



SECOND SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

(HANSARD)

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The Hon. Randy Weekes
Speaker



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
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Lieutenant Governor — His Honour the Honourable Russ Mirasty, S.O.M., M.S.M.

Speaker — Hon. Randy Weekes

Premier — Hon. Scott Moe

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Lambert, Lisa — Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood (SP)

Lawrence, Greg — Moose Jaw Wakamow (SP)

Love, Matt — Saskatoon Eastview (NDP)

Makowsky, Hon. Gene — Regina Gardiner Park (SP)

Marit, Hon. David — Wood River (SP)

McLeod, Tim — Moose Jaw North (SP)

McMorris, Hon. Don — Indian Head-Milestone (SP)

Meili, Ryan — Saskatoon Meewasin (NDP)

Merriman, Hon. Paul — Saskatoon Silverspring-Sutherland (SP)

Meyers, Derek — Regina Walsh Acres (SP)

Moe, Hon. Scott — Rosthern-Shellbrook (SP)

Morgan, Hon. Don — Saskatoon Southeast (SP)

Mowat, Vicki — Saskatoon Fairview (NDP)

Nerlien, Hugh — Kelvington-Wadena (SP)

Nippi-Albright, Betty — Saskatoon Centre (NDP)

Ottenbreit, Greg — Yorkton (SP)

Reiter, Hon. Jim — Rosetown-Elrose (SP)

Ritchie, Erika — Saskatoon Nutana (NDP)

Ross, Alana — Prince Albert Northcote (SP)

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Sarauer, Nicole — Regina Douglas Park (NDP)

Skoropad, Dana — Arm River (SP)

Steele, Doug — Cypress Hills (SP)

Stewart, Hon. Lyle — Lumsden-Morse (SP)

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

Vermette, Doyle — Cumberland (NDP)

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

Wilson, Nadine — Saskatchewan Rivers (Ind.)

Wotherspoon, Trent — Regina Rosemont (NDP)

Wyant, Hon. Gordon — Saskatoon Northwest (SP)

Young, Aleana — Regina University (NDP)

Young, Colleen — Lloydminster (SP)

Vacant — Athabasca

Party Standings: Saskatchewan Party (SP) — 47; New Democratic Party (NDP) — 12; Independent (Ind.) — 1; Vacant — 1

Clerks-at-the-Table

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Deputy Clerk — Iris Lang

Clerk Assistant — Kathy Burianyk

Sergeant-at-Arms — Terry Quinn

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[The Assembly met at 10:00.]

Clerk: — I wish to inform the Assembly that Mr. Speaker is not present to open today's sitting.

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to all members of this Assembly, it brings me great pleasure today to introduce you to 21 students along with three of their teachers that are attending here. They're in the west gallery today, and they are from Rosthern Junior College from the community of Rosthern obviously, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the teachers joining today are Karalee Kuny, who I talked to the other day; Ryan Wood, Richard Janzen are accompanying our 21 grade 12 students from Rosthern Junior College, Mr. Speaker.

I had the opportunity to first visit Rosthern Junior College, or RJC, back in 1993 where a university friend of mine had attended the college, and we went back for a visit at that point in time. I doubt whether any of you were even on this earth in 1993. I was probably just a little bit older than you at that time, and I'm starting to get into dating myself here.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome these students here and just take a moment to just note the history of RJC. It's a high school that's been around since 1905. Over 100 years they've been educating students from across Canada and around the world, Mr. Speaker. And you really are a part of something special, part of a high school and of a movement really, that has been, you know, providing the opportunity for children to be educated, educated very well, but also, Mr. Speaker, the opportunity to practise their faith and to go on to much better and brighter things once they graduate. Great opportunity to participate in the arts, to participate in athletics, and to really be part of a great community in the community of Rosthern, which is a beautiful community and a real honour for me to visit every time that I have the opportunity.

So to these three educators, these 21 grade 12 students that I know are going to move on to very exciting things this next year as they graduate and carry on with their lives and shaping the world ultimately that we live in, Mr. Speaker, I want to take this moment to welcome them. And I ask everyone to join me in welcoming them to their Legislative Assembly here in Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Request leave for an extended introduction.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member has requested leave. Is

leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Continue.

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to join with the Premier and thank him for his kind introduction of this group from Rosthern Junior College, seated up in the west gallery. Rosthern Junior College has a special place in my heart as it's the reason that I moved to this province, thinking that I was coming here to join the staff for one year. And that was 18 years ago. And I fell in love with the town of Rosthern, with the province of Saskatchewan, and the people here. And Rosthern Junior College was a big part of that.

As the Premier noted, 116 years of history. RJC began as a German-English academy in 1905, the effort of Mennonite settlers. And this effort continues to be supported by Mennonite Church Saskatchewan and Mennonite Church Alberta. Now while the school is rooted in Mennonite Anabaptist traditions, it is also inclusive and welcoming of all faith and non-faith backgrounds as they strive to create a learning community where students can imagine, thrive, explore, and belong.

So I'd like to say a kind welcome to this grade 12 class and all of their teachers: Karalee, who's the VP [vice-principal] academic and a fine science teacher; Richard, who is a teacher and the director of music. And I will note — and I know that the Minister of Government Relations will also note — that he often brings his choir to sing "O Canada" at the SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] conventions, which they also do a great job of. As well as Ryan Wood, the principal and a long-time friend of myself and my family.

Now my understanding is that this class is mostly composed of Saskatchewan residents, but I also want to acknowledge that there are some out-of-province students in this group from British Columbia, from Minnesota, El Salvador, and Thailand. So I ask all members to join me in welcoming the grade 12 class from Rosthern Junior College to the legislature today.

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

Mr. Grewal: — I request leave for an extended introduction.

The Deputy Speaker: — Leave has been requested. Is the leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Continue.

Mr. Grewal: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To you and through you and to all members, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome my friend Moni Minhas, founder and president of Minhas Sask, sitting in your gallery along with his leadership team: Jack Sulea, general manager; Tom Jones, brewmaster and distiller; Alex Green, manager of packaging; Kulbir Singh, manager of sales; Samantha Harvey, supervisor of packaging; Brittany Adams, manager of Regina retail; Rahul Gajipara,

supervisor of distribution; Matthew Rolli, winemaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Moni Minhas founded Minhas Sask in 2017 and has since expanded it manyfold by acquiring adjacent properties and constructing additional buildings, including their new off-sale retail store on McDonald Street in May of this year in my constituency of Regina Northeast. It is now the largest brewery, distillery, winery, and cidery in the history of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Minhas Sask Labs has created more than 150 products in almost every alcohol category, and these products are distributed from their warehouses located in Regina and Saskatoon, serving every corner of our great province with their own trucks. The company creates its own brands, designs, labels, sales, and marketing materials with their Saskatchewan-based in-house staff.

Just a month ago Minhas Sask started its cidery in Regina by launching 13 types of ciders. This week they are launching their winery. They have shipped in grape juice from the famous Central Valley of Chile and are fermenting it here at their Regina facility. The wines have been vinified, blended, aged, and bottled in Saskatchewan. I am pleased to note this is a first in Saskatchewan and that these wines will be released for sale in the coming weeks.

Moni Minhas's goal is to reverse the flow of alcoholic imports into our province of Saskatchewan from other provinces and countries. Mr. Deputy Speaker, his commitment extends to using as many local Saskatchewan ingredients in their products as possible, including Saskatchewan-grown barley malted in Biggar, Saskatchewan, and berries from Saskatoon and honey from Shellbrook, produced in Saskatchewan. With this dedication and by ensuring that all their products are being created, produced, bottled, and distributed in Saskatchewan, Minhas continues to help our local economy sustain increased growth.

With that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask all members to join me in welcoming Moni Minhas and his team to their Legislative Assembly. Thank you.

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

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As critic for SLGA [Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority], I'd like to join with the member opposite in welcoming Moni Minhas and his leadership team to this Legislative Assembly.

I had the opportunity to meet Mr. Minhas during the Throne Speech day a few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker. And while it was a delight to get to know him, even more of a delight was his guest that he brought that day, his granddaughter. She was absolutely wonderful, and I hope she maintains an interest in politics. And who knows? Maybe we'll see her sitting in one of these chairs someday in the future, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you to Mr. Minhas and all of his team for the work they do in this province, their focus on local ingredients, and the jobs that they have brought to Saskatchewan. I ask all members to join me in welcoming Mr. Minhas and his leadership team to their Legislative Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Mr. Lawrence: — I ask permission for an extended introduction.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member has asked for leave for an extended introduction. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Carried.

Mr. Lawrence: — To you and through you, seated in the west gallery is a young lady that I owe an apology to. Started with some members on this side where they claimed their CA [constituency assistant] was the best in the province. Well I was so rattled by that in my reply from the Speech to the Throne, I forgot to mention my CA, Simone Gemmell, who is absolutely the best CA in the province.

So this is her first time in the legislature to see the proceedings that go on here. So I would like everybody to make Simone feel very welcome in her legislature.

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

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to welcome a couple of guests in the west gallery here. We have Lisa Birnie, who is my senior admin assistant, Mr. Speaker. Both Minister Hindley and I share Lisa, and she keeps us both on track as well as everybody else in our office.

Just a little brief history about Lisa. She was 17 years with WestJet. Many people that were travelling through Regina probably met Lisa at one point in time, whether she was up front or in the service manager position. She started out as a customer service representative and moved all the way up to guest service manager for Regina and airport area.

I want to thank Lisa for all of her hard work keeping Minister Hindley and I. It is a monumental task, as you can understand, Mr. Speaker. Health is a very busy file, but she does an amazing job. And I'd like to welcome Lisa to her Legislative Assembly.

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to also welcome Jenn Pippus to her Assembly. Jenn is from Moose Jaw, drives back and forth every day from the great city of Moose Jaw to help Minister Hindley and I again. Mr. Speaker, Jenn is a Christmas enthusiast. She is so excited about this. It was November 30th, Mr. Speaker, and she was calling it December Eve. She was so excited. If anybody's seen, which I'm all sure we've seen *Elf* with Will Ferrell, she is excited as Will Ferrell, Buddy the Elf is, when Santa is coming, because she is that excited all the time about Christmas. So I'd like to welcome Jenn to her Legislative Assembly as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — I would remind members not to use other members' proper names when they're making an introduction. I recognize the member from Indian Head-Milestone.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker,

to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly, I want to join with my colleagues and recognize Melissa Neufeld, who is sitting in the gallery. She works in my office. She also was a former WestJet after 21 years. We are so lucky to have them come and work in our building.

You know, WestJet was certainly known for its customer service. And WestJet as a company have decided to go a different direction, and we have benefited greatly by that direction WestJet chose, because now we have some of the best customer service this province has ever seen in our offices. And you know, she has done a great job in our office.

She also is a bit of a Christmas enthusiast as well, Mr. Speaker, so I'm sure they've got lots of notes that they can compare up there. But I just want to welcome Melissa for the first time into this room of her Legislative Assembly and thank her for what she does each and every day. Thank you.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise again today to present a petition to the Government of Saskatchewan to fix rural health care and the staffing crisis. These citizens wish to bring to our attention that recruitment and retention of health care professionals is a particular issue in Saskatchewan's rural health care facilities leading to many emergency room, acute, lab, and X-ray disruptions.

The ongoing pandemic has created burnout and led to early retirements and resignations, which has rippling effects for small cities and towns. Health care workers and their families are valuable assets in Saskatchewan communities and local economies, and at the 2021 SARM convention, over 94 per cent of rural leaders voted to support a resolution acknowledging the nursing and health care worker shortage across Saskatchewan.

[10:15]

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 fix the rural health care staffing crisis.

This petition today is signed by individuals from Biggar and Wilkie. I do so present.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm on my feet again today to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly calling for the funding of in vitro fertilization treatments in Saskatchewan. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the signatories of this petition wish to draw our attention to the following: that one in six couples in Canada will experience infertility; and that IVF [in vitro fertilization] treatments are prohibitively expensive for many, with one cycle typically costing at least \$10,000 and the

accompanying drugs and medications needed costing anywhere from 2 to \$7,000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan people's ability to conceive should not depend on their socio-economic status, and that investing in people, in our neighbours, who are determined to grow their families here in Saskatchewan makes economic sense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, other provinces in the Dominion of Canada have created programs that financially assist in providing IVF treatments to those struggling.

I'll read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Government of Saskatchewan immediately move to cover the financial burden of two rounds of IVF treatments for Saskatchewan people experiencing infertility.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, today the signatories of this petition are from Regina and Moose Jaw. I do so present.

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

Ms. Conway: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a privilege to again be on my feet to present a petition calling on this government to reverse the cuts and changes brought about under the new SIS [Saskatchewan income support] program. The signatories of this petition wish to bring to this government's attention that SIS represents cuts to what were already inadequate social assistance amounts. It has led to an increase in arrears, evictions. It has aggravated homelessness across our province.

And today I want to make special mention of the cut to SIS of the disability benefit, on today, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Many people can't access SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability], the disability benefit, and relied on this disability benefit under SIS to make ends meet. And the cruel cut to this benefit has impacted folks across the province.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will 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 restore direct payment of rent and utilities for income support clients.

The signatories of this petition reside in Regina. I do so present.

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

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — miigwech, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise today to present the following petition. The folks who signed this petition wish to bring to your attention the following: this government has been selling off Crown land with no meaningful duty-to-consult process and this government has also ignored its own 1992 TLE Agreement [Treaty Land Entitlement Agreement]. The current process of mailing, emailing notices, and one-off meetings with one or two people does not work. Indigenous people do not see this current process as a collaborative process, let alone duty-to-consult.

Without clear legislation in place for duty-to-consult in a meaningful way, it leaves little accountability for this province. The lack of meaningful duty-to-consult policies leaves the taxpayers of Saskatchewan footing the bill for the Government of Saskatchewan's mistakes and losses in court. And the 10 per cent Crown land we still have must be protected for First Nation and Métis people so that they may continue to exercise their inherent treaty right to hunt, fish, and gather.

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 stop the sell-off of Crown land and work with First Nation and Métis communities to develop a new duty-to-consult framework.

The signatures of this petition reside in Regina, Lestock, and Sintaluta. I do so present. miigwech.

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

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wish to present a petition calling on the government to save our swales. The undersigned residents of the province wish to bring to your attention that the Ministry of Highways is planning a four-lane high-speed highway around part of Saskatoon that goes through the swales. The northeast and small swales provide food and habitat to a number of endangered and declining species and many others not listed as endangered.

The government is neglecting its environmental protection duties to adequately protect wild species, habitats, and ecosystems of local, regional, national, and global significance. Lack of adequate protection is leading to a decrease in many species of wildlife, particularly grassland habitat, declines in species populations and health. Highways impact ecosystems through fragmentation and assessments of their impacts are only done for site-specific boundaries, ignoring their regional and cumulative impacts.

I will read the prayer as follows:

We call on the provincial government to (1) suspend planning for the Saskatoon freeway and development around the swales until a regional cumulative effects assessment is completed; (2) update *The Wildlife Act* and expand the list of species protected; (3) recognize the swales as an important ecological habitat to designate them as protected; and finally (4) ensure adequate long-term funding for research, management, and enforcement.

This petition is signed by the residents of Saskatoon. I do so present.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Maidstone Quilting Squares Help Those in Need

Mr. Domotor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great

pleasure that I recognize an amazing group of ladies. Maidstone Quilting Squares is a local and surrounding-area group of 19 ladies that get together and create quilting magic.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Maidstone Quilting Squares created 17 special quilts and donated them to the Ronald McDonald House in Saskatoon on October 5th. Wow, what an amazing way to show just what Saskatchewan people are made of. It makes me very proud to have constituents that are so giving of their time, energy, and special talents to help those in need.

The Maidstone quilting guild was started by two community members about 20 years ago and has grown and evolved ever since. The members meet every other Monday all year round. Dependent on the pattern, one quilt can take anywhere from 2 to 100 hours to make. A total of nine months were spent working on the quilts given to the Ronald McDonald House in Saskatoon.

This group of ladies continuously gives back to charities. A couple of years ago they made another large donation of quilts to the Ronald McDonald House, donations to STARS [Shock Trauma Air Rescue Service] air ambulance, and to families in need after tragic events.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would ask that all members of this Assembly join me in congratulating the Maidstone Quilting Squares group on their contributions and thank them for sharing their talents with various charitable organizations across Saskatchewan. Thank you.

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

Exploring Development of a National Urban Park in Saskatoon

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Over this past summer, Parks Canada signed a statement of collaboration with the Meewasin Valley Authority to explore the creation of a national urban park within Saskatoon. The northeast and small swales in Saskatoon are a great example of a high-priority area for conservation and restoration that could benefit from the development of a national urban park in Saskatoon. The swales not only provide food and habitat for wildlife but also a space for people in Saskatoon to experience natural areas unique to Saskatchewan.

The development of an urban park in Saskatoon will challenge many municipal and provincial governments' processes to better protect ecological and cultural assets of areas like the swales along with their associated benefits. It will also be critically important to partner meaningfully with Indigenous nations whose traditional territories the proposed park is located in.

Although it's in its early stages, this is a great opportunity for all levels of government to work together collaboratively to expand existing protected areas and strengthen protection mechanisms while providing urban dwellers with greater opportunities to connect to and learn about local natural areas.

The Deputy Speaker: — Next statement, please. I recognize the member from Prince Albert Northcote.

River Valley Resilience Retreat to Provide Respite for Public Service Personnel

Ms. A. Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The River Valley Resilience Retreat will provide a safe and secluded respite for public service personnel who are suffering from workplace stress, illness, and injury. Co-founders Michelle McKeaveney and Jeff Reeder envision a lodge, rooms for clinics or therapy, and a main gathering place, a riding area for equine therapy, a classroom for workshop sessions, and expansion plans to include cabins for families.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the non-profit is working hard to raise funds and plan to soon have a lodge on property in the Prince Albert area. Michelle, who works in corrections, has seen colleagues who struggle with their mental well-being. Jeff, a firefighter, has experienced PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] and knows how nature, support, and working with horses has helped his healing.

Studies show that 45 per cent of participants who were screened, they screen positive for one or more symptoms of mental health disorders. Public service members believe Saskatchewan is ready for this River Valley Resilience Retreat, a place where public personnel can go suffering from workplace stress, illness, and injury and receive respite and treatment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now ask all members to join me in recognizing the groundbreaking efforts to create the River Valley Resilience Retreat, where public service personnel can focus on their mental health and well-being. Thank you.

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

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Ms. Conway: — Thank you. I rise today to recognize International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The United Nations theme this year is leadership and participation towards an inclusive, accessible, and sustainable post-COVID world. This is a timely theme, especially when we reflect on how the last 20 months have further excluded people with disabilities in this province.

Many unable to access health care, programming, work placements; many pushed further into poverty with no increase to SAID in years; an irrational CERB [Canadian emergency response benefit] clawback for folks receiving that benefit; the heartless decision to scrap the disability benefit under SIS; a lack of accessible public housing; and the continued second-class treatment of the people who work tirelessly to support people with disabilities every day. Needless to say this Sask Party government has not made good on its promise to make Saskatchewan the best place in Canada to live for people with disabilities — not at all.

Multiple barriers endure, whether in transportation, education, employment, or even accessing basic government services and information. Saskatchewan people living with disabilities still lack equitable opportunities to live, work, and play in Saskatchewan and this must change. I hope 2022 is the year we finally see this government work meaningfully to improve the

lives of all people living with disabilities across this province. With that I would ask all members to join me in recognizing International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

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

Midale Couple Recognized with Philanthropy Award

Hon. Ms. Carr: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize an outstanding couple from my constituency. Dave and Tami Piper were recently recognized by the Saskatchewan chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals and the National Philanthropy Day committee as the 2021 recipients of the Outstanding Philanthropist Award.

Dave and Tami have been supporting various charities for over 15 years and were both thrilled and surprised to win the award. Dave was a teacher for 30 years, while Tami was a stay-at-home mom raising her two boys, Dylan and Nathan.

It was from their own personal tragedies that Dave and Tami decided to give back to various causes in their community that affected them. Dave survived cancer both in 2003 and 2006, then tragically lost their son Dylan, and Tami's mother had Alzheimer's. It was through all these family tragedies that this outstanding couple decided to get more involved, supporting over 35 charities in the process.

[10:30]

Dave and Tami also received an outpouring of gratitude from charities they supported such as the Canadian Cancer Society, the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan, and many more.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members join me in thanking Dave and Tami Piper for all of the incredible work that they do, and congratulate them on winning Outstanding Philanthropist Award for 2021. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Canadian Energy Regulator Delivers Ruling on Enbridge Mainline Dispute

Mr. D. Harrison: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Canadian Energy Regulator has delivered its decision regarding the Enbridge Mainline dispute. This is good news for Saskatchewan and good news for Saskatchewan jobs. The regulator rejected proposed changes around contracting for the use of the Mainline pipeline, which is critical for the health of Saskatchewan's oil sector.

The Mainline carries around 70 per cent of our provincial production to export. The suggested changes could have negatively impacted investment, sector jobs, royalty and tax revenues, and prevented a fair value for our production of oil and related products. Saskatchewan's energy sector support 30,000 jobs in Saskatchewan. Energy royalties and tax revenues help build hospitals, schools, and roads.

Our government stood up for the interest of Saskatchewan, its economy, and energy sector when we intervened in the CER

[Canada Energy Regulator] hearings this past summer. Stakeholder organizations have taken notice of Saskatchewan's leadership, including Tristan Goodman of the Explorers and Producers Association of Canada, who said that we "showed tremendous leadership to support the citizens of Saskatchewan and continued job growth in that province."

Mr. Speaker, that quote says everything you need to know about our government's support and commitment to our energy sector. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

RBC Economics Releases 2022 Growth Projections

Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This morning RBC Economics released their economic growth projections for 2022, and I am pleased to report that they project Saskatchewan will lead all provinces in growth.

Now to quote from the report:

In the case of Saskatchewan, we project growth to accelerate to 5.6 per cent thanks to a ramp-up in capital investment, improved crop conditions, and a material turnaround in the energy sector.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this projection comes as no shock to members on this side of the House. This year we've already seen well over \$10 billion in major capital projects announced in our value-added agriculture, forestry, and energy sectors across this province.

Now in spite of the issues facing global supply chains in the first nine months of 2021, our exports have increased 20 per cent compared to last year. Our tech sector is seeing a record year, with over \$200 million of venture capital investment coming in through the first three quarters of 2021.

Now this information would come as a shock if you had just been listening to the members opposite over the last year. According to them, the state of our economy can be summed up in two words: "doom" and "gloom." But on this side of the House we know that our economy is roaring back to strength and the future looks very, very bright for this great province. Thank you.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Provision of Security in Legislative Building

Ms. Sarauer: — Now, Mr. Speaker, the Minister for Corrections, Policing and Public Safety keeps pointing to other provinces when trying to rationalize her new security force. But every other province and the federal parliament have independent security that are accountable to the independent Speaker. Can the Premier explain why this government would like to make Saskatchewan the only parliamentary jurisdiction in Canada that doesn't have a non-partisan, independent security structure that reports to the Speaker?

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

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Mr. Speaker, we have begun the process of looking at ways we can enhance the overall security of the Legislative Building, Mr. Speaker. The first step in doing so, which we've already done, is to amend the legislation, separate the parliamentary and security roles of the current position. Separating out these roles allow this position to access broad policing networks available through the ministry.

So having said that the roles can be separated out, as I've said before, that does not mean that one person cannot perform both roles, Mr. Speaker. We are looking at all options and opportunities to enhance safety and security within this building and beyond. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What the minister doesn't get is, it's important who this person reports to. We already have the ability to enhance security here through the BOIE [Board of Internal Economy]. If there are legitimate security concerns, the minister and this government should take it to the Sergeant-at-Arms, to the Speaker, and report those concerns to the BOIE as well, Mr. Speaker.

The Sergeant-at-Arms already has the ability to channel other resources like the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] and the Regina Police Service, which they already do daily. This is also what happens in every other legislature in Canada.

Can the Premier explain what threats warrant this unprecedented power grab, and why this government wants to be the only jurisdiction in Canada that reduces the role of the Sergeant-at-Arms to a ceremonial one?

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

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try and break that down. There's a number of subject matters within that one question, Mr. Speaker.

The members opposite claim that this means it will be a partisan appointment, having it broken out one . . . the parliamentary procedures and the security component. They should know that this language is actually very common in legislation, Mr. Speaker. Section 279(1) of *The Business Corporations Act* empowers the minister to appoint a director of corporations, Mr. Speaker. Section 14 of *The Residential Tenancies Act* empowers the minister to appoint a director of residential securities. I could go on with a number of these types of appointments that we're talking about here.

We will explore all options, Mr. Speaker, to ensure the safety and security of this building and beyond.

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

Ms. Sarauer: — Mr. Speaker, you'd expect the minister to know

the difference between appointing at the Residential Tenancies office and appointing a director of security for the Legislative Building. Will the minister finally do the right thing, kill Bill 70, and give the Sergeant-at-Arms the respect he deserves?

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Minister for Corrections and Policing.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, separating out these roles allows the position to access broad policing network available through the ministry for the security component . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Listen up.

For example, security in today's world has a significant intelligence-gathering component in order to be proactive rather than reactive, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to incidents and events. Accessing intelligence databases and sources is notoriously difficult between police agencies, let alone for a stand-alone service such as the Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to find the best security function within the building and beyond, Mr. Speaker.

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

Provision of Health Care

Ms. Sarauer: — Mr. Speaker, Canora, Shaunavon, Porcupine Plain, Carrot River, Indian Head, Redvers, Preeceville, Leader, Wolseley, Pangman, Carlyle, Melfort, Broadview, Lampman, Lanigan, Theodore, Wilkie, Spalding, Eastend, Arborfield, Midale, Gainsborough, Bengough, Dinsmore, Birch Hills, Cudworth, Climax, Goodsoil — all rural communities that can't offer full health services because there aren't enough staff. Short-staffing has been an issue for years, but it has been made so much worse by the pandemic. To the Premier: should access to health care depend on your postal code?

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

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are aware that we have a number of communities right now where we have some temporary service reductions, Mr. Speaker, and communities we're working very hard with. I meet with them regularly. I meet with officials regularly to work and strategize on how we're going to fill those vacancies that we have in these rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, I would point out that this is an area that the Government of Saskatchewan is very much focused on, making sure that we provide the best possible care across this province regardless of which community people may live in, in Saskatchewan.

We know we have some challenges out there, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to continue to try our best to try to address those, working on a number of initiatives right now through the Ministry of Health, through the Ministry of Advanced Education when it comes to training seats, through the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training as well when it comes to recruitment of professionals from outside of our province and our country, Mr. Speaker. And we're going to continue to try to

address this challenge as best we can. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Sarauer: — It isn't just rural areas facing this challenge, Mr. Speaker. Regina surgeries can't fully resume because they are short 20 operating room nurses. And, after three months, our organ donation program isn't online in Saskatoon because they're too short of staff.

We are joined today by health workers Helen, Dion, Cindy, Jamie, Darlene, Rebecca, Janelle, Rhonda, Benjamin, Justin, Linda, and Bashir. Nearly two years into the pandemic, they are tired. They feel underappreciated, and they want this government to create a plan.

Saskatchewan's health care system is in a staffing crisis. What's this government's plan to get us out of it?

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

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and thank you to the health care workers for joining us here today. But more importantly, thank you for everything that you're doing behind the scenes in keeping our health care system running as efficiently as it possibly can.

Mr. Speaker, obviously we have faced some challenges over the past few months. We had to shut down and pause some of our services, Mr. Speaker, because of the influx of, mostly, people that were unvaccinated. Mr. Speaker, we have 90 per cent of those services have resumed, Mr. Speaker.

There are some challenges, as the member opposite has identified, Mr. Speaker. But we're working with our health care workers to make sure that those critical services are up and running as fast as they possibly can for the people of Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Sarauer: — Mr. Speaker, health care workers are fed up, and they want more than empty words of thanks.

The folks in this gallery could tell you about a six-week stretch where long-term care residents got nothing but soup and sandwiches because they didn't have enough kitchen staff, or being denied much-needed home care that our people are forced to go without right now. CCAs [continuing care aides] are working 80 hours of overtime a month just to ensure residents get the bare minimum of care.

It's no wonder, Mr. Speaker, that 94 per cent of rural leaders voted at SARM to beg the Sask Party to fix the health care staffing crisis. So, Mr. Speaker, will they?

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

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are taking a number of steps to try and address some of the temporary service

disruptions that we have in rural Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, I would point out in the list of communities that the member opposite listed as an example, Spalding and Lampman, both of those communities, Mr. Speaker, where hospitals were closed by the NDP [New Democratic Party].

Last week, Mr. Speaker, the member for Saskatoon Fairview and the Leader of the Opposition went on a bit of a trip up to the North Battleford area last week, Mr. Speaker, where they talked to individuals about health care, and I understand that, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if during their trip, if they decided to stop in at Borden or Cut Knife or Doddsland or Eatonia or Edam or Goodsoil or Leoville or Loon Lake or Macklin or Neilburg or St. Walburg, Mr. Speaker — all communities where hospitals were closed by the NDP back in the 1990s, Mr. Speaker.

When we had the honour of forming government in 2007, Mr. Speaker, there were 800 nursing vacancies in this province. We're working very hard, Mr. Speaker, to try to retain and attract more health care professionals across Saskatchewan.

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

Ms. Sarauer: — Mr. Speaker, that smug, empty rhetoric does nothing for health care workers and the people of this province today. There are currently more than 1,250 vacant health jobs in this province. Posting wanted ads on the internet simply isn't getting the job done. The Sask Party response to this pandemic, leaving us with the worst fourth wave and the worst job market, isn't creating the hype that might attract health care workers.

Mr. Speaker, short-staffing in health care has been an issue before the pandemic. Will the government commit to a plan that fixes the chronic health care shortage faced today?

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

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the Government of Saskatchewan is committed to a long-term plan and also a short-term plan to address some of the vacancies that we have in this province, Mr. Speaker. Most recently I can speak to, in this year's budget, funding for new continuing care aides in this province. Three hundred over the next three years, Mr. Speaker, 108 that'll be funded in this year's budget, are funded in this year's budget, Mr. Speaker, \$6 million towards that particular program.

[10:45]

As I've said earlier this fall, Mr. Speaker, we have hired 85 FTEs [full-time equivalent] when it comes to CCAs in long-term care homes across this province, Mr. Speaker, with an additional 10 in home care as well, Mr. Speaker.

I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that we take this issue very seriously. We know that there are disruptions in rural Saskatchewan, temporary disruptions, and we are going to work, as I've said earlier, Mr. Speaker, very hard within our ministry, other ministries as well, to make sure that we get the appropriate health care workers — which are doing outstanding work for us — but also continue to build upon that staff force across the

province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Mr. Speaker, they haven't delivered on that CCA promise either, so I don't understand why the minister can stand up and proudly proclaim that they're working on it.

In March we called for a comprehensive health staffing strategy, and this government said everything was fine, but the fourth wave showed us otherwise. Surgeries, cancer care, kids' therapies, organ donations — all suspended because we didn't have enough staff to manage the surge.

Will the minister learn a single lesson from this pandemic? Will he commit to a health human resources round table to bring together the training institutions, health care workers, SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority], and ministries to create a strategy that ends understaffing in health care once and for all?

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

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And we set very aggressive targets for the resumption of services. As soon as our hospitalizations started to slow down, Mr. Speaker, and our ICU [intensive care unit] capacity was stabilizing, Mr. Speaker, we set targets that by Remembrance Day we would have 50 per cent. We set targets so we would have 90 per cent of the services resumed by the end of the month, and we met and exceeded those targets.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister from Rural and Remote Health, in the previous answer, identified we are working with the Minister of Advanced Education, the Minister of Trade, to be able to fill in some positions that are currently vacant, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, I can't imagine what we would be dealing with here if there were 4,000 less nurses, 1,000 less doctors in this province. Mr. Speaker, can you imagine what the crisis would have been under the NDP because they didn't do anything for health care workers, Mr. Speaker? They continued to underfund our health care system, both on the operating and on the capital. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Mowat: — This is their legacy, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party's mismanagement of the fourth wave has taken a terrible toll on people, including our health care workers. In addition to the human costs of overworked and burnt-out staff, there's a tremendous cost to our health care system.

Last night we learned that it has cost more than \$142,000 to provide flights, meals, and accommodations to the families of patients sent to Ontario ICUs. That doesn't include the cost of actually providing care in Ontario hospitals or of flying those patients there and back.

Does the Minister of Health recognize that his failure to act and

to listen to Dr. Shahab created this completely avoidable cost to our health care system?

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

[Interjections]

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I haven't even begun my answer, Mr. Speaker, and they're already yelling at me. I haven't even said . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we had a very challenging fourth wave. But I can't thank enough the health care workers that are represented here, that represent the whole health care system, Mr. Speaker, but also the health care workers that were able to assist us in Ontario in a very challenging time, Mr. Speaker. We were able to work with the Ministry of Health in Ontario, with the minister's office in Ontario to be able to move some patients out there while we were experiencing our challenging times.

Mr. Speaker, we have repatriated most of those people back, Mr. Speaker. I think there's only four or five that are left in Ontario that we're going to be moving back as soon as we possibly can, Mr. Speaker. But again this was a very challenging time. I have to thank the health care workers, first and foremost in our province, for rising to that challenge, Mr. Speaker. But I also have to thank the health care workers in Ontario for being able to step up and help us in our time of need. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course we also want to thank the health care workers. I think that that is absolutely critical. They brought us through the fourth wave. They deserve our thanks but they also deserve our support. And all of this could have been avoided if this government would have listened to Dr. Shahab at the end of August.

We also learned this week about the costs of caring for COVID patients in our hospitals. The average hospitalization stay costs more than \$14,000. With 2,814 COVID hospitalizations over the course of the pandemic, that's nearly \$40 million in avoidable costs in our hospitals. Does the Minister of Health recognize that his choice to let the fourth wave run wild cost Saskatchewan people tens of millions of dollars in avoidable hospital costs?

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

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And while we were dealing with this pandemic, although we focused on the dollars, the biggest focus was on patient care, Mr. Speaker. It's not always about dollars and cents, Mr. Speaker. That's what they seem to be able to put this in, Mr. Speaker, always about dollars and cents.

But let me inform the House of where we are here today. Mr. Speaker, our seven-day average is down to 72, Mr. Speaker, the lowest level since August 9th — 85 per cent down. Our active cases are now at 735. That's an 85 per cent decrease, Mr.

Speaker. We have over 900,000 shots in arms, Mr. Speaker, first shots in arms. And we've been able to . . . our pediatric vaccination program is leading the country, Mr. Speaker.

So again, Mr. Speaker, I have to thank the health care workers for what they are doing, understanding that there have been some challenges, Mr. Speaker. But I'm glad that Saskatchewan people have gone out and done their job to be able to get their vaccine, and if you haven't got your vaccine I'd encourage you to go out and get it done immediately. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Mr. Speaker, because of this government's inaction, we've had the highest COVID death rate in Canada during the fourth wave. There's no question that the greatest cost in this pandemic has been the unnecessary loss of nearly 1,000 Saskatchewan lives. But when it comes to dollars and cents, the costs of ICU admissions stand above the rest. We learned at committee that the average ICU stay in Saskatchewan costs our health care system \$69,000. That means of the 863 COVID patients who required ICU care, that's \$60 million in avoidable costs.

That puts the total cost to our health care system at well over \$100 million, on top of billions lost in economic activity. Again, will the Health minister admit that his mismanagement of COVID-19 has been a costly and devastating failure?

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

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And for a party that talks about putting people first, they seem to be putting dollars and cents first over and over and over again, Mr. Speaker. The cost of the pandemic was something that we had budgeted for back in January to drop our budget in March, Mr. Speaker. And we've been able to add in dollars of that because of the fourth wave.

Mr. Speaker, they also talk about not listening to Dr. Shahab. That's completely opposite. We were able to implement measures and restrictions and guidelines in the middle of September, which I know the members are frustrated with this, Mr. Speaker, but it drove down our numbers, Mr. Speaker, and drove up our vaccination rates.

I very much thank the people of Saskatchewan for going out and getting their shot. The way through this pandemic, as the Premier and I have been saying, is through vaccinations. We've seen the results of that, Mr. Speaker . . .

[Interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. I'll ask the members to come to order when I call order, please. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And as I was saying, I can't thank the health care workers enough. I can't thank them for doing their job, some that were non-traditional jobs, the immunizers out there, Mr. Speaker, and also the people that are on the front lines of our health care system. To them I say, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Health Care Costs and Provincial Economy

Mr. Wotherspoon: — What nonsense from the Health minister. The minister who ignored Dr. Shahab, the modelling, and that cost Saskatchewan people their lives, that put people in ICUs, that sent Saskatchewan people out of Saskatchewan for health care. What a horrible, horrible response from that Health minister.

It's more than passing strange that day after day, questioning in this Assembly, the Finance minister couldn't provide a single answer about the more than \$100 million in costs as a direct result of that government's COVID-19 mismanagement. But those officials of course had those answers in hand at the health committee the other night within a matter of seconds. Any Finance minister worth their salt would have answered those questions. Why couldn't this Finance minister do so?

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

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, again I'm amazed. I should ask the Health minister if that member opposite was actually in committee as I suggested he do. The answers were there exactly where I said they would be. They're in committee where the officials have all of the details.

I have obviously the generic budget — a budget that we just gave a second-quarter update to, the second quarter which has been well received by different financial agencies saying that things are looking much better in Saskatchewan. We are very encouraged by the budget of Saskatchewan and the growth in our economy that we have seen in this year.

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

Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Fund

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, this arrogant and entitled Finance minister has now turned her sights on a new . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — I would ask the member to refrain from personal remarks like that.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, that Finance minister has now turned her sights on a new target, the agricultural producers of Saskatchewan. In response to their concerns with this government blaming producers, she put pen to paper along with the Agriculture minister to write a two-page rant that was completely beneath a minister of the Crown. It was arrogant. It was entitled. And it was threatening, Mr. Speaker. I've never seen such a condescending display.

And threatening producers, threatening producers with future support is just . . . well is just beyond the pale. If the minister had any respect for producers, she'd apologize for this offensive and ridiculous letter. Will she take that opportunity to do the right thing and do that here today?

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Marit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost, I want to thank the farmers and ranchers of this province for their resiliency and getting us through a very difficult year. The crop insurance payout this year will be well in excess of \$2.3 billion, probably the highest payout. That's a result of the excellent coverage that we have in the Crop Insurance Fund, Mr. Speaker, the highest coverage on average in history at \$273 an acre, Mr. Speaker. I will stand and defend the programs that this government has implemented for the agriculture industry here in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — It's completely beneath a Minister of Agriculture to sign on to that letter yesterday, offensive as it was. But the fact of the matter is that we're talking about producers' dollars, surpluses that were built up with producers' dollars. That's their backstop.

For that government to take credit for returning those dollars to producers is offensive enough, but to add insult to injury, they've been shortchanging producers for years on the fair return they deserve on those dollars. The Sask Party has been borrowing every last one of those surplus dollars and paying producers the lowest possible interest rate in return, instead of allowing producers to get a fair return on their dollars, their surplus that they paid for.

How can that minister, the Agriculture minister, defend shorting producers on the return they deserve? Why won't he show some respect to the producers of Saskatchewan?

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Agriculture minister.

Hon. Mr. Marit: — Mr. Speaker, let's put it on the record: 40 per cent of the fund is funded by the producers of the province of Saskatchewan; 60 per cent of the fund is funded by the two levels of government as well, Mr. Speaker. This is going to be a record payout of \$2.3 billion or more, Mr. Speaker. There's still going to be \$1.3 billion left in the fund. The fund is very solvent. It's solid, Mr. Speaker.

We're very proud of our record that we have done for the agriculture industry here in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to stand behind the agriculture industry here in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

[11:00]

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Crown Investments.

Small Modular Reactor Technology in Saskatchewan

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning Ontario Power Generation announced that they have selected GE Hitachi to provide small modular nuclear reactor technology. Ontario will build Canada's first small modular reactor at their Darlington site.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and inform this House that Saskatchewan will announce its selection for SMR [small modular reactor] technology in early 2022. Saskatchewan will continue to evaluate the different technology proponents and make the best decision for the future of power generation in our province.

Mr. Speaker, for the first time in Canada's history, we have a pan-Canadian approach to electrical generation. New Brunswick, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta all are working together for the development and deployment of small modular reactors. The SMR feasibility study released in 2019 concludes that the development of SMRs would support domestic energy needs, curb greenhouse gas emissions, and position Canada as a global leader in this emerging technology.

Mr. Speaker, the future for Saskatchewan power production is exciting, and the world supports the direction Saskatchewan is going. In October this year, France's president, Emmanuel Macron, announced a \$1.4 billion investment in small modular reactors. *Fortune* magazine stated that President Macron's decision looks smart to many, and it is perfectly timed.

In addition to France, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia have all signed on to an EU [European Union] article to have nuclear energy recognized as green power and a solution to climate neutrality. We also understand that both Sweden and the Netherlands are supportive of this push.

In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Boris Johnson recently stated to the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] that "We do need to go forward with more nuclear power. I do think it should be part of our baseload." The prime minister later stated that investments in small modular reactors are indeed green investments. Rolls-Royce in the UK [United Kingdom] has now raised almost \$330 million from private investors to develop British small modular reactors.

To the south of us, the United States are making a big push for small modular reactors. In 2012 President Obama announced funding for the development of SMR technology, citing a host of safety, construction, and economic benefits to the United States. Today President Joe Biden's energy platform specifically cites nuclear power as part of critical clean energy technologies. President Biden is also creating the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Climate that will have a specific focus on small modular reactors.

In addition to these domestic investments, the United States and Romania have recently announced plans to build a small modular reactor in Romania.

Mr. Speaker, every serious environmental and energy think tank supports the development of nuclear energy and SMRs. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has recommended that nuclear power be significantly expanded in order to meet the challenges of climate change. The IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] is not alone. The Energy Information Administration, International Energy Agency, and the International Atomic Energy Agency all agree that nuclear energy is a critical part of the solution to address climate change.

Mr. Speaker, the world and Saskatchewan are moving forward on green electrical generation; however our federal government is not. The latest headline from the COP26 [Conference of Parties 26] conference this past November was, "Canada's Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault refuses to declare his support of nuclear energy."

Minister Guilbeault's track record is not one to be proud of. On numerous occasions he has publicly lobbied to shut down Canada's nuclear industry. Minister Guilbeault's rhetoric is alarming and is in stark contrast to the former Natural Resources minister Seamus O'Regan who stated that "We have not seen a model where we can get to net-zero emissions by 2050 without nuclear power."

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote Pulitzer Prize winner, author Richard Rhodes who said:

Nuclear deserves better than the anti-nuclear prejudices and fears that have plagued it. It's a valuable and irreplaceable part of the solution to the greatest energy threat in the history of humankind.

Mr. Speaker, we need our federal government to support realistic solutions to decarbonizing our electrical grid. Small modular reactors will do that; so will carbon capture coal. And yes, we are also investing in renewables. We've built over 240 megawatts of wind power, with another 585 megawatts of additional wind power in development. We have built the first-ever commercial solar project in the province and we are building battery storage facilities.

These renewable power initiatives are important, but they are not the full story. Wind and solar can only offer intermittent sources of electricity. We still need clean baseload power, which SMRs can provide. What we do not need is extremists at the helm who oppose science and evidence-based decision making.

We hope the federal government will be a true partner with Saskatchewan SMRs as we announce our technology vendor next year. We also hope the opposition will join with us in a united front as we create a clean, modern power grid in our province with the development of small modular reactors. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And my thanks to the minister for his remarks and the courtesy shown in providing them in advance. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I join with the minister in applauding the pan-Canadian approach to power generation and security. If we are going to be serious about our approach to climate change and to our economy, we must think locally certainly, but we must also think nationally and globally. While we must work with and for our neighbours and in the interests of all Canadians, we cannot have those outside of Saskatchewan dictating the economic fates of so many.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister's statement contained a notable list of international players: Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and with comments from the UK, from France, Presidents Macron and Biden and former president

Obama. And he noted that Saskatchewan will announce its selection for technology and that Saskatchewan will evaluate proponents. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that it's the experts at SaskPower who will decide. And I hope that the thoughts and words of those in Saskatchewan will feature just as heavily in future announcements and ministerial statements as did those of Prime Minister Johnson.

For many sincere, thoughtful, and concerned residents of our province, the shadows of Chernobyl and Fukushima do loom large, and there are those who will be concerned. And they will be concerned with conviction and sincerity. And while we are tectonically stable with exceptional geology, and the workmanship of maintenance workers and tradespeople here in Saskatchewan is beyond reproach, concerns and questions around such an intergenerationally significant decision must be treated with courtesy and with respect. Because as members know, for some in this province, nuclear energy will be frightening to them. But it will also hold great appeal and opportunity.

Former Premier Blakeney, the late Allan Blakeney, spoke of the opportunities in the general nuclear area. He recognized the incredible work of those in the North and the incredible uranium industry here at home. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Allan Blakeney said:

As concerns about global warming grow, as I believe they will, there will be increasing interest in generating power by using nuclear fuel rather than fossil fuel. As oil prices rise, there may well be other opportunities to use the surplus or off-peak uranium-generated electricity to manufacture hydrogen. These are possibilities only but they illustrate that in areas of development, Saskatchewan has substantial advantages.

This could be the right choice for Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but this is a government that has at times been all too cavalier with transparency, and in every situation it's been the public left holding the bag.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the public will have questions, and the public deserves transparency when it's their dollars that are at stake. There are many who will question the government's track record of managing large projects and contracts with multinational corporations, and there are others who will have legitimate curiosities, queries around feasibility, technology selection, locations, timelines, consultations, disposal storage, and security.

And I urge the minister, and I urge all members opposite to ensure that they enter this decision as they should all decisions, with sincere consultation, consideration, and engagement. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this process must be open. This process must be transparent, and there must be accountability.

I urge the minister and all members not to politicize such an important process, to prioritize what is correct over what is expedient, and not to rush such processes, not to disregard or brush off sincere questions or concerns that our communities will share, and to truly work to ensure that this is an opportunity for Saskatchewan. Dividing our province, Mr. Speaker, makes it weaker. Thank you.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice.

Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice

Mr. Docherty: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice to report that it has considered certain supplementary estimates and to present its second report.

I move:

That the second report of the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice be now concurred in.

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

That the second report of the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice be now concurred in.

Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies

Mr. Dennis: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am instructed by the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies to report that it has considered certain supplementary estimates and to present its third report.

I move:

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

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

That the second 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 Deputy Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Carried.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to order the answer to question no. 12.

The Deputy Speaker: — Ordered.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

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

Support for Agriculture Producers

Mr. Francis: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm very happy to have the opportunity to speak today and move the motion on this week's 75-minute debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the agriculture industry in this province has been nothing short of a great Canadian prairie success story. From the time the first settlers came west to this province well over a century ago, agriculture has always offered great opportunity but not without great challenges, great risk, and often great hardship.

Determination and perseverance in the face of adversity is something that generation after generation of farm and ranch families have learned to willingly accept as a way of life. When your livelihood depends on a few precious inches of topsoil and the fact that it rains every once in a while, you can't help but become an eternal optimist.

Mr. Speaker, many of us here and many, many more across the province have and continue to live and breathe and share that optimism that our ag producers exude. The hope, the despair, the pride, the accomplishment — and yes, the feeling of failure — can often be wrapped up in one single crop year.

[11:15]

There's no better feeling as a farmer than to pull off that bumper crop, and no worse feeling to have a wreck like we had last year. But producers are forward-looking people. Next year always brings on that it'll-get-better attitude, whether it's raising crops, animals, or both. Every year is a new adventure, and success is never guaranteed. But next year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, always provides hope.

When you're in a business that is at the mercy of mother nature, your best efforts, inputs, and practices can be thrown out the window in a single weather event. No matter how some in this House may try to tell you this is all new, it certainly isn't. And this year's drought across the prairies was certainly a bad one, no question, but not a once-in-a-lifetime event.

1988 is the last large-sweeping drought that I experienced, and it was ugly. An 8-bushel average on durum on summerfallow was pretty hard to forget. Yet the dollar of loss is certainly higher this past year, Mr. Speaker. But 20 per cent interest rates in the early

'80s coupled with several years of drought made that time what I think the absolute worst time in the history of our ag sector in this province.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what makes this particular year different is the fact that producers, the industry, and the province for that matter, learned some very important lessons from the last two droughts. This time, Mr. Speaker, everyone was far more prepared. Never fully prepared, but far more prepared. Government-funded business risk programs like crop insurance and AgriStability have made a huge difference in protecting producers from what could have been a bad situation, far worse. Saskatchewan Crop Insurance was also sitting on a significant surplus. A decade of low-indemnity payouts had afforded the corporation to be in a very enviable financial position. Reinsurance on our indemnity proved to be very valuable also, insulating the government financial position by nearly half a billion dollars.

Ironically the NDP Ag critic suggested that the government was hoarding the money to the point that he suggested crop insurance pay back the premiums to producers. Just six or seven months ago that same member was quoted in *Hansard*, and I quote:

... if we're in, you know, a situation of serious excess, that we're looking at a way to get those dollars back to producers in a fair way.

And he went on to say, and I quote:

Right now the surplus, the reserves that are there, are about \$2.2 billion. So I think there's a space here that maybe there needs to be some serious review as to, you know, what's the best way to treat those dollars?

Certainly as I say, the province is just cobbling those.

Typical NDP fiscal wisdom shortsightedness from a party that has suddenly found new interest in the well-being of rural Saskatchewan. The same old NDP trying to gain some much-needed relevance on issues they've ignored for decades because, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you can't pass up a political opportunity during a crisis.

Could you imagine if the NDP was in power and they liquidated the crop insurance reserves, paid them back to producers, and then we have the drought that we had in 2021 and have nothing left to pay out? The sad thing is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's the best the opposition has to offer on this file. It's sad. Sad.

Fortunately for the producers in this province, the government has and continues to have some common-sense people making financial decisions since 2007. Apparently, federal politicians aren't the only ones that don't think too much about monetary policy and that money stuff just kind of all figures itself out.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this year's drought proved to be more devastating than originally estimated, and as a provincial government, we realized that and stepped in quickly. This government realized that the livestock sector was in deep trouble. Losing a crop is one thing, but producers without feed and water for their livestock was something that needed immediate attention. We moved the date up and doubled the low-yield

appraisal threshold to allow the salvage of much-needed grain feed for our livestock producers.

The Ag minister and officials worked hard to secure much-needed additional supports for the sector as well. Working with federal counterparts, they came up with the AgriRecovery program, a \$200-a-head compensation package to cover retention of breeding stock and to help cover other extraordinary expenses associated with herd maintenance.

This government knows breeding stock is the heart of every livestock operation, and we focused on supporting that as soon as we could. We provided 119 million to support this program, much-needed funding to support the purchase of feed, access to water, and other normal expenditures producers found themselves on the hook for, months and months ahead of a normal year.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition has numerous times accused the government of “taking the summer off.” Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of the Ag minister’s schedule here. It’s extensive. Above the AgriRecovery framework and the stakeholder meetings he had, he had meetings with grain companies. He had meetings with other provincial ag ministers. And I’ll read some excerpts out of here, Mr. Speaker. Since June 15th, he met with Canada Arab Business Council, Saskatchewan Stock Growers on that same day. June 22nd, stakeholder calls with livestock and crop industry representatives. June 24th, meeting with Ag-West Bio. June 29th, meeting with Sask Pulse Growers and a meeting with SARM the same day.

July 14th, meeting with the ag minister from Manitoba. July 15th, federal-provincial-territory meeting of ag ministers. July 20th, livestock and forage field day attendance, as well as stakeholder calls with livestock industry and crop industry representatives, Mr. Deputy Speaker. July 22nd, he met with SARM. July 23rd, he had calls with Cargill, Viterra, Richardson on drought and grain contracts. July 27th, he met with Federated Co-op on drought implications, also a phone call with the credit unions and a call with the Farm Credit Corporation, Mr. Deputy Speaker. July 28th, industry calls with livestock and crop representatives. Also met with Donald’s Fine Foods, met with G3. On the 29th of July he met with Paterson GlobalFoods and Parrish & Heimbecker.

August 3rd, another meeting with ag ministers on drought supports across the nation. Also a meeting with Minister Tell regarding the drought. August 4th, provincial ag ministers on drought supports. August 5th, stakeholder calls. And it goes on and on. He has a full schedule right until the start of session, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I could hardly say that he took the summer off.

But, Mr. Speaker, as a government we were also proactive with improving our existing programs in years prior to this drought. We took over the administration of the AgriStability program and also removed the reference margin, which will continue to benefit producers in years to come. Unlike the NDP, our government recognized the changing landscape of agriculture over the past decade. We increased coverages for crops by more than three times to \$273 an acre. We doubled the unseeded acreage coverage from \$50 an acre to \$100 an acre. We doubled the low-yield appraisal threshold, as I mentioned earlier, to allow

producers to salvage crops for green feed, something our cattle producers dearly needed. We raised the wildlife compensation rate from 80 per cent to 100 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, we introduced compensation for injured or killed livestock, something the NDP were asked to do decades and decades ago and refused. Mr. Speaker, I do commend the opposition for their effort, although extremely feeble and half-hearted, to try to relate to our province’s ag community. I do believe it to be well intentioned. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, The NDP government’s track record certainly speaks for itself. They continue to be out of touch. They sold out rural Saskatchewan. They sold it out in agriculture, in health care, in highways, in infrastructure. You name it — if it was rural, they ignored it. And the proof of that lies in the number of rural seats that they hold. And that number, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is zero.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP held this province back for decades. Since 2007 our government had a vision for growth, prosperity, and a bright future for the province, not just for agriculture, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but for every sector in the province. The private sector has confidence in our province, and we as a government have confidence in our province, a confidence you would never see under an NDP government.

And with the few minutes left, Mr. Speaker, I would like to actually highlight some of that private sector investment that we’re accused of bragging about. But you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It’s private companies that are investing in this province. And if we can’t be proud about that and show some pride on that front, unlike them, then we’re doing a disservice to the people of this province and the companies that drive our economy in this province.

Mr. Speaker, Viterra announcing the canola crush facility in Regina. \$800 million to this city, this city alone. And these members think we’re bragging about that. Well that’s good for everyone, not just members on our side of the government. It’s good for all of us. You should remember that.

Cargill announced a new \$350 million canola processing facility, 50 more jobs, capacity of another million metric tons. Ceres Global Ag announced a new integrated canola crush facility in Northgate, another 1.1 million-metric-ton capacity and another 50 full-time jobs. Richardson’s announcing the doubling of their canola processing at Yorkton, 2.2 more million metric tons. Red Leaf Pulp and their new facility, 110 permanent full-time jobs when it’s completed.

Mr. Speaker, the private investment in this province coming out of a pandemic is amazing, and we have something to look forward to. Our ag industry is going to come out of this drought stronger than ever, Mr. Speaker. We have great vision for this province. We have good news to report on the private sector side. And we are looking forward to the next decade of growth that’s going to occur here in Saskatchewan.

And we couldn’t be prouder to work alongside these companies in making a business environment that is going to help grow this province, grow our population, grow our economy for years and years to come, Mr. Speaker, and not go back to the days of the NDP where people my age left. And there was dozens of them that left. They left many, many years ago, many years ago,

around the last drought actually.

At any rate, Mr. Speaker, we have no plans, and I don't think the people of Saskatchewan have any plans of giving them any seats in 2024, or maybe even not in a by-election coming up quite recently here. And the member wasn't . . . It's getting a little loud over here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but that's good. We're setting these guys off a little bit. They're going to talk about an industry that they have no common sense about, no experience, and I'm really looking forward to hearing their speeches. It's going to be interesting to hear a couple more of my colleagues get up and also waiting to hear how that's going to go with the statements from the members opposite.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I run out of time, I would like to put forward the motion officially. And that motion reads as follows:

That the Assembly commends the Government of Saskatchewan for responding quickly and substantially increasing supports to agriculture producers in response to severe and widespread drought this spring and summer.

I do so move.

The Deputy Speaker: — It has been moved by the member from Kindersley:

That the Assembly commends the Government of Saskatchewan for responding quickly and substantially increasing support to agriculture producers in response to severe and widespread drought through this spring and summer.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well you know, it's a pleasure to get up any time to talk about agriculture in Saskatchewan and to talk about producers in this province. And you know, what we're talking about here is some of the best of Saskatchewan, producers that drive local economies, drive our provincial economies, that feed Saskatchewan and feed the world, Mr. Speaker.

We couldn't be more proud of what producers do in this province, and how proud we are of this agricultural sector that's the envy of the world, the ecosystem that includes the research and the university and all of the different crop science and crop groups, through to all the ag manufacturing and businesses across Saskatchewan. And of course our world-leading producers, who have always ushered in the new era of best practice and innovation and stewardship, Mr. Speaker, that gets transported in the end around the world. When it comes to agriculture, Saskatchewan leads. They always have.

[11:30]

And producers demonstrate the best of Saskatchewan. They're at the mercy of things outside of their control when we look at weather and conditions, but they persevere. And they do all they can to plan for success. And they take on risk, significant risk every year and then they work towards a conclusion. They have

factors outside of their control, like weather, or the transportation of that grain too often let down by governments who are unwilling to lean into things like a transportation industry that fails to perform for producers.

What we faced this year with respect to this drought has been devastating for producers. I know it's tested producers across Saskatchewan, a proud and independent and such an important part of our local economies. I know this summer as we got into the drought, it was real evident things were real dry. Crops were scorched early on. We had no access to water for livestock producers. Feed was non-existent. And producers in Saskatchewan were facing incredible hardship without easy answers, without fixes. And there is an incredible burden and responsibility in raising livestock and caring for that livestock. I know my family on the farm knows that all too well, and I know the producers that I reached out to and listened to all across Saskatchewan this summer knew it all too well.

You know, I saw a lot of proud and strong producers this summer in their fields with scorched crops and with hay crops that were non-existent, and with water that had been depleted or become poisonous because of the dissolved solids situation, who, as proud as they are of what they do, as independent as they are in what they do, there was a real recognition of the burden and the hardship and the crisis they were facing. It's fair to say that I really appreciate the time and the experience that I had with producers through this time. And on more than one occasion I had proud, strong producers who had a tear in their eye as they spoke about the conditions they were facing.

And we toured and met and held meetings all across Saskatchewan. And our phone rang late at home, returning calls to members' constituencies from across this province. The member from Last Mountain, who likes to all of a sudden heckle from his seat and say sort of cheap comments in here, I took phone call after phone call from constituents of his, producers of his, who were looking for answers, who weren't getting the kind of support that they were needing from that government. The same can be said throughout the Agriculture minister's own riding, holding meetings throughout Lafleche and Mankota and McCord and Rockglen, Mr. Speaker, working with some incredible people and beautiful land, Mr. Speaker, but facing enormous hardship.

And that's why, as the Saskatchewan NDP, as the official opposition, we stepped up and wrote and pushed this Premier and this Prime Minister to treat this agricultural crisis for what it was — an emergency, a drought emergency. Pushing this government throughout June and into July to make sure it was treated as such and that producers would receive the supports they needed around maintaining breeding stock and genetics, around maintaining breeding stock and genetics, around making sure these are hard-built in Saskatchewan. These are points of pride for Saskatchewan producers and at risk when you have hay and feed that are not available to folks. And they deserved and needed supports.

I want to give credit to all those producers who gave voice. I want to give huge credit to the agricultural organizations in Saskatchewan that stepped up throughout this, serving their members, producers across Saskatchewan, and working with government to make sure that they were pressing for a response

and getting the supports they need, folks like the stock growers here in Saskatchewan, who have been so strong, so strong in face of this devastation; folks like the Saskatchewan Cattlemen's Association; folks like APAS [Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan] in this province, who have been disgraced of late by that Finance minister and that Agriculture minister; folks like of course the Farmers Union — all the agricultural, all the commodity groups in Saskatchewan who have been so strong in advancing the interests of their members.

There are still gaps in the supports that are needed for producers. The stock growers have been very clear that the current measures shut out smaller producers, smaller operations, those with tighter margins, a threshold that the province has established for an income of \$50,000 that shuts out many producers on the farm and ranch water program. They've also been very clear that there needs to be support in that program for the pumping of water, for pump infrastructure, for water that's going to be hauled, Mr. Speaker.

We know of course business risk management programs need to be fixed in this province. This was a government that sat on its hands heading into this drought while producers were united and the federal government was actually at the table to fund the lion's share of that fix, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a government that didn't act and left Saskatchewan producers high and dry on this front.

But I want to speak more specifically to this motion. I thought first of all the fact that we have this sort of historic hardship that Saskatchewan producers are continuing to face, caught up in grain contracts that they can't fulfill, caught up with input costs that are going through the roof, caught up with the stress of trying to figure out how they're going to ensure winter feed. Instead here in this legislature we have a government trying to commend itself, to back-pat itself, a political exercise of, you know, political interest that is all about this government and their political fortunes. What an entitled, what a selfish, what an out-of-touch approach of a government, Mr. Speaker.

You know, and I think it's this kind of taking for granted of rural Saskatchewan and the producers in Saskatchewan that will in time catch up with this government, because they're right. They represent the rural seats in Saskatchewan right now. They boast about it and joke about it and they make fun about it. But yet they leave producers high and dry on front after front, and boast about their own actions while producers are facing real hardship.

You know, to the member from Kindersley who got up — and he's a likeable guy; I get along with him just fine — I'm surprised with his entry here today, a self-congratulatory partisan exercise that failed to look at the incredible producers in his riding and those across Saskatchewan, the challenges that they face, and to speak about the kinds of supports they need.

You know, we've pushed this government to treat this as an emergency and ensure the supports that producers need and deserve. There's still gaps, though. To make sure that we're addressing those, we'll continue to push.

I want to address the points from the minister. He clearly doesn't understand fiscal policy, clearly doesn't understand our public finances. He was talking about a committee where just last spring . . . And I'm real proud that we were talking about this last spring,

where we were talking about the surplus of crop insurance dollars — of producers' dollars, Mr. Speaker, I should point out — that were sitting there and being . . . weren't sitting there, sorry. They had been borrowed by the province of Saskatchewan. And that's the term COB [consolidated offset balance] for the member from Kindersley. It's a financial term. It's about public finances.

And instead of offering Saskatchewan producers the best return they could get on those dollars and on those surpluses, those hard-earned paid premiums, the Saskatchewan government has been shorting producers, ripping them off of the return they deserve. Paying them . . . borrowing every last one of those dollars and paying them the lowest interest rate possible, depriving them of the kind of return they should have on those dollars to ensure that backstop of their dollars is as strong and robust as it needs to be.

And clearly my friend from Kindersley just doesn't get, just doesn't get what cobbing is and how his government is shorting producers on this front, paying producers the lowest interest rate to borrow every last one of those dollars, you know, instead of allowing them to make sure they bolster that backstop, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to continue to represent all of Saskatchewan. We're going to continue to stand strong for producers.

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — I recognize the member from Cannington.

Mr. D. Harrison: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees. I am proud to support my motion from my colleague from Kindersley. To the member from Regina Rosemont, I too am a strong supporter of the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association. I am a member and director and very proud of that organization, and the minister meets often with them and hears their concerns and addresses all the issues.

The Government of Saskatchewan continues to support agriculture, ag research, and value-added ag industries. Agriculture is much more than growing crops and raising livestock. The government has continued and increased funding for crop research and development — \$9.8 million; \$7.5 million for livestock-related projects. The government has invested 386.9 million into the Ministry of Ag, 6 per cent increase.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, the Ministry of Ag has enhanced coverage through the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation. Unseeded acreage coverage can be purchased with multiple options of coverage up to \$100 per acre. In 2020 over three-quarters of the insurable acres in the province were insured by Saskatchewan Crop Insurance, a record for the program. Average coverage levels are \$273 per acre, more than triple since the NDP was in government.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, since 2009 wildlife compensation has been covered 100 per cent, and predator injuries and kills on livestock has been included. Livestock producers are truly appreciative of this additional coverage.

Aside from the crop insurance, the government fully funds AgriStability, AgriInvest, and livestock price insurance. AgriStability was enhanced with the removal of the reference

margin limit and increased the interim benefit from 50 to 75 per cent, getting more money into the pockets of producers. These are business risk management programs that producers can access to reduce their risk due to weather, market changes, and other unforeseen circumstances.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, this year our ag producers were dealing with a widespread drought across most areas of this province. We responded by doubling the low-yield appraisal threshold for crop insurance customers to help provide additional grazing and the opportunity to cut for green feed. Being able to salvage a poor crop to feed the livestock in drought-stricken areas benefited many producers.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, livestock producers not only face the shortage of winter feed and grazing, they're dealing with water shortages — water shortages in their pastures and shortages for their winter water requirements. Producers have pumped the closest dugouts in the last couple years. This year they are having to pump dugouts further and further away, sometimes pumping from a neighbour's dugout miles away.

Several producers in my area have had to contract crews, use multiple pumps and miles of the water line to move water from the river. Others have drilled water wells — some successful, some not. All this extra work comes with a high price tag, but all are very thankful to have their dugouts full and have a secure water source for the winter.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, building a water trough, staring back at the faces of a herd of thirsty cows on a cold winter morning quickly makes you realize how dependent your herd is for their quality of care that you provide. You also learn very quickly that cattle seem to drink twice as much when you're having to haul it.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, to alleviate the financial burden of developing additional water infrastructure, the farm and ranch water infrastructure program maximum rebate was increased from 50,000 to \$150,000 of eligible costs. The first 50,000 is shared 50/50 with producers; the additional 100,000 is cost shared, 70 per cent government and 30 per cent producer.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, with feed prices increasing and feed availability becoming scarce, our government announced the Canada-Saskatchewan drought response initiative. Through AgriRecovery, the program provided \$119 million in direct support to livestock breeders — financial support to protect and retain the breeding herd in Saskatchewan. Under this program, producers can apply for up to \$200 per head of breeding stock to assist in offsetting their feed and wintering costs, unforeseen costs not covered under other business risk management programs.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, my colleagues and I, along with the Ag ministry, have engaged directly with producers across the province. The minister consulted multiple times with ag stakeholder groups to hear their concerns regarding the drought and to discuss support for the industry.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, your government has responded and are here to backstop agriculture in Saskatchewan. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, Saskatchewan has been and

continues to be a leading agriculture and agri-food exporter in Canada and around the world.

[11:45]

In 2020, we recorded \$16.9 billion in agri-food exports, nearly triple the exports of the NDP in 2007. Adding value to the products produced in Saskatchewan creates employment and fuels our economy and will build strong communities and a better future for the people of the province — field-to-plate value-adds literally delivering proudly Saskatchewan food on the table for families around the world.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, Saskatchewan farmers grow a variety of different crops year after year. One of these crops is canola. Our farmers annually grow more than half of Canada's canola. This volume of production is not lost on canola crushers. Several companies have combined to invest over \$1.5 billion in crushing capacity across the province. In Yorkton on the east side of the province, Richardsons are doubling their crushing capacity to 2.2 million metric tons. In my constituency south of Alameda at Northgate, Saskatchewan, Ceres Global Ag announced a \$350 million integrated canola crush facility with capacity to crush 1.1 million metric tons.

Right here in Regina, Regina has two new canola crushing facilities announced. Viterra will construct a new facility worth \$800 million and a capacity of two and a half million metric tons. Cargill will invest \$350 million to construct a new facility with capacity of 1 million metric tons. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, adding value to crops our farmers produce is growing Saskatchewan. In addition to canola, we are cleaning and processing oats, peas, soybeans, lentils, and other crops grown right here in Saskatchewan — families feeding the world and fuelling Saskatchewan's economy.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, our Ag minister was extremely busy this year meeting with ag industry stakeholder groups, hearing their concerns regarding the drought, and discussing concerns that producers have encountered. Mr. Deputy Speaker, he was meeting and communicating with grain companies, asking for flexibility with producers regarding admin fees on grain contracts, meeting with ag lenders discussing the impacts of the drought and producers' financial needs, meeting regularly with his provincial and federal counterparts to keep them updating and forging ahead with support programs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to take this moment to thank the minister and the entire ministry staff for their continued hard work on drought relief for Saskatchewan farmers and ranchers. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would also like to thank the farmers and ranchers of Saskatchewan for their resilience and determination to carry on making agriculture the industry it is today.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud that Canadian Western Agribition continued their legacy by having their 50th show this year. It wasn't without challenges, but they pulled it off extremely well. I attended, as well as several other members of this Assembly, and I think they deserve an applause.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll end just to reconfirm I am proudly supporting the motion by my colleague from Kindersley. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise here on my feet today and debate the motion that's been brought to the floor and speak a little more in-depth to the points raised by my colleague from Regina Rosemont here today.

The member from Kindersley brought forward a motion:

That the Assembly commends the Government of Saskatchewan for responding quickly and substantially increasing support to agriculture producers in response to severe and widespread drought this spring and summer.

And it identifies about, I would say, four points of a debate that I'm wanting to touch on in the time that I have there this morning. And I'll just itemize those now so that folks on the other side don't lose track of my comments, as they tend to do.

So there's the issue that my colleague from Regina Rosemont was able to touch on briefly regarding commending the Government of Saskatchewan. And the arrogance that is tied up in that kind of language, I'll speak on that. I'll talk to the point about responding quickly, and just, well, Mr. Speaker, indeed how quickly was that response. I'll touch on that matter. And then in terms of substantially increasing support, I guess that would be the third thing. And then finally, in response to severe and widespread drought, and the context that that's happening in.

Maybe before I do that I'll also just spend a few brief moments acknowledging the important role that agriculture plays here in our province. It's absolutely a valued part of our economy. It's embedded in our history as a province and our culture, and we all have links and ties to that part of our economy and culture here in the province.

And certainly there's many facets to that sector. I've heard members on both sides speak to the incredible work in the area of research that's done at our academic institutions, the leading world-class role that we play in terms of advancing the sector and agricultural techniques, methods, equipment, so on and so forth. It is absolutely a major contributor both to our economy but also our academic research, and we are a thought leader and energy innovator in this sector. And I think that bears mentioning as we are discussing this motion that's come to the floor here today.

But I think that it's fair to say that the government did not act quickly enough when producers and producer groups were calling for emergency measures in support earlier this year. And certainly I can go back to January, when our Agriculture critic on January 28th made a statement and called on the Sask Party government to agree to AgriStability reforms, and the fact that it was past time for the Sask Party government to step up and fix AgriStability to make the program work for producers in our province, and that time was running out.

So I think it's fair to say that we very much had our finger on the pulse and were doing our role in terms of highlighting this important issue and calling out for those reforms. Fixing AgriStability, as we said at that time, is important to producers and farmers across Saskatchewan, and particularly important to hard-hit livestock producers and the need for changes to increase

payment levels to 80 per cent and remove the reference margin limit. And the reason I mention all of this . . . And I'm not quite sure why the members opposite are laughing the way that they are, but when we . . . Oh, some suggest perhaps entitlement and arrogance, so I'll get to that in a moment.

But this motion specifically wants to commend our government for responding quickly, and I think that's what's really up for debate here. Did they respond quickly or did they not? I'll go on in my remarks here.

So certainly our Agriculture critic was quick to respond, on his feet and making those calls. Again April 22nd, we had a joint news release along with oppositions from Alberta and Manitoba, where we called for the provincial governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba to go back to the table with the federal government and sign the full AgriStability proposal before the June 30th deadline, so that farmers and producers could enrol in the program.

On March 25th, the provinces had come to a partial agreement to make changes, and the reference margin limit was removed. But conservative premiers had refused to invest the money necessary to change the compensation rate from 70 to 80 per cent at that time. And so when we think about substantially increasing support at that particular time, certainly we were calling that matter into question.

And I guess the statement was made that after everything prairie producers have been through in recent years, the last thing they need is for conservative leadership that puts partisan fights ahead of their livelihoods, and that was really disappointing to say. So as I say, that was April 22nd.

I'll now fast-forward to September 27th. And again it was our Agriculture critic who was hot on the heels, calling on the Agriculture minister to act urgently to protect producers unable to fulfill grain contracts, and take immediate action to protect producers unable to deliver the volume of grain to fulfill the terms of their forward grain contracts as a result of the summer's devastating drought, and that they were now facing unreasonable penalties that could bankrupt them.

So I think really perhaps what the motion should state is that the Assembly commend the Agriculture opposition critic for all of his proactive statements to address the emerging crisis faced by agricultural producers this past summer. And of course, as you'll know, that was something that I had also called attention to as we headed into the Canada Day long weekend and the concerns about extreme temperatures and drought and its impact in other areas.

I do want to make note of the fact, it's rather interesting to me that so far in the remarks from the government side, that there's been no mention of Prairie Resilience. In your own strategic report you talk about the importance of building resiliency within our agricultural sector to improve the quality of our soil's ability to retain moisture. And there's a very disturbing disconnect, I would say here, between the causes and influences of this drought and their connection with a changing climate that's related to human-induced factors. And I think that it really speaks to the disingenuity of our government side in terms of the connections here between both sides. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — Thanks, Member. I recognize the member from Lumsden-Morse.

Hon. Mr. Stewart: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to join in this 75-minute debate, and I too would like to say that I'm honoured to support the notice of motion for a 75-minute debate presented by my colleague from Kindersley.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the response of our government to the drought of 2021. Our Minister of Agriculture did an outstanding job of quarterbacking that response. No reasonable response from government can ever fully compensate for a lost crop, for a summer of not nearly enough grass for livestock or hay for winter feed or dried-up water holes.

[12:00]

But programming can help, and with thoughtful programs like doubling the low-yield appraisal threshold values, which benefits grain producers because they have their poor crops written off at a higher yield threshold if the crop is used for livestock feed. This is a new concept and a brilliant one, if I may say, Mr. Speaker. This provides higher insurance payments for the crops and feed for livestock.

Mr. Speaker, FRWIP, or the farm and ranch water infrastructure program, funded 50 per cent of eligible costs to \$50,000 over the life of the program for projects like dugouts, pipelines, and wells. But on July 14th, Mr. Speaker, the program was improved because of the devastating drought of 2021 to make \$150,000 the maximum rebate, the first 50,000 to be based on a 50/50 cost share and the remaining 100,000 to be based on a 70/30 government-producer cost share.

Mr. Speaker, AgriRecovery is a program to compensate for unforeseen losses that are not insurable or covered by some other business risk management program. For 2021 the Canada-Saskatchewan drought response initiative will help to offset extraordinary costs incurred by livestock producers due to last summer's drought. The program provides a per-head payment on female breeding stock. The program provides \$119 million of support under the AgriRecovery program for drought-affected producers. The program will pay up to \$200 per head for breeding cattle, with adjustments for other breeding livestock.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP likes to lay in the weeds and take potshots without having the least bit of knowledge, background, or insight into agriculture. Let's examine their record against ours, and I think it will all become a little more clear as to who supports ag and who didn't.

Mr. Speaker, our government increased research, ag research, from 13.5 million under the NDP to 32.9 million this year. And we have also encouraged many more millions of dollars in private research, which the NDP would never have done under any circumstances, Mr. Speaker. If there were no dollars invested in research, they still wouldn't stoop that low. Saskatchewan exported \$16.9 billion of ag products in 2020, and we will have trade offices in eight of our major markets to support even higher export numbers in the future. This is an increase of 164 per cent, Mr. Speaker, over the NDP's best efforts.

Our government has always fully funded business risk

management programs, including crop insurance, AgriStability, AgriInvest, and livestock price insurance. But, Mr. Speaker, the NDP didn't fund the programs, so our farmers would get less benefit from the programs than farmers from other provinces. On at least one occasion they also filed late, so our producers not only got less money from their underfunding, but were a whole year late getting paid.

Bear in mind, Mr. Speaker, the NDP years were horrific years for agriculture. Now I'm not blaming all of that on them. Don't get me wrong. Circumstances contributed to that as well. But farmers and ranchers needed these payments to survive, and the NDP were not there for them.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we have now removed the reference margin limit. And in the early days of our government we moved administration of these programs to Saskatchewan, which also speeded up payments and gave better service to our producers as well as employing a substantial number of Saskatchewan people to do the work.

Mr. Speaker, crop insurance insured a record 30.8 million acres in 2020. This is 76 per cent of the province's insurable acres, an incredible goal and an incredible achievement. Coverage for unseeded acres has doubled from what the NDP used to make available, to \$100 per acre. Now producers have options for coverage of 50 to \$100 an acre in four increments. Mr. Speaker, average coverage levels have more than tripled to \$273 per acre, up from an uninspiring \$88 an acre under the NDP's best efforts. Our government has increased wildlife damage from 80 per cent under the NDP to 100 per cent. As well, Mr. Speaker, we introduced compensation for livestock killed or injured by wildlife.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on, but I think my point is already made. However, there a couple of things I would like to mention about the callous nature of the NDP's disregard for agriculture. The NDP tore up signed NISA [net income stabilization account] contracts with farmers — I think it was 1991 — leaving them with absolutely no protection for that year. Mr. Speaker, I was one of those farmers.

Mr. Speaker, the Diefenbaker dam was built primarily for irrigation. The federal government of the day put hundreds of millions of dollars into that project, taking the province on its honour that it would build out the irrigation part of the project. In 1973 Allan Blakeney was driven up to see the work being done on what we now call the rehab phase or phase 1 of the new irrigation project. And with only two miles to go to connect Lake Diefenbaker to an already partly constructed reservoir, which would have irrigated the first 80,000 acres or more of the west side project, Blakeney had absolutely no interest in agriculture or the economy or people's jobs or livelihoods evidently, and he demanded that all work be stopped.

Since then, 24 kilometres of main canal has been growing weeds and grass and the occasional tree, but not the 80,000 acres of high-value crops that it was intended to grow. Imagine, Mr. Speaker, what a difference we would have seen in this province today had that work been completed back then and continued to expand through the west side and the . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . But it didn't happen. It didn't happen because they didn't want it to.

They haven't changed. They haven't changed, Mr. Speaker. They are against all kinds of free enterprise progress, whether it be in agriculture or mining or oil or gas or any other thing. Mr. Speaker, it wasn't very many years ago . . . Oh, I guess my time's up, Mr. Speaker. I support the motion.

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

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and enter into this 75-minute debate. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had honestly just written down some kind remarks about the former Agriculture minister and how good it was to hear his voice and some of his perspective and certainly some of his concerns, historic concerns with the NDP. I acknowledge that he's one of few members on that side who understand, who have been in opposition, Mr. Speaker, but I'm not sure. Going back to Blakeney in 1973 has me rewriting some of my remarks here, Mr. Speaker. It's almost as if we forgot about Devine and the fact that these guys have been in power for the past 14 years.

But here is where I wanted to start, Mr. Speaker, and more on the theme . . . Right on cue, clapping for themselves, and it actually goes right into the substance of my remarks. And I want to start by taking us back not that long: November 30th of this year. An editorial from the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*: "The arrogance and condescension of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety minister Christine Tell in responding to questions over plans to change security procedures at the Legislative Building [they might want to hear this part] starkly underline the rot that marks the beginning of the end for long-in-the-tooth governments," Mr. Speaker.

Certainly something that we have heard in many corners of this province, Mr. Speaker, there's a tendency when governments have been in power for a long time to start to drink your own bathwater, to start to cheer a little too loudly for yourself, and start to forget that you are here at the will of the people who put you here, Mr. Speaker. You serve their interests and not the other way around. I would think that maybe that was a high-water mark with the security bill that we saw recently, Bill No. 70, Mr. Speaker, until recently.

In response to a fairly carefully worded letter on December the 1st from APAS, Mr. Speaker, saying that they were concerned about the Government of Saskatchewan's claims around crop insurance and it's impact on the provincial deficit, we saw an over-the-top reaction from the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Finance. I'm just going to read a little bit of that for tone, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Speaking about Vice-President Ian Boxall: "Perhaps he is unfamiliar with the concept of summary financial reporting." I would assure all members that he's not.

But the arrogance, the disdain, comes through. Because, Mr. Speaker, this is a government that we see time and time again that is pretty sure that the sun started shining in this province in 2007, and they, with some exceptions, don't have a great sense of the history of this province.

Mr. Speaker, more about that letter. I'll quote again from the letter, "It is disappointing, to say the least, that an organization such as APAS would, either through ignorance or deceit,

willingly misinform its members with such callous disregard."

Remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this was a very carefully worded letter pointing out that they had some concerns about how this was being portrayed to the people of the province. I would suspect, although I don't know, that what they wanted was for the general public not to have a misunderstanding about why the deficit was there and not direct their anger or their concern towards producers in the province. They were supporting their members, as they are elected to do, Mr. Speaker.

But this is a government who is in that late stage, that "beginning of the rot" as the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix* article mentions. And they have shown us time and time again, in this session alone, that they cannot handle the smallest bit of criticism. They turn back to threats, Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . What threats, the Minister of Health asks? Well:

In summation, we not only disagree with the statements made by [the] Vice-President . . . but we urge you to retract them.

In the future, we hope APAS will remember that our government has been steadfast in its commitment . . . and that APAS doesn't take that support for granted.

That's the type of threats, Mr. Speaker, that we hear from this government.

Now where we do have some agreement, Mr. Speaker, is in the value of agricultural producers and ranchers to this province, not only today but throughout the history of our province.

[12:15]

And we also have agreement here, Mr. Speaker. This drought this year was extraordinary — perhaps not the driest on record, but second driest on record. In fact it was a drought that happened right across Canada; 80 per cent of all national agricultural land was under drought. That number increased to 94 per cent in Western Canada. Crop yield reductions, 30, 40 per cent across Western Canada, Mr. Speaker, and some localized areas even greater.

And certainly we can look up those statistics, but we also had the opportunity to go out and see it for ourselves, as I'm sure many members here did. I think of the trip that we took in July down to McCord, Saskatchewan, where the drought wasn't just for this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It went back. They've had very little rain for the last four years, and you could see the concern on the face of those producers there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And it wasn't a partisan issue. These were people who were worried about not only how they were going to pay their bills, but that was a little down the road. They were worried about how they were going to get enough water for their cattle that day. And those who have had that experience, who watched their water supply for their cattle turn poisonous because of drought, and they have to find in a hurry another water source. They've got to haul it in. Mr. Speaker, those are a lot of sleepless nights.

So what I wanted to say on that, Mr. Speaker, as you would think from members opposite that this is, you know, there's a huge

expanse between concern or care for producers in this province between the two sides. And I'm here to say that's simply not the case. We all were elected to serve all people in this province, and certainly we recognize and appreciate those contributions.

And as has been said by members I believe on both sides, you know, those producers, the ranchers but also the other economic activity that's centred around agriculture in this province. I think of, you know, of course canola in this province. The University of Saskatchewan, the world-class genetics that we've seen. Drought-resistant breeding that has really saved a lot of producers over the last few years where rains have been down.

As has been mentioned, apparently we haven't clapped enough on this side for some of these investments, Mr. Speaker, to their liking. We certainly welcome the investment in this province for value-added agriculture, and we would hope to see that continue, Mr. Speaker.

But what I was looking for in the comments from members opposite was some humility, Mr. Speaker, and we didn't see that. So perhaps we'll see that in the questions. With that, I'll conclude . . .

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan producers, ranchers have gone through historic hardship, Mr. Speaker. They deserve more than a government that's going to back-pat itself with a motion like this. And they certainly deserve a whole lot more than a government that's going to treat producers in such an entitled, arrogant way as we saw yesterday when producers raised a concern with this government, and what they got was a government that attacked them and that actually threatened the very support that producers may need and deserve going into the future.

My question to the member for Cannington: how can he defend these outrageous actions of two ministers of his government?

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

Mr. D. Harrison: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and thanks for the question from the member from Regina Rosemont. The government is not blaming farmers. Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation is there for farmers. We've had over three-quarters of the eligible acres registered, insured. It's there for their protection. It was used. That's what these business risk management programs are for, and we're very glad they participate.

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

Mr. Friesen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We appreciate the concern members opposite are bringing forward about producers going through challenging times. However, just over six months ago, members opposite wanted to reduce, yes, reduce the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance reserve funds, the very funds that are in place for challenging years such as this one. Mr. Deputy

Speaker, if those members had been in government, imagine how much worse off we would be if they had been allowed to liquidate crop insurance reserves.

Will the member from Saskatoon Nutana stand today and acknowledge that there are excess dollars in that fund?

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

Ms. Ritchie: — Well thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the member from Saskatoon Riversdale for that important question and opportunity for me to clarify the record. At no time whatsoever was our Agriculture critic, the member for Regina Rosemont, suggesting that we liquidate that fund. Quite the opposite. It was about ensuring that producers were getting a fair return on the money that they were investing into that fund. One per cent, an absolute minimum, was an absolute disgrace. And that's what the Agriculture critic was asking for.

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

Ms. Beck: — The severity and the frequency of droughts is increasing in Western Canada. Does the member from Kindersley think that severe droughts are a symptom of climate change?

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

Mr. Francis: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I thank the member opposite for the question. You may forget that I happen to have some experience in dealing with farming during the NDP regime and the Sask Party regime. And I'll tell you the reason why I wanted and really contemplated getting out of crop insurance, because you cut spot-loss hail in 2002, premiums were jacked up, and coverages were down. And I considered getting out of crop insurance, because it was not worth spending the money on what they offered for a return.

Contrary to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Sask Party record: premiums are up by triple, insured acres are 31 million acres. That's 76 per cent of the total insurable acres. Crop insurance works today. It did not work under you.

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

Ms. C. Young: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NDP have had a hard time with credibility in rural Saskatchewan ever since they closed hospitals, schools, and famously ripped up GRIP [gross revenue insurance program] contracts with farmers, an action that caused tremendous hardship and an animosity that remains to this day. When times get tough, rural residents know they can't count on the NDP.

To the member for Saskatoon Nutana, do you condemn the NDP's decision to rip up GRIP contracts with farmers, abandoning rural Saskatchewan, or is this the sort of thing you'd consider doing again today?

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from

Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Ritchie: — Well it's hard for me to actually thank the member opposite for the question. I find it rather ridiculous that you're asking me to comment on something from ancient history. I think what's more pertinent is to focus on the letter that was sent from the ministers of Finance and Agriculture to APAS, threatening them instead of taking some kind of a conciliatory approach.

I think it's absolutely shocking and offensive that they would say in the letter that, "It is disappointing, to say the least, that an organization such as APAS would, through either ignorance or deceit, willingly misinform its members with such callous regard." I mean that's the kind of a statement in a letter that is . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Next question. I recognize the member from Regina Lakeview.

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, the members on this side are concerned about not answering questions. So I'll ask the question again. Does the member for Kindersley think that severe droughts are a symptom of climate change?

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

Mr. Francis: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know what I would really like to see the members opposite do, is to contact their federal counterparts in Ottawa and tell them what a good job our ag sector is doing with sequestration of our grasslands, our crops, our forestry products. Pass that on to your leader that supports the Liberals every step of the way on killing policies that hurt our ag sector and our energy sector.

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

Mr. Skoropad: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This year's drought brought the importance of water management to the forefront. As the member from Lumsden-Morse pointed out, it highlighted the importance of the Diefenbaker irrigation project, a project that is filled with optimism for the ag sector and for the province as a whole, and a project, as I'll point out, that the NDP killed in the 1970s. Imagine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how far ahead we would be today if that project had been given the opportunity to fully mature.

To the member for Saskatoon Nutana: can Saskatchewan people count on your support for this generational project? Or do you still uphold your party's position from 50 years ago?

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

Ms. Ritchie: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to answer that question. But we requested a special committee be formed to look at the project and make an informed response to your question. I mean we have several concerns about the economic feasibility, the duty-to-consult, the impact on downstream users, and questions about crops. If you'd be willing to form an all-party committee then I would be happy, happy to answer your question.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, question for the member for Kindersley: how can he defend the threatening, coarse, you know, condescending letter that was sent to the producers of Saskatchewan yesterday? Further, how can he stand by while his government rips off producers of the return they deserve on their surplus dollars, paying them the lowest interest rate possible when they borrow every last one of those dollars, instead of giving them the fair return they deserve on their dollars?

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

Mr. Francis: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd like to point out to the member that Sask Crop Insurance is an insurance program that is shared by producers, the provincial government, and the federal government. It's in everybody's best interest to manage that asset well. I know management is a very tough idea for you guys, but our crop insurance program is in a good position even though we had a large payout this year. It's still in a good surplus situation for years to come.

Now you guys don't think too far down the road. We get that. You don't like history and you don't like the future. We're not sure what you like but we're very, very pleased to be in charge. This treasury board is very pleased to be in charge of crop insurance. They're doing a great job and they're supporting our producers as they should.

The Deputy Speaker: — The 75-minute debate period has expired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 606

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by Ms. Bowes that **Bill No. 606 — *The Saskatchewan Employment (Paid Sick Days) Amendment Act, 2021*** be now read a second time.]

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

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and enter into the debate on Bill No. 606, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Paid Sick Days) Amendment Act*. I want to start first by thanking my colleague, the member for Saskatoon University, for her tireless advocacy on this issue. She has been pushing for paid sick days for a while now, Mr. Speaker, and I encourage anyone who's interested in this topic to take a look at her second reading speech that she gave back in November 18th, where she laid out very succinctly and very eloquently the case for paid sick days in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

[12:30]

You'd think that, being in the middle of a pandemic, where there's requirements for self-isolation and there is a universal understanding, largely, of the importance of ensuring that those who are sick have the ability to stay home to recover, that this would be a no-brainer, Mr. Speaker. Yet we see time and time again this government refusing to put forward common-sense solutions that would help workers in this province, Mr. Speaker, that would help those who either are sick, who are deemed close contacts either with COVID or otherwise, and those who are caring for loved ones who are either deemed sick or close contacts.

When I was thinking about this bill, I was thinking particularly about, you know, my personal experience with having a toddler in daycare, Mr. Speaker. Having a toddler in daycare during a pandemic is an interesting journey to say the least. Anyone who lives with a toddler knows that they're sick essentially 24-7. They have some sort of symptom all the time, basically. My daughter has a runny nose more often than not. That does not necessarily mean that she's sick, but she has a symptom.

And depending on the daycare that individuals have their children in, understandably so, there are some fairly strict rules around being able to have your child at a daycare if they're displaying, you know, more than one symptom of what could be COVID. For example, they often can't go and oftentimes they have to be symptom-free for at least 48 hours before they can go back again.

I hear it constantly from working mothers whose children can't go to daycare because they have runny noses, because they have coughs, and are struggling because they don't have paid sick days, but they still have to be home caring for loved ones. So you'd think there are many, many examples throughout this pandemic of why this is an important measure, why this makes common sense, and it boggles my mind why the Sask Party government continues to refuse to provide this.

This is a government who we hear, and we heard again today, thank health care workers, thank these front-line heroes for the work that they provided during this pandemic. Yet a simple, logical solution to a problem that many of them experience in terms of not having access to paid sick days, would be a great way for this government to show their appreciation for all that they do.

For example, Mr. Speaker, care aides. You know, there's cashiers, cleaners, there are many folks. Even, Mr. Speaker, those who are working in our food and beverage industry, these are folks who haven't been able to stay home, who've continued to work during the pandemic. And if they are sick or they're deemed close contacts, you know, and they don't have these paid sick days, that would be so helpful for these individuals.

Mr. Speaker, there are five provincial and territorial jurisdictions that have already implemented government-funded paid sick leave policies that address the gaps in the federal program. Although the feds had stepped up and provided some resources, you know, there were clear gaps in those resources. And although, Mr. Speaker, the Yukon, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, BC [British Columbia], and Ontario saw those gaps, stepped up, provided some filler for that, this government, the Sask Party government, have not done the same for Saskatchewan workers,

Mr. Speaker.

I want to speak briefly about some of the myths associated with providing paid sick days, because I think it's important that we provide some clarity as to what providing paid sick days would actually do for this province, for the economy, and for workers. Mr. Speaker, this is coming from the organization called Fight for \$15 & Fairness. They provided a document called *The myths and truths about paid sick days*.

The first myth that they wanted to bust was around the argument that some people make that workers don't need the law to guarantee paid sick days. They can simply rely on voluntary employer policies.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that Canada relies more heavily than many other countries on private coverage for sick leave and disability insurance. And in fact, a Conference Board of Canada study last year found that only one-third of employees between the ages of 18 and 24 have any paid sick days, and fewer than half of Canadians young and old are covered by employer sick leave. And the most . . . The saddest fact of all, Mr. Speaker, is that the lower a worker's wages are, the less likely they have access to paid leaves.

Mr. Speaker, another myth I want to touch on is that workers with access to paid sick days will abuse the policy. And, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that evidence from other jurisdictions that have implemented legislated paid sick leave policies shows that workers very rarely abuse their access to paid sick days and tend to take fewer days than those which are, they are entitled.

For example, in San Francisco, research from 2011 showed that despite the availability of either nine or five paid sick days per year, the typical worker used only three, and one-quarter of workers, Mr. Speaker, used none. The same research showed that parents with paid sick leave were more than 20 per cent less likely to send their sick kid to school than parents who did not have access to paid sick days, which is touching on the issue that I was just speaking about earlier that I think has been really exacerbated by the pandemic, Mr. Speaker.

Another myth that they wish to bust is that a one-size-fits-all policy is bad for business and that setting a standard of paid sick days will make businesses less flexible. Mr. Speaker, the reality that this organization wanted to share is that a legislated paid sick day standard simply sets a minimum floor of labour standards, which is the role of our Saskatchewan employment Act, Mr. Speaker.

A minimum labour standard of paid sick days would ensure that businesses are addressing workers' basic needs but leave employers free to go beyond this floor to meet the needs of their workforce. A minimum standard of paid sick days would also help level the playing field for businesses that already offer them. Such a standard is not one-size-fits-all. It is a basic minimum that society believes all workers deserve. I think we should all be able to agree that all workers in this province deserve a basic minimum standard of paid sick days.

I hope that this government does the right thing. Pass my colleague's bill, the member for Saskatoon University, Mr. Speaker. There are many folks who've spoken out in support of

this bill. We are happy to continue working with those individuals in groups and organizations that see the benefit, both the personal, the societal, and the economic benefit of providing this to all workers in this province, Mr. Speaker.

I know I have a lot of other colleagues who are very interested in speaking about this piece of legislation, and in order to facilitate that, Mr. Speaker, I am prepared now to adjourn debate on Bill 606.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker: — It has been moved by this Assembly that this Assembly do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:39.]

GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN

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Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

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Minister of Highways
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Water Security Agency

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Minister of Immigration and Career Training
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Minister Responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated
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Hon. Christine Tell
Minister of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety

Hon. Gordon Wyant
Minister of Justice and Attorney General