

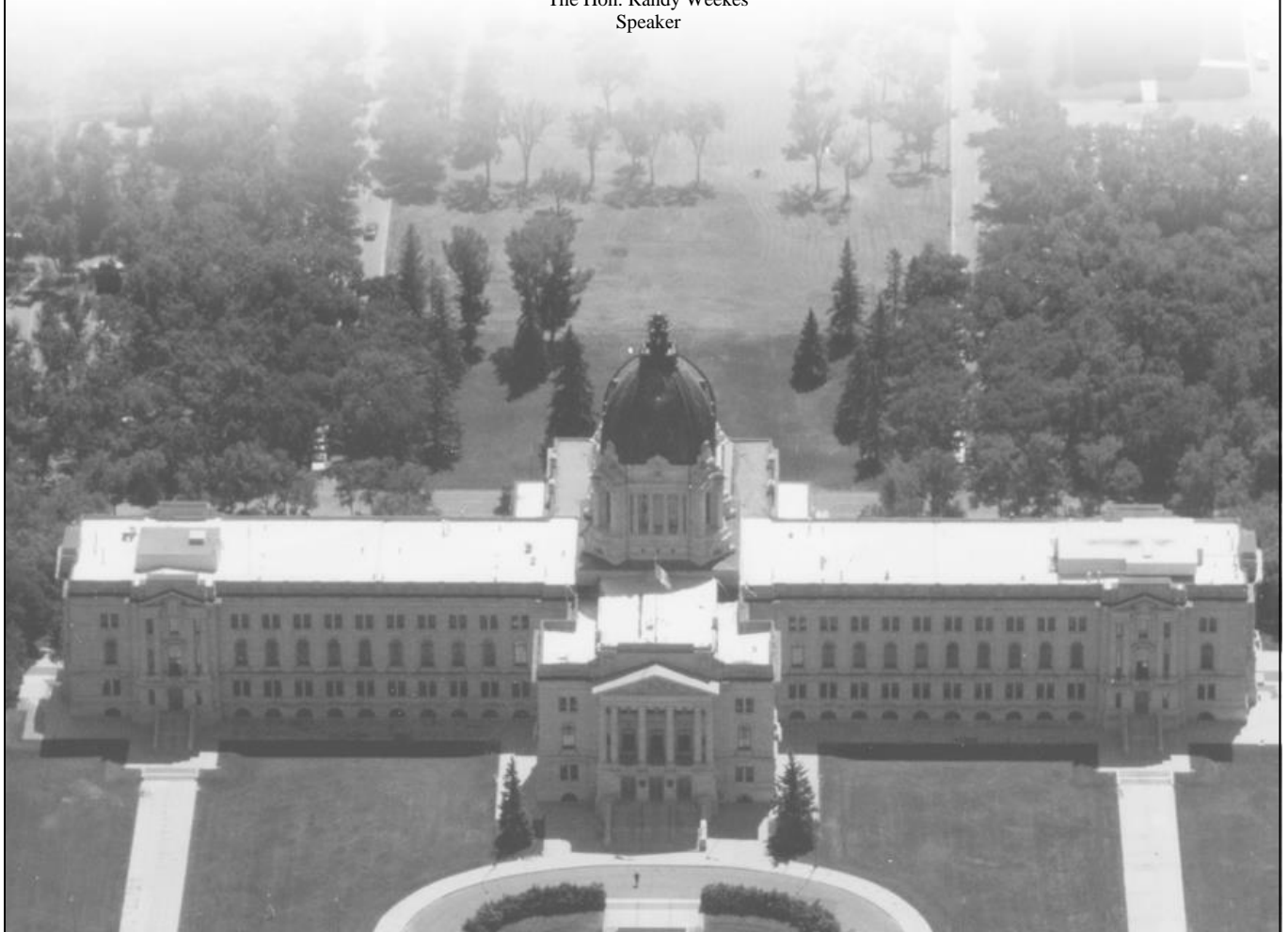
FIRST SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
AND
PROCEEDINGS**

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



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
1st Session — 29th Legislature

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

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

Beck, Carla — Regina Lakeview (NDP)	Love, Matt — Saskatoon Eastview (NDP)
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Lawrence, Greg — Moose Jaw Wakamow (SP)	

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

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[The Assembly met at 10:00.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to present a petition to save the Lighthouse and provide core funding to emergency homeless shelters. These individuals wish to bring to our attention that Saskatchewan is the only province in Canada that still uses a per diem funding model where emergency shelter for a person facing homelessness is provided only for social assistance recipients per bed per night. Other provinces use a block funding model where the shelter is funded by providing core funding to the shelter, and it's open to anyone who needs it.

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 of Saskatchewan to immediately provide stable, guaranteed core funding to the Lighthouse serving The Battlefords and to expand supports for emergency shelters across Saskatchewan by moving to a core funding model.

This is signed by individuals from North Battleford, Mr. Speaker. I do so present.

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

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to present a petition once again today calling for pay equity legislation. The signatories would like to bring to our attention the following points. The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission has recommended proactive and comprehensive pay equity legislation, which has not been pursued by the Government of Saskatchewan. Proactive laws require employers to review their own pay structures to ensure compensation of male-dominated and female-dominated jobs is actually based on skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions, not gender.

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 of Saskatchewan to introduce pay equity legislation.

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

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

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly against the \$150 electric vehicle tax. The undersigned residents of the province of Saskatchewan wish to bring to your attention the following: the citizens of Saskatchewan are concerned with the newly imposed \$150 annual tax on fully electric vehicles that will be applied during SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] insurance registrations, starting in October '21. They believe the provincial government's flawed rationale is that the annual tax will help pay for the wear and tear from electric vehicles operating on provincial roads and highways, and that they are misguided in their thinking.

The provincial government previously cancelled the 20 per cent Go Green SGI rebate which averaged \$210 per vehicle in 2011. SaskPower has not yet invested in fast-charging infrastructure for the provincial highway system, which has impaired EV [electric vehicle] drivers' ability to use many roads and highways in our province. Saskatchewan only has 403 fully electric vehicles registered in the province out of an approximate 1.4 million total vehicles, and an additional tax on electric vehicles will be a barrier for many in Saskatchewan to choose a more environmentally conscious means of transportation.

I will read the prayer as follows:

The provincial government cancel the \$150 tax on electric vehicles and invest in charging stations to encourage electric vehicle use in Saskatchewan.

Signed by residents of Saskatchewan from Saskatoon. Thank you.

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

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition calling for the government to save our swales. The undersigned would like to bring to our attention the following: that the Ministry of Highways is planning a four-lane, high-speed highway around part of Saskatoon and through the swales; the northeastern small swales of Saskatoon provide food and habitat to a number of endangered and declining species; the provincial government is neglecting its environmental protection duties to adequately protect wild species, habitats, and ecosystems of local, regional, national, and global significance; that the lack of adequate protection is leading to a decrease in many types of wildlife habitat.

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 provincial government to (1) suspend planning for the Saskatoon freeway and development around the swales until a regional cumulative effects assessment has been completed; (2) update *The Wildlife Act* and expand the list of wild species protected by provincial regulation; (3) recognize the swales as important ecological habitat and designate them as protected areas; and (4) ensure adequate long-term funding for research, management, and enforcement to protect the swales for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by residents of Saskatoon. I do so present.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Mental Health Week and Supports for Saskatchewan People

Ms. Mowat: — Mr. Speaker, this week is Mental Health Week, and today is Child and Youth Mental Health Awareness Day. Just like adults, children and youth struggle with mental health issues, and in many ways they are more vulnerable because they do not have the benefit of wisdom and life experience. According to the Saskatchewan Alliance for Youth and Community Well-being, 38 per cent of Saskatchewan youth report feeling depressed. Sadly, the pandemic has made the challenges for our young people even worse. It's no secret that Saskatchewan leads the country in youth suicide rates, with it being the second-highest leading cause of death between people age 15 to 24 in our province. We know those tragic numbers are so much worse for Indigenous youth.

Mr. Speaker, unlike mental health weeks in years past, this week started with the suicide prevention strategy being enshrined in law. This is thanks to the tireless advocacy from my friend and colleague from Cumberland who refused to give up and refused to settle for less when it comes to support for people who are struggling in his community.

Mental Health Week is important, but we need to have these conversations every day. As legislators, we need to ensure our decisions are informed by the reality that many Saskatchewan people struggle with mental health issues and are still unable to access the care they need. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Davidson Brothers Realize Hockey Accomplishments

Mr. Skoropad: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the community of Davidson in the heart of my constituency of Arm River is well known for its hospitality and its hockey. In fact over the years, the Davidson AGT Centre has produced a number of highly accomplished hockey players.

Mr. Speaker, not unlike many young people from communities across the province, the Allan boys, Blake and Nolan, grew up with a stick in their hands at the local rink. Fast forward and both brothers now find themselves competing in the Western Hockey League, Blake with the Calgary Hitmen and Nolan with the Prince Albert Raiders.

Mr. Speaker, most recently 18-year-old Nolan Allan gave the town of Davidson a little more reason to cheer for Team Canada at this year's U-18 [under 18] World Championship in Frisco, Texas. As Saskatchewan's lone representative on the team, Mr. Speaker, this 6-foot-2, 195-pound defenceman did the province proud and was a force at the blue line playing a pivotal role in Canada's gold medal win over Russia yesterday. Nolan's performance at the World Championship will undoubtedly serve

him well at the upcoming 2021 NHL [National Hockey League] draft this summer.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to help me in congratulating the Allan brothers, Blake and Nolan, on their accomplishments and wishing these Saskatchewan-grown talents golden success in the future. Thank you.

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

Craft Beer Week

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to rise on this fine Friday in May in recognition of Craft Beer Week here in Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this year's special-edition release beer is aptly named Resilience. And, Mr. Speaker, COVID has affected everyone and every business in this province, and the craft beer industry has been no exception. From the aluminum tariffs to the production levy, craft breweries have faced their share of challenges. But true to our nature, Saskatchewanians have risen to those challenges and come up with new and innovative ways to support each other, from sharing supplies and canning materials, to coming up with the home beer delivery system early last spring of which I took great, great advantage when it was 45 below.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the craft beer community has been nothing short of resilient. Mark "The Mullet" Heise, president of the Saskatchewan Craft Brewers Association stated, and I quote, "The response from craft beer fans has been overwhelming with so many people asking how they can help us out."

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is a sector that models true Saskatchewan values: collaboration, treating their employees with dignity, paying ethical living wages, building their communities, and leading the charge against sexism and gender-based harassment in the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members in the House today to join me in a toast and cheers to the craft brewers around the province and their resilience in the face of adversity.

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

Infrastructure Investment in Saskatchewan

Mr. Grewal: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that yesterday our government and its partners announced significant investments that will benefit residents across the province. This will come in the form of more than \$50 million in joint funding for 55 infrastructure projects in the province.

The projects are funded under the new COVID-19 resilience stream of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. These projects will benefit communities for years to come. The funding will go towards the construction of a new community centre in Kinistino, the expansion and improvement of transportation networks for the following communities: The Battlefords, Estevan, Kindersley, La Ronge, Swift Current, and Yorkton.

Also these investments will connect the Flying Dust First Nation to the community of Meadow Lake with a new walkway. Lastly, projects in Moose Jaw, Wilkie, and Biggar will see a solar power upgrade to their power supply and municipal buildings.

Mr. Speaker, providing communities with reliable and sustainable infrastructure is a priority for our government. These investments showcase this priority and will help communities build back better and create jobs for the long term. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Correctional Services Appreciation Day

Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, May 7th, 2021, is proclaimed Correctional Services Appreciation Day. On this day we recognize the work of all correctional officers, facility youth workers, probation officers, and community youth workers who go above and beyond every day to keep our communities safe.

Mr. Speaker, correctional staff diligently care for adult and youth offenders in our communities across this province. They provide rehabilitative services, programming, and support to those serving their time in a correctional centre or serving time in the community.

Working in corrections is a challenging job in normal circumstances, but this year has been even more difficult while dealing with changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their constant professionalism and resiliency under these circumstances is admirable. We are proud of the work these individuals do every day.

Mr. Speaker, there are approximately 2,030 provincial correctional officers, facility youth workers, probation officers, and community youth workers across Saskatchewan. Today we recognize these individuals that continuously show their unwavering commitment to their profession and their dedication to the safety of the province of Saskatchewan.

If members on both sides would please join me in recognizing correctional staff across the province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Melville-Saltcoats.

Melville Sees Increase in Building Permits

Hon. Mr. Kaeding: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Melville may be one of the smallest cities in Saskatchewan, but it is punching well above its weight. Building permits in Melville hit a six-year high in 2020 according to figures released by the city during their council meeting on April 6th.

[10:15]

In a report to council, Andrew Fahlman, director of public works, provided a report on building permits issued in 2020 in which he stated that the city granted 58 building permits last year. The permits, which had a construction value of over thirteen and a

half million, was a 78.7 per cent increase over the previous year and was the highest in six years. The major projects that accounted for the thirteen and a half million dollars in building permits included the new Co-op food store along with a home and agro centre, as well as a new Sarcen building, the Department of Highways storage facility, and a number of small-business expansions.

The city of Melville's economic planning and development team, led by Mayor Walter Streelasky and CEO [chief executive officer] Ron McCullough, continue to advance investment attraction strategies including those that I've discussed earlier in the Assembly. These strategies will add value to the provincial economy, the region, and their city while recognizing the importance and support of the Saskatchewan agriculture community, the transportation sector, and the processing sector.

There's also an increase in development permits issued for smaller projects on existing residences, commercial buildings such as driveways, fences, and decks. City councillor Andrew Rondeau said it best, "If there's been a silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic, it's that many residents are taking advantage of their time at home to tackle the home improvement projects on their list."

Mr. Speaker, Melville, like every community in the province, is open for business and ready for investment attraction that will grow Melville and the province.

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

Employment Numbers in Saskatchewan

Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week the Premier announced the best reopening plan in all of Canada. And as of this morning, Saskatchewan now has the best jobs record in all of Canada. StatsCan today announced that in April most provinces saw their job numbers decline and unemployment go up. But not Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan's employment was up by 9,500 new jobs just in April. That's an increase of 1.7 per cent, the strongest job growth in all of Canada. Our unemployment fell to 6.6 per cent, and that's the lowest unemployment rate in the country.

There were more women working. There were more men working. There were more First Nations people working and more young people working. More jobs in Regina. More jobs in Saskatoon. There were more construction jobs, more tech jobs, more ag jobs, more manufacturing jobs, more health care jobs, and more education jobs. More jobs in almost every single area of our province, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, the NDP [New Democratic Party] like to say that hope is not a plan. And they would know. They don't have either. The good news is, Mr. Speaker, this government does have a plan. And it's a plan that now means Saskatchewan has the best job creation record in the country and the lowest unemployment in the country. We have a plan, Mr. Speaker, and that plan is bringing hope and jobs to Saskatchewan. Thank you.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Provision of Health Care

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's record in this pandemic at preventing illness is disastrous, but the least he could do is make sure that people get the care they need when they're sick.

The member for Saskatoon Silverspring-Sutherland was known for his incompetence and lack of compassion when he was minister for Social Services. And I know the talent pool is pretty shallow over there, but somehow the Premier looked around and said, that's the guy I want to lead as Health minister during a pandemic, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday those qualities of incompetence and lack of compassion were on full display, Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Health would not commit to reversing a policy that denies health care coverage to a child, denies health care coverage to an infant — the child of Jo Pereira, Mr. Speaker. That little boy was born right here in Regina, Mr. Speaker, right here in Regina. That little boy is a Canadian citizen, and his family is being sent a bill for his medical care.

The minister called this plan, this policy that denies a Regina-born little boy health care, he called it a communication problem. Mr. Speaker, it's not a communication problem; it's a compassion problem. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier overrule his Health minister today and get rid of this discriminatory policy?

The Speaker: — I'd just like to remind the Leader of the Opposition not to make personal comments about other members. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I will also just correct the Leader of the Opposition's comments, Mr. Speaker. The health care was provided. It is always provided to people that are seeking health care here in the province. We have a very strong public health care system, Mr. Speaker, that has been invested in and invested in heavily — by successive governments yes, over the course of the last many, many decades — to ensure that people that do need health care in Saskatchewan, that health care is provided. And I'm certain that it was in this case.

With respect to the specific case, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to discuss the case. We're going to protect this particular family's privacy as we do, you know, all families here in the province, Mr. Speaker.

However what I would say is that at times there are rare and somewhat unique cases that would come forward, Mr. Speaker. The health care is offered to these folks, Mr. Speaker. And when there is a Saskatchewan health card that is present, most certainly then that health care is paid for by the Saskatchewan people. When there is a Canadian health card presented from a province or territory across this nation, we obviously have agreements in place across the nation, Mr. Speaker.

And in the unfortunate circumstances where there may not be a Canadian health card that is available, then most certainly the Saskatchewan Health Authority and the Ministry of Health's office are going to work very closely with those families to ensure that if they can access a Canadian health card, we most

certainly are going to do everything that we can so that can be the case.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That family has spoken publicly. They're not worried about their privacy; they're worried about paying the bills that that Health minister has sent them. Mr. Speaker, what these situations show us is a government that has lost its moral compass.

As the member for Regina Elphinstone-Centre pointed out yesterday, both Ms. Pereira and her infant son were among the many thousands of Saskatchewan people who were infected with COVID-19. When she reached out to the minister's office for help, she didn't get help. She got a letter, a letter signed by that Health minister. A letter confirming that this little boy, a Canadian citizen, would not be granted health care coverage due to his mother's status. Ms. Pereira told the *Leader-Post* yesterday, and I quote:

He's a Canadian, but I feel like he doesn't have the rights of Canadians. It's a human right that I'm asking for, but they're just neglecting it. What they're doing to us is inhuman.

To the Premier: is he really telling us today that he's going to stand up with his Health minister in his incompetence, stand up with that Health minister instead of standing up for a little boy, born in Saskatchewan, who deserves health care coverage?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for the question. Mr. Speaker, as I stated yesterday in this House and I also stated to the media, no health care was ever denied to anybody in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. I can't comment on the specific cases and the member opposite should know that. That's protected under the HIPA Act [*The Health Information Protection Act*], Mr. Speaker.

But what I can say is we continue to work with our health care system to make sure that the proper health care is provided to any individual across this province when they need it, Mr. Speaker. Every child, adult, and senior has access to health care in this province, Mr. Speaker, and we'll continue to provide that service. And I want to thank all the people on the front line, health care workers that are doing their job, maintaining everybody's safety but also dealing with the COVID situation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Speaker, the minister is right about one thing. Doctors and nurses in Saskatchewan, when somebody comes in, they'll treat them. They have that level of dedication. The coverage was denied. The bill was sent from this minister.

And it's not a single episode, Mr. Speaker. Narcisa Carranza is a grandmother from the Philippines who came to visit her family here in Saskatchewan. She was unable to return safely home because of the pandemic. She was stuck in Saskatchewan where this Premier did nowhere near enough to protect people from COVID-19. So she was one of those unfortunate thousands who

got sick with COVID-19, and she found herself in one of our overwhelmed ICUs [intensive care unit], Mr. Speaker.

But it's not only the pain and suffering of illness that she's dealing with. The Health minister also decided to send her a bill for \$300,000 for her time in hospital. Mr. Speaker, these are extraordinary times, times when we've been asked to be all in this together, a global fight against a global pandemic. Will the Premier commit today to help Ms. Carranza and waive those fees?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I do understand the concerns of this family that are brought forward to my attention, and I appreciate the member opposite who wrote me the letter on this, Mr. Speaker. We do have policies and procedures in place. Mr. Speaker, in this specific case I don't want to get into too much details. But I can assure the House the child was covered, Mr. Speaker, and that we did perform all of the health care that those individuals needed.

Mr. Speaker, again the member opposite wants to stand up and make slanderous accusations of myself and all of the health care workers, Mr. Speaker. That's just in poor taste, Mr. Speaker. They're doing a yeoman's work out there to make sure that we can provide the proper health care to the individuals. No matter where they're from, Mr. Speaker, as long as they're in our province, Mr. Speaker, we'll provide that health care for them.

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

Mr. Meili: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question was of course about Ms. Carranza, which the minister chose not to answer. And the Premier chose not to have the courage to stand and not to have the courage of his predecessor either, it turns out, Mr. Speaker. Because I'm old enough to remember, I'm old enough to remember when Jason Kenney, when Jason Kenney, the Premier's best political pal, decided it was time to cut refugee health care.

And a guy by the name of Brad Wall, a guy by the name of Brad Wall spoke up for funding for a man in Saskatchewan who needed cancer treatment. I'll share the quote for the members opposite because they seem to have forgotten this sentiment. Here's what Mr. Wall said. He said, "This is the kind of country we are." He said, "You just cover it."

Does that compassion still exist in the Sask Party, or did it only exist if Ottawa was footing the bill? Will the Premier honestly stand up — and I doubt he'll even do that — but would he honestly stand up and tell a Saskatchewan family whose lola caught COVID-19 during the third wave that he failed to prevent, is he really going to stand up and tell that family that they're on the hook for 300 grand in life-saving care?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure why the member keeps asking the same question. I'm giving the same answer, Mr. Speaker. The individual that was . . . these individuals that they're just throwing around in this House and using as political footballs, Mr. Speaker, it's just unclassy. We

provided health care to any individual that comes into our province, Mr. Speaker. No matter where they're from, their country of origin, no matter what it is, Mr. Speaker, we provide that health care. And we will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

It is disappointing that the members opposite seem to be using this as some political football. Mr. Speaker, we have policies in place that are very similar to the rest of the provinces, Mr. Speaker. They were the same provinces that were under the NDP. And we'll continue to work with any families that have received an invoice from the Saskatchewan Health Authority. We'll continue to work with them to make sure that they are able to provide payment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Paid Sick Leave and Tax Reductions for Families

Ms. Bowes: — Choices, Mr. Speaker. The Deputy Premier and Finance minister likes to talk about choices working people can make. She said we misrepresented her words, but here's the *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker:

If a couple, maybe low income, but they make the choice to go without a few things so that they can stay, one of the couple can stay home with the child.

Let's talk about making that choice to stay home from work, then. It's a choice that over half of sick workers in our province can't make because they have to pay the bills. If this government is now all about working people having choices, they should give more working people the choice to stay home when they're sick. Does the Sask Party agree this is a choice workers should be able to make? And if so, will they work with us to make paid sick leave a reality in Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, I know my answer a few days ago is really, really difficult for the members opposite to understand, but I will go through it again.

We put a number of policies in place so that all families have more of their own income that they can keep for themselves. What the members opposite would do is they would tax it. They would take it because they know best for all these families on what they should do when it comes to child care, Mr. Speaker.

I named a number of . . . I was one that chose to stay home. I had a very good income. I chose to stay home. That meant we couldn't have a fancy holiday. We couldn't have a fifth wheel camper. But I don't regret any of those decisions at that time.

Mr. Speaker, other people make other decisions, but what is important is if I would have had my children today, I would have had more money in my pocket than I would have under the NDP. Because they taxed it, took it away from families, and they decided what was best.

Mr. Speaker, it is to the advantage of families if they can keep more of their money to make their own decisions.

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

Ms. Bowes: — Mr. Speaker, it's unbelievable how committed to mediocrity the Sask Party government is. Fully three-quarters of workers making less than \$25,000 don't have access to paid sick leave. It's not fair to ask low-wage workers, which are mostly women, many racialized, to stay home without pay when they're sick. And the workers without paid sick leave are the same ones the Sask Party makes a show of saying thanks to and slapping on the back.

[10:30]

Paid sick leave is crucial during a global health crisis, especially when people are going back to work and expanding their bubbles. You can't take the time off to see the doctor, get tested, and recover from illness when you can't afford to take time off work.

Later today I'm introducing a paid-leave private member's bill. Will the minister work with us to create a paid sick leave program that works for working people?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of SaskBuilds and Procurement.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety has answered a number of questions in this House on this topic, Mr. Speaker.

Last summer our government, along with all provinces across the country, negotiated a historic \$19 billion Safe Restart program, Mr. Speaker, that provides a billion dollars for paid sick days through the Canada recovery sickness benefit. Mr. Speaker, as of the middle of April, the federal government had over \$600 million left in that fund, Mr. Speaker. We think that there should be a national standard on this, Mr. Speaker. Our government continues to lobby the federal government on this, Mr. Speaker. We think that's the appropriate way to go.

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

Ms. Bowes: — Always hiding behind the federal government, Mr. Speaker. Paid sick leave isn't just for infectious disease. Paid sick leave allows workers dignity in accessing supports and recovery for stress, anxiety, addiction, and depression. Paid sick leave is a mental health strategy. Paid sick leave is harm reduction.

Paid sick leave is good for business too, Mr. Speaker. It is proven to decrease turnover and increase morale. When working people are healthy and happy, it's a boost to the economy and in turn people are more likely to spend money in their neighbourhoods.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it boils down to choices: this government's choice to support workers or not, and the choice workers need to make to stay home when they're sick. For once this session, will the Sask Party government take leadership and stop choosing to turn their back on working people?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of SaskBuilds and

Procurement.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, this government solidly supports working people in this province. Mr. Speaker, this government introduced special vaccination leave so people could leave work for three hours to get vaccinations. Mr. Speaker, again our province was front and centre in the negotiations with the other provinces to negotiate the Safe Restart program. As we said, we continue to lobby the federal government on that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as far as what's good for workers in the province, I think the announcement today — the lowest unemployment rate in the country — speaks volumes about workers in this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Greenhouse Gas Reduction and Renewable Energy

Ms. Ritchie: — We have so much potential in Saskatchewan to create good green jobs and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, but this government is choosing to do neither. And our province has some of the best renewable power resources in the country. Even the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce is calling on this government to seize this opportunity and create jobs while lowering emissions. And I quote, "In terms of opportunities, Saskatchewan is well poised for sustainable investment in renewable energy sources like wind, solar, and geothermal, given the province's largely unrealized potential in these areas."

We could be a renewable power leader, but after 14 years of inaction and climate denialism from this government, we've become laggards. Why won't the Saskatchewan Party support homeowners and businesses; expand wind, solar, and geothermal power in Saskatchewan; and create good jobs in our province?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Environment.

Hon. Mr. Kaeding: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually the province is on a good path towards increasing renewable energy. SaskPower, just the other day, actually increased the level that they were going to reduce emissions by 2030. I believe they went from 40 per cent to 50 per cent reduction, Mr. Speaker.

Within the last number of years we've actually developed quite the wind sector in the province, Mr. Speaker. We've certainly increased the focus on solar, but we've even moved into flare gas; flare gas moved to energy production, Mr. Speaker. We're supporting the geothermal industry. The biomass, Mr. Speaker, the Meadow Lake Tribal Council will be initiating a biomass project I believe coming online this summer, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we've even encouraged the cities. Regina and Saskatoon are working on quite an extensive waste-to-landfill gas conversion, Mr. Speaker. I think the province is on a very good path. I believe by 2030, Mr. Speaker, SaskPower estimates they'll be close to 50 per cent renewable energy.

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

Ms. Ritchie: — Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible] . . . failed to answer the question. It was directed towards supporting homeowners and businesses. But nowhere in this government's disdain for green jobs is it more clear than in their mean-spirited, regressive, backwards tax on electric vehicles. This \$150 tax serves no purpose other than to show loudly and proudly that this government isn't interested in taking climate change seriously.

We should be looking for ways to make energy-efficient choices more affordable, not less. And this mean-spirited and useless tax will be voted on in the Assembly later today. Will the Sask Party finally listen to reason, stop making life more expensive, and finally axe this pointless tax on electric vehicles?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Environment.

Hon. Mr. Kaeding: — Mr. Speaker, I believe we've talked about the role that we're going to have with the EV component in the budget, Mr. Speaker, and it's all to do with fairness. Everyone travels the roads in this province, including electric vehicles, so I think we've covered that.

But, Mr. Speaker, what we've also been focusing on is the role of small modular reactors. That's an area that we can see providing significant baseload energy production for the province from 2030 and beyond, Mr. Speaker. There's going to be a tremendous development in that area, Mr. Speaker. We've developed, SaskPower, SaskEnergy have a number of efficiency programs that they've initiated across their operations, Mr. Speaker, including a home renovation opportunity for low-income people, Mr. Speaker, that they have had significant subscription to.

I think the focus of this government has been spending an awful lot on decreasing emissions, Mr. Speaker, and improving resilience in this province, Mr. Speaker. I certainly want to recognize the role that agriculture continues to play in the province in storing greenhouse gases and supporting emissions reduction in this province.

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

Staffing in Long-Term Care Facilities

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, three weeks before budget day, three weeks, the Premier stood at the SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] convention and he told delegates from across the province, many from members opposite's ridings, that he would be following through on his promise to hire 300 more care aids in this budget, three weeks before budget day. What changed in those three weeks, Mr. Speaker?

The Premier broke that campaign promise, just as Brad Wall broke his promise in 2016 to invest 7.5 million to the front lines of long-term care. This government's approach to caring for the people who built this province is like a broken record, Mr. Speaker — report after report shelved; promise after promise broken.

If this pandemic has taught us anything, Mr. Speaker, it's that Saskatchewan seniors deserve better. Why is this government so

intent on sticking with the dangerous and deadly status quo?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Seniors.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a number of questions in that question from the member opposite.

We'll start with the continuing care aids, Mr. Speaker. In the election we committed to hiring 300 new continuing care aids in this province, Mr. Speaker. There was funding in this year's budget to hire the first 108 continuing care aids, Mr. Speaker, \$6 million to hire 90 CCAs [continuing care aid] in long-term care, and 18 continuing care aids to support rural home care across this province, which the member opposite was speaking about, Mr. Speaker. And we'll continue to add and build upon that as we are able to.

Mr. Speaker, we know this is an important area for this government. We'll continue to support rural health care through staffing and capital investment projects now and into the future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Love: — Mr. Speaker, this minister is left to trip over his own words and the words of the Premier. Dozens of seniors died in facilities that this government knew were dangerous facilities. This government ignored recommendations from independent officers of this legislature that could've helped keep seniors safe. And despite the rhetoric and the heartless boasting from this government, the fact remains that we have fewer care aids working in long-term care during a pandemic than we had five years ago.

Short-staffing is now the norm and it's getting worse. We're expecting the Ombudsman's latest report into Parkside outbreak in the coming months. Will this government actually act on the latest report? And will they use this opportunity to do a full autopsy on the deplorable state of long-term care in Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Seniors.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Mr. Speaker, we take this issue very seriously. The deaths that occurred at Parkside Extencicare are tragic and that is why I've asked the Ombudsman to do a very thorough investigation as to what happened there, Mr. Speaker. And we look forward to the results of that investigation, and her recommendations, so that we can make additional improvements to make sure that this does not happen again, Mr. Speaker.

In response to the member's other questions regarding recommendations and investigations, Mr. Speaker, I've said before, we've made a number of investments into this area. We've made some significant changes with regards to previous reports by auditors, by the provincial Ombudsman as well. The vast majority of those recommendations have been implemented, dating back to 2012, 2014. The 2015 Santa Maria investigation by the Ombudsman, Mr. Speaker, wherein that is the one investigation where 18 of the 19 recommendations have been implemented. And, Mr. Speaker, work carries on on that final recommendation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Enforcement of Public Health Measures

Ms. Sarauer: — Mr. Speaker, last week the Sask Party voted down my motion to introduce mandatory minimum fines of \$10,000 for the organizers of anti-mask, pro-COVID rallies here in Saskatchewan. The Sask Party had a chance to send a message to Saskatchewan people that these rallies are unacceptable and need to be met with serious consequences. They chose not to. In fact, they did the opposite.

There are more of these superspreader rallies planned for this weekend, led by Maxime Bernier and his cohort. And I know there are members of that cabinet, Mr. Speaker, who are big fans of mad Max and his policies. In fact, the Minister of Status of Women was the Co-Chair of his Saskatchewan leadership campaign and helped organize his leadership rallies.

What does the Minister of Justice have to say to the rally organizers who are flaunting the current fine structure, gathering to spread lies, and are putting us all at risk?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — [Inaudible] . . . Mr. Speaker, that we brought forward amendments to *The Emergency Planning Act*. She also knows, Mr. Speaker, that the charges that are being brought with respect to organizers are being brought under *The Public Health Act*. Any amendment that she would have brought to the emergencies Act, Mr. Speaker, wouldn't have any effect with respect to the charges that are currently being laid, Mr. Speaker.

We have all the confidence in the world, Mr. Speaker, in our police services, in our public health service workers to ensure the safety of residents in this province, Mr. Speaker. The police will continue to enforce the laws that they currently exist, Mr. Speaker. They understand the consequences, Mr. Speaker. They understand the link between the Criminal Code and with respect to *The Summary Offences Procedures Act*, Mr. Speaker. The police will continue to enforce this, Mr. Speaker.

We just implore people in Saskatchewan to comply with the public health orders, Mr. Speaker. Complying with the public health orders and going out and getting a vaccine, Mr. Speaker, is the road map to get through to the end of the pandemic.

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 603 — *The Saskatchewan Employment (Paid Sick Days) Amendment Act, 2021*

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

Ms. Bowes: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 603, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Paid Sick Days) Amendment Act*,

2021 be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member from Saskatoon University that Bill No. 603 be now introduced and read a first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Clerk: — First reading of this bill.

[10:45]

The Speaker: — When shall the bill be read a second time? I recognize the member from Saskatoon University.

Ms. Bowes: — At the next sitting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies.

Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies

Mr. Dennis: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies to report that it has considered certain estimates and to present the first report. I move:

That the first report of the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies be now concurred in.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Chair:

That the first report of the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies be now concurred in.

Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried. I recognize the Chair of the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies.

Mr. Dennis: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies to report Bill No. 32, *The Vapour Products Tax Act* with amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this bill be considered in Committee of the Whole on Bills? I recognize the member . . . or the minister. I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this bill and that the bill and its amendments be now read a third time.

The Speaker: — The minister has requested leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on Bill No. 32 and that the bill and its amendments be now read the third time. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — When shall the amendments be read a first time? I recognize the minister.

FIRST AND SECOND READINGS OF AMENDMENTS

Bill No. 32 — *The Vapour Products Tax Act*

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I move that the amendments be now read a first and second time.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the minister that the amendments be now read a first and second time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Clerk: — First and second readings of the amendments.

The Speaker: — The minister may proceed to move third reading.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 32 — *The Vapour Products Tax Act*

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I move that the bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the minister that Bill No. 32 be now read the third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Clerk: — Third reading of this bill.

The Speaker: — Third reading.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies.

Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies

Mr. Dennis: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies to report Bill No. 33, *The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2021* without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this bill be considered in the Committee of the Whole on Bills? I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this bill and that the bill be now read the third time.

The Speaker: — The minister has requested leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on Bill No. 33 and that the bill be now read the third time. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The minister may now proceed to move third reading.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 33 — *The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2021*

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I move that the bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the minister that Bill No. 33 be now read the third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Clerk: — Third reading of this bill.

The Speaker: — Third reading.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies.

Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies

Mr. Dennis: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies to report Bill No. 34, *The Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2021* without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this bill be considered in the Committee of the Whole on Bills? I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this bill and that the bill be now read the third time.

The Speaker: — The minister has requested leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on Bill No. 34 and that the bill be now read the third time. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The minister may now proceed to move third reading.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 34 — *The Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2021*

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I move that the bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the minister that Bill No. 34 be now read the third time and passed under its title.

Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: — No.

The Speaker: — On division.

Clerk: — Third reading of this bill.

The Speaker: — Third reading.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies.

Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies

Mr. Dennis: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies to report Bill No. 35, *The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2021* without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this bill be considered in Committee of the Whole on Bills?

I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this bill and that the bill be now read a third time.

The Speaker: — The minister has requested leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on Bill No. 35 and that

the bill be now read the third time. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The minister may proceed to move third reading.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 35 — *The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2021*

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I move that the bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the minister that Bill No. 35 be now read the third time and passed under its title.

Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Clerk: — Third reading of this bill.

The Speaker: — Third reading.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies.

Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies

Mr. Dennis: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies to report Bill No. 36, *The Provincial Sales Tax Amendment Act, 2021* without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this bill be considered in Committee of the Whole on Bills? I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this bill and that the bill be now read a third time.

The Speaker: — The minister has requested leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on Bill No. 36 and that the bill be now read the third time.

Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The minister may proceed to move third reading.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 36 — *The Provincial Sales Tax Amendment Act, 2021*

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I move that the bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the minister that Bill No. 36 be now read the third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Clerk: — Third reading of this bill.

The Speaker: — Third reading.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

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

Government Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to enter into debate today on what's quite an important topic that requires additional scrutiny across the province, and that is of course this government's COVID-19 response. And I look forward to moving a motion at the end of my remarks here.

There are a number of significant challenges that people across this province have faced over the past 14 months. It's hard to believe at this point that we are now 14 months into this pandemic. I feel like every time we start to gain a bit of hope, this virus comes back in new ways that continue to challenge us as a province.

And as such, this government's response to COVID-19 is of critical importance in terms of both the number of folks who have been infected, the hospitalization rates, our ability to effectively test and trace, and our ability to flatten the curve as we were talking about so much at the beginning of this pandemic. But I think in many ways, folks are just trying to make sure that we have the health capacity to deal with the COVID cases at this point in time.

We know that as we speak today, there are extensive health measures that have been prolonged, particularly in the Regina area, that this has had a significant impact on people's work and lives in the communities surrounding the area. And that hasn't spared us either, Madam Deputy Speaker. We as individuals in serving in this Assembly have spent weeks away from our loved ones in honour of doing this job. And I know that that's not

uncommon in many different workplaces across the province, but certainly it puts a fine point on some of the issues that we're talking about here today.

In a week's time I'll be returning back to my home community in Saskatoon where cases are on the rise in a really significant way, so I feel like we will be living *Groundhog Day*. I hope we won't be reliving what we've lived in Regina so far with ICU beds double-bunking, with cases out of control, the introduction of variants. It has been alarming, Madam Deputy Speaker, and we've had so many health professionals that have spoken out about this government's COVID response. And it shouldn't have to take hundreds of doctors across the province signing letters, urging action to see even small amounts of action from this government, Madam Deputy Speaker. Far too many people have lost loved ones because this Premier has let them down.

And people are looking for hope. I'm looking for hope. I want to be able to have a normal-ish summer of some sort. You know, I want to be able to hug my parents again or go inside their house. You know, we used to have weekly meals as a family with my brother and his family as well, and I feel like that's such a distant past, that I haven't seen my nephews and niece grow up this year, that it's had a tremendous impact on all of us. We'd like to be able to have hope. We'd like to be able to go back to normal.

And that's why we have called for targeted, stringent measures for periods of time. But this government has selective hearing and thinks that we're in favour of a prolonged lockdown, and that's absolutely not the case, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have called for nipping this in the bud, being preventative when see the modelling rise, reacting quickly rather than being slow about it. And the numbers are starting to come in. So those are some of the issues that I want to talk about in my remaining time here.

We know that vaccines offer some light, but they aren't the entire picture, Madam Deputy Speaker. And unfortunately that's all we've been hearing about from this government. Even when I ask the ministers in committee, what are you doing to tackle the pandemic? They only talk about vaccines, whereas, you know, all the infectious disease docs say we need to be controlling the pandemic at the same time. So you know, if you have epidemiologists and people who specialize in infectious disease, it almost makes sense to listen to these folks, Madam Deputy Speaker.

And we need to make sure that in addition to these vaccines, which . . . You know I am 100 per cent pro-vaccine, Madam Deputy Speaker — my arm is sore today to prove it — and am grateful for the opportunity to receive those vaccines. But this is only one part of the picture. And we need to make sure that in the meantime, we're still keeping people safe, because we're still seeing alarming numbers.

You know, we still have people that have passed away this week. We have younger people in our ICUs, which is meaning they're staying there longer. The variants are impacting Saskatchewan differently, and so there is a ton of concern about what our health capacity is moving forward. We have led the country in COVID-19 case rates. For most of 2021, we've had far too many lives lost, with over 500 people.

And we also have had a terrible job-recovery record. And you

know, this government is so proud of themselves today and patting themselves on the back. We're still 13,000 jobs down from when the pandemic started, Madam Deputy Speaker. This back patting is cold comfort for the individuals who are out of work today. And I know every member of this Assembly — if you did any door knocking during the election, if you have any sense of your constituents — you have heard about the hardships that people have faced during this pandemic. And we need to be working on making sure that people can get back to work so we can have a strong economic recovery as well.

[11:00]

But this government doesn't take responsibility for their lack of action to prevent a severe second and now third wave of COVID-19 in the province, and they haven't kept their promises. And this came up in question period today, that they think they can take the people of this province for granted. They think people can't do simple math — that 100 does not equal 300. It's a simple equation, Madam Deputy Speaker, and one that people are astonished to hear about when we chat with them. So I appreciate the fact that my colleague from Saskatoon Eastview continues to bring this up, because this is something that folks need to pay attention to.

This government promises the world when it comes to long-term care and then doesn't deliver it. And these are our family members, Madam Deputy Speaker, and every one of us who's had a family member in long-term care knows those workers are working as hard as they can in the conditions that they have. And it is the fault of the organization, the establishment, the Ministry of Health for not adequately funding these organizations, for not ensuring that we have minimum care standards in place, for not making sure that we're looking after the amount of hours that individuals get for care, for keeping people on wards by themselves when often it takes a two-person lift to get someone to the washroom. Where is the dignity, Madam Deputy Speaker?

And I know members of the government will talk about, oh, I hear that opposition blaming health care workers. This is absolutely 100 per cent not the case, Madam Deputy Speaker. In so many cases the health care workers are the ones who come forward to us to say, I can't effectively do my job according to my professional responsibilities because this government isn't adequately funding health care and long-term care in the province.

And I have heard so many of these stories from individuals and I've seen it with my own eyes, Madam Deputy Speaker, with my grandfather when he was in long-term care. It's sad. It's not right. And it's leading people to a situation where they feel like they don't want to go into long-term care. Everyone I talk to now is like, well it sounds . . . things are really bad there. I don't . . . I want to avoid having to do that at all costs. And we know we have an aging population. We need to be able to look after our seniors. They deserve some dignity and it is absolutely disheartening, gut-wrenching that this is a broken promise this year. I cannot believe it, but I also can, Madam Deputy Speaker.

They haven't taken action on long-term care. This short-staffing is not something that came up recently. We have been raising alarm bells for years. The member from Saskatoon Eastview has been highlighting some reports about the lack of transparency

that exists in long-term care in terms of what the actual . . . whether they're meeting guidelines, and the fact that those guidelines are just guidelines themselves and they need to be standards.

And it's not like this was a surprise, Madam Deputy Speaker, when you look at what was happening in Saskatchewan over the summer versus what was happening in other provinces. And we saw other provinces being overwhelmed in long-term care with COVID, having to call in the military for support. That's when this government should have been staffing up in long-term care, but instead they sat on their hands.

And the proof is coming out, Madam Deputy Speaker. I referred to previously an article that was called, and I'm quoting here, "Your money or your life? Scott Moe's tragic miscalculation." This was written by a health policy consultant formerly based in Saskatchewan, an epidemiologist and professor at the University of Saskatchewan, and a public health and epidemiology professor at the University of Saskatchewan. Sounds like people who know what they're talking about, Madam Deputy Speaker.

And it highlighted the fact that the Premier has rejected measures that keep infection rates low and that as a result . . . And we've seen this work in other jurisdictions, Madam Deputy Speaker. To him it's a trade-off — the more you lock down, the greater the economic damage. But that's not what we're seeing in the results, Madam Deputy Speaker. Places that delayed restrictions saw case numbers climb, resulting in more deaths. Alarming numbers forced these places to impose longer and more stringent lockdowns. Does this sound familiar, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Well it's exactly what's happening here and Saskatchewan is profiled in this article as a case study. And I hear someone talking about wanting to see it. Google it right now, "Your money or your life." It's very easy to find.

And that's exactly what we have ended up with, Madam Deputy Speaker, a prolonged, slow-motion lockdown. And it is completely factually incorrect that this is what we wanted. And I just want to make sure that that's on the record because this is just petty politics coming from this government in terms of how they are characterizing our entrance into this conversation.

Part of the article also talks about the fact that the Premier has miscalculated his ability to influence the economy, that just because we have bars and restaurants open, doesn't mean people will go to those bars and restaurants. Because we're in a worst-of-both-worlds situation, Madam Deputy Speaker, people have been told to stay home while businesses have been told to stay open.

And the member for Regina University has been on the record repeatedly on the fact that businesses are struggling across this province. I have many businesses as well that have been in touch with myself directly in my constituency that are struggling, that want better, that deserve better from this government, Madam Deputy Speaker. And they are continuing to spew their rhetoric, Madam Deputy Speaker. What a surprise. What a surprise.

Our ICUs are over capacity. We have double-bunking, unprecedented double-bunking happening in our ICUs, but the Premier and the Health minister won't go visit those ICUs, won't

see it first-hand. And you have to ask why, Madam Deputy Speaker. Why won't they go see it first-hand? Because this is happening on their hands, Madam Deputy Speaker.

And then there's the chaotic vaccine rollout. I'm really disappointed I'm running out of time here. Chaotic, so chaotic. We have heard, Madam Deputy Speaker, so many concerns about this government's inability to follow the national guidelines. When it came to the rollout, they had health care workers included, then they took them out, Madam Deputy Speaker. We had to point out the fact that non-SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] health care workers weren't included. They didn't know, Madam Deputy Speaker. After we pointed it out they were like, oh yes, I guess those people are important.

This has been nothing but chaos, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is a . . . Well and I will forward the concerns that we're hearing from our office. And that Minister of Health has seen all of these concerns. I make sure that they're all directed to his office. So this isn't a surprise. I don't know why people are being so sensitive about this, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I'm running out of time, so I have to move the motion, Madam Deputy Speaker. But I do hope we'll have some folks talking about their plan for the way forward here.

I will move the following motion:

That the Assembly condemns the government for its failure to control COVID-19, which has resulted in hundreds of deaths and significant economic hardship for Saskatchewan people.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Saskatoon Fairview:

That the Assembly condemns the government for its failure to control COVID-19, which has resulted in hundreds of deaths and significant economic hardship for Saskatchewan people.

Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member from Saskatoon Riversdale.

Mr. Friesen: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am proud to rise today and speak to this. Let me start by saying my sincere condolences to all the families who have lost someone to this terrible virus. I have personally lost a friend and car buddy who battled the virus and lost.

Madam Deputy Speaker, pandemic planning started way before we saw our first case of COVID-19 in Saskatchewan. The government started planning early, securing PPE [personal protective equipment], ventilators, and other necessary equipment. This has given us the fortune to help India now with 100 ventilators. This government has taken a balanced and measured approach to get through this pandemic. This means watching our hospitalization and ICU numbers while maintaining our commitment to small business in this province.

We hear often from the members of the opposition, in particular the member from Regina University, that we do not support small business, and restaurants would have preferred a shutdown or a circuit breaker. I find this interesting, as one of the things I like to do wherever I go is feel the pulse of the people around. I went last night to get some takeout from a local restaurant, and the owner told me the business supports have helped immensely and they were very easy to access. He went on to say how thankful he is that the government, even though at a lower capacity, has allowed him to operate for the majority of the last 14 months. And this I have heard time and time again.

If we don't support small business, I wonder the answer to this question: why is Cheetah Resources planning a \$5 million rare earth extraction plant? Why is North American Helium Inc., with Canada's largest helium purification facility, spending \$32 million here? Why is Viterra, with its two and a half million metric ton canola crush facility spending their money here? Why is Cargill, a canola crush facility, spending over \$350 million, again here in our province? These are just a few of the many great companies putting their money here in this province. We have all had to make some tough decisions along the way, but we do care about Saskatchewan business and it shows.

And we continue with some supports for our Saskatchewan businesses. To name just a few: the small-business tax rate reduction, at a cost of over \$64 million in foregone tax revenue, reducing the rate of tax from 2 per cent to zero until July of 2022 and 1 per cent until July of 2023. We have introduced a small-business emergency payment program which has provided over \$66 million in financial support to more than 6,400 businesses as of April 26th. This is a program that many other provinces modelled their programs and it's got a very streamlined process. We have set in place a program to keep as many businesses running as possible, safely, while watching the cases and most importantly, hospitalization. I cannot speak for the opposition, but I for one want my small businesses, restaurants, to be open in this province.

Let us remember, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a global pandemic, not just in Saskatchewan. For the members opposite to say that we are to blame for all the deaths in this province is so disappointing. We have done what we can and no plan is perfect. They have mentioned on several occasions that we took the summer off and did or do not have a plan. And this completely undermines the work and is insulting to our health workers, our chief medical health officer, health ministries, and all in government involved in guiding us through this, and certainly can't forget about our own member from Prince Albert Northcote who also worked tirelessly on this.

Any death is a tragedy, Madam Deputy Speaker, which is why our best-in-the-province vaccine rollout focused on our extremely vulnerable — 84 per cent of our most vulnerable and 96 per cent of our deaths are in the age 40-plus category. Our age-based approach was the right way to roll out our plan, and this is based on science, not on he-said-she-said.

What was very reassuring is that Dr. Shahab has a wealth of knowledge and experience in this field, and we were and are so very fortunate to have his guidance to help us through this. Madam Deputy Speaker, I could speak for 10 minutes alone on Dr. Shahab and his accomplishments. He has an excellent record

on vaccine rollouts. In the past, with the Health ministry and the SHA, he has rolled out the best vaccination plan in the country. We are immensely proud of the job Saskatchewan Health Authority and all our front-line workers, under the guidance of the chief medical health officer and our Health ministries in their efforts to move this out quicker than we could even get the vaccines from the federal government.

[11:15]

Of course the opposition does not want to talk about the vaccine rollout, except for apparently calling it chaotic when we're number one in the country. Other countries have shown that the road out of this pandemic runs through a vaccination clinic, and that is why when I was given my chance, Madam Deputy Speaker, I did. I did my part and I stuck it to COVID.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I have said in this House before, I owned an automotive business in Saskatoon for over 25 years. Now I was not the type of business owner that would micromanage what my technicians would do. It's a counterproductive way of operating. If I hired the wrong person, I would take an action on that end. This led to great staff, one who drove . . . One of my staff drove from Prince Albert to Saskatoon every day. I considered my employees as associates and representatives.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have 27 school divisions in this province, of which the community elects school board trustees. These are the ones that work tirelessly and make sure the facilities are in good working order and programs are in place to make sure the schools run smoothly and safely. So why, Madam Deputy Speaker, would the opposition want us to mandate what all the provincial schools do? Does that mean they don't want school boards? I do believe it's not in the place of government to micromanage. Twenty-seven school divisions, Madam Deputy Speaker, all with different needs.

I would like to offer my personal thank you to all the school board representatives, teachers, and all the staff for the great job they have done, even more so over the last 14 months, to keep our kids safe. And for the vast majority of the time over 80 per cent were in school learning, and now we're at the rate of 95 per cent.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to talk about the budget in relation to this pandemic, another thing the opposition does not like to talk about and did not support. As a fiscal conservative, I do not like deficit budgets. However, we have seen nothing like this since World War II. I'm proud of how our budget in 2021-2022 broadly supported this province with over 1.5 billion in COVID relief funding, following nearly 2 billion in 2020-2021, and another 1.3 billion planned over the next two years to help recover this province's economy.

This year alone we have announced nearly \$190 million in educational capital, built 16 new schools, and renovated five existing schools, instead of the NDP's dismal record of closing 176 schools. It makes a person wonder, did the former NDP government not feel our children worth investing in?

I'm so happy we've been able to roll out our road map to recovery when our neighbours next door who, I may add, have and had lockdowns and no sight of getting out of this. The Leader of the

Opposition has got one thing right: the fact that our province needs leadership. I'm proud to be a part of a team with great leadership leading the nation in the vaccine rollout, leading with small-business support packages, and leading with our road map to recovery. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. You know, it is my pleasure to enter into the 75-minute debate, and certainly this discussion is an important one, you know, as we've hit a stark number of 500 people dead as the result of COVID-19. You know, I do caution the members opposite to check the boasting that goes on and keep that number in mind. Five hundred people have died. Thousands of people are left to grieve and reflect on what happened, and it is becoming on us as an opposition to interrogate what led to those deaths.

Now with the motion here before us from my colleague, you know, certainly it is a huge concern to us, and we believe that this government has failed to control the COVID-19 pandemic. And I believe that the evidence that we have to present is thorough. It's exhaustive. And while I hear really discouraging remarks from the other side claiming that they haven't seen the evidence, I'm left to wonder about why maybe they haven't taken the time to examine that evidence.

I thought many times preparing for this that perhaps I would just stand here and read the news. I could just read the news. I could perhaps read the three-part series from the *Leader-Post* on the failures in long-term care, just to make sure that they heard it. I thought about reading it verbatim to this Assembly. I even thought about reading the minister's own words verbatim from estimates, just directly what he had to say and what they did and did not do to control this pandemic. I thought about reading pieces from international news and national news, looking at the failures in Saskatchewan, just to make sure the members opposite could not say that they were not aware. But to hear them heckling in here right now, Madam Deputy Speaker, to say they haven't seen that evidence, it is mind-boggling. But I simply cannot accept that being unaware of the evidence is fitting for the people who sit in this Assembly.

So with that, you know, many of my comments will focus on my critic areas today, you know, and I want to put it on the record that it is my concern for seniors that also translates to those who work with our seniors in communal living settings. Their needs and their experiences are intertwined. I've spoken with many stakeholders, many front-line senior staff in our province, you know, the folks who care for our parents, our grandparents, our relatives, our loved ones, our community members. And they are feeling let down by this government. Our parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, and teachers, many of them are seniors now. They've been impacted by COVID-19 perhaps more than anyone else as we look at the impact that this virus has on older adults in Saskatchewan and all places.

But I want to start just with a little bit of a timeline. And I want to go through this timeline just to phrase, for all members here, what the posture of this government was in addressing the challenges of COVID. So let's look quickly back at March 10th of last year. The Leader of the Opposition rose out of concern for

the coming pandemic, which was most certainly coming here. And we all know that the now Deputy Premier decided to take that opportunity to engage in name-calling and fearmongering. And I don't need to repeat the ridiculous approach that she opted for, but I want to say that it sent a clear message to the people of Saskatchewan that this government would not be taking the global pandemic seriously.

Nearly a week later on March 16th, with seven cases in the province, two confirmed and five presumptive, the Premier went with a live press event and he told everyone the schools would be closing down. That was the right thing to do at that time. But I think perhaps for fear of not looking strong or maybe admitting that he needed time to figure out the details, the Premier went on to tell students that they had passed, the year was over, and they could go home.

And I can tell you the chaos that that caused in schools was unbelievable. Teachers were literally grabbing students out of the hallway. My colleagues in my school, grabbing students out of . . . But I'll be clear: the message that the year is over, everyone can go home, everyone has passed . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay. I already mentioned that. Thank you for clarifying, Minister. I just said it was the right thing to do, but the messaging was erratic. It was reactionary. I can tell you that teachers were grabbing students, saying he doesn't know. And students were saying, but that's the Premier. Isn't he right? And teachers would have to say no, he doesn't know. We'll figure this out.

Within two weeks teachers pivoted. Within two weeks learning resumed. We needed time to figure it out. And if the Premier had just said we need to hit pause and figure this out, that messaging would have relieved the stress and strain for students, teachers, and parents. Schools pivoted. Teachers did what we do. We got back to work and we figured it out. The Government of Saskatchewan can take no credit for the success, as teachers and students were left high and dry by a Premier who overreacted and he showed how little he understands realities in schools.

Now moving on throughout the spring and into the summer, Madam Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan watched as the first wave of the COVID pandemic spread throughout places around the globe and other places in Canada. We saw exactly what would happen when COVID was allowed to spread uncontrolled, and we had every warning that one could ask for. Saskatchewan would eventually have to deal with the outbreaks that were seen in Ontario and Quebec, and we had time to prepare. Nowhere is this more true than when we look at what happened and what didn't happen in communal living settings for seniors. We had the evidence we needed, but no action was taken.

Further to that point, this government had warning signs going back over seven years — seven years of warning signs of risk to infection control in long-term care. There literally couldn't be any more red, big, flashing warning signs available to this government to take action. I'll go through them again for the sake of the record: CEO tour reports, Ombudsman reports, auditor recommendations highlighting facility problems, aids recommending . . . Ventilation, in a pandemic where the virus is airborne, wasn't addressed. I mean it's just . . . It's mind-boggling. We have four seniors in a room with a shower curtain as a bathroom door. We have inhumane living conditions. We have no tracking of things like falls, serious incidents,

bedsores. Like, the conditions are nothing for this government to boast about.

And then of course you have short-staffing, and these reports go back for seven years. This government cannot claim that they didn't know. Their own reporting proves it. Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, I spoke with stakeholders. I spoke with workers. I've heard the realities of their job. And then I heard this minister say in committee, when asked about what he did to staff up long-term care, he said that he employed temperature checks, PPE, and cohorting. Let's be very clear. None of those things will improve the level of care for seniors.

Those are all good decisions. I don't have a problem with any of those. Those are excellent decisions, but those decisions take away hours of care for seniors. It takes extra time to follow proper PPE protocol. Cohorting is a good idea, but it actually limits the amount of work hours that CCAs can provide. And then of course the temperature checks. These are all things that take time in a facility. And the end result is that the care provided to seniors — those who remained healthy and those who unfortunately got sick, and many of them died — was not provided because this government did nothing to staff up long-term care.

For us to find out now that there are fewer continuing care aids working during a pandemic than were there five years ago is something that should anger every citizen of this province. And then they'll find out that this promise of 300 continuing care aids was one that is highly questionable. If this government ever, at any point, thought that that was a realistic thing that they could follow through on, it's a major question because they haven't done any of the things needed to actually follow through on that. No work was done with Advanced Education. No work was done to work with their partners in health care with the health care union. None of these discussions happened to actually follow through on that.

So to find out that the Premier got up days before the budget was delivered and made that promise again is something that seriously reduces any trust in the competency of this government, because they like to promote these things that they haven't done any of the groundwork to actually change. I don't know how to explain that. We've seen the spin. We've seen the tripping over his words from this minister, from the Health minister, from the Premier. And there's no way to explain why none of these steps were taken, steps that in a very real way would have protected seniors, kept them safe, and kept more of them alive.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have seen the failures of this government to protect seniors in long-term care, and I believe that their COVID response has failed. Thank you.

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

Mr. Goudy: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I love debate actually. I have a dream one day that we're going to see debate. I would love to be able to sit down with my wife and kids, make some popcorn, turn on the TV, and see experts on both sides of an issue just hash it out. I just think that would be . . . I was on the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association] for years and I asked for debate. We always just seem to hear one

side of a story, and you know, it's good to hear both sides.

[11:30]

But you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I saw the motion yesterday or the day before. It got sent to my phone and it got sent from our Whip and I thought he was joking actually. I thought ah, that's not the debate topic. And as I'd been preparing, I honestly hoped at the end of the day that when it came out, it wouldn't quite be this because I . . . You know, there's debate and there's a fight. But I read this motion, and it seems like it's more of a fighting motion than a debate. It says, I'm going to move that the Assembly condemn the government for its failures on two sides: one side we've caused the deaths of people, and the other side we haven't allowed the economy to thrive. It's been a tough go.

So you know, when I looked at that I thought, how are we going to debate this? This isn't . . . You know, I've done a lot of marriage counselling, and this is kind of one of those where it's not, you know, dinner and a movie or, you know, flowers to your wife to make up for this. This is a big deal. Like, wow. This is, we got to get to know each other again. We got to spend some time. We got to understand where the other person's coming from.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, I've seen a lot of marriages descend into trouble, and you know, no kid wants to see his mom and dad fight. And I honestly don't think in this province that any citizen wants to see their government and the opposition actually just fight. They want to see us debate, healthy debate. We can't start from this premise that we're going to condemn the other group. We have to come at it and say, we got to work together. We got to discuss two sides of an issue.

So you know, I'm naive, Madam Deputy Speaker, but not completely naive. And you know, I'm a bit of a matchmaker. I like to see a good romance. I was out with my daughter and her boyfriend not so long ago, they were biking. I'm not one of these dads who likes to threaten the guy. I kind of like this young man. And we were out biking and I took a picture of the two of them. I just thought, boy that's just . . . I love to see that. So I'm not expecting us to, you know, have some kind of romance, but at least to get along. You know, like maybe a peacemaker; blessed are the peacemakers.

You know, I've never seen somebody in my life that was . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, it's a lot tougher I'm sure being in opposition. But you know, blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed means, oh how happy. And, you know, if we just are all about fighting, it's hard to be happy. But if you're about, you know, trying to find some common ground, it's a lot easier to be a little more happy and bright. So I think the citizens of this province are looking for healthy debate to work together through this.

You know, the member from Arm River was talking about it: this is like a storm, And the member from Moose Jaw North said, you know, this storm was predicted and the numbers that we have there . . . He showed me the numbers, 3,075 to 8,350. Those were the numbers that we were looking at for deaths going into this storm.

You know, when I was young, I used to watch the hurricanes come through. They gave them all names, Hurricane Katrina and all the rest. They have these smart guys who can put out those, you know, we've all seen them on TV, the whirling thing. And everybody's praying and hoping that that doesn't touch down on land. But they, across the East coast, I've got some friends live over there and they're kind of always prepared. They know what to expect. This storm's coming and here's what to expect.

We have a Health minister sitting over here and a Rural Health minister that this storm that nobody else could say, hey guys, this is what's coming; this is what you can expect from last year. This was a massive deal for the whole world. So to start talking about condemning, that's a toughie. You know, like, we need to pull together to get through this.

To introduce the opposition to the government a little bit, you know, if we're going to be peacemaking, just to get to know . . . Like when I would counsel couples, you know, sometimes you just got to know where the other person's coming from. And just we're a bit of a process-driven group. And so we have a kind of a process-driven group and we like to ask the experts to guide us through the storm . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay, so, peacemaker.

So this side of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, we like to follow process. So we had a man in place . . . I've looked at Dr. Shahab's credentials and they're as long as my arm. So when the pandemic first hit, we looked to the experts. We employed Dr. Shahab for a reason. Because our Premier, I haven't seen him taking the credit for the good things. He's always been pointing to our staff, to the people who are serving the citizens of Saskatchewan. He's been pointing to the people of the province as they've been the ones who've carried us through this pandemic, and they're the ones that are going to get us to the end — the school boards, the SHA, those front-line workers. You know, Madam Deputy Speaker, we've been working together with those experts. We've been following their advice.

You know, I'm pretty broken-hearted when I hear the number 500 lives that were lost, and I'm also broken-hearted when I see businesses closing down. You know, we've tried to be balanced and measured in all that we do.

I love to build houses, and we have a building inspector, Herb Marshall, back in Melfort. And that guy, he keeps us balanced and measured as we put up those homes. Like a lot of guys don't like him because he's pretty sticky. He'll come and he'll shine his flashlight on your insulation and see if there's any . . . He's trying to make sure that we follow best practices as we move through this. Madam Deputy Speaker, what's the best practice to navigate a pandemic? We don't know yet. But we're trying to listen to the experts. We just hope that there's not a whole bunch of finger pointing and blaming, fighting. You know, you wonder, could two sides that disagree work together? I really do believe that we can.

Madam Deputy Speaker, years ago my father and I went to Brazil, and we ran some meetings which never anyone would have dreamed would have happened. And those meetings were between all the ag leaders of the United States and their media people and the Brazilian ag leaders and their media people talking about working together. If there's two ag groups that were

kind of at odds, it was the Brazilian farmers and the American farmers. The American farmers, they had subsidies and wealth and the American people behind them. The Brazilians had low-cost production, all sorts of acres to develop. And you know why we took them all together and we had that peace meeting in Brazil? It was because we as the Canadians were getting beat up in the middle.

I had a PowerPoint slide, and on the one boxer's shorts, it showed the American flag and everything, and the other one was the Brazilian. And those two boxers were just fine. They were ready to fight. But the referee was Canadian boxers, and he was black-eyed and bloodied. Because these two were fighting, the Canadians . . . low-cost production for the Brazilians, subsidies in the States, and the Canadian farmers, Australia, everybody else was getting beat up in the middle.

So you say if you guys could just get along everything would go so much better. And I would say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that both sides of this House need to pull through this storm, because we don't know what's going on. We'll be able to look in the end and say what were the best practices, compare the provinces. I'm glad to be in Saskatchewan. I'm very proud of what our Premier's done. Like, he's got this. Where are we headed?

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to close with a bit of a poem maybe for both sides. You talked about taking both sides. But a fellow said:

I watched them tearing a building down,
A gang of men in a busy town.
With a ho-heave-ho and a lusty yell,
They swung a beam, and the side wall fell.
So I asked the foreman: "Are these men skilled
Skilled as men that you'd hire to build?"
He scoffed and said: "Oh no, indeed!
Common labour is all I need.
My men can tear down in a day or two
What's taken builders years to do."
So I asked myself as I went my way,
Which of these two roles have I tried to play?
Am I a builder who takes great care,
Who measures life with a rule and a square?
Or am I wrecker, who walks the town
Content with the job of tearing down?

So I won't be voting for the motion, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise here today and enter into the 75-minute debate. It's my first time and I've been sitting and watching, and I have been looking forward to it. I would like to thank the members who have spoken before me for their comments and their contributions to the discussion this far.

And I think, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to begin by, you know, acknowledging the unprecedented and historic times that we are living in and expressing my respect to all of those who are working as hard and as thoughtfully as they can to ensure that we steer through these times and emerge on the other side.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think a lot of the frustration that you're hearing today, and some of the frustration that the member from Melfort alluded to, is frustration that this government has not been open to feedback, has not been open to advice, has not been open to the lived experience, and has only changed course when voices have swelled to a crescendo.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, I've seen this pandemic from a couple of different angles. You know, certainly I sit here in my role as a legislator. I went through this pandemic as a pregnant person which was certainly a unique experience. At the start of this pandemic, I was still sitting as a school board trustee and as vice-president of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, privy to some of that early, early scramble to figure out how the education sector was going to adapt in the face of this unprecedented pandemic. And it has been an incredibly, incredibly unique experience.

And I'd like to maybe to touch on some of those areas as well as of course working as a small-business owner, as a front-line worker through the majority of the pandemic up until this fall. And you know, I still go in a couple days a week when I can, seeing some of the members opposite in there and I thank them for their custom . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . To the member from Kindersley, I will name and shame them later.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, you know, as a new MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly], one of the things that has been interesting to learn is the ropes of advocacy through the pandemic. You know, we saw today a lot of heat and a lot of fire and I think some incredibly, incredibly thoughtless accusations from the members opposite that in bringing forward stories of people in this province we're trying to politicize their tragedies.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, to yourself and all the members in this House, as a new person in opposition, here's how I try and run my advocacy when people reach out to me. Now people aren't reaching out to me as their first point of contact. You know, somebody with a struggle isn't going, you know, I'm going to reach out to the member for Regina University as the first place I look for help. These people reach out to me after they have tried time and time and time again to get through to a member of the government — whether they're going through ministries, whether they're going through their own MLA — and they have been unsuccessful.

It is only after they have exhausted those attempts at advocacy do they reach out or they're frustrated enough, because members of this House know, excluding those of us here, the majority of people in Saskatchewan are not deep, fierce, diehard partisans. The people of Saskatchewan are not looking to play politics with their challenges and their opportunities.

But after somebody has reached out time and time again through the Ministry of Health, for example, and heard nothing, and they have reached out directly to the minister's office and they have heard nothing, then they go to the opposition. And then once we receive this feedback . . . I'll speak of a constituent of mine, Bruce. Bruce is a heart transplant recipient. He's a handyman. He's a father. He's a husband. He is salt of the earth. And guess what? Bruce did not vote for me in 2016.

But going through some of his challenges that he went as a heart

transplant patient, he reached out to me and said, I actually voted for you in 2020 and I'm still having these challenges, but now as it relates to vaccinations. I've been going time and time again to the Health ministry. I've been calling. I've been asking public health. I'm worried about when I can get my second dose because there is research that indicates the spacing of vaccines for transplant patients matters significantly more than it does for the average person.

And Bruce and his wife spent weeks . . . I mean the Minister for Health can heckle a heart transplant patient if he wants. He's on a roll this week. So I mean if you want to continue, I'll read your comments into the record.

So Bruce struggled to get any help. Bruce reaches out to me. And what do I do? I send a letter to the Minister of Health. I don't raise this in the House. I don't call up the media to try and get attention to this, to try and somehow get my name in the press. And what do I receive but no answer to the question that I am not asking on behalf of myself, I'm asking on behalf of the constituent — a constituent who is worrying that they have made it through an incredibly challenging health crisis, and they are getting no response on how they can keep themselves safe.

[11:45]

And so this is what advocacy looks like in opposition. To the members who have never had the opportunity to sit here, I hope you do one day. But it is not, it is not about trying to score cheap political points off people's tragedies.

Madam Deputy Speaker, another area I've tried to advocate for is around prenatal care and what it's like being a pregnant person going through this pandemic. This was especially challenging for me. You guys have all seen my baby. We know she came out of it okay. But during my pregnancy I had some really scary moments. We had some really scary moments where we did not think she was going to be okay, and where we had received some concerning test results that what was going on with her might not be compatible with life. And I could not get consistent information from the Ministry of Health as to whether I could have my partner accompany me to those appointments.

And while it worked out, and I have a healthy and happy baby, just the emotional toll of trying to go through those appointments, knowing that I might have to sit there and receive tragic news and then walk out to the car where my husband was sitting and share it with him because there was inconsistent information being provided to specialists and clinics across the province, was incredibly, incredibly frustrating.

We have seen from this government just inaction. They're not moving quickly enough on things like vaccinating midwives, vaccinating people who worked in mom and baby, and labour and delivery. And I know when I was in there delivering — and I wrote to the Minister of Health on this and he did respond, so I thank him for that — there were doors taped off because there were COVID positive patients in there, and folks working in those wings did not have their vaccinations. And I know there have been challenges with vaccines, and I appreciate that there are those . . . that are out of this government's control. But there are things that are in this government's control, and it is my deep frustration that it is on those things that they can control that they

show a full unwillingness to listen and to act until it has built to that crescendo.

You know, we've seen this again . . . I've seen this in education in the early days of COVID, sitting on calls with boards across the province, with directors of education, with partners from the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation] and the Ministry of Education, where boards were begging for leadership. Not, as the member from Riversdale articulated, for somebody else to do their jobs for them, but because they were receiving inconsistent information from one public health official to the other, which was then again inconsistent with what they were hearing from the provincial ministry. You know, forcing school boards to spend dollars prior to the end of the calendar year only to, you know, have demands that somehow they shell out more for PPE, that is playing politics with the pandemic. That is playing politics with budgets and bottom lines.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, you know, as somebody working front line of a small business during a lot of this pandemic, for those members who've never worked in a small business, it's a lot like door knocking. You know, folks come in; you chat with them. They share part of their day with you and you learn a little bit more about your community. It is an incredible privilege to be able to do that and it's clear why they call it retail politics.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, Main Street, Saskatchewan is still struggling. And it does not give me joy to stand up and raise this every day. I want good things for this province. I want our economy to recover. I want the economy of households and the kitchen table to be strong, but right now it is not. And it is incumbent on us to do our best to advocate for the people of this province who are unsuccessful in getting through to this government. And I will continue to stand day in and day out and do my job as I'm elected to do.

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

Ms. A. Ross: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a privilege to enter into this debate today regarding the Government of Saskatchewan's COVID-19 response plan. COVID-19 is a worldwide pandemic. It's a phenomena to most of us. You know, few of us have ever experienced anything like this. My mom and dad were kids in World War II. So most of us here today have never experienced this. We watched systems around the world being . . . health care systems being crippled, and many have lost their lives to COVID-19.

Tragically, we have lost people in our province too to COVID-19. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, all deaths are tragic, and I offer my sincere condolences to those families and their friends who have lost loved ones to COVID-19.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I come from a background in health, I stand here today to clarify and address some of the statements from members opposite and from the Leader of the Opposition that our government had no plan to the response for COVID-19. Madam Deputy Speaker, I was part of that planning. Friends, colleagues, family members, members of this House, members of our communities were all parts of this . . . worked on this response. I've heard, many multiple times in this House, accusations that our government had no plan. And frankly, that's

a fallacy and an insult. It's an insult to me and to those people who have worked tirelessly in the planning — evenings, nights, weekends spent away from families while pandemic plans were being worked on — people at all levels.

The safety of our families, our friends, our community, and the people of this province were at risk, and we knew we were responsible to be coming up with a plan to address this. Madam Deputy Speaker, our government has provided governance and targeted funding for a comprehensive COVID-19 response. Funds were provided for procurement of equipment and testing and contact tracing and lab capacity to support long-term care and to plan our vaccine rollout. Planning was integral though to the fulfillments to requirements of this funding. You don't just get funding and all of a sudden have things.

Early in 2020, Madam Deputy Speaker, long before we had any cases of COVID-19, along with the Ministry of Health, SHA, strategies, update sessions were occurring on a daily basis. Information was being shared top-down, ground-up to ensure consistency. Medical health officers, representatives from departments in Health, public health, representatives from First Nations communities were all invited to these sessions to ensure priorities were being identified. Staff were being kept up-to-date on websites that were constantly needing updates as more information about this new phenomena, this COVID-19, was becoming available.

Madam Deputy Speaker, modelling based on the known science of the time, reports we were hearing from other countries, and the continuation of travel, international travel to Canada, we knew made planning for this a priority. And we had to determine measures that would be needed in the event we needed to preserve our health care system.

Fluid, comprehensive surge-capacity plans were developed for acute care hospitals and ICUs in this province. Prioritization strategies were developed for surgeries and other non-essential services. All space was re-evaluated and alternative plans for additional ICU space was found. Additional equipment was purchased. Plans for housing COVID-19-positive patients were put in place, again fluid and changed multiple times to accommodate the needs of the units and patients.

Standards and restrictions around visitations were implemented, and these weren't always popular but they were very necessary during these times. Field hospitals were planned, equipment ordered. We needed to be ready if our health care system faced the situations we were already witnessing at that time in Europe.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if this plan would have occurred in 2007, we would have faced a very challenging time in this province because between 2001 and 2006, the previous government lost 450 nurses and 173 doctors and closed 52 hospitals, and also had the longest surgical wait times in Canada. Since the 2011 election . . . sorry, 2007 election, our government has recruited 900 doctors and over 400 nurses and doubled investments in hospitals for our province.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the need to set up a coordinated provincial labour pool and cohorting system to support long-term care was recognized very early. Discussions and negotiations with the five health care unions in our province resulted in an

agreement with all five unions for the implementation of a labour pool to accommodate the movement of staff to where they were needed and where they were suited to work, and the implementation of cohorting to protect the most vulnerable in long-term care.

Links were established with communities to keep them up to date, to answer their questions, to help them with their disaster planning. Protocols, work standards, training for test centres needed to be organized. Testing site locations needed to be procured, staffing arranged, staff trained. There was so much work that was happening at this time, it was all-consuming, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Community service prioritization plans were implemented to allow community staff to be deployed if necessary. Support was provided for people from northern and rural areas who would not be able to isolate in their homes. Contracts and then negotiations needed to be struck with local hotels so the people would be safe and be comfortable. Long-term care pandemic plans were finalized after hours upon hours of planning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Saskatchewan is privileged to have Dr. Shahab as our provincial chief medical health officer. He is highly qualified and credentialed in this area. He has supported us with our vaccine delivery plan that was designed to save lives and stop the spread of COVID-19. Saskatchewan's COVID-19 plan is built on the foundation that age is the major risk for a negative outcome from COVID-19, and we have been very successful. We are the best in Canada, Madam Deputy Speaker, with our vaccine rollout plan.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have only been able to capture a glimpse of the amazing work that has been done by all of the people in government, the SHA, and the people of Saskatchewan, to keep all the people in Saskatchewan safe — our families, our friends — everyone safe.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not be supporting the motion by the member opposite, but I will be supporting the tremendous work and dedication being done by the people of Saskatchewan. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — The 65-minute period has expired. The 10-minute period, question and answer, will begin. I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Mr. Meyers: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Yesterday, the member from Saskatoon Fairview said that our health care workers, “. . . need to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time.” Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, we find this very disrespectful to our health care workers, one who is sitting right next to me here, who've created a plan and worked tirelessly each day to ensure the plan stays in place to protect themselves, like wearing a mask at all times in hospitals, no matter where they are or their distance from their patients. Will the member from Saskatoon Fairview stand and apologize for her disrespectful comments towards all health care workers?

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

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I do want to thank the member opposite for the question, although I think he needs to check *Hansard* again. I certainly wasn't saying that about health care workers, Madam Deputy Speaker. Of course I was talking about this Health minister and how the Health minister needs to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time, which includes fighting COVID-19 on the one hand and bringing in vaccines on the other.

And he seems to have forgotten that there is a whole host of measures that need to be implemented in order for us to fight COVID-19. He seemed, he seemed shocked when I brought up testing and contact tracing, when I brought up rapid testing in committee. He seemed shocked by that, Madam Deputy Speaker. What in the world, when our Health minister doesn't understand how he is failing to fight COVID or is just simply not interested in learning how to make that happen, Madam Deputy Speaker?

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

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I heard the member from Melfort talk about getting along, and I appreciate those comments. But I want to remind that member that during my response to the budget I spoke about my own immunocompromised status and asked members in here to show love and care for their neighbours.

[12:00]

For those remarks I was laughed at, I was called a whiner, or I was told to go home. My question to the member from Melfort . . . And by the way, I've not received a single apology for that, for those attacks. To the member from Melfort, what steps did you take to address this behaviour within your caucus?

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

Mr. Goudy: — Mr. Speaker, the motion that I saw was not so much about debate; it was about fighting. And I don't know if this question has anything to do with that motion. You know, my comments are that it would be probably good for everybody in this Chamber to eat a little bit of humble pie. It's, you know, it's horrible-tasting stuff but, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you can choke it down, it's filled with vitamins. So you know, I think we all need to get along a little bit better and, you know, maybe not bring up these kinds of motions in the future, and things that can come to a good end.

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

Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Just three weeks ago, the members opposite voted against funding for VIDO-InterVac [Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization-international vaccine centre]. Our government has proudly invested in this state-of-the-art facility and our federal partners have followed suit. It's as if the members opposite want to keep us in this pandemic, Madam Deputy Speaker, and they never want to see the end for their own political gain. It is clear they are against opening the province back up.

To the member from Saskatoon Fairview: she is pro-vaccine so

yes or no, does she support making VIDO-InterVac the centre for vaccines in Canada? And if yes, why did she vote against funding for VIDO-InterVac?

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

Ms. Mowat: — Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is a colourful depiction of what happened in this space when we voted against the budget, Madam Deputy Speaker. When we talk about VIDO, absolutely 100 per cent we have been in favour of making sure that we can produce those vaccines on the spot. I think our intermittent supply has really highlighted the need to have a domestic solution to vaccines. We have certainly seen the impacts of not being able to predict that vaccine schedule and how that has impacted folks around the province, especially folks that have reached out to our office and talked about being turned away after driving three hours and that sort of thing, Madam Deputy Speaker.

If he wants to talk about supporting VIDO, maybe he should look back though into their government's books. Maybe he should look at their record for health innovation funding before he asks a question about this.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. And I have a question to direct to the good member from Saskatoon Riversdale. Now in your remarks you addressed the need, the great need for the autonomy of boards. And while the member is new here, I'd like to draw his attention to Bill 63, which his government introduced some time ago striving, striving to centralize control and take away the autonomy and the local voice from education.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, members on my side of the House certainly support local government and the importance of democratically elected local voices in education. So based on his remarks, will the member from Saskatoon Riversdale stand in his place and, on behalf of his government, commit, commit to the importance of the autonomy of boards? And will he ensure that school divisions are protected under his government?

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

Mr. Friesen: — Well thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. And thank you for the question. Our school divisions are very diverse. Our school divisions, they want their own autonomy. I'm not sure why the members opposite wanted us to mandate what they would do when they were going back to school in the back-to-school plan. I believe our school divisions do a great job, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I'm very proud of what they've done and how they've exercised the back-to-school plan.

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

Mr. D. Harrison: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The member from Regina University proudly took to Twitter and said the Regina restaurants actually wanted to shut down and send

their employees home. She wouldn't say who, but said there were plenty. Many Regina restaurant owners questioned her on this and questioned who she had really consulted with. To the member from Regina University: can the member put on record who she consulted with? Or will she admit that she used hard-working business owners as a front for her own personal agenda?

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. And I would thank the member for his question and urge him at the earliest opportunity to raise up his sleeve and stick it to COVID.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think my support of the restaurant industry is well known, and unlike the member from Saskatoon Riversdale, I'm able to name a number of restaurants in this city. I'd love to name some restaurants just nearby. We've got Orange Café. We've got Pile O' Bones. We've got Malinche, Madam Deputy Speaker. We've got Stone's Throw café.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what restaurants and the food and beverage sector in this province are looking for is the ability to operate, not 75 per cent closed as they have been by this government, but for this government to do their job, get COVID under control, keep their employees safe, and allow them to go back to business as usual.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The member from P.A. [Prince Albert] Northcote mentioned in her remarks, she was applauding this government's surge capacity. I will note that 400 intensive care beds were promised last year, yet we have been double bunking in the Regina ICUs.

So what I'd like to ask her: if we have such a great surge capacity in this province, where are those 400 beds?

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

Ms. A. Ross: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. So our government has taken a balanced and measured approach and made very surgical decisions throughout this pandemic. We've had to enact public health measures that have been recommended and put in place by our chief medical officer, Dr. Shahab. This has been a great challenge for all. The road . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — The 75-minute debate period has expired. I recognize the member from Kelvington-Wadena.

Mr. Nerlien: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise today to speak to a motion that was put forward earlier, and I will read that motion to remind us of what it is. I quote: "That this Assembly calls on the federal government to immediately commit . . ."

The Deputy Speaker: — Pardon me. I have to interrupt you for a moment. We'll let the Clerk do some business.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 2 — Increase to Canada Health Transfer

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by Ms. A. Ross.]

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

Mr. Nerlien: — My apologies to the Clerk. So I'll begin that quote again:

That this Assembly calls on the federal government to immediately commit to long-term funding increases to the Canada Health Transfer, representing an increase from its current share of 22 per cent to 35 per cent, in order to keep pace with rising health care costs that are putting unsustainable financial pressure on provinces and territories.

Madam Deputy Speaker, my colleague from Prince Albert Northcote has outlined clearly her experience coming from another province to work in a health care system in Saskatchewan that was in shambles, thanks to 16 years of NDP government mismanagement, facility closures, professional services losses, and a flood of professional staff leaving the Saskatchewan health service industry for greener pastures elsewhere.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the position put forward by the Council of Federation, the premiers, is quite clear. It called for the federal government to increase its proportionate share of funding to 35 per cent from 22 per cent with a 5 per cent escalator. Recall that the original agreement was a 50/50 split in funding, so this is still not reaching parity. Madam Deputy Speaker, a rational approach to the proposed funding model is absolutely critical as the federal Trudeau Liberal government, supported by the NDP, continue to download costs of all federally initiated programs to the provinces and territories through vague cost-sharing programs across every ministry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan experienced unprecedented population growth in the 14 years of Sask Party government. With that population growth came upward pressure on infrastructure, health care, education, and all services the government supports. We are incredibly fortunate that the Saskatchewan people are resilient self-starters who believe the true value of government is when it provides the necessary supports, guidelines, and services and gets out of the way so they, the entrepreneurs and the heart and soul people of this province, can succeed at their own pace and ability.

Under previous NDP governments and the philosophy of the current iteration, it was and would be vastly different. They believe the government knows all and should be the facilitator of all things to and for all people. Their foundational principles still do not recognize that you have to have a successful economy to provide the supports for the people of the province. That economy is the purview of the people, not the government.

What is the relationship between the success of our economy and the subject of the motion? Simply this: health care is, depending on the poll of the day, the first or second most important thing on people's minds on any given day. The alternate is the economy. And the two are intermingled, as we all acknowledge on this side of the House, that a strong, healthy economy usually functions as a result of a strong, healthy citizenry.

It is notable that the federal parliamentary budget officer has concluded that there's significant fiscal imbalance between the federal and provincial-territorial governments. No one except the NDP would give the federal government kudos on their recent handling of the current fiscal framework or their debt and deficit management. Unfortunately, as the constitution is currently interpreted, we must live with their ineptitude on this issue.

The current pandemic has certainly exacerbated the health funding situation. Make no mistake, the provinces and territories have appreciated the funding attached to the COVID health care protocols, notwithstanding the numerous documented failures of the NDP-supported Trudeau government on travel bans, equipment procurement, bungled vaccine procurement, costing, and distribution.

Frankly, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is most evident that it was the leadership of the provincial-territorial governments, and more specifically our Premier as Chair, in the early stages of the pandemic that led to some semblance of order in creating a meaningful plan for partnership in dealing with a global, national, and local health crisis.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is no doubt that the pandemic has left its mark on the health care system of Saskatchewan. Unfortunately, with ICU capacity at risk, our health professionals have had to manage normal surgery capacity, resulting in some delays. Prior to the pandemic we were very close to meeting our wait time objectives, and we will work very hard to return to those metrics at the earliest possible post-pandemic opportunity. This will, however, depend on effective, efficient partnership with the federal government.

[12:15]

Let's focus just for a minute on the opportunities in health care if we do this right. Madam Deputy Speaker, the health care needs of Canadians, and more importantly the delivery models required, must be responsive to the unique challenges of the regions of Canada. Health care delivery is vastly different from a downtown Toronto hospital to a remote northern Saskatchewan clinic. While we have conversation about the dollars and cents transfers, we must have conversation about the flexibility of design in models that work for us here in Saskatchewan.

Furthermore, I remember well the conversations driven by the release of the book, *Boom Bust & Echo*, by David Foot. This 1996 bestseller identified some important Canadian demographic data that has helped us to formulate important decisions driven by age-related factors. We are in the midst of those most important age-related challenges, and must have flexibility in modelling to deal with these issues.

The *Canada Health Act* and this federal government are stifling innovation at every turn by attaching strings to all sharing

programs. We should be very aware that historically the federal governments have attempted to balance their books on the backs of the provinces and territories through numerous nefarious means. We can fully expect a full on assault on provincial fiscal capacity when the proverbial chickens come home to roost, so to speak, as the feds face the eventual reality of their debt.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if I may, I'll take a few moments to provide an overview of how the Canadian health care system was formed and some of the highlights of its particular unique features. This will help us to understand the importance of the conversation around federal-provincial transfers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Canada has a decentralized, universal, publicly funded health system called medicare. Health care is funded and administered primarily by the country's 13 provinces and territories. Each has its own insurance plan and each receives cash assistance from the federal government on a per capita basis. Benefits and delivery approaches vary. All citizens and permanent residents, however, receive medically necessary hospital and physician services free at the point of use.

To pay for excluded services, including out-patient prescription drugs and dental care, provinces and territories provide some coverage for targeted groups. In addition, about two-thirds of Canadians have private insurance.

Canadian medicare was established through federal legislation originally passed in 1957 and 1966. The *Canada Health Act* of 1984 replaced and consolidated the previous two Acts and sets national standards for medically necessary hospital diagnostic and physician services.

To be eligible to receive full federal cash contributions for health care, each provincial and territorial health insurance plan needs to comply with the five pillars of the *Canada Health Act* which stipulate that (1) it is publicly administered, (2) it's comprehensive in coverage conditions, (3) it is universal, (4) it is portable across provinces, and (5) it is accessible. Canadian provincial-territorial governments have primary responsibility for financing, organizing, and delivering health services, and supervising providers.

The jurisdictions directly fund physicians and drug programs and contract with delegated health authorities — either a single provincial authority or multiple sub-provincial regional authorities — to deliver hospital, community, and long-term care as well as mental and public health services.

The federal government co-finances provincial-territorial universal health insurance programs and administers a range of services for certain populations, including eligible First Nations and Inuit peoples, members of the Canadian Armed Forces, veterans, resettled refugees, and some refugee claimants, and inmates in federal penitentiaries. It also regulates the safety and efficacy of medical devices, pharmaceuticals, and natural health products; funds health research and some information technology systems; and administers several public health functions on a national scale. Most providers of health services are self-governing under provincial-territorial law. They are registered with a provincial regulatory body such as the College of Physicians and Surgeons that ensures that education, training, and quality of care standards are met.

Total health spending is estimated to have reached 11 and a half per cent of GDP [gross domestic product] in 2019, or \$265 billion. The public sector and private sector account for approximately 70 per cent and 30 per cent of total health expenditures respectively. Each provincial-territorial health insurance plan covers all medically necessary hospital and physician services. Supplementary services for those not covered under medicare are largely privately financed, either from patient out-of-pocket payments or through employer-based or private insurance.

No physician or hospital can refuse to provide care in an emergency, and midwives provide some maternity services. The main funding source is general provincial-territorial government revenue. Most provincial-territorial revenue comes from taxation, and as a federation our health care costs are amongst the highest in the world. Private insurance, held by about two-thirds of Canadians, covers services excluded under universal health coverage such as vision and dental care, outpatient prescription drugs, rehabilitation services, and private hospital rooms.

In 2015 approximately 90 per cent of premiums for private health plans were paid through employers, unions, or other organizations under group contracts. In 2017 private insurance was estimated to account for 12 per cent of total health spending. The majority of insurers are for-profit. To qualify for federal financial contributions, provincial-territorial insurance plans must provide first-dollar coverage of medically necessary physician, diagnostic, and hospital services, including in-patient prescription drugs for all eligible residents.

All provincial-territorial governments also provide public health and prevention services including immunizations as part of their public programs. However, there is no nationally defined statutory benefit package. Most public coverage decisions are made by provincial-territorial governments in conjunction with the medical profession. There are some health services that, for the most part, are not covered by any provincial-territorial insurance plan, including dental services, physiotherapy, psychologist visits, chiropractic care, and cosmetic or plastic surgery.

About 27 per cent of Canada's physicians received their degree outside Canada. In 2017 92 per cent of physicians practised in urban locations. There are no national programs to ensure a supply of doctors in rural and remote locations; however most provinces have rural-practice initiatives. Saskatchewan communities have many diversified approaches to bringing doctors to rural opportunities.

In 2019 there were 2.41 practising physicians per 1,000 population; 52 per cent were family physicians and the balance were specialists. Most physicians are self-employed in private practice. In 2017, the last year of the National Physician Survey, about 44 per cent of GPs [general practitioner] worked in fee-for-service. In 2017 about 62 per cent of regulated nurses, registered nurses, NPs [nurse practitioner], and licensed practical nurses worked in hospitals, and 15 per cent in community health settings on salaries.

Provincial ministries of Health negotiate physician fee schedules for primary and specialist care with medical associations. In some provinces, such as British Columbia and Ontario, payment

incentives have been linked to performance. Specialists are mostly self-employed; there are few formal multi-specialty clinics. The majority of specialist care is provided in hospitals on both an in-patient and out-patient basis, although there is a trend toward providing less complex services in non-hospital diagnostic or surgical facilities.

The majority of physicians and specialists bill provincial-territorial governments directly, although some are paid a salary by a hospital or a facility. Hospitals in Canada generally operate under annual global budgets negotiated with the provincial ministry of Health or delegated health authority. Hospital-based physicians generally are not hospital employees and are paid fee-for-service directly by the provincial ministries of Health.

Some provinces have launched efforts to co-locate mental health services with primary care. For instance in Saskatchewan, a mental health strategy, Pillars for Life, has been expanded to better integrate mental health and primary care.

Long-term care and end-of-life care provided in non-hospital facilities and in communities are not considered insured services under the *Canada Health Act*. All provincial-territorial governments fund such services through general taxation, but coverage varies across jurisdictions. Spending on non-hospital institutions, most of which are residential long-term care facilities, was estimated to account for just over 11 per cent of total health expenditures in 2017. Nationally, a roughly equal mix of private for-profit, private non-profit, and public facilities provide facility-based long-term care.

Provinces and territories are responsible for delivering palliative and end-of-life care in hospitals covered under medicare where the majority of such costs occur. Provinces have agencies responsible for producing health care system reports and for monitoring system performance. In addition, the Canadian Institute for Health Information produces regular public reports on health system performance, including indicators of hospital and long-term care facility performance.

Provinces and territories continue to implement structural reforms to improve efficiency. The latest example occurred in 2017 when Saskatchewan replaced its 12 regional health authorities with a single provincial health authority. This initiative reflects a national trend toward greater administrative centralization. Similarly as part of an evolving reform effort, Manitoba established a single provincial organization, Shared Health, to centralize some clinical and administrative services.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are reasons the premiers should be wary of relying heavily on the federal government to fund their health services. Specifically, the premiers must continue to emphasize that their continued reliance on federal health care funding comes at a cost, again the inability to experiment with and design policy that could actually improve health care lest they run afoul of federal guidelines.

To understand why, look at the CHT [Canada Health Transfer] and how it's intended to support the principles of the *Canada Health Act*, which outlines the conditions provinces must meet to receive full cash contribution from Ottawa. Perceived deviation from the rules could cause the federal government to withhold

funds. And this is not hypothetical. If you recall, former federal Health minister Jane Philpott repeatedly threatened to withhold the Canada Health Transfer from specific provinces for perceived violations of the CHA [*Canada Health Act*].

In addition to challenging the federal government on rebalancing the federal funding model, the provincial ministers could ask for more freedom, once again to have the ability to experiment and implement policies of more successful universal health care systems in other countries. Even if governments could afford to spend more on health care, it's unclear that increased spending would improve the system. Even in the pre-COVID world there was mounting evidence that Canada spends more on its universal health care system compared to other countries while performing poorly in key measurements.

So why the disparity between countries? Simply put, other universal health care systems embraced to varying degrees the private sector. Australia, for example, uses parallel private health care to augment its public system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the motion put forward by my colleague from Prince Albert Northcote is vitally important to Saskatchewan health care and the people of Saskatchewan in the context of the broader conversation around health care reform.

At this time I wish to adjourn debate on the motion put forward by the member from Prince Albert Northcote. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Kelvington-Wadena:

That the Assembly calls on the federal government to immediately commit to long-term funding increases to the Canada Health Transfer, representing an increase from its current share of 22 per cent to . . .

The member has moved to adjourn debate. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

[12:30]

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Mr. Dennis: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I move that this Assembly do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member has moved to adjourn the House. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adjourn the House?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Carried. This House stands adjourned until Monday, 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:32.]

GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN

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Premier

President of the Executive Council

Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

Hon. Fred Bradshaw

Minister of Highways
Minister Responsible for
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Minister of Immigration and Career Training
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