonie; and renovations to Campbell Collegiate here in the city of Regina. So that's the five projects that we've allocated \$4.4 million in planning to, Mr. Speaker. So that's on top of work that we're already doing and that SaskBuilds is already doing.

We have \$115 million, so of that 147, \$115 million to support 20 ongoing major capital and 15 new schools and renovating five existing schools. So a new joint-use facility for two elementary schools in Regina to replace Argyle and École St. Pius. And I want to give special credit, because this has not been all the case in capital projects that we've announced in the last two or three years. Regina Public and Regina Catholic, Mr. Speaker, did not spend a single moment longer than needed to in designing the school and moving forward with this school, Mr. Speaker. In fact I believe the projects were announced in March of 2020. It might have been a little bit later because that was that weird budget year where we had a budget and then we didn't have a . . . And then we had to come back because of COVID, Mr. Speaker.

But I'll say this. My understanding is that the Regina Public side essentially will be open for occupancy after Easter of this year, and the Catholic side will be ready for occupancy . . . because part of the Catholic entrance needs to be torn down, because it's part of the old school, Mr. Speaker. I won't bore the House with details, but it'll be ready for kids to move in this fall, Mr. Speaker. So a great credit to those two school divisions for not wasting any time in getting on this project, Mr. Speaker.

A new K to 12 school to replace the Blaine Lake Composite School. A new K to 12 school to replace and consolidate the elementary and high schools in Carrot River. A new K to 12 school to replace and consolidate the elementary and high schools in Lanigan. The new elementary school to replace Ducharme Elementary School in La Loche.

New elementary school to replace Princess Alexandra, King George, Pleasant Hill in Saskatoon. A new joint-use facility with two new elementary schools to replace Sacred Heart, St. Mary, Empire, and Westmount schools in Moose Jaw.

The aforementioned St. Peter, St. Michael, Imperial and McDermid elementary schools here in the city of Regina. A new elementary school to replace St. Frances Cree Bilingual School in Saskatoon. A new francophone elementary school in Regina. So that's a francophone elementary school in Regina, planning for one in Saskatoon, planning one in Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker.

A new joint-use facility with two elementary schools in Regina's Harbour Landing, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member from Regina Pasqua for all his work on that project, Mr. Speaker. Renovations and additions to Holy Rosary High School in Lloydminster. Renovations and addition to John Paul II Collegiate in North Battleford. Renovations and additions to Lloydminster Comprehensive High School. Renovations to Yorkton Regional High School, and renovations to Athol Murray in Notre Dame, Mr. Speaker.

As well, Mr. Speaker, we created a new minor capital program just last year. We've increased the budget from \$5 million to \$11.3 million. New projects to consolidate the elementary school and high school in Kelvington. Renovations to St. John Community School in Prince Albert. Renovations to Medstead Central School as well as the projects that were announced last year, renovations to Kyle Composite and École St. Margaret school in Moose Jaw.

As well, Mr. Speaker, we're increasing the budget for relocatables by 33 per cent from 12 to \$16 million. Because frankly, Mr. Speaker, we need the space in our schools, particularly in our urban areas, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to also touch on, that's \$147.3 million. As well, Mr. Speaker, on top of that, \$50 million to PMR. And I will say first of all, Ken Krawetz just not that long ago gave me some good advice. Don't call it PMR, because nobody knows what PMR is, Mr. Speaker. So this is for Ken: preventative maintenance and renewal. Preventative maintenance and renewal, \$50 million in that budget that'll go to school divisions, Mr. Speaker, and this is a really important program. One, because in the last 10 years we have put in \$436,269,502, Mr. Speaker — 436,269,502.

Prior to . . . I was going to say PMR. Prior to preventative maintenance and renewal, Mr. Speaker, prior to that even existing, because it didn't at the time, Mr. Speaker, this had to be funded out of operating of the school divisions. So whatever their funding was in operations, Mr. Speaker, whether that was through levying the mill rate or after those changes were made . . . And the ratio changed so that the government was funding at a greater degree than property tax payers. Regardless of who was paying, Mr. Speaker, preventative maintenance and renewal always had to come out of operations. It now exists. It's \$50 million this year, and over the last 10 years it has been \$436 million, Mr. Speaker, and change.

Mr. Speaker, finally I do want to touch on mental health. I want to thank the Minister of Health and the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Mr. Speaker. There's a couple of really good initiatives. One is the mental health capacity building. That money is staying consistent with what it was last year, Mr. Speaker.

But there are two new programs. One is the integrated youth strategy, integrated youth services, Mr. Speaker. This is 3.4 — I believe it's 3.4 or 4.3; I might have that backwards — million dollars, Mr. Speaker. And this is going to provide virtual services for students, frankly for people between the ages of 12 and 25 but certainly it will affect students, or will have a positive impact for them in three locations as well as virtually, Mr. Speaker, as well as the fact that our mental health walk-in clinics, I believe there

are 31 across the province. And this year we're providing funding in the budget, Mr. Speaker, for I believe it's 11 or 12 of those, youth services to be added to those.

And I think this is a really important part and we've certainly shared this with stakeholders because I think one of the concerns has been, from school divisions, is that they feel like they're in this all by themselves. And, Mr. Speaker, that's not the case. And the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions I think is doing a really good job of expanding the number of services that are available. And frankly they don't have to come from our budget. We can work together as ministries, Mr. Speaker, and that's going to happen.

The final thing I want to talk about, Mr. Speaker, and I will close at this point . . . Actually two things, and let me know if I need to wrap up. I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say, because the member opposite . . . And I don't want to get into a debate this evening but I do want to say certainly, yes, we did achieve the \$10 a day three years in advance, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the child care agreement. And there's a reason for that, Mr. Speaker, in part because, and I agree, a workforce strategy. We need a workforce strategy, Mr. Speaker, and I think people agree that that will take some time.

One of the challenges though that we have, Mr. Speaker, is that while there are significant dollars available, federal dollars, which I mean we're federal taxpayers in this province as well, Mr. Speaker, so there are dollars but I think what's important to note is that we are limited in the amount of money if it is unspent that we can carry over. And I know the member opposite knows this.

Because we signed the agreement in the middle of the fiscal year, the federal government allowed us 60 per cent carry-over. So anything that wasn't spent up to 60 per cent in that first year, Mr. Speaker, we could carry it over to the next year. That falls to 30 per cent in the second year, and then I believe it's 10, 10, and 10 for the final three years of the agreement.

The challenge with not moving forward on \$10 a day as quickly as we did, Mr. Speaker, but putting our focus on a workforce plan, workforce strategy is that — and I think rightly the member opposite would have criticized us for this — we would've left way too much money on the table, Mr. Speaker. So in terms of the issue that the member raises, it is a relevant issue. It's a good issue, and we are committed to the sector to fixing the issue that has been caused, Mr. Speaker. So that's all I'm going to say on child care.

The final thing I do want to mention, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the caucus's support on this and that's moving to the Sask DLC, centralizing for our online education, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is going to provide . . . So there'll be 10 campuses: the Kenaston as the headquarters and nine regional campuses, Mr. Speaker. The ministry's been working very hard with the school divisions, Mr. Speaker, as we make this transition in part because we want to ensure that students, wherever they are being educated, whatever school division, that they have access to courses that maybe they didn't have access to, Mr. Speaker.

We want to ensure that kids can have an education, Mr. Speaker, hopefully connected to a local school but certainly so that they

can still have access to extra-curricular activities, things like driver training, things like sports teams, Mr. Speaker. And that sometimes was a bit of a challenge, Mr. Speaker, in the event that they wanted to pursue their education remotely, perhaps in a different school division than their home school division, and that did cause some issues, Mr. Speaker. Most importantly though we want to have students have access to the broadest array of classes if they're studying online, whether part-time or full-time, Mr. Speaker, regardless of where they live.

[21:15]

And, Mr. Speaker, just to give you an example: so 180 K to 12 courses are available through the Sask DLC, 70 electives, Mr. Speaker, over 40 classes that are dual credit. So whether we're talking Sask Poly, University of Regina, University of Saskatchewan, Collège Mathieu, Athabasca, Mr. Speaker, over 40 dual credit courses.

But here are some of the courses that now students will have access to regardless of where they live in the province, Mr. Speaker: cow calf production; equine studies; field crop production; agriculture equipment technician; animation; astronomy; IT [information technology] fundamentals — I think I need that course, Mr. Speaker; mechanical and automotive; one that is really popular at home, Mr. Speaker, paleontology 20. I think I've got a couple of boys that may be trying to see if they can sign up for that.

And here's a really good example, Mr. Speaker. I think of where we've been able to take the best of what was happening in other school divisions, because it wasn't just Sun West School Division. Sun West School Division has offered power engineering 4th class upgrade A and B. Prairie South School Division has offered power engineering class 5. So they're now available to students regardless of where they live in the province, Mr. Speaker. Those are just a couple of examples I think of, some of the benefits.

And the other thing, Mr. Speaker, and this has been communicated to school divisions, because of the way that we are funding this we think, which you would not see kind of as the way the budget is presented, Mr. Speaker, we certainly believe, in running some of the numbers that we have run based on kind of historical trends, this will save public school divisions roughly \$13 million collectively for not having the costs associated with running an online school, Mr. Speaker.

So that is freeing up additional dollars, Mr. Speaker, that the school divisions now have access to, that prior to this they were dedicating to online learning, Mr. Speaker. And so these will be resources that they will have access to going forward.

Mr. Speaker, with that I won't be supporting the amendment but I will be honoured and proud to support the budget presented by the Minister of Finance. Thank you.

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

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always an honour to rise here in the legislature and share perspectives certainly from The Battlefords and the job that I get to have here.

And you know, if as the member from Melfort says, happiness and gratefulness are correlated, man, I'm a pretty happy guy. And I've got a lot of people that I'd like to thank here before we get started.

And you know, last Wednesday on budget day I had the privilege of hosting a number of people from The Battlefords who, you know . . . It's a four-hour drive, Mr. Speaker. It's a full day for them to come down and take in the budget proceedings, and I'm really grateful that that group of people did.

It was an exciting day, budget day, for The Battlefords I would say, and I'll share more about that in a little bit. But you know, a real privilege to have folks from your home constituency join you. And I mean, I guess I'm a little bit biased but I think the legislature is a little bit better when there's more people from Battleford inside of it than not, Mr. Speaker. So it was a good day last Wednesday.

You know, I was thinking about these folks. I was in the building a couple of evenings early last week before the budget happened and just working in my office and walking around a little bit. And I love when I see people doing detailed tasks that just seem, you know, may seem kind of — I don't know what you say — tertiary, or like they just seem secondary tasks.

But I just want to thank the people in this building who clean and maintain this building each and every single day. And I'll tell you something, you know, because again I just talked about people coming from my home community, come to budget day. And whenever I have people here from The Battlefords they always come and say, this is such an incredible building. And I say, no, I know, isn't it? I get to work here every day. That's an amazing thing.

But you know, I think it was last Monday night I walked in the building, and it was late and there was a young gentleman polishing all the brass details on doors on the first floor. Like, Mr. Speaker, how many people on budget day were on the first floor . . . or it was in the basement, sorry. So how many people were in the basement on budget day? But there this guy was, polishing the brass door pulls and door handles, all to make sure that the building was in its best possible state for budget day.

And you know, I know that's a small detail but there's folks right now in the building here who are cleaning the floors, turning around the building for the next day. So that's something I noticed last week, you know. It was like an extra layer of wax on the floor for budget day. And man, I'll tell you, all those brass elements in the elevator and on all the doors, Mr. Speaker, were all polished up and ready to go. And I just say, the effort certainly does not go unnoticed.

I'd also just thank the folks who work in my ministerial office here in Regina — Lee and Ryan and Linda and Candace. And I sure appreciate their work. I think I mentioned this in the fall but I like to laugh when I work. I like to share a few jokes and, you know, I laugh a lot with these folks and we have a great time working together here in Regina.

You know, similarly I've got a great couple of staff that I have the pleasure of working with in The Battlefords. Gail and Claudette are my two constituency assistants and, you know,

these two women just really do incredible work when it comes to serving the constituents of The Battlefords.

And you know, I know how much they care because recently we had a bit of casework that we'd been working on for a number of months, and been working closely with the minister's office on this case. And you know, a bit of back and forth, some difficulty on it, but we got it to a point, Mr. Speaker — thanks to the minister's office for their work on it as well — where we got a fantastic result for this family, Mr. Speaker. And you know what? Hearing the joy in the voices of Gail and Claudette when we got that through, that was so . . . I was ecstatic, Mr. Speaker. But they really carried the torch on that one, and they do that each and every single day for me and all of the constituents of The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker.

I should also mention the folks, the officials that I get to work with both in the Ministry of Highways and Water Security Agency. And you know, I think that's something . . . As I've gone from being a private member to now having ministerial responsibilities, I get to meet all these people who work in Highways and Water Security Agency that, sure, I may have seen them around the building at different committee meetings or at treasury board, but now I get to work with them each and every single day.

And you know, it just opens your eyes to I think the talent that we have in government in this province, Mr. Speaker. People who are competent, yes. People who have expertise in their respective field, absolutely, Mr. Speaker, but I think also people who care and people who understand the fact that all of our jobs wherever you work, whether you're elected or whether you're an official, at the end of the day you're serving the people of this province. And I'm really grateful to work with the folks that I get to work in both Highways and Water Security Agency.

And I also, you know, it's mentioned by members often, but I'd certainly like to thank my family, and first and foremost my wife, Meagan, who has a tremendous amount of patience for me and the schedule that we keep in this job here, and you know, accepts me being away from home for long stretches while I'm out here in Regina or wherever around the province, Mr. Speaker. And I sure appreciate her support. And yeah, I would also just say that both of our families, both Meagan's family and my family, just incredibly supportive in this role, Mr. Speaker.

You know, and I guess on that note about family, Mr. Speaker, I'll just actually . . . You know, and perhaps I'll have more to say on this, you know, at a later time but just kind of some observations. I like to think that I keep a close eye on what's happening around me. You know, an observation I'd make just, you know, from the colleagues that I get to work with here on this side of the House — and actually on the other side of the House as well, but you know, I know these folks a little bit better than those folks — but you know, between my colleagues here and between the people that I get to meet on a daily basis, you know, it's interesting.

I think I've talked to hundreds, if not thousands, of people in the last few years in my role as an MLA. And I think something that is a commonality whatever side of the House you sit on, whatever part of the province you live in, whatever you do in your nine-to-five job, Mr. Speaker, you know, what's most important to

people at the end of the day is their family. And you know, we all thank our family here when we have an opportunity, as we should.

But you know, you really . . . And I talked about casework earlier, Mr. Speaker, and I would just say that, you know, you really see the importance of family support as you get to meet more people. And you know, family for most of us, you know, they're our economic support, they're our emotional support, and really at the end of the day, they're probably our strongest reason to be here, strongest reason to live, Mr. Speaker.

And you know, here we are talking about a budget. We're talking about the amounts of investments and the allocations of investments, Mr. Speaker, and debating the merits of those amounts and allocations and the effect they'll have on life here in Saskatchewan. But you know, I think I've noticed it more, you know, in the last couple of years of my life than ever before — and I'm a relatively young guy so I've got lots to learn — but you know, there's really one investment where you can't go wrong and that's your family.

And I think that's something that whatever you do in this province, whether you have the privilege of serving as an elected MLA or whether you're a welder in Estevan, Mr. Speaker, or whether you work in the forestry industry, at the end of the day, you know, even though we're here talking about investments and important investments for the province, Mr. Speaker, the really important investment, Mr. Speaker, I would say it's in our families.

I'd like to thank a number of my colleagues, Mr. Speaker. And first of all . . . You know, I will talk about the budget, Mr. Speaker. Don't worry. I'm getting there. But I'd like to thank the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Finance. And you know, on this side of the House, we have the privilege of working closely with her every single day, Mr. Speaker, you know, and really to see her experience and expertise on files. Mr. Speaker, the province is well served. The province is well served by this Deputy Premier.

You know, and the two former, the two recently former members, I should say, from our caucus, and Mark Docherty from Regina Coronation Park. And I just want to thank him for his service to the people of his constituency in the city of Regina and the province as a whole.

And I'd also like to thank the former member from Lumsden-Morse. And you know, I remember shortly after I was elected, I called my predecessor, Mr. Cox and I said, Herb, you know, I'm going down to Regina. Who's one person, who's one person that I could really learn from? And I don't think he meant any disrespect to any other colleagues here, Mr. Speaker, but he thought about it for a second and he said Lyle Stewart. Lyle Stewart, that's who you should learn from.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, so I remember ever since that point I've been watching. I've watched Lyle closely in meetings — how he conducts himself with stakeholders, his approach to things, you know, how he comes prepared. He knows what he's talking about. And really it's a no-nonsense approach. And so I didn't get to work with Lyle as long as I wanted to, but man, I'm sure grateful for the time that I had to be a colleague of Lyle

Stewart.

And you know, I would just say he's kind of a giant, when you think about it, in Saskatchewan politics. And I would just say, you know, the reason you know that is because when you tour around the province and you talk to people, you know, he goes by his first-name basis with everybody. People just say, well yeah, well Lyle was here a number of years ago and we had this conversation. You know exactly who they're talking about. It's not Lyle who lives in the next RM. It's Lyle Stewart, because Lyle spent so much time travelling around this province advocating for our producers. And so I just want to thank him for his service to his constituents, but also to our province. And we owe a great deal of gratitude towards Lyle Stewart.

I'd also like to thank the member for Regina Walsh Acres. And you know, a good kid from Midale who maybe never expected to work in this legislature, but he worked hard and he was given that privilege by the good folks of Regina Walsh Acres in 2020. And I feel incredibly fortunate to call that member a good friend and somebody that I respect, not only, you know, as an MLA but also as a parent and as a partner.

[21:30]

And you know, Mr. Speaker, I remember during the more challenging days of pandemic times — we'll say, in 2020 and 2021 — you know, there were some discouraging days, Mr. Speaker, some discouraging weeks. And I remember, you know, I'd call a number of colleagues on a weekly basis, but the member for Regina Walsh Acres was one of those.

And you know, he represents a constituency in a big city, Mr. Speaker, and then I represent a community or a couple communities in a different part of the province, you know, a smaller city and a larger town and a little bit of an RM, Mr. Speaker. But you know, we'd call and we'd chat about what we were hearing in our respective constituencies and, you know, we'd have an opportunity just to support each other.

And I would just say that one thing that always shone through on those phone calls, Mr. Speaker, was the member's positivity. Even in those difficult weeks when things were challenging and it felt like there weren't a lot of answers, Mr. Speaker, I would just say the member for Regina Walsh Acres continued to be a positive force.

And I know he shared things in this House, you know, and it's been documented other places. You know, that member and his family have faced some challenging circumstances in their lives over the last number of years, but I know, and I've seen it first-hand, Mr. Speaker, just the remarkable positivity and perseverance and really gratitude that the member for Regina Walsh Acres has. And I just appreciate that so much about him.

And I would just say, you know, one more thing about Regina Walsh Acres. You know, that member, there's something in this budget that that member really pushed for, really advocated for, Mr. Speaker, and that's the new parkade at Regina General Hospital. And I know, Mr. Speaker, that if that member were addressing the budget in reply, Mr. Speaker, he would talk about how the people of Regina Walsh Acres are going to benefit from that new parkade at Regina General Hospital. And I just want to

make sure that those folks in Walsh Acres know that, that your member pushed hard for that parkade and that's a commitment that this government has made.

Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to quickly touch on some things in this budget that impact The Battlefords directly, Mr. Speaker. And you know, I would say on the public safety front, Mr. Speaker, you know, we actually just had a . . . we recently had a change in the officer-in-charge position in The Battlefords RCMP detachment. And Jason Teniuk moved on from that role and moved to a different detachment in the province, Mr. Speaker, and we have a new inspector in town now, Jesse Gilbert. And I just want to thank Inspector Gilbert and all the men and women who work at the RCMP detachment in The Battlefords for the work that they do each and every single day to keep our communities and our region safe, Mr. Speaker. We know that there's challenges in the Northwest when it comes to policing. We know there are, quite frankly there are bad people pushing bad products that have bad effects on people in our community, and we know that that requires more support, Mr. Speaker.

And so really exciting in this budget is the funding, the \$1.6 million towards the second crime reduction team in The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, these crime reduction teams, we're going to have 10 of them in the province after the second one in The Battlefords is set up, Mr. Speaker. These are focused teams that come in, and you know, can have an immediate impact, Mr. Speaker, on challenges we have around public safety in our communities. And again, I want to thank the folks that work in The Battlefords, who work for the RCMP detachment, and work on our crime reduction teams for the really important work that they do, Mr. Speaker, in keeping The Battlefords safe. Each and every day, Mr. Speaker, they keep us safe.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to health care, you know, certainly we've come through a challenging couple of years, Mr. Speaker. And again, there's been some challenging weeks, Mr. Speaker. You know, last summer we had a long-time family doctor, Dr. Johnson in The Battlefords, retire. I mean Dr. Johnson served literally thousands of patients for decades in The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker. And you know, obviously we wish him the best in retirement, but when a family doctor retires, you've got to find another family doctor, right? And you know, there's been some challenges there in terms of people having access to a family doctor.

And I'm really excited because, you know, I've been working with the Minister of Health and the Minister of Rural and Remote Health to, you know, to make this a priority, to make recruiting family physicians a priority for The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's exciting, you know, just a couple weeks ago, we now have a new SIPPA [Saskatchewan international physician practice assessment] physician practising in the community. It looks like we have one, possibly two, more family doctors coming to The Battlefords here before the summer, Mr. Speaker.

This is great news. This is great news for The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker. This is great news for families who are looking for a new family doctor. And it just shows this government's commitment to ensuring that everybody in this province, regardless of where they live, have access to good medical services, Mr. Speaker. And I look forward to these doctors

starting practising in our community.

You know, another couple of things, Mr. Speaker. I think about the 550 new training seats that have been created, Mr. Speaker. And you know, it is important. There's people, there's young people in this province who are interested in working in health care. They want to live here in the province, regardless of what the opposition says. Mr. Speaker, young people are growing up wanting to work here in Saskatchewan. And so by creating new training seats, Mr. Speaker, that opportunity is going to be there.

You know, another thing that I have to commend the Minister of Health for, you know, really prioritizing over the last number of months, and I know it's in this year's budget as well. There's roughly \$22 million to create 250 new full-time positions and it also converts some part-time positions into full-time positions, Mr. Speaker. And I think that, you know, this transition is really important for smaller cities and smaller towns, Mr. Speaker. It's really important that there's full-time opportunities available for health care professionals.

You know, I would also say some of the incentives available through the health human resources plan are also starting to have a significant impact in The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker. You know with the \$50,000 incentive, Mr. Speaker, for all the nursing professions to move to different communities, including The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker, we've recruited nearly 20 new nurses over the last number of months, Mr. Speaker, to The Battlefords. That is fantastic news for the residents of our community and for the Battlefords Union Hospital.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I would also point to another piece in the budget. And you know, it's a small piece but it's an important piece. And there's \$361,000, Mr. Speaker, in this budget to enhance security at Battlefords Union Hospital. And you know, our hospital in North Battleford, it's a busy place, Mr. Speaker. It's a regional hospital so we have people coming from, you know, a wide area around The Battlefords to use the services, whether that be dialysis or whether that be imaging, whether that be the lab services or, you know, primarily, Mr. Speaker, our emergency room and our intensive care unit, Mr. Speaker.

So you know, to improve security . . . It can be a busy place at night, Mr. Speaker. I've been there. And you know, we want to make sure that when people are accessing services at the hospital, Mr. Speaker, they feel safe doing so. And we also want to ensure that, you know, when sometimes the RCMP bring folks to the hospital, Mr. Speaker, and we want to make sure that people can be safe when they access services at the hospital.

You know, I think perhaps the most impactful investment though, Mr. Speaker, in terms of health care for The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker, is something that was announced, and again it's a small investment this year, Mr. Speaker, but that investment is going to grow over the next number of years into a brand new long-term care facility, a brand new replacement of Battlefords District Care Centre.

And you know, the planning dollars, \$250,000 in this fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, just to get the ball rolling and start work on planning for this new long-term care facility. And I would just say, you know, Battlefords District Care Centre, I believe it's actually the oldest building in the province providing patient care. And this is

a building that has served the residents of Battlefords and region for, well for a long time. I would just say, you know, the staff we have at BDCC [Battlefords District Care Centre] are amazing and have done an exceptional job in terms of making that facility run and being known in our community for being a really quality, kind of, high quality of service at that facility, Mr. Speaker. But this is really exciting.

And I would just say, you know, I have to give a lot of kudos to the ministers of Rural and Remote Health, the ministers of Health, the Minister of SaskBuilds. You know, this is one of those buildings that one ministry owns the building, another ministry does the programming inside of it. Sometimes things can kind of fall through the cracks, Mr. Speaker. But I know that when I was elected in 2020, bringing this building to the government's attention was one of my priorities. And so, you know, it was a really exciting day last Wednesday to see these planning dollars allocated towards Battlefords District Care Centre.

And I would just say too, you know, we talk a lot about partnering with our municipalities, Mr. Speaker. And I would just say, you know, over the last number of months, I just give a shout out to Mayor Leslie from the town of Battleford for working quite closely with me and having conversations about this facility. And you know, really excited to continue to work with Mayor Leslie and his whole council and the town on planning this new facility, Mr. Speaker.

Now you know, those are great numbers. They're great numbers. Those are great announcements. But at the end of the day, you know, if the investments that we're making don't have a real impact on people, they're investments, right. They're just investments. And so let me give you a real case study on how these investments that I've just talked about in the health care sector are having real impact on real people in The Battlefords.

And you know, I was talking to a local gentleman the other day, and he was sharing about his daughter's post-secondary experience. And you know, I guess, he shared that his daughter graduated high school during COVID, wasn't quite sure what she wanted to do. And you know, kind of thought about a few things, but then came home one day and said I want to be a psych nurse. I want to be a psych nurse, and I want to do that program at North West Regional College. And so sure enough, she's currently enrolled at the psych nursing program at North West Regional College in North Battleford, Mr. Speaker.

A program, Mr. Speaker, that, you know, just a couple of years ago we had 16 seats in every annual cohort, Mr. Speaker. Now we have 24 seats, Mr. Speaker. Again, this is real impact of having more training seats available locally, Mr. Speaker, so more people can get trained.

Now you know, I understand from my friend, she's enjoying the program. She's getting great work experience on days off and looking forward to graduating. Now, let's just, as I said, let's just understand that process, how we get from investments to real impact, Mr. Speaker. You know, we have new seats created at the regional college, which means more training opportunities available to young people locally who are interested in health care, of which there are lots, Mr. Speaker. These students are training. They're getting work experience locally, which means

they're building up their competencies. They're building camaraderie with other staff, and they're building confidence as they care for patients.

So now we add in the incentives that our government has added to nine different medical professions in smaller towns and cities across Saskatchewan, which means that those students have a financial benefit, a financial incentive to stay in and invest in their home communities, Mr. Speaker. And now we have a replacement facility, Mr. Speaker, in Battlefords District Care Centre, a facility that this individual will likely graduate and work in, Mr. Speaker. So there we go.

You know, we have all the tools, Mr. Speaker, that our government's putting in place to make sure that our young people in this province have the best possible opportunity to create a great profession for themselves and to serve the people in their community and to serve our province, Mr. Speaker. If that's not growth that works for everyone, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what is.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just talk briefly about the highways and the Water Security Agency budgets. And you know, a number of members already have spoken about some of the specific projects, you know, that we're doing in highways. We've got \$422 million of highways capital, 442 if you count the third-party capital like RIRG [rural integrated roads for growth program] and urban highway connector program and the community airport program investments that we're going to be making in this next fiscal year, Mr. Speaker.

But you know, we have some significant improvements. You know, the Minister of Education just mentioned a few of these. Probably our largest project next year, Mr. Speaker, is the twinning work that's being done on Highway 6, just south of the Regina bypass for about 7 kilometres on that stretch, Mr. Speaker, and then another section that's being twinned at the intersection of Highway 6 and Highway 39 at Corinne. And you know, Mr. Speaker, this is a busy corridor for people travelling between Regina and Weyburn and other points in the southeast of our province, and looking forward to delivering on this project this year, Mr. Speaker.

You know, we also have additional passing lanes that we're adding on Highway 5 east of Saskatoon. You know, I would just say on passing lanes, Mr. Speaker, it's amazing the impact that passing lanes have in our province. And I was at an event. You know, we were opening up a new stretch that had just been twinned, Mr. Speaker. And you know, you meet people who, I met people who had lost family members on that stretch previously, Mr. Speaker, when it was a two-lane stretch, and they actually lost a child. They lost a two-year-old child on this stretch.

[21:45]

And you know, you meet people who have tragically lost family members in an accident, Mr. Speaker, and then you're there and you're announcing that you're opening passing lanes, you're opening a new twin stretch of highway, Mr. Speaker. And you know, you can see in real time the impact that these investments have, Mr. Speaker. It's not just asphalt. It's not just line paint, Mr. Speaker. It's not just lights and signage, Mr. Speaker. It's

highways investments that are having real impact on real people, Mr. Speaker.

And that's something that's so special to see, and that's . . . You know, when we talk about growth that works for everyone, Mr. Speaker, that is growth that works for everyone. That's making the highway network safer for people as they travel all across the province.

You know, and on that note about safety, Mr. Speaker, we're coming into the last year of a five-year safety improvement program, Mr. Speaker, \$100 million spent over five years. And you know, in that time, Mr. Speaker, we've reviewed every single major highway intersection in the province, Mr. Speaker. We've evaluated opportunities where there should be better signage, better lighting, Mr. Speaker, where there needs to be turning lanes or acceleration lanes, Mr. Speaker, or maybe sections that justify passing lanes or twinning, Mr. Speaker.

And that's something . . . I'm really proud of the work that our ministry staff have done on that program, because again you hear all over the province, you know, the impact that a turning lane can have, Mr. Speaker, the impact that four or five new lights at an intersection can have, Mr. Speaker, just to make things a little bit safer for the travelling public.

Mr. Speaker, you know, on the water security front I would just say this is . . . I was thinking about it the other day. The Water Security Agency budget this year, it's kind of like a reorientation budget, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're taking a compass, and we're kind of pointing . . . Maybe a compass isn't a great analogy, Mr. Speaker. But you know, we're taking an arrow, and we're just pointing it in a little bit different of a direction, Mr. Speaker.

And you know, with Water Security Agency, at the end of the day like every other ministry, Mr. Speaker, we serve the people of this province. And so a focus heading into this next year and the next number of years, Mr. Speaker, is going to be client service. And we've added significantly to that part of the organization just to make sure that we are equipped to support people, you know, whether it be a drainage project, Mr. Speaker, whether it be any type of approval, Mr. Speaker. So we're really excited for that.

I'd also point to the \$32 million that we're going to be investing this year in irrigation projects. You know, and this government has a growth plan. You know, our growth plan goal is to add 85,000 acres of irrigable land by 2030, you know, so that's about 8,500 acres a year, Mr. Speaker. In December we added 15,000 more acres of allocation off the SSEWS [Saskatoon south east water supply] canal, Mr. Speaker.

You know, good news, Mr. Speaker. We are well ahead of our goals to achieve that goal, well ahead of targets, Mr. Speaker, to achieve that growth plan goal of adding irrigable acres. Obviously we're continuing to work on both Lake Diefenbaker and a number of other smaller irrigation projects all around the province. I would just say it's really exciting to see the excitement in the producer community, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to irrigation and the potential for irrigation in this province.

You know, now I'm just about to wrap up here. And you know, for anyone keeping score at home, you probably notice I haven't spent much of my time analyzing the NDP's response to the budget. And it's just frankly not worth the time, Mr. Speaker. This is such a great budget. This is such a great budget for the people of this province, such a great budget for the people of The Battlefords.

You know, I thought about it. You know, sometimes, you go into your pantry and you pull out a bag of chips and it's open. It's been folded over, maybe sealed up a little bit, Mr. Speaker, and you take a chip out and you bite into it — oh — and you realize that's a stale chip, Mr. Speaker. I mean the NDP's budget response points, they're like those chips, Mr. Speaker. You know, and sometimes you want to just power through the bag and finish it because you bought the bag of chips. Mr. Speaker, just throw the bag out. They're not worth it, Mr. Speaker. It's not worth it. So, Mr. Speaker, the talking points are stale. They're just not based in reality, Mr. Speaker.

But you know what reality is, Mr. Speaker, out there? You know, the reality, Mr. Speaker, that, folks in Estevan and folks in Prince Albert and folks in Lloydminster and folks in Yorkton are seeing — and all the points in between, Mr. Speaker — is we have an economy that's growing. Saskatchewan's economy is growing. There's more opportunities for young people every single week, Mr. Speaker. Whether it's in mining, whether it's in forestry, Mr. Speaker, whether it's in health care or education, there are more opportunities in this province and there's hope in this province.

And at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, that's what this province has better than any other province right now in Canada. We have a hope. We have a hope for families to come and build their future. We have a hope for kids to grow up here and stay here, Mr. Speaker, and stay in and invest in their communities, Mr. Speaker, and that's exciting. That's exciting.

So of course I'm happy, Mr. Speaker. Of course I'm happy. I'm grateful to live in this province, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful to represent the people of The Battlefords. I'm grateful to serve with this caucus, with this cabinet, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, to stay focused on growth that works for everyone. And that's why I'll be supporting the budget motion and will not be supporting the amendment. Thank you.

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

Mr. Lemaigre: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This late in the evening, I know my entire family — maybe except my son because he might be working night shift — are probably sleeping, but I want to start by acknowledging the people that have my back, sitting here. My wife, Wendy. Earlier I heard the Minister of Education talking about their anniversary. This year will be 25 years for us. And just this past Thursday we had our grandkids over to the house, so I rushed home from here to be with them, and my goodness how much they've grown.

My grandson Lincoln is in elementary school. And so just recently they had a talking circle, and they had a talking stick. So they were passing it around, and he was just elated, excited when it was his turn. And he has . . . In his excitement, he was telling a story to his classmates, and every other word was some name

of a dinosaur. He was so excited to tell a story about a dinosaur. And he spoke for about 10 minutes, and all the kids have a couple of minutes. That sounds familiar around here, right? Yeah.

And so when he was done, the entire class applauded him. Another, sounds familiar around here. Yeah. And so, you know, we're thankful to the teachers, we're thankful for the support staff in the classroom, and we're thankful for the daycare staff that set the foundation within my grandson to appreciate and to enjoy going to school.

His sister Parker almost cries every morning because she wants to go to school with her brother, but my son has to bribe her every morning so she can go to daycare. And just this past Thursday she found her old guitar in the house. And my goodness, she's stringing and singing "Old MacDonald" and the "ABC song." And you know, sometimes with the amount of commitment we give, our children and grandchildren are growing up at home, and it's those moments you realize why it is what it is we do here. It is for their future.

My son and his wife are both in health care. My daughter just started school, aviation mechanical engineering. And you know, that is what growth looks like in this province, and so it baffles me when I hear about the constant state of crisis. I'm not sure if Saskatchewan even realizes or picks up on that because what we see is growth that works for everyone.

So I want to start by thanking the Minister of Finance, Deputy Premier, and to all my colleagues that put the effort behind this budget that we're speaking to. This budget is not only setting a foundation of a responsible government, but we are ensuring that our future is bright. And that is exactly what this budget is doing, so I want to say thank you.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes in life we're reminded of the people in our lives and the impact that it has. Lyle Stewart, Mark Docherty, we've heard stories about them here and the seats that they held, and with heart they cared for this province. And I just want to acknowledge them and thank them. Public service is sometimes not easy, but the follow-through is even harder. And they set a strong foundation for us, and with that I want to say thank you.

And my colleague, the member from Walsh Acres. You know, Mr. Speaker, when I first got here, he invited me to his home and we visited. And the last discussion we had that evening will stay with me forever. We talked, and we heard constantly about his optimism. And till today that optimism is irreplaceable and gives us hope. It's a strong foundation of faith, and it's with that that I recognize him. And I say to him, thank you. Your friendship, your guidance, your support has not gone beyond where I stand. And thank you to your family. And what we go through sometimes, Mr. Speaker, sets the foundation for us, and his foundation is strong. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, this budget should give all residents of Saskatchewan hope. The great people of Saskatchewan still remember what we've been through. When used appropriately, history allows us to forge ahead based on lessons learned, and the residents of Saskatchewan continue to do that and it is reflected by the numbers in this House.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Athabasca have entrusted me to be

their voice. Mr. Speaker, I'll have to acknowledge the recent steps taken in this Chamber to cast doubt on my efforts for the people of Athabasca. It was calculated. It was direct. And for a moment it shook my foundation.

But I sat here that day and I looked around the gallery, and for a moment I thought to myself, somewhere in this province there is a pipe carrier that would have raised the pipe for us to have a good day. And as prayers, as recognition, nowhere during the raise of that pipe would they have said, beat on your own. That is exactly the exercise that took place in this Chamber, where democracy should be protected by all of us who have been entrusted with that responsibility, Mr. Speaker.

And I will say to the people of Athabasca, what you saw that day is not a true reflection of the efforts that I've been giving on your behalf. I have been working hard, building positive relationships in government for the people of Athabasca. Mr. Speaker, this province has a foundation beyond all of us. In this Chamber, in the moments we don't agree, we should completely understand that we all have a responsibility to the very foundation for those that will come after us.

[22:00]

Mr. Speaker, we have a population of over 1.2 million residents that call Saskatchewan home. If anything, our voices should be exercised to celebrate our differences so that collectively we share the responsibility of looking after our home and creating opportunities that I know are supported in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard all kinds of feedback to this budget, but that feedback is having an impact on the people of Saskatchewan. What we hear is not truth. What we hear is a message of crisis. What we hear is a message of a system that is broken. I wanted to acknowledge that because of the impact that it has on people at home.

Mr. Speaker, I recently had the privilege of going into northern communities with the president of the University of Regina, his dean of nursing, his dean of social work, the vice-chancellor, the CEO and president of Northlands College, and our support staff. Went into four northern communities and we visited. We listened to leadership. But what we also did was we went into grade 9 student classrooms, and what we said was, if you want to be a nurse, here is a way we will support you. Mr. Speaker, that's the kind of hands-on work that I've been doing.

Mr. Speaker, I bought a car after I got elected. It's sitting outside. As of this morning, it's got almost 65 000 kilometres that I clocked in doing what I'm doing. I am going into the communities, not only am I just showing up. The discussion is that of what people are saying is real to them, this is their reality. But I don't just validate that. For years that's all they've known, is for them to be validated of what they see to be wrong.

What I do there, Mr. Speaker, is I talk about solutions. I talk about partnership. I talk about how can we do this together. And that was more evident by the efforts of this government and what we will accomplish together when three of the First Nations from my community was present in this gallery and we talked about what our future is going to look like.

Just a couple of Fridays ago, Mr. Speaker, I was in my community. We offered in partnership, a carpentry course. There was eight graduates. My goodness, what a proud moment in the community. And throughout the afternoon and the celebration and people talking, I found out that all eight graduates immediately got into the apprenticeship program because they were there, and they all got hired at Jansen mine with BHP.

And you know, how could I stand there and say we are in a crisis, when all of those eight graduates that are going to work are going to be providing for their family at home? What I did say to them, Mr. Speaker, was we trained you because of the NexGen project, so we will have to take you back from Jansen mining at some point and put you to work closer to home. But isn't that a good problem to have? Like, isn't that a good problem to have for all of us?

So it just throws me off because, you know, I've gone into high schools. I've gone into talking to families. I've sat at their dinner table and they talk to me about their dreams and what they want to do. And with this budget, we can carry that conversation to the next level, and we can talk about what are we going to do together. And you know, that in itself, that in itself should never be discredited because these are the people that we serve telling us. Empowerment takes us a long way, telling people that this foundation of this province is built because of your commitment to your home. How could we stand in this very building, in this very Chamber, and say to the people that it's broken when it's not, that it's in crisis when it's not? Because, Mr. Speaker, that has an impact on people.

I just recently talked to a police officer. I used to be one, and my neighbour that just moved in is a police officer. And we had a lengthy discussion after budget. No surprise to me that he said that's a really good budget. And he also said, all this talk about the system being broken. We are in an HR [human resources] crisis across the province, Canada, and around the world. And what he said was, because of the language that is used and what is heard, we are stopping people from wanting to join the police force. We are stopping people from wanting to be nurses. We are stopping people from wanting to be teachers.

All of this is having a psychological impact on people. But if we were to weigh in, Mr. Speaker, on what this budget is doing, is the hope that it's given to people. And what we hear constantly is not what the people of Saskatchewan are saying. What the people of Saskatchewan are saying is thank you, because what this budget did is not only secure our time now, but it's securing what our future is going to look like. And that's exactly what we're accomplishing, because we've been entrusted by the people of Saskatchewan and we're delivering on the mandate that we said we would do. And we are continuously building on that.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to briefly touch on . . . Clearly, I'm an Indigenous man. I speak my language fluently, and I proudly not only represent Athabasca but the Dene people of Clearwater River Dene Nation. And in this building I've been afforded the opportunity to not only celebrate how far we've come but to actually be an example of exactly how far we've come. I speak my language, I exercise my culture, and I'm supported by everyone on this side of the House.

What was displayed recently, that's not truth. That was a

calculated effort on what they think I should be going through here. But the truth is, when my father was alive, my father never . . . The message my father always gave me was be proud of who you are, don't be ashamed of who you are. Because of his history, because of what he went through, he wanted my experience to be different. And what I'm experiencing is different.

When I'm here, when I sit here and we talk about the issues and we talk about how we're looking after this province, Mr. Speaker, first I speak about Athabasca because that's the people that sent me here. That is who my first responsibility is to. But because of the nature of how things are, that responsibility is stretched out to the province of Saskatchewan. We have the distinct privilege and honour of being responsible for everyone in this province. If you are not getting that message, it is not based on truth. All of us bear the responsibility on this side of government for everyone in this province.

Why I say that is because this divisive language that is spoken is not a true reflection of where we're going. The budget that I'm going to support sets a strong foundation for this province. We should give more credit to the people of Saskatchewan. They haven't forgotten how things used to be. They haven't forgotten the history.

I have family members. I had a father that had to go to Alberta so he could provide for us. But he also set a foundation for me of what it means to stand up for what you believe in. And I exercise that here because of my foundation, because of what I recognize to be true. And I am supported with that truth that will take us, that will take my grandchildren, that will take my . . . I as I'm standing here is setting a foundation for them and what their future should look like. My wish and dream is, when Parker or Lincoln or MacKenzie or Chandler decides to stand here in this side, that they are not shamed because of who they are.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at our province and we go out into our province, I can proudly say that in Athabasca, even the far, fly-in communities — and all of them except the two that I had to get to either by boat or by snowmobile — I visited twice since I've been here. And still yet they would say, what are you doing here? It's not election season. And that speaks volume and calibre of what was there.

And, Mr. Speaker, I went into a community that never saw their representative before. And on my fourth visit — it was my birthday, away from my family — but when we had supper that night and I was thanking them, for certain community members for their contribution to their community by giving out a jubilee award, we sat down to eat and they brought out a birthday cake. And it was for me.

You know, Mr. Speaker, that is a foundation that I want my legacy to be and, too, I want my time here to show that I've empowered the people. And that is echoed continuously when I hear about the business partnerships that are being developed. We're getting a new school in La Loche. We had highway improvements on 155, and the list will go on. And more recently with this budget, the lives that will be improved because of it.

And if you're sitting at home and you've been listening to how that isn't true, then give me a call. I'll be glad to sit down and explain to you where that truth and that foundation is because,

Mr. Speaker, the people of Athabasca for a long time haven't had that, and they deserve the best that could be given to them.

And this moment they have entrusted me to be that person. I am not in position to divide the people. I'm in not position to say that who they are is not true. But, Mr. Speaker, I take this responsibility to heart, and there are days where I wish it was closer to Regina.

[22:15]

But I just want to finish off by saying we hear lots about mental health; we hear lots about addictions. And, Mr. Speaker, that's one thing that does not discriminate against anybody. It hits all of us somehow. And as Legislative Secretary to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, I'm excited for this budget because the efforts that I've been working on with some of the communities, we're going to make things a reality for them. And that is what we do on this side of the House. We work together.

And our amazing budget, it's been described as a windfall. The people of Saskatchewan worked hard for that, and they've entrusted us to be responsible for that. And twice since I've been here, two budgets in a row, \$1 billion in debt has been paid down. I'm going to say that again. The two budgets I've sat through here, we paid down debt by \$2 billion. And every, every ministry, there was no cuts. If anything it was increase.

And I tell the people of Athabasca, you know, because of that we will stay on course. I will continue to listen. I will continue to take your efforts. And our future will be of brightness; it would be of hope. And if anything, those eight people that went to work at Jansen mine, that is exactly why we are here.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to finish off by saying, the budget, this amazing budget that I will be supporting — and I say this coming to my own thought and mind, Mr. Speaker — that I will not be supporting amendment from opposition. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Silverspring-Sutherland.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just don't know how to follow that. I mean the passion and compassion that comes through from our new member from Athabasca . . . Maybe he's our lucky charm. Since he's arrived, Mr. Speaker, \$2 billion in debt paid down. I think he might be our lucky charm. He might have thought I was standing up to give him a standing ovation, but not quite.

But amazing speeches from this side of the House of positivity, of what we're seeing. The potential in our province, the potential in all of the ministries, but most importantly the potential of the people in our province. The 1.2 million people that now call Saskatchewan home see the potential. Other provinces are seeing the potential, Mr. Speaker. It's great optimism and it's a great time to live in Saskatchewan. And I'm proud that I get to be able to be part of this budget, part of this caucus, and part of this government to be able to deliver this on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

As is traditional, I will . . . I've got a few minutes here, Mr.

Speaker. I'll touch base on some thank yous. I have to thank my family. First and foremost, my wife, Leane, who is absolutely amazing in keeping me centred when I come back on Thursdays. It's just a two-and-a-half-hour drive back to Saskatoon. That's my time to decompress and make sure that I am switching over from being politician to being partner, husband, and father. And that's my transition time, and I try to do that as much as I can.

Lately, Mr. Speaker, I've been on the phone talking to constituents and talking to stakeholders, but that's my opportunity. So when I get back there, they don't care how bad question period, they don't care how bad the scrum is. They just want to spend some time with me, and I want to spend some time with them.

So, Mr. Speaker, to my wife, Leane, who is just an amazing pillar . . . I think it was the corner post, was the reference from the member from Cannington. She's my corner post, she's my pillar, she's my foundation. She's everything to me, and I very much love her and appreciate everything that she does for me while I'm doing this challenging job, especially being away from home.

To my kids, four kids. My son Carter, who is in commerce right now or re-enrolling in commerce at the University of Saskatchewan, had the opportunity the last two summers to go out and do manual labour and earn a hard day's paycheque, Mr. Speaker. He was working with Venture Construction with a friend of mine, Sean Wilson, and working out in Carrot River and paving the roads for the Minister of Highways and making him look good.

And he took this job on, working 16 hours a day in dust and dirt, and I wasn't sure if he was going to make it in the first couple of days. It's pretty tough work and I can't imagine. But, Mr. Speaker, I couldn't be more proud of him. When all of his friends were taking the CERB [Canada emergency response benefit] payments from the government, he refused to take that and went out and got a job and earned his money the old-fashioned way, working hard, going from rolling to running the pug mill out at the sites. And I couldn't be prouder of him that he loves to work and he loves to work hard. And that's a quality that I keep telling him will carry him through life. So proud of my son Carter.

My daughter Courtney, who I speak of quite often, she's enjoying her time out at the Farm in the Dell in Aberdeen, and is very excited about the opportunity of going to the Rush game this weekend, and very excited about going to the potential Blades game, and to a movie. And every time she calls me, Mr. Speaker, she's got a plan. And her plan is something to do with me and taking her out and an event, and possibly some M&M'S and a stuffie. So that's how my week goes, talking to her until we plan for the weekends.

But she's doing amazing, and the Farm in the Dell organization, led by Lynette and her team, just amazing how they're treating adults with different abilities, Mr. Speaker. Because they all have abilities; it's just some different abilities from everybody else. But they have their abilities and they love . . . They do everything from planting a garden to woodworking and assembling of the small containers for the . . . [inaudible] . . . containers that actually are distributed throughout all of Saskatchewan. And just an amazing family out there, it's called. She has her farm family and she has her home family. And her farm family loves her very

much. So I can't thank Lynette and Donna and the rest of the team at the Dell for taking care of my beautiful little girl.

Kassidy and her husband Wayne have just relocated this last year out to Melville, and they're working in Yorkton with the Boys & Girls Club. Well she is, anyways, and he's working as a machinist. They're starting their new life there and enjoying the life of a small town versus Saskatoon and Regina, where they both lived. And they're newlyweds, Mr. Speaker, so they're always . . . everything is optimistic and everything is rosy and shiny. And I love to see that in them.

And my other stepdaughter, Keely, who's becoming a dietitian, who's going to be moving down with me, Mr. Speaker. I have my man cave in Regina. I've had this man cave since 2011. I really enjoy my man cave, Mr. Speaker. And as of September my stepdaughter Keely will be moving in with me into my man cave, so I'll have to step it up a little bit and make sure that I take all the football jerseys off of the walls and make it a little more homey for her. But I can't wait; I'm very excited for the opportunity for her to come down and live with me and maybe put a little feminine touch on my man cave down in Regina here.

I've got to thank my staff. David Keogan, my chief of staff. I've got Cheyenne and Lisa and Aaron in my office. Amazing people that talk to some people that are having lots of challenges out there, Mr. Speaker, whether it would be with their health care or just other challenges within the system, and helping them navigate the system. They work with the ministry; they work with the Saskatchewan Health Authority. Great team.

I'll touch on Minister of Rural and Remote Health. And despite what is said in this Chamber and sometimes outside this Chamber, I've never seen a man so dedicated to mental health, dedicated to addictions — learning about it, listening to people, and acting on it. And it is a challenging file. There's no one quick fix for this, but I can tell you the man that gets to sit in this Chamber from Swift Current is an amazing advocate. He's talking to people. He's meeting with families.

And I can tell you, I've had those meetings with families when they were in crisis. They're not easy meetings to have and he does them over and over again, Mr. Speaker, so he can let them know that he understands and we're trying to act on some of those initiatives. And he's acted on a lot. So I thank him for all of his support. The staff that he has — Elias, Ang, Derek, Cole, Jenn, and Steph who just joined us. Just a great team, they're just an amazing team to be able to work with every day.

And I thank my caucus colleagues for supporting the health side of the budget, but also providing criticism and questions on what we're doing within Health to make sure that we are meeting their needs. It's not just my needs, the ministry needs, the Health Authority needs, the affiliates' needs; it's the needs of the constituents that they represent on all sides of the House, Mr. Speaker.

Two things that I better check off my box of my thank yous are the people that sit beside me. Certainly the Minister of Finance, a mentor of mine, the member from Humboldt, Deputy Premier, who is our quarterback for everything to do with finance. Just an amazing woman. Comes in here every day with a mountain of pressure on her on the financial side of our government, and she

delivers every time. She knows everybody's files. She knows where the dollars are. She knows where everything goes, and she has a team in behind her of officials but also treasury board.

And the treasury board — people that don't know, people that don't understand this — they're sitting throughout the week in January. When a lot of people are trying to get out of here and go on vacation, the treasury board team is sitting there going through everybody's line item to make sure they're putting that sober second thought on everything that we are spending on in government. And it's an amazing crew of the treasury board and the Minister of Finance and all of her officials. I can't thank them enough other than she stole my deputy minister — and we'll talk about that later on — Max Hendricks.

And who sits beside her, our Premier who is just an amazing gentleman in his own right. I don't know when the man sleeps. I wake up at six in the morning, I've got four texts from him — some good, some questions. And working all the time. And again the depth that he knows on everybody else's file is just absolutely amazing. I have a ton of respect for the man. We got elected together. We've come a long way since 2011 of him and I sitting in the back row, him on one corner and me on the other corner. And I have the utmost respect for his work ethic but how he always puts the people of Saskatchewan first in every decision that he makes.

I see I'm almost getting close here, so I'll finish my thank yous, and I'll get into the budget tomorrow after I got a good sleep . . . [inaudible] . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'll thank some of my officials: Tracey Smith, my deputy minister, and my ADM [assistant deputy minister], all of her team of ADMs that are just absolutely depth of knowledge that each one of these individuals know. Andrew Will who's our CEO of the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority]. We have all our affiliates. I always forget to mention the affiliates when I thank the SHA. The affiliates that are out there are the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency; we have 3sHealth [Health Shared Services Saskatchewan]; we have eHealth.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think I'll save that of talking about my colleagues of Mark Docherty, Lyle Stewart, and the member from Walsh Acres till tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, because I don't want to end this evening on a note, on a sad note, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say thank you to these people that I get to represent. The Minister of Rural and Remote Health and myself get to represent this fabulous team which is almost 45,000 individuals that work within the health care system. We get to represent them, and we try to do the best job, and we take that job extremely serious of representing them. But not just them; their families, the pride that they have in their work.

And I am very disappointed when I hear that they get run down because I know they're doing the best job that they possibly can, Mr. Speaker. My job is to support them in any way possible that I can, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Rural and Remote Health. Mr. Speaker, we have a fabulous team in health care. We're growing. We've got a lot of people coming into our system whether they're coming from Saskatchewan, across Canada, or halfway around the world in the Philippines. We're going to keep growing our health care system to shore it up to make sure that this is absolutely the best health care system in all of our country.

And I will continue on my discussion tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, when we adjourn after question period.

The Deputy Speaker: — It now being 10:30, this House does now stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:30.]

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President of the Executive Council
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

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Minister of SaskBuilds and Procurement
Minister Responsible for the
Public Service Commission
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority
Minister Responsible for
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