



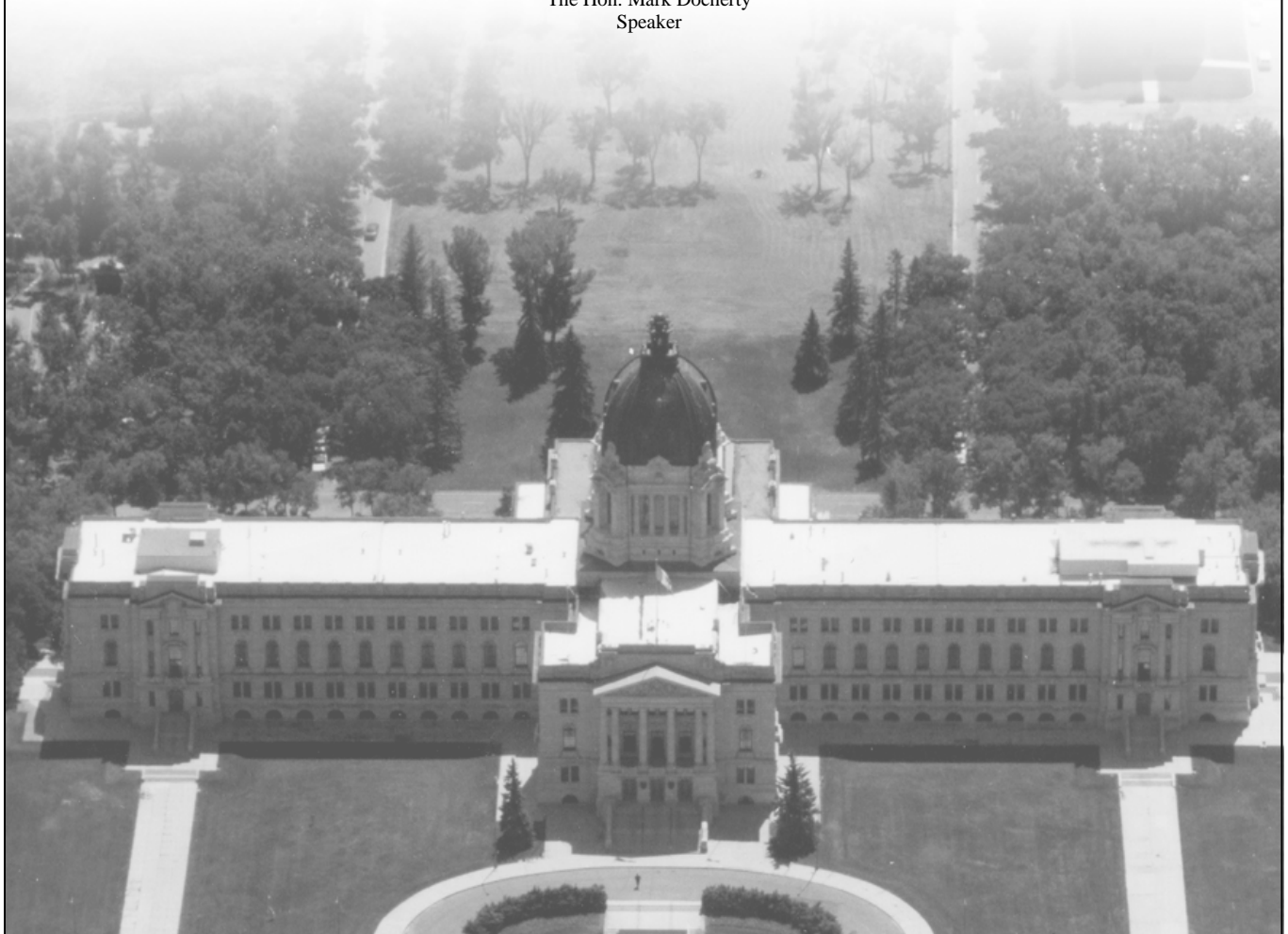
THIRD SESSION - TWENTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)
Published under the
authority of
The Hon. Mark Docherty
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
3rd Session — 28th Legislature

Speaker — Hon. Mark Docherty
Premier — Hon. Scott Moe
Leader of the Opposition — Ryan Meili

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

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[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: — Well I'd like to take the opportunity to welcome everyone, and hopefully you'll have an interesting day. With that, introduction of guests.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And we as well are looking forward to an interesting day. Mr. Speaker, we're very pleased everyone could come this afternoon from across the province, our great province of Saskatchewan, on what is truly a beautiful afternoon, a beautiful afternoon which is also the very first day of spring.

Mr. Speaker, there are many people in the House today deserving of an individual introduction. And representatives are here today, organizations from across Saskatchewan who do critical work in our province serving the people of our province, citizens who contribute to the well-being of Saskatchewan in so many varied ways across the province, Mr. Speaker.

In the interest of brevity, I'll provide a general introduction to our guests on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan and on behalf of the Minister of Finance. We're grateful for your attendance here today. Thank you. You all represent thousands of people across Saskatchewan that we are honoured to serve each and every day in your Legislative Assembly. And in just a few minutes the Minister of Finance will stand in her place and she will deliver a balanced budget here on your behalf.

This has been a long road for us to arrive here — three budget cycles, two years. But every step of the way, we have kept serving the people of this province front and foremost, Mr. Speaker. That has been the priority. That has been our focus. We've endeavoured to balance investments in our economy with growth in infrastructure and with important investments in the services that we provide on your behalf.

And at the end of the day, Saskatchewan is and always will be the very best place for us to live, for us to work, and for us to raise our family. And that's because of each of you in this gallery and your friends and family at home. So in addition to welcoming you here today, I want to say thank you. I want to say thank you for your part over the last number of years in getting us to this momentous day today.

We are honoured and we are humbled to present our balanced budget on your behalf, and we believe it is the right balance for the province of Saskatchewan. So I want to ask all members to join with me in welcoming our guests to their Legislative Assembly.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's my pleasure to

join the Premier and, on behalf of the official opposition, welcome everyone to their Legislative Assembly and thank them for their presence here today.

And I see community leaders, labour leaders, business leaders, leaders in education, in health, from all sectors. I see some of us who are not so young, and I see some really young people over there as well. I'm especially noticing these little folks because the decisions . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, I'm not talking about the member for Cannington.

The decisions here, the decisions that are made here are where we can make the choices that will allow Saskatchewan to be the best place to be a kid or to raise one. The decisions that we make here when we discuss our budgeting, our financial choices, when we discuss what we do around education, how we manage debt, how we view our choices beyond just today's budget day or today's news cycle or the next election. When we take in mind that frame, that here in this building that was built so many years ago we are building a future for Saskatchewan, then we'll make the right choices. So I'd like to ask all the members to join me in welcoming everyone who has joined us today. Thank you so much.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, it's an honour to rise to present petitions once again today on behalf of concerned citizens and residents and communities and local businesses all across our province as it relates to the expansion and imposition of the PST [provincial sales tax] onto construction labour. Quite simply, this is the epitome of a job-killing tax. We had a Sask Party government that saw a slowing economy and slammed on the brakes. Sadly we see the building permits down, projects not going forward, and far too often Saskatchewan people facing job loss, far too often having to leave the province.

The prayer reads as follows:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on the Sask Party government to stop saddling families and businesses with the costs of their mismanagement and immediately reinstate the PST exemption on construction and stop hurting Saskatchewan businesses and families.

These petitions today are signed by concerned residents from Luseland, Saskatoon, Regina, Moose Jaw, Weyburn. I so submit.

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

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition to restore public control over Wascana Park. Mr. Speaker, those who have signed this petition wish to draw our attention to a number of points: that Wascana Park is a treasured urban park and conservation area that had been responsibly managed through an equal partnership between the city of Regina, the University of Regina, and the government for more than 50 years; that the government unilaterally gave itself

majority control of the board of the Provincial Capital Commission through changes brought on by Bill 50, *The Provincial Capital Commission Act* in 2017; and that more and more people in Regina and right across this province are becoming concerned with the growing commercialization of Wascana Park and they want to see it stopped.

Mr. Speaker, I'll read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on the government to restore the governance structure of the Wascana Centre Authority and end the commercialization of Wascana Park.

Mr. Speaker, those who have signed this petition today reside in Regina. I do so present.

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

Ms. Sproule: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition calling for a public inquiry into the GTH [Global Transportation Hub] land deal. The individuals who have presented this petition today would like to bring to our attention the following: the Sask Party government has refused to come clean on the GTH land deal, a deal where Sask Party government insiders made millions of dollars flipping land, and taxpayers subsequently lost those millions of dollars.

Instead of shining a very bright light on the issue and unequivocally calling a public inquiry, the Sask Party government is instead hiding behind excuses around public prosecutions. And you'll know, Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party government continuously blocked key witnesses from providing testimony here in committees, in this building, about the land deal. Mr. Speaker, it's Saskatchewan people who footed the bill for the GTH land deal, and they deserve nothing less than the truth.

I'll read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on the Sask Party government to stop hiding behind partisan excuses and immediately call for a judicial inquiry and a forensic audit into the GTH land deal.

And the individuals who have signed this petition today, Mr. Speaker, are from Lumsden and Regina. I so submit.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Douglas Park.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition calling for critical workplace supports for survivors of domestic violence. Mr. Speaker, the individuals signing this petition today wish to bring to our attention the following: Saskatchewan has the very dubious distinction of having the highest rates of domestic violence amongst all of the provinces, and those who've signed this petition believe that five days of paid leave and up to 17 weeks of unpaid leave should be made available to workers who are survivors of domestic violence. Mr. Speaker, this is what we've called for in our private member's

bill for five days' paid leave. I believe it's the fourth time at least that we've put forward this provision in the last three years. The government has yet to pass it, but they still have the opportunity to do the right thing and do so.

We're not asking for the government to reinvent the wheel. In fact this provision exists in several other provinces such as Manitoba which has five days' paid leave, Ontario which has five days' paid leave. Quebec has two days' paid leave. New Brunswick has five days' paid leave, and PEI [Prince Edward Island] has three days' paid leave, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call upon the Sask Party government to pass legislation to ensure critical supports in the workplace, including reasonable accommodation and paid and unpaid leave for survivors of domestic violence.

Mr. Speaker, the individuals signing this petition today come from Coronach, Gravelbourg, and Moose Jaw. I do so present.

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

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly calling for a \$15-an-hour minimum wage. The petitioners are well aware that under the Sask Party, Saskatchewan has the dubious distinction of having either the lowest or the second-lowest minimum wage in all of Canada.

They point out that the Saskatchewan people working full time at minimum wage jobs are working for poverty wages, Mr. Speaker. They point out that a \$15-an-hour minimum wage will improve health and well-being and lift Saskatchewan workers out of poverty. And they point out that a \$15-an-hour minimum wage will benefit local businesses and support local economies by putting money in workers' pockets to spend in their community.

Mr. Speaker, in the prayer that reads as follows, the petitioners:

Respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on the Sask Party government to adopt a plan to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for all workers.

Mr. Speaker, this particular petition, one among many, is signed by citizens from the good city of Prince Albert. I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan regarding the federal carbon tax and the devastating impact that that will have on this province, Mr. Speaker.

What is interesting about this petition, most interesting, is this

petition was first read in this legislature, but this petition could be now read in New Brunswick's legislature. It could be read in Ontario's legislature. It could be read in Manitoba's legislature. And we're not sure about Alberta yet, Mr. Speaker. We don't really want to comment because apparently they're into something pretty special there the next four weeks.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is extremely important because there are some on the other side of the aisle who would describe this province as the wee province. But, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to fighting back for Saskatchewan and standing up against the federal government, this province is a leader and you can see it because of this petition, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the prayer reads as follows:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: to cause the Government of Saskatchewan to take the necessary steps to stop the federal government from imposing a carbon tax on this province.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, and as I said, there are many provinces that have joined the fight that Saskatchewan started. But people in Saskatchewan come from Alsask, Battleford, Biggar, Borden, Cut Knife, Dalmeny, Eston, Frenchman Butte, Glenbush, Hague, Hepburn, Holbein, Kindersley — and I'm just started, Mr. Speaker — Leask, Maymont, Moose Jaw, Nipawin, North Battleford, Osler, Outlook, Paradise Hill, Peck Lake, Regina, Richard, Rockhaven, Saskatoon, Shellbrook, Speers, Spiritwood, St. Walburg, Swift Current, Unity, Warman, and Wilkie — the entire province, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

The Speaker: — And just before statements by members, I'd just like to remind all of our guests to not participate in the debate by clapping or cheering. Leave that to the people in the actual desks.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Caregivers Week Honours Volunteers

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year, March 17th to 23rd is Caregivers Week in Saskatchewan. It is a week to highlight and honour the contributions of volunteer caregivers to our families, our friends, and our neighbours. This is an opportunity to focus on the needs of caregivers as they provide invaluable care and companionship to people in our communities.

[13:45]

At some point in our lives, each of us may find ourselves being caregivers or we may need caregivers. Because of advanced medical care, seniors, accident survivors, people with short-term disabilities, or those with chronic conditions are living longer. The need for caregiving services is projected to double in the next three decades. Almost 13 million Canadians are volunteer caregivers for a family member or loved one. Young people between the ages of 15 to 29 are a growing part of these volunteer

service providers.

The Caregiver Information and Support Centre is a program of the Saskatoon Council on Aging, a non-profit that works to create a positive future for seniors. For 19 years this centre has provided a dedicated phone line, caregiver resource guides in English and French, and a website and community workshops for caregivers to network and receive support.

On March 22nd a forum, Care for the Caregiver, will take place at Circle Drive Alliance Church in Saskatoon. Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in saluting volunteer caregivers in Saskatchewan who play a critical role in our communities. Thank you.

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

Support for Health Care in Saskatchewan

Hon. Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to acknowledge our government's continued commitment to bringing the best health services to the people of our province. Mr. Speaker, the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital is approaching its final stages and remains on schedule and on budget. Children are the future of this province. This hospital will better meet the needs of our province's children.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford officially opened up this month. This hospital represents the single-largest investment in mental health services in the history of our great province. The care and treatment administered at the Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford builds on the best practices in mental health care.

We all know, with the growing population in our province, we remain committed to staffing our health system to best meet the needs of Saskatchewan patients: 3,700 more nurses continue to call Saskatchewan home for their profession; 900 more doctors have chosen Saskatchewan to practise medicine. Over 740 more FTEs [full-time equivalent] in long-term care facilities to help our province's aging population.

I look forward to our Minister of Finance rising today to deliver the budget, as I think we will see continued support for health care and quality of life here in Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Encouragement for Adoption of Electric Vehicles

Mr. Pedersen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently hundreds of students gathered here to demand that this government act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the effects of climate change.

One of the things our government could be doing is encouraging electric cars and investing in the infrastructure that would be required. For almost three months, I've been driving an electric car, a fully electric car, and I can testify that they're ideal for our Canadian winters. There's never a concern about whether they will start, and they warm up instantly. There's no oil changes and

a lot fewer moving parts to break down. The electric motor is roughly two times more efficient than the internal combustion engine.

Even with coal-fired electricity, I estimate I have lowered my footprint by almost 20 per cent. The cost of electric vehicles is coming down. The range of batteries is going up, and the number of options are increasing.

A recent poll confirmed that two-thirds of Canadians want to see electric vehicles become mainstream. The governments of BC [British Columbia] and Quebec have taken action to encourage the adoption of electric vehicles. Suncor and Canadian Tire are both investing in building a national electric car-charging network with the help of the federal government. Sadly, Saskatchewan's government has not done anything, and in fact has done a disservice by repeating inaccurate information about electric cars.

So I want to extend an invitation to you, Mr. Premier, and to the Minister of the Environment to come to Drive Electric Earth Day on April 27th from 12 to 4 at the Saskatchewan Science Centre. Come for a test drive and learn about the advantages of electric cars.

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

Commitment to Job Creation Produces Growth

Mr. Buckingham: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak about our commitment to job creation and the good work Saskatchewan entrepreneurs and businesses are doing. February was a record month for job growth in Saskatchewan. Female employment, full-time employment, and overall provincial employment all hit record highs for the month of February. This February also marked the seventh consecutive month of job growth in our province.

The Conference Board of Canada predicts Saskatchewan's economy will grow by 2.2 per cent, ranking fourth in the country. Our government has always placed a strong focus on job growth. It is how we pay for our great quality of life. Since we have had the privilege of forming government, 71,000 new jobs have been created — the third-best job creation record in Canada. The GDP [gross domestic product] in Saskatchewan has grown by nearly 20 per cent since 2007.

Mr. Speaker, the private sector continues to be a key driver of positive growth in Saskatchewan. Private sector employment is up over 20 per cent when comparing January 2019 to January 2007. And this is a testament to the confidence of Saskatchewan businesses and the hard work of Saskatchewan people.

Our government will continue to stand up for Saskatchewan families and we will see that in the budget the Finance minister will present today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Melfort.

Benefits of Investment in Education

Mr. Goudy: — Mr. Speaker, schools are at the heart of our

Saskatchewan communities. It's where over 180,000 of our children are developing their minds and building their character. It's where almost 25,000 of our devoted staff spend long hours each week serving our children. Our schools are places where communities meet, and there is no doubt that supporting our schools helps to ensure our communities remain vibrant and their future remains bright.

Mr. Speaker, the bricks and mortar in which our children learn are a foundational part of ensuring that they can receive the best possible education. That is why over the past decade we have prioritized these very spaces. In 65 communities across this province, students have new places to learn, Mr. Speaker, certainly a stark contrast from the days when rural Saskatchewan was mourning from the closure of many local schools. And in those schools, Mr. Speaker, there are now more staff supporting our students: over 900 more teachers than there was just a decade ago, more mental health resources, more educational assistants, more speech and language pathologists. And the list goes on.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that under this government the heart of our communities will continue to beat strong. From Leader to La Ronge, from Rosthern to Gravelbourg, we will continue to invest in our children, our future. And today when the Finance minister speaks, I think that we're going to hear some more good things about how we have continued that investment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Swift Current.

Expansion of Exports Produces Opportunity at Home

Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan has what the world needs. We export about 62 per cent of what we produce to countries across the globe. Not only do we recognize the need to expand our access to new markets, we also realize the need to strengthen existing trade relationships.

Just last week the Minister of Trade and Export Development embarked on a trade mission to Singapore and the Philippines. In 2017 Saskatchewan exported \$1.2 billion worth of goods and services to Singapore, the Philippines, and other member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The recently signed Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership provides tremendous new opportunities for exports into Southeast Asia.

Mr. Speaker, while on the mission, the minister met with a number of food processing and agricultural companies to encourage expanded trade between our nations. We need to proactively engage with key markets around the world to ensure that we are creating wealth and opportunity for Saskatchewan people right here at home.

As we all know, Saskatchewan is a major supplier of food, fuel, and fertilizer, and we are a leader when it comes to enhancing the world's food and energy security. And, Mr. Speaker, I think we'll see that work continue in the budget that the Finance minister presents here in the Chamber later this afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Celebrating Saskatchewan

Mr. Olason: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan has been and always will be a province for everyone. From our world-class freshwater lakes to our vibrant cities, we here in Saskatchewan can create lasting memories right in our own backyards. Living in Saskatchewan you can easily escape the busy city life to enjoy some peace and quiet in our great provincial parks or stay right at home and take in the local cuisine and entertainment.

Tourism is one of our largest sectors, and that is definitely something to celebrate. We can also celebrate that nearly 64,000 Saskatchewan residents are employed in full- or part-time tourism-related jobs.

Mr. Speaker, people know that when they come to Saskatchewan, they will be greeted with exceptional hospitality and unforgettable events that have gained us international recognition. And we are just getting started. We all can look forward to the big events coming our way such as the Tim Hortons NHL [National Hockey League] Heritage Classic in 2019, and the Scotties Tournament of Hearts; and in 2020, the Juno Awards, the Grey Cup championship, and many more.

Mr. Speaker, there is nothing more special than making memories with your family and friends right in your own backyard. I look forward to hearing from the Finance minister delivering the budget today and look forward to continuing to celebrate this great province we are so fortunate to call home. Thank you.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: — All right, I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Reduction of Child Poverty

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan can and should be the best place in Canada to be a kid or to raise one. That's the measure of whether we're doing the right work in this place. But today Saskatchewan kids are struggling. One in four children in this province are living in poverty. Saskatchewan kids are hungry. We have the highest number of children who are needing to access the food bank. And across the country, only Saskatchewan and Quebec saw their poverty rates increase last year.

Back in 2014 the Sask Party promised a poverty reduction strategy. The strategy never came and neither did the reduction. In fact in the last two budgets, the government has boasted about an increase in social services spending. Now that didn't come with any increase in programs to help people out of poverty; it was an increase in the number of people needing that service. Mr. Speaker, how strange to boast about more people in the province requiring social assistance. Mr. Speaker, when will this Premier take the challenge of poverty in Saskatchewan seriously? When will we see action to tackle child poverty? When will there be hope for those who need it most?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, we believe that Saskatchewan, our communities across this province, are today the best place in the nation and in the world to raise a family, to raise our children. Mr. Speaker, we have worked very hard and we have taken very seriously the opportunities for that next generation. That's why we have invested and invested heavily in our education system, Mr. Speaker, taking an education budget from less than a billion dollars to two and half billion dollars today, Mr. Speaker. That's commitment to that next generation. That's commitment to the opportunities providing every opportunity of success to that next generation.

Mr. Speaker, we have invested in the economy here in the province to the degree where Saskatchewan now has the fourth-highest average weekly earnings in the nation of Canada, Mr. Speaker, a stat that we most certainly can be proud of. In fact in this province, Mr. Speaker, we have lowered income taxes. We have taken 112,000 people, families, Mr. Speaker, totally off the provincial income tax roll. In fact workers in this province earn amongst the most in the country before they pay any provincial tax of any type, Mr. Speaker.

So we remain committed to our investment in our children, in our next generation, Mr. Speaker, so that they can be all as successful as they can possibly be.

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

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Speaker, that answer described the ways in which we as a province are wealthy. And the fact is, that is absolutely a fact. We are blessed with great abundance in this province. But that answer is small consolation for the many children who are going to school every day without having had a meal before they get there and are expected to learn.

Mr. Speaker, there was no answer in that question. No sense that the seriousness of a quarter of the children in this province living in poverty today has reached the desk of the Premier. I ask, what is the plan to address this most pressing issue?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, I explained just a couple of the investments that we have looked at and taken very seriously, Mr. Speaker, to improve the opportunities for families and communities across Saskatchewan, as well as improving the opportunities and the outcomes for our next generation for all of our children, wherever they may live.

In Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, we are starting to see some success with respect to the poverty rate here in the province. When you compare for example the decade of 2007-2017, Mr. Speaker, the percentage of people in the low-income bracket in our province moved from 14.6 per cent in 2007 down to 9.5 per cent — a positive movement for sure, Mr. Speaker, but also points to, we do have more work to do here in this province.

[14:00]

When we go to children, Mr. Speaker, children living in low-income families, the numbers are even a better improvement. In 2007 we had 21 per cent of our children in this province, Mr. Speaker, living in a low-income environment. In

2017, through initiatives and investment and given more work to do, we've moved that number to 10.3 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

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

Support for Education

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those numbers are not in keeping with the national numbers as reported by Statistics Canada. 2017, we have over a quarter of the province's children living in poverty, and when you get to reserve communities that number rises to over 60 per cent, Mr. Speaker. This is an incredible challenge for our province and should be at the forefront of our discussions.

One of the best ways for us to address poverty, improve health, and improve our economy in the long term is through education. Saskatchewan classrooms today are more crowded and more complex than they've been in the past. There are more children who speak English or French as an additional language, more children with special needs. And that inclusivity, that diversity is wonderful, but only if the supports are there to make sure that those students can succeed.

Rather than investing as they should, the Sask Party has cut deeply in preschool, in K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] education, and post-secondary, all while the number of students have grown. In K to 12 alone, since the big cuts in 2017, we've seen an increase of over 7,000 students.

And this government has created an environment of distrust, alienating teachers and taking away the ability of school boards to make the best decisions for their local students. What will this government do? What will this Premier do to restore that relationship, restore that trust, and restore education in Saskatchewan to what it should be, to restore us to a position of leadership with a well-resourced system that can confidently prepare students for the challenges of today and the opportunities of tomorrow?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Just to clarify, Mr. Speaker: in my previous answer, I did not cite the source. The source is Statistics Canada, Canadian income survey based on market basket measures, Mr. Speaker. So those stats are from Statistics Canada.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the education funding and the importance of education to this government over the course of the last number of years, Mr. Speaker, our record is strong and we will continue with our engagement with our education sector, our K to 12 sector across the province, Mr. Speaker.

As I said we took an Education budget, a line item in our provincial budget that was less than a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker. We've moved that now to about a two-and-a-half-billion-dollar investment on behalf of our next generation so that they can achieve every success possible, Mr. Speaker. That is commitment nonetheless: 42 new schools across the province, Mr. Speaker. Our commitment to education has been strong.

With respect to the funding of that education, Mr. Speaker, the

vast majority of that funding has come through decisions of the provincial government as we fixed what was a broken education property tax system here in the province, Mr. Speaker, precipitating really protests at SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] and SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] conventions, Mr. Speaker, at engagements with the previous administration.

Mr. Speaker, we fixed that education property tax system that was broken in the province, Mr. Speaker, and we've held the funding of the rates on that system over a number of years. And, Mr. Speaker, we look forward to future investments in a sector that is so very important to the success of our province, our communities, and ultimately our families.

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

Teacher Education in the North

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last five years, this government has presided over a precipitous drop in the amount of funding per student in our education system. At a time when our classrooms are more stressed, more complex than ever, we're seeing less and less funding per student and less and less funding to help those students with the highest needs.

One of the first things that the Premier did when he was the minister of Advanced Education was to sign a five-year funding agreement with NORTEP [northern teacher education program], the northern teacher education project. Just one year later, he signed a letter cancelling that program entirely. This is a pattern for this government: shutting down correctional facilities in the North, shutting down offices for environmental services in the North, and in the case of NORTEP, shutting down a program that had been enormously successful for over 40 years, a program that saw over 90 per cent of its graduates stay teaching and stay in the North.

Now since the Premier made that decision to shut down NORTEP, there are teacher shortages in northern Saskatchewan and enrolment in teacher training is down. Why did the Premier decide to shut down NORTEP a few short months after he had signed an extension agreement? And what's his plan to address the damage that his decision has caused?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, as was discussed in this House a number of months ago with respect to teaching, our teacher education programs throughout the North, Mr. Speaker, we have transferred positions to Northlands College in La Ronge, and they provide that service to members from across the North, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we have engaged with communities across the North, most notably La Loche, where we have implemented the Dene teacher education program, the DTEP program which, I believe, at last check had 24 or 25 individuals from that community that were taking their teacher education course in their community, Mr. Speaker. They were taking it in the language that they were born and raised in, Mr. Speaker. And the hope was that those 25 individuals would be able to continue to teach the next generation in that community,

Mr. Speaker, in the community of La Loche.

We have a strong investment record when it comes to our investment in post-secondary education, in particular in our investment in post-secondary education in the North, again to ensure that our residents across this province, no matter where you live, have every opportunity to be as successful as possible, Mr. Speaker, and participate in an ever-growing economy here in Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. NORTEP was a program that was governed by local leadership, local community leaders, First Nations and Métis leaders, and it was an extremely popular and successful program.

Now today, because of the Premier's decisions, there are fewer teachers in the North. There are fewer students who will become teachers in the North, and there is less hope for young people in northern communities who are going to see fewer people who represent them in front of the classroom.

The question, the very simple question is, why? Why did the Premier choose to shut down NORTEP, and what will he do to fix the damage caused?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — When you see what we intend to do, Mr. Speaker, with our next generation, with our students across the province, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition . . . Being a physician, I would hope that he might just have more patience here today because in a few minutes my Minister of Finance is going to rise to her feet and she is going to communicate precisely what our commitment is to all of the people in all of the communities across the province of Saskatchewan.

With respect to our engagement in the North, Mr. Speaker, it simply is not the case that there are less people being educated throughout our northern communities or our First Nation communities across this province. Our investment in adult basic education, Mr. Speaker, our investment in post-secondary education in all corners of the province of Saskatchewan, including the North, Mr. Speaker, has been strong. It's been increasing, Mr. Speaker, and it's a commitment for us to continue with that engagement and that commitment into the future.

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

Wages and Affordability

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Speaker, in a few weeks, Saskatchewan will once again have the dubious distinction of having the lowest minimum wage in the country. This fall our minimum wage went up by 10 cents an hour — a whole dime. At the same time, in our neighbouring province of Alberta, it went up by \$1.40 an hour. So for a Saskatchewan worker, that meant an increase of about \$180 a year. For that same worker in Alberta, that meant an increase of over \$200 a month.

Why does the Premier not think Saskatchewan workers are worth

what Alberta workers are? Why is he okay with people working full time and still needing to use the food bank?

At the current rate, Mr. Speaker, the minimum wage in Saskatchewan will reach \$15 an hour in the year 2052. The Premier's asked us for a bit of patience, but that might be a bit much when the current workers today are likely to be ready for retirement by the time they'd be getting \$15 an hour. Why won't the Premier show that he thinks Saskatchewan workers are worth it and phase in a \$15 minimum wage?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, a number of years ago we had come together in this Assembly. We passed legislation with respect to a formula that would be used, tying our minimum wage to the growth of the economy essentially here in the province, Mr. Speaker, along with some averages of wages across the province.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, and I alluded to this earlier, we have worked very hard to take our low-income families off the tax rolls entirely here in the province, Mr. Speaker. We have worked extremely hard to ensure that we have some of the lowest cost utilities across the nation, and when you . . . And I think we'll see some of this very soon, Mr. Speaker. When you look at the cost of living here in the province, Mr. Speaker, it's very, very advantageous to other areas of the province.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we continue to push and enhance and provide every opportunity for our economy to grow here in the province. This is very different, Mr. Speaker, from years gone by, years gone by when we have had a lagging economy, a lagging population, Mr. Speaker, and we've seen a government that has had to go into extended periods of deficit. And we're going to see the end of a very short period here, with a commitment that was made three years ago by this government, when the Minister of Finance takes to her feet, Mr. Speaker. And we look forward to the next hour or so in this Assembly.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That minimum wage is not keeping up with the cost of living. Wages across Saskatchewan aren't keeping up with the cost of living, a cost of living that has grown because of choices by this government. Saskatchewan's economy is struggling today, and this government talks about balancing its budget, but family budgets across Saskatchewan are in real trouble.

The slow economy and the addition of a billion dollars in PST have made it harder for families to make ends meet. Home foreclosures have doubled in the last four years. And we have double the national average in people that are unable pay their mortgages. Between SaskEnergy and SaskTel, outstanding bills are up 86 per cent in the last decade. People can't pay their property taxes, Mr. Speaker — arrears are up 85 per cent in Saskatoon, 112 per cent in Moose Jaw, a whopping 145 per cent in Regina.

The Premier may claim that his budget is balanced, but what good does that do if his government's choices are breaking the bank for everyone else?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Crown corporations and the rates of non-payment, that simply isn't the case, Mr. Speaker. There are slightly more people that have not paid their bills with respect to the Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker, but the percentage is exactly the same as it was a number of years ago. The difference is, there's more people that live here today — over 160,000 more people relative to under the members opposite. When they had the opportunity, we dropped in this province in our population by 22,000, Mr. Speaker.

We have today the best job creation record in the province with over 60,000 jobs, Mr. Speaker, attracting people from over 190 countries to over 320 communities across the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. This is a stat that we most certainly are proud of on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, and that has created for us the opportunity to work our way through the last couple of years to this balanced budget here today, Mr. Speaker, which I would put forward would be the right balance.

This is in stark contrast to what we used to do in this province when we had a government that would just whip out their big orange credit card, Mr. Speaker. They would whip that credit card out to take care of the public debt, Mr. Speaker, on the backs of the people across the province. In that day they had to swipe the card and sign it so it took a little while to get that far into debt. Our concern today, Mr. Speaker, is they'd whip out that card, given the opportunity again, and just tap, tap, tap themselves to the Leader of the Opposition's \$10 billion deficit, Mr. Speaker.

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

Provincial Economy

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a bit of revisionist history going on there, and a bit shocking when you see a government that's come out of a decade of record revenue, a decade of record revenue, and now has the highest debt in the history of this province, debt that's set to triple by 2022, Mr. Speaker, from when they came into office. This is embarrassing for them to talk about debt in any way when not only have they doubled the debt already, they've also doubled the PST. They've doubled what they're charging ordinary Saskatchewan people. Two years ago they doubled the PST, increasing it by a billion dollars a year by adding a point and expanding the PST to restaurant meals, kids' clothes . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order, please. I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have guests after all, folks. They added it to restaurant meals and recently they added it to used cars, Mr. Speaker. But the biggest addition of all was to construction labour, a cost that has contributed to making homes and renovations more expensive for Saskatchewan people, has cost municipalities millions in added costs for key infrastructure projects, and has contributed to a housing and commercial building slowdown and near shutdown all over the province.

[14:15]

With an already slowed economy, this was the worst possible time to slam the brakes on a key recovery industry. That's exactly what they did and the impact has been severe. More than 14,000 jobs lost in construction in the last three years, but the Premier has shown no interest in correcting this mistake and removing the PST from construction. What message does this send to contractors and construction workers? Sorry about your job, but we need the money? And is a budget really balanced if it's sending a key industry into a tailspin?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, with respect to some difficult decisions that had to be made here two years ago, three budget cycles ago, Mr. Speaker, we've worked with industries across the province. And with respect specifically to the construction industry, Mr. Speaker, there was some difficult decisions that were made, both at the provincial level and, in fairness, also at the federal level.

Mr. Speaker, we have had some headwinds with respect to our economy here in the province as well over the last few years, Mr. Speaker. And we've worked very hard on this side of the House to represent the economic drivers of this province, Mr. Speaker — the agriculture industry, the mining industry, the energy industry, the manufacturing industry here in the province, Mr. Speaker. We've worked very hard to ensure that they have every opportunity to rebound and succeed, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to that and in fairness, we were happy to hear yesterday with respect to first-time homebuyers that the federal government is looking at making some changes, and we will look with interest as to how that may affect that industry positively.

With respect to general construction and provincially invested construction, Mr. Speaker, this province has never seen it better. Never seen it better with record investments in highways, Mr. Speaker. Never seen it better with our investments in infrastructure in health care. And I would just point out, not only the 15 long-term care facilities or the hospital in Moose Jaw, but we were up a couple of weeks ago to open what is the single-largest investment in mental health treatment here in the province's history, Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford. Forty-two new schools, Mr. Speaker; more to come in just a few minutes.

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

Investment in Mental Health

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were facing headwinds and this government chose to turn on the fan. And when they say things are better than ever, talk to the construction workers out there who are out of work, who are leaving the province because they can't find employment here at home. And talk to them about the way the economic downturn is damaging the mental health of people across the province. Everywhere we go in Saskatchewan — rural and urban, north and south — mental health is top of mind. Too many people are struggling with anxiety, depression, addictions, and other mental health challenges. In particular every teacher I've met has said there's a

huge spike in the number of children presenting with serious difficulties. And the crystal meth and opioid crises have left no communities unscathed.

As our mental health and addictions critic, the member for Saskatoon Riversdale, has pointed out, we've lagged far behind other provinces in an investment for many years. We need to increase funding significantly. We also need to do the work to prevent mental illness. This means making the right choices and reducing poverty and investing in education and developing a suicide prevention strategy for the province.

My question for the Premier is this: are we going to continue to play catch-up, lagging near the back of the pack? Will we take this crisis seriously and have Saskatchewan take its place as the leader and make sure that everyone has the opportunity to live their healthiest life in body and in mind?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, we take the issue of mental health extremely serious in this province, Mr. Speaker. We've had a number of new initiatives. The Premier spoke earlier today about the single-largest, biggest investment in mental health spending in the history of this province with the new hospital in North Battleford.

Mr. Speaker, we've had a number of other initiatives, the community recovery teams that we've unveiled around the province. There's been pilot projects with my colleague, the Minister of Education, and schools for children dealing with mental health issues.

Mr. Speaker, we need to put this in perspective. There is much more work to do. But, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite constantly criticize. It's always, there's not enough resources; there's not enough funding. Since we've been given the privilege of forming government, we've increased mental health spending by 60 per cent in this province, Mr. Speaker.

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

Government's Fiscal Management

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our provincial debt has grown spectacularly under this government and it's set to triple to 23 billion by 2022 according to last year's budget forecast. That's \$22,000 per woman, man, and child in this province. After a decade of record revenue, we've seen a record tax increase with the doubling of the PST, and we're leaving record debt for the next generation. Yet this government continues to sell themselves as good fiscal managers.

Wise fiscal management, Mr. Speaker, would look beyond the horizon of this year's budget or next year's election and make the right investments for the long term.

What does this government have to say? What does this government have to say to a generation living through a crisis in our classrooms, a crisis in mental health and addictions, high levels of poverty, and skyrocketing provincial debt? When will the Premier have an eye to the future and when will Saskatchewan be what it can and should be — the best place in

Canada to be a kid?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, to answer that question, just in a few minutes when we see the Minister of Finance table what will be a balanced budget on behalf of the people of the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, three years ago, three years ago we said . . . we embarked on an effort here in the province. We made a commitment to the people of the province to balance the budget on a three-year plan to balance, Mr. Speaker. We have remained on track to do that, Mr. Speaker. We've done that to ensure that we can retain our AAA credit rating, not only today but into the future, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm happy today that that promise that was made three years ago is going to be kept today, Mr. Speaker, we also say that this balanced budget that we are going to introduce today is the right balance for the people of the province. We feel that we've found the right balance that will continue to invest in the services the people in our communities and this province deserve, Mr. Speaker.

We feel that we have found the right balance that will focus on the priorities that matter to Saskatchewan families, including record investments into education, into mental health, into addictions supports, Mr. Speaker, in communities right across Saskatchewan. And we feel that we have found the right balance that will ensure the investments that we are making today will remain sustainable for our children and into that next generation.

So, Mr. Speaker, us on this side of the House, we are so very proud of this budget that will be introduced by our Minister of Finance in just a couple of minutes.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

TABLING OF ESTIMATES AND SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to submit the estimates and the supplementary estimates accompanied by the message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

The Speaker: — Okay, would you please rise for a message from the Lieutenant Governor. The message is as follows:

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2020, and supplementary estimates — no. 2 of certain sums required for the service of the province for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2019, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Honourable W. Thomas Molloy, Lieutenant Governor, province of Saskatchewan.

Please be seated. I recognize the Minister of Finance.

**MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY
(BUDGET DEBATE)**

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, colleagues, and visitors, today I have the great honour and the responsibility of delivering my second budget as Saskatchewan's Minister of Finance.

Before I do so, however, I'd like to introduce some very important people that are in attendance today. I have with me all three of my daughters, and they've always been my support team. I have Crystal Buckoski, my oldest daughter, and her children, James and Lucas. I have Shannon Harpauer and her partner, Brian Burgess, and their children, Makenna and Emryk. I have my youngest daughter, Lindsay. I have my partner, Tom Wildeman. And I have the best constituency assistant I think any of us could have and a dear friend, a lifetime friend, in Susan Dunne. I want everyone to note that we kind of lost the attention of one of my grandchildren before I started speaking.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise the House of this: the 2019-20 budget is a balanced budget. Mr. Speaker, this is a balanced budget and it's the right balance for Saskatchewan. It's the right balance for investments in health care, supports for seniors, supports for vulnerable families, and funding for classrooms, to help improve the lives of Saskatchewan people today and into the future.

It's the right balance for the much-needed investments in infrastructure for a growing province in both urban and rural Saskatchewan. It's the right balance for investing in important government services, while at the same time controlling spending and keeping taxes low. Mr. Speaker, this budget contains no new taxes or tax increases. It's the right balance to strengthen our economy and make life affordable for Saskatchewan people.

This budget is a balanced budget, and it sets Saskatchewan on a path to ensure balanced budgets in the years ahead. The 2019-20 budget delivers a strong, sustainable fiscal plan as Saskatchewan continues to be the best place in Canada to live, to work, to start a business, to get an education, to raise a family, and to build a life.

Mr. Speaker, this year's balanced budget is the culmination of a three-year fiscal plan. Two budgets ago Saskatchewan was facing over a billion-dollar decline in our resource revenues. Some difficult choices had to be made because budgets, quite frankly, just don't balance themselves. Those choices reduced Saskatchewan's reliance on volatile resource revenues and set Saskatchewan on a path to where we are today with a balanced budget and spending that is affordable and sustainable now and into the future.

Mr. Speaker, some governments in other jurisdictions have chosen a path of ongoing deficits. Here in Saskatchewan we've charted a different course, one that provides a bright future for the people of our province. Saskatchewan's 2019-20 budget is balanced with a projected surplus of 34.4 million. Higher surpluses of 49 million, 72 million, and 84 million are projected for the three fiscal years that follow. The government's operational debt will not increase in 2019-20. Revenue is forecast at 15.03 billion in this budget, up about 782 million or 5.5 per cent compared to last year's budget. Expense of 14.99 billion is projected this year, up from the previous year's budget by 382

million or 2.6 per cent.

The 2019-20 budget provides increased support in almost every area: in health, social services assistance, protection of persons and property, education, agriculture, community development, environment and natural resources, and transportation. Recently higher potash prices and a modest recovery of our oil have helped our oil and mining sectors. Agriculture, the manufacturing sector, and the value of our exports and other engines of the economy remain strong.

This budget keeps Saskatchewan on a sustainable fiscal path that will ensure a balanced budget, not just this year, but in the years to come. The right balance is important because Saskatchewan continues to grow. Newcomers from around the world continue to come to our great province to create better, safer, more prosperous lives for themselves and for their families, in partnership with our First Nations, Métis, francophonie, and all of our Saskatchewan people.

[14:30]

Our population is now more than 1.16 million, an increase of more than 160,000 people since 2007. A growing province means a growing demand for the vital government services Saskatchewan people expect and deserve. And our government is committed to a responsible, sustainable plan to deliver and improve those services now and in the years ahead.

This budget's total investment in health in 2019-20 is projected to be 5.89 billion. That's an increase of 123 million or 2.1 per cent compared to last year's budget. This includes spending through the Ministry of Health, the Saskatchewan Health Authority, the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency, eHealth, and the Health Quality Council, and 3sHealth [Health Shared Services Saskatchewan]. This budget increases operating funding to the Saskatchewan Health Authority to 3.6 billion, up more than 113 million or 3.2 per cent compared to last year.

Specific health care investments in this budget include funding the pre-construction design of a new Victoria Hospital in Prince Albert and a new hospital in Weyburn. The province and the municipal governments are working together to secure federal funding for the project in Prince Albert, which is vital to ensuring quality health services for the people of Prince Albert and northern Saskatchewan.

Two weeks ago our government opened the new Saskatchewan Hospital, North Battleford, replacing a century-old building. This unique and much-needed facility demonstrates our government's significant commitment to improving mental health services across Saskatchewan.

And in fact the 2019-20 budget includes a strong focus on mental health. Funding for targeted mental health and addictions initiatives is increasing by nearly \$30 million in this budget to a total of nearly \$402 million. This represents the largest commitment ever to mental health services in Saskatchewan, and it includes funding for more than 140 new beds for mental health and addictions treatment.

This province has never had a children's hospital. That will change this fall when the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital opens

in Saskatoon. This budget provides 23 million in increased operational funding to that facility so that doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals provide the best care for our children.

Last year our government introduced an individualized funding benefit for children with autism. This year's budget provides 700,000 increase for autism individualized funding benefit. As a result, the benefit will increase by 50 per cent, from 4,000 to 6,000 annually for each child with autism under the age of six. This will help ensure that children with autism and their families will be able to access the services and the supports that they need.

This budget continues to provide care for seniors by investing to replace the Northland Pioneers Lodge in Meadow Lake, fulfilling our government's commitment to replace 13 long-term care facilities for seniors across the province.

This budget also increases home care support to help people stay safely in their homes as long as possible through the Connected Care program. That program will receive more than \$20 million in 2019-20, an increase of nearly 1.6 million compared to last year. As part of Connected Care, new clinics are operating in Regina and Saskatoon that focus on older adults with chronic and complex conditions. These clinics provide interdisciplinary teams of doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, and other providers who deliver both on-site and home-based outreach services to seniors in need.

This budget also provides 1.1 million, an increase of more than 660,000, to the Alzheimer Society for the First Link program. First Link assists people who are newly diagnosed with dementia to get the help they need as soon as possible.

This budget also makes a \$1.4 billion total investment in social services and assistance, an increase of 51.4 million, or 3.7 per cent compared to last year. This budget provides an increase of more than 27 million to support at-risk children and families. This funding will enhance the range of services that keep children safe, including services to help families keep their children safely at home, and for private treatment for children with high needs. Community-based organizations and those who deliver services to children and families and provide support for people with intellectual disabilities will receive an additional \$5.9 million in 2019-20.

As a part of this increase, through a new 1.4 million investment, foster families will be eligible for additional monthly payments once they complete specific training to increase their caregiving skills.

This budget provides a 6.6 million increase in support for adults with intellectual disabilities. Funding for income assistance programs and service delivery will increase by 10 million in this budget, including an additional 6.3 million for the Saskatchewan assured income for disability program. This budget also provides 250,000 in new capital investment for transit assistance for people with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, this budget invests in our children's education: 3.28 billion in total, up more than 19 million compared to last year. Saskatchewan school divisions will receive 1.9 billion in operating funding for the 2019-20 school year, an increase of

more than 26 million year over year. And this budget is increasing the school division funding while the education property tax remains unchanged.

This budget includes more than 72 million for child care, enabling the provision of more than 16,700 child care spaces across the province. That's an increase of 7,000 spaces since 2007-08. And this budget invests in education in our post-secondary students as well. Funding for the Ministry of Advanced Education exceeds 727 million. More than 672 million of that amount will go towards operating and capital grants for Saskatchewan's post-secondary institutions, including nearly 88 million of funding for the College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan.

This budget increases funding for the student loan program by 4.7 million, to a total of more than 26 million. This will provide repayable and non-repayable financial assistance to more than 18,000 students. Saskatchewan students will also continue to receive benefits after their studies are completed through the graduate retention program, which provides up to 20,000 in income tax credits to graduates who live and work in the province. In order to ensure the continued sustainability of our financial supports for students and to ensure that support is targeted to the students who need it most, the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship is being converted to a needs-tested support.

Mr. Speaker, our government's commitment to the priorities of Saskatchewan people is clear. Investment into those three areas — health, education, and social services and assistance — is \$10.6 billion in this budget, which is up 67 per cent or 4.3 billion since 2007-08. These three priority areas account for 71 per cent of our overall budget expense.

This budget also invests in the safety of Saskatchewan people and communities. To improve safety of highway intersections, the first year of a multi-year strategy is being funded in this budget. This year our government will invest 13 million as the first step of a five-year, 65 million, enhanced intersection safety program that will improve signage, sightlines, and lighting, and add safety features such as rumble strips at intersections throughout the province.

This budget will include over 60 million for twinning and passing lane projects which will improve safety for drivers on Saskatchewan highways. Overall, this budget provides funding to improve about 1000 kilometres of highway network in 2019-20. Our government will continue its efforts to reduce impaired driving in Saskatchewan, and this includes 1.1 million more for drug-impaired driving education training for police.

This budget includes more than 15 million to continue funding 128 municipal police positions and targeted police initiatives across the province. Our government remains committed to addressing the issue of rural crime through continued investment in the protection and response team, crime reduction teams, and the combined traffic safety services initiative.

Mr. Speaker, this budget delivers the right balance by ensuring that Saskatchewan's municipalities receive a consistent source of unconditional funding to invest in local priorities. This budget provides more than 251 million in municipal revenue sharing, a

\$10.5 million increase compared to last year, for Saskatchewan's rural, urban, and northern municipalities. A new formula developed by the province with the municipal sector is based on revenue generated by three quarters of one percentage point of the PST.

Mr. Speaker, since 2008, municipal revenue sharing has nearly doubled, an increase of more than 124 million. Including revenue sharing, infrastructure funding, and a number of other grants and initiatives, this budget provides more than \$437 million in direct government support to municipalities from multiple ministries across government. That's an increase of 25.4 million or 6.2 per cent compared to last year.

This budget also includes 211 million in targeted investment that will benefit First Nations and Métis people, communities, businesses, and organizations, a 4.7 per cent increase compared to last year. That includes more than 72 million in gaming agreement transfers to First Nations and Métis organizations, and 45 million to First Nations and Métis community-based organizations that deliver individual and community supports.

This budget also provides an increase of 2.25 million, for a total of 27 million, to help deliver the Sarcan beverage container collection and recycling program. Sarcan employs more than 700 people at 72 collection depots across the province. The funding increase in this budget will help Sarcan build upon its long-standing success helping both the environment and Saskatchewan people.

This budget delivers \$2.7 billion for infrastructure investment in 2019-20: 1.6 billion of capital investment will be in the commercial Crown sector, and 1.1 billion of capital investment by executive government ministries and agencies. This budget provides capital investment of 103 million for health care infrastructure including 12 million to begin the construction of a new long-term care facility to replace Northland Pioneers Lodge in Meadow Lake, 5 million for preconstruction design of a new Victoria Hospital in Prince Albert, and a new hospital in Weyburn.

Infrastructure investment in the K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] school system in this budget exceeds 95 million. Projects include consolidation and replacement of St. Pius and Argyle School in Regina, and a new joint-use school to replace Sacred Heart, St. Mary, Empire, and Westmount schools in Moose Jaw. This budget also provides funding to plan the replacement of St. Frances School in Saskatoon. There's also 29 million for ongoing construction of new schools in Rosthern and Weyburn.

Municipal infrastructure funding exceeds 229 million in this budget, an 11 per cent increase from last year. That includes new funding under the Investing in Canada infrastructure program, as well as funding to continue commitments under the New Building Canada Plan, the Clean Water and Wastewater Fund, and the Public Transit fund.

Saskatchewan's major commercial Crown corporations will undertake a number of capital projects in the 2019-20 fiscal year. SaskPower's 873 million planned capital investments will connect more customers and expand electricity generation assets. SaskPower will continue to renew its distribution and transmission systems this year with a goal of achieving a 40 per

cent reduction in CO₂ emissions by 2030.

[14:45]

SaskTel will enhance services to its customers with capital investment totalling 321 million in 2019-20. This will allow SaskTel to upgrade the wireless and wireline networks, as well as continue the rollout of Infinet, the corporation's high-speed fibre optic internet services. SaskTel is continuing to enhance rural services and has announced the addition of 41 new cellular sites this year as part of a two-year initiative. By March 2020 SaskTel will have added 100 new cellular sites in smaller communities right across Saskatchewan.

SaskEnergy will make \$340 million in capital investment in 2019-20 to meet growing customer demand, as well as to ensure the integrity of its natural gas transmission and distribution systems.

SaskWater's planned 32 million in capital investment in 2019-20 will go towards maintenance of existing infrastructure, as well as the creation of new water and waste water systems.

This budget strikes the right balance by providing quality services for all Saskatchewan people while keeping taxes low. Our budget has among the lowest personal and business taxes in the country, and there are no tax increases in this budget and no new taxes in this budget.

Since 2007 personal income tax exemptions have removed 112,000 people from the province's income tax rolls. Tax reductions introduced over the past decade are providing more than \$610 million in annual income tax savings to Saskatchewan people.

Last year the tragedy involving the Humboldt Broncos highlighted the crucial work of volunteer first responders who serve our province in times of emergency. This budget now contains a new, non-refundable tax credit for volunteer firefighters and volunteer medical first responders who serve to protect and help Saskatchewan people when they need it the most.

Beginning with the 2020 taxation year, individuals with at least 200 hours of volunteer service in the year will be able to claim a \$3,000 tax credit. Mr. Speaker, these new credits for volunteers recognize the valuable work of our emergency responders, and it's another example of our government helping to make life more affordable for Saskatchewan people.

This budget also includes measures that will ensure that the people of Saskatchewan receive a fair and balanced return for their potash. The base payment component of the potash production tax is intended to provide a simple, flat payment per tonne of potash sales. However it has gradually been eroded by currently allowable deductions. To address this, effective April 1st, the calculation of the potash production tax will be simplified by eliminating those deductions.

This budget achieves the right balance by investing in hospitals, schools, highways, and municipal and Crown infrastructure to help meet the needs of a growing population and economy while ensuring that debt is managed responsibly. At March 31st, 2020

the province's net debt is forecast to be 12.4 billion, one of the lowest among provinces as a percentage of GDP. All government debt, including that of Crown corporations, is forecast to remain manageable at 21.7 billion at March 31st, 2020, which is up 1.8 billion from last year due to further investment in capital projects. Government's operating debt is forecast to remain unchanged in 2019-20 at 6.15 billion, which is about 10 per cent lower than it was in 2008, resulting in a cumulative savings of nearly 1.2 billion in interest payments.

Last September, Saskatchewan had its AAA credit rating confirmed by Moody's Investors Services, the agency's highest rating. Saskatchewan has the second-highest credit rating in Canada when ratings from the three major agencies are combined.

Mr. Speaker, the 2019-20 budget is balanced and it's the right balance for Saskatchewan people. Our province's economy is strengthening. Our population is growing. The 2019-20 budget is our government's plan to continue to balance into the future to sustain needed investment in high-quality government services for all Saskatchewan people.

The 2019-20 budget balances those needed investments with carefully managed spending and continues to develop a stable, sustainable revenue base without raising taxes. It's the right year for our growing economy. It's the right balance for our growing communities. It's the right balance for Saskatchewan people. Mr. Speaker, the 2019-20 budget is the right balance for Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Indian Head-Milestone:

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

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Finance, seconded by the member for Indian Head-Milestone:

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

Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member for Regina Rosemont.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the official opposition, it's my honour to respond to the budget that's tabled here today and talk a bit about what balance means and whether we see it in the document that's before us here today.

But first I really want to welcome everyone that's joined us here today from across Saskatchewan. This Assembly is filled with leaders that built our province, with community leaders from every corner, from all facets of our province: business leaders, municipal leaders, indigenous leaders, leaders in education and health care, labour leaders, working men and women, so many good friends, family also — hey, Mom and Dad. And thank you so much for all being here. We're all here today because we believe in this province. We believe in each other and we want to build a better future for our children right here in Saskatchewan.

Now if balance is the yardstick this government has chosen to

measure this budget, then we must ask two questions: did they succeed, and at what cost? To the first question, is the budget balanced, we must answer no, because it certainly is not. There's no balance when provincial debt will grow by \$1.8 billion in this year alone. There's no balance when our debt has tripled in the last decade under this government's watch, from \$7.8 billion of debt in 2009 to \$21.7 billion of debt at the end of this budget. Debt has never been higher and it's projected to hit, if you can imagine, \$26 billion in just a couple of years.

This trajectory is unsustainable and it's pushing that burden onto future generations and it's hamstringing our public finances. And there's no debt when they're saddling our Crown corporations with so much of that debt, so much of that a result of this government's mismanagement, resulting in the piling on of bad debt from things like the incredibly costly carbon capture project, the GTH land scandal, equity stripping, and so much more. And to that point, there's no balance when they're pulling a surprise \$100 million from SaskPower to plug the gaps at a time when that Crown needs those dollars to reinvest, when debt ratios are as high as they've been. And just think of the blackouts that we faced this winter. There's no doubt that with this government, our Crown corporations are at risk.

There's no balance when the surplus they're claiming is based on rose-coloured economic and revenue assumptions. On this end, this government has quite the history of saying one thing on budget day with a very different reality to follow. Boasts of budgetary balance year after year — I've been around this Assembly a few years; I've watched it a few times — only to result in big-time deficits, including for some of the best years of revenue within this province's history.

But to the second question, what's the cost of this narrow pursuit of balance? The budget before us is a document without hope or vision. It's an accumulation of band-aids intended to cover over cuts and choices that have hurt our province and people. There's nothing here for working families paying more and earning less, and more concerned with balancing their own families' budgets than the province's. There's nothing here for children or for young people, nothing here for those that have faced job loss or are at risk of job loss and worried about that each and every night, nothing for the North, nothing for First Nations and Métis people within this province.

We see increased spending on illness, poverty, and crime, which are consequences of past cuts, choices, and a struggling economy. And we see remarkably, after the alarm that's been raised about the slow-moving crisis in our schools, a damaging failure to invest meaningfully in our future. Past cuts and choices have hurt Saskatchewan students, young people, seniors, and families and weakened our economy, and this budget does nothing to repair that.

I'd like to speak specifically to education, because what we see in this budget underlines so clearly the problem. This is a government that's all about today, leaving nothing for tomorrow but growing debt and its burden, and students and families without the supports and services they deserve.

After pulling out the allocated dollars for the teachers' settlement, this budget offers up a fraction of what's needed in classrooms across Saskatchewan. \$14.5 million is the total sum

for the increase on the operating side for school boards at a time when our classrooms are at a breaking point. This is inexcusable and it's damaging.

Classrooms have been strained for many years under this government, not getting the resources that they needed, neglected during the boom, and then in the devastating budget of 2017 they were hit with cuts of \$54 million. Since then schools have grown by 7,000 students and teachers are dealing with overcrowded classrooms, cuts, tight resources, complex needs while students are left without the supports and services they deserve and that they need.

[15:00]

Time and time again, this government has failed students and classrooms while also disrespecting and disregarding crucial partners in education: our teachers, our boards, and of course parents. Sadly this budget goes no distance to repairing that damage, and it leaves students without the supports that they need. And this is after the minister seemed to show interest and said some of the right things, raising hopes, including mine, that at least some of the damage might be undone. That makes this budget a real disappointment for students in our classrooms.

Secondly, I want to touch on something we've been calling for repeatedly and that I don't see in this budget, and that's their damaging PST expansion to double the take on PST and expand it to construction labour, restaurant meals, insurance, used cars, trucks, and children's clothing. The economy is struggling and people are hurting because of this failure to walk back their PST expansion and increase.

The economy has been weakened by the choices of this government over a number of years, squandering a historic opportunity with record revenues and through that period of time failing to save a dime, draining the rainy day fund, and piling on debt. And when they saw a slowing economy, instead of aiding our recovery they slammed on the brakes and slapped the PST onto construction labour.

This has left our economy weakened and people vulnerable. Let's take retail sales, an important measure within the economy, an important measure as well within the well-being of household financial positions across the province. It's been flat, 1.5 per cent over five years. That's despite a growing population. That's terrible per capita. Nominal GDP, completely flat over a five-year period.

And the damage caused by the PST is clear. Since just four years ago, the average household is now paying \$778 more in PST, a 70 per cent increase over just four years because of the unfair tax hike of that government. This has put many families in a whole lot of financial hurt and it's directly reflected in the retail sales numbers and our economy.

And of course the PST on construction has hit our economy hard — permits down, projects halted, local businesses hurting, and so many skilled workers, Saskatchewan people, losing their jobs and being forced from our province to pursue a job. The very people who want to build the province that they know and love are being forced to move. Our economy needs a boost, a shot in the arm, to build a recovery and create jobs to get us back on

track. But this budget certainly fails on that front.

And while many face economic pressures and costs because of those choices, the most vulnerable are left in a more precarious position than ever. The heartless and harmful cut to the rental housing supplement for the most vulnerable people and families has not been reversed. One in four children in our province lives in poverty. Just let that sink in. One in four children live in poverty. This should be acceptable to no one, and it prevents progress. Learning in a classroom, for example, is a non-starter if a child doesn't have food in their belly or a safe, stable roof over their head. Nothing in this budget undoes the damage to fix these unacceptable realities for far too many across our province.

If there's a ray of hope within this budget, it's the additional funding we see to address mental health and addictions, the crisis within our province. This is something that we've been calling for, something that we've had families joining us to do so, advocates calling for, and particularly my colleague, the member for Saskatoon Riversdale, who has served as our party's and our province's first mental health critic for the past year, who has worked tirelessly to hold the government to account on this front and for years to fight for a better way forward.

Of course more needs to be done to get ahead of the crisis in mental health and addictions and to fix that broken system. We're still far behind, even with the adjustments here today, behind other provinces when it comes to funding. And far, far too many Saskatchewan people are in darkness and despair and depression without the services and supports they need when they need them. We see not nearly enough in this budget for addictions counsellors or addictions beds, two things that are badly needed when it comes to making gains on the crystal meth epidemic that's ravaging the lives and families and communities of far too many.

Mr. Speaker, because Saskatchewan families and people of this province won't see themselves, their priorities, or their future reflected in this budget, because it's off balance, because we owe it to the people of this province to step up to the challenges of today and ensure that better tomorrow awaits, we as an official opposition cannot support this budget. This is a budget that triples the debt, that doubles the PST, that flattens the economy, and fails to deliver for students who desperately need supports.

I'll have more to say on this budget here tomorrow, entering into debate. But at this time I move that debate now be adjourned. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The member for Regina Rosemont has moved adjournment of debate. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Motion for Resumption of Budget Debate

Hon. Mr. Brkich: — I move:

That debate on the motion "That the Assembly approves in

general the budgetary policy of the government” be resumed on Thursday, March 21st, 2019.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

That debate on the motion “That the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government” be resumed on Thursday, March 21st, 2019.

Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Hon. Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — Before I place the question on adjournment, I want to first say thank you to all of our guests that have joined us here today for your co-operation in observing the rules of the Assembly. And now I’d like to extend an invitation to our guests to join the members for tea in the Legislative Library, to your right as you leave the Assembly, and room 218, to your left.

At this time I will place the question. The Government House Leader has moved that this House do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. Thank you, everyone.

[The Assembly adjourned at 15:09.]

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Premier

President of the Executive Council

Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

Hon. Tina Beaudry-Mellor

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Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Minister Responsible for Innovation

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Minister of Central Services
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Minister Responsible for Public Service Commission

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