



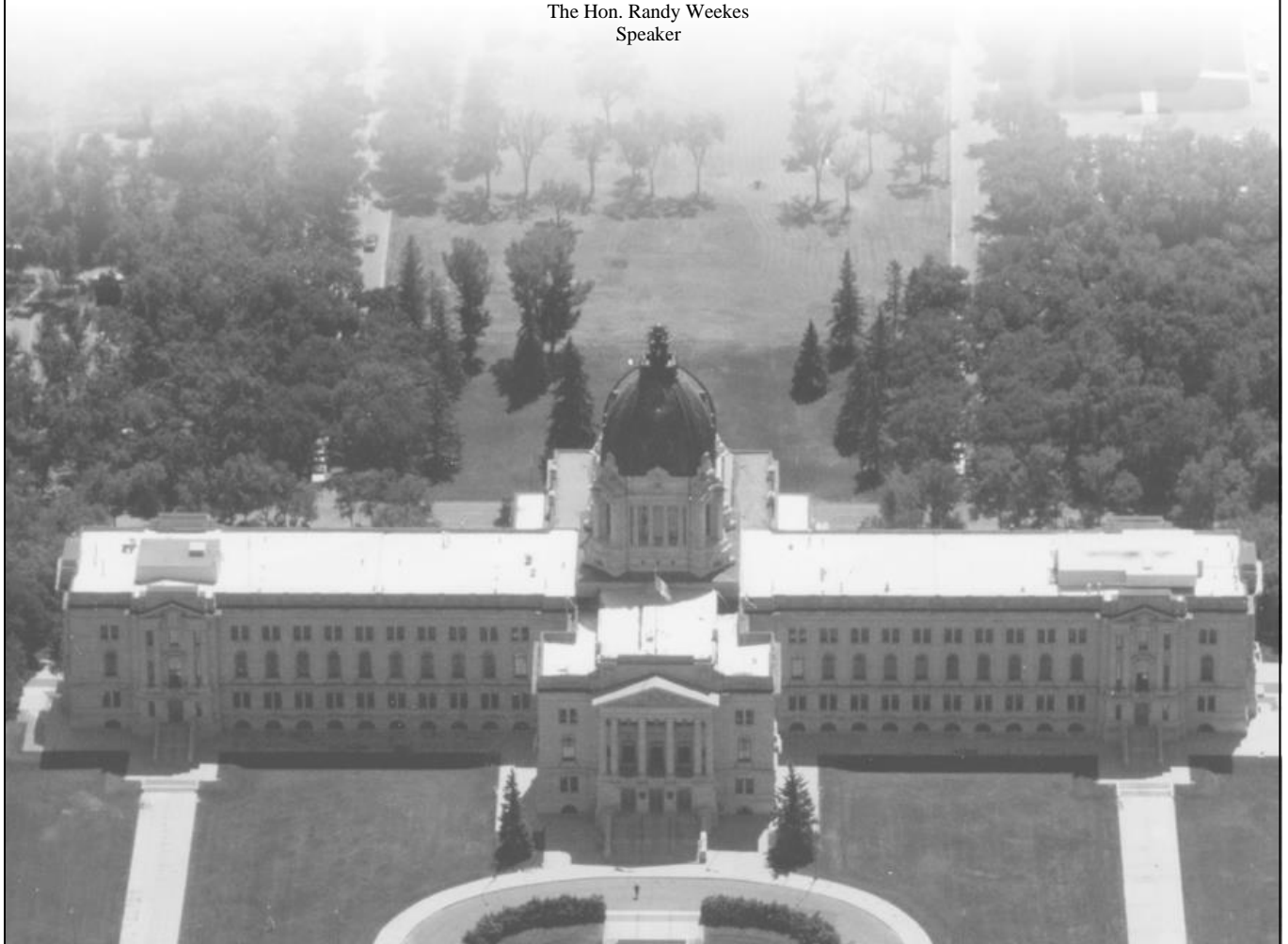
SECOND SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

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



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
2nd Session — 29th Legislature

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

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

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Hindley, Hon. Everett — Swift Current (SP)	Vermette, Doyle — Cumberland (NDP)
Jenson, Terry — Martensville-Warman (SP)	Weekes, Hon. Randy — Biggar-Sask Valley (SP)
Kaeding, Hon. Warren — Melville-Saltcoats (SP)	Wilson, Nadine — Saskatchewan Rivers (Ind.)
Keisig, Travis — Last Mountain-Touchwood (SP)	Wotherspoon, Trent — Regina Rosemont (NDP)
Kirsch, Delbert — Batoche (SP)	Wyant, Hon. Gordon — Saskatoon Northwest (SP)
Lambert, Lisa — Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood (SP)	Young, Aleana — Regina University (NDP)
Lawrence, Greg — Moose Jaw Wakamow (SP)	Young, Colleen — Lloydminster (SP)
Lemaigre, Jim — Athabasca (SP)	

Party Standings: Saskatchewan Party (SP) — 48; New Democratic Party (NDP) — 12; Independent (Ind.) — 1

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EVENING SITTING

The Speaker: — It is now 7:00 p.m. We resume debate.

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

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

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

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Keisig: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited to rise and debate the budget brought forward by our highly able Minister of Finance. It's important to note, Mr. Speaker, that our Finance minister is the longest-serving female member of cabinet in all of Canada. She should be very proud of that, and I'm very proud to serve alongside her.

Before we debate the budget, Mr. Speaker, I want to take a minute and provide an update on my family. My youngest daughter, Sharlize, is doing very well at Lakeland College taking the veterinary technologist course. She genuinely enjoys her school, happy to be learning in person, and has secured work at a local veterinary clinic in Melville this summer.

Shannara, my oldest, is loving nursing school. She's currently doing a clinical rotation at Wascana at the Rehabilitation Centre. But then again, Mr. Speaker, she hates the parking there too.

My wife, Sheila, is busy at work serving the ratepayers of Tullymet, and she's also very busy organizing the Rural Municipal Administrators' Association annual convention. It's scheduled for May 2022 in the city here, Mr. Speaker, and it'll be their 100-year anniversary. It's quite an accomplishment for that organization, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank my constituency assistant, Tina, for all the hard work she does in handling everything in the office. She really had to step up, Mr. Speaker, and help me out on budget day. I was unable to attend, and she handled all my guests and everything else, so I really thank her for that.

An Hon. Member: — That's a good woman, right there.

Mr. Keisig: — Very good, yes. And I also want to thank my constituents, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank them for their calls, their emails. You know, they want to ensure that I'm correctly representing them, and I love hearing about my constituents' concerns and the things that they want this government to address.

I also want to congratulate my neighbour, the member from

Athabasca, Mr. Speaker. His hard work, commitment to his communities, and the positive message from our Premier all helped to contribute to his victory. I know he will serve the constituents of Athabasca very well. And his maiden speech, Mr. Speaker, that was literally the best maiden speech I ever saw in this Chamber and far better than anything I could ever hope to do.

After the by-election, Mr. Speaker, I read a lot of newspaper articles about the Saskatchewan Party's historic win in Athabasca. And I can't remember who wrote it, but there was a newspaper article about the Athabasca constituency had not voted for a centre-right candidate since 1908. That's a bit of really historic knowledge that drives the point home of how unprecedented and what a win it is for this government, Mr. Speaker.

I also want to thank Georgina Jolibois for putting her name forward. Democracy only works when there's two choices on a ballot, Mr. Speaker. All of us in this Chamber understand how much work it is in an election, and I want to thank her for that.

Back on track, Mr. Speaker. What an excellent theme for a budget. After two years of COVID, we can see the light at the end of that tunnel. And this budget will surely put us back on track, spending almost \$7 billion on health that's critically needed and welcomed by the people of this province. We were shown that a bottleneck in our health care system was our lack of intensive care beds, and I'm happy to see twelve and a half million to add 11 new ICU [intensive care unit] beds this year which will bring the total up to 90. Right now it's important to note, Mr. Speaker, that our ICU's true strength is the excellent staff with the training and skill set to perform their duties.

Three and a half million for rural doctor recruitment is great to see, along with six and a half million for an additional 117 continuing care aides. We have a plan to address surgical wait times, Mr. Speaker, and 21.6 million will assist with that. It's excellent to see the expansion to 150 seats for the training of nurses, with almost a \$5 million price tag. I'm very excited about that.

It's very good that we're recruiting people from across the globe, Mr. Speaker, but we also have to train our youth. We are providing 114 million to support the development of our labour market. With over 13 billion of investment pouring into this province, we desperately need labour growth.

As a blue-collar worker all my life, Mr. Speaker, we're entering into something of a perfect storm. When demand for labour is high, wages will rise accordingly. There's some great times for all tradesmen across this province and a real opportunity for young people, Mr. Speaker. It takes around four years to go through the apprenticeship program for most trades, and there will be so much work that young people will have no problem logging their hours.

The Minister of Crown Investments Corporation always talks about the good of lawyers. And I want to make a pitch to all the young people across this province, Mr. Speaker: working with your hands is a great way to provide for yourself and your family. There are tons of room for advancement. It is an enriching and

rewarding career path, and I enjoyed every minute of it. There's going to be massive demand for all trades — electricians, welders, pipefitters, ironworkers, boilermakers. There's going to be lots of demand for all those trades, Mr. Speaker. This will put us back on track.

Seven million dollars for school divisions to hire 200 educational assistants is a welcome addition, welcome news for parents and students.

It's also exciting, Mr. Speaker, to see the funding for Creative Saskatchewan expanded to \$10 million to assist our provincial film and television industry. With the rise of all the streaming services, they're all looking for content, so this announcement is timely and pertinent, Mr. Speaker.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, something truly relevant is the over 3 million in the budget for our international trade and investment strategy. We are an exporting province, and I've always felt it is the duty of our elected representatives to sell the goods that we produce. It always helps if you have boots on the ground, Mr. Speaker, to make the contact, sell our products, and attract investment into our great province. This is another outlay putting us back on track.

And I want to thank the Premier, who's currently in the United Kingdom and Germany, for personally spearheading a lot of this work. This is why I believe we must discuss the current war in Ukraine, Mr. Speaker. This unprovoked aggression from Putin is globally condemned and was unanimously condemned in this Chamber, which is great to see, Mr. Speaker. But it has to open everyone's eyes to how critical policy decisions are in a decision-making process.

I previously spoke, Mr. Speaker, on how critical it is for us to get our energy products to port and allow the global community to purchase our ethically produced products. Purchasing Saskatchewan- and Canadian-produced products will stop the funding of the Putin war machine.

Closer to home, Mr. Speaker, we have to move cautiously on any government policies that will hinder our world-class agricultural producers. The federal government's proposal of reducing nitrogen fertilizer rates is something that a lot of my constituents are very concerned about, and it has to be scrutinized very carefully because we can't do anything to impede our farmers in this province.

Ukraine has a very similar climate to us and their spring planting is about to commence. Many of their regions are in a war zone and will not be able to plant this year, and areas that can are facing tremendous hurdles. There's a massive problem with fuel, seed supplies, fertilizer shortages, and one of the most important shortages of all is labour. Most men and women are heavily involved in the war effort fighting on the front lines, leaving fewer people at home to get the seed in the ground. Many of us in this Chamber understand how critical timing is in a planting season. There's an incredibly small window to get your work done.

Ukraine currently produces 16 per cent of global corn supply and 12 per cent of wheat stocks. They've always been one of our main competitors on the world stage, Mr. Speaker. These are

huge numbers. And our world-class farmers will be able to produce enough to fill the shortage if mother nature complies.

But we have to be able to get our products to port. This is another example of why pipeline capacity is critical. All those tanker cars we see every day on the railroad could be transported safer, cheaper, and faster if we had capacity in our pipeline system. We need the railroad. It's our lifeblood in this province for our food and fertilizer. And we need pipelines for our fuel. The need for this is not just for our province's economic opportunity; this is for global security, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a minute and just touch on some of the things that this budget means to Last Mountain-Touchwood. We've seen our incredible health care team give Saskatchewan people their all for the past two years. When it seemed like they could not give any more, Mr. Speaker, they continued to push through and give more. Our health care team — second to none. I do not question for one moment that many of our doctors, nurses, and technicians are tired. But they continue to show up.

An increase of 4.9 million to expand nurse training by 150 seats is greatly appreciated by my constituents. There are so many young people who are looking to advance their education in the health care field. This helps students like my daughter. We need to give more incentives for people who wish to enter into health care.

I know many constituents speak very highly of our graduate retention program which allows up to 20,000 in tax credits for students. It's imperative that we work with students to make Saskatchewan a province where they not only want to continue their education but also want to stay here after completing their education.

We want our students to work in Saskatchewan. We need our nurses who, I'd like to add, are the most sought-after nurses across the nation because of the fantastic nursing programs we have here. We need them to stay in Saskatchewan. We need them in our rural hospitals. We need to show our Saskatchewan-trained nurses that there's no better option than staying in Saskatchewan.

I'd like to talk a bit about revenue sharing, Mr. Speaker. We've seen revenue sharing increase in this province by 106 per cent since 2007. In Last Mountain-Touchwood, many municipalities are seeing increases of as much as 117 per cent since 2007. These increases ensure that municipalities are supported and able to manage their affairs and communities.

Our municipalities know their communities the best. They know where money needs to go for their communities to grow. For our province to grow, we need to ensure that our municipalities have the funds they need to continue to be able to add to our economy. By increasing revenue sharing, we lay the foundation and ensure that our municipalities will work side by side with the provincial government to build Saskatchewan.

There's something very relevant we should talk about while we're debating budgets, Mr. Speaker. There's a straightforward economic premise that governments of all stripes use — the idea of raising taxes to prohibit demand. We are employing this technique in the budget, Mr. Speaker, on the increase of tobacco tax. It's an effective tool, and we must utilize it to discourage

people from adopting unhealthy personal habits.

But there's also an economic principle referred to as inelastic demand, and it relates to the idea that it doesn't matter what an item costs, people will still purchase it. This principle applies to the carbon tax, Mr. Speaker. The carbon tax is rising 25 per cent on April 1st, and that'll add up to over 11 cents a litre, Mr. Speaker, on our gasoline, never mind the increase on our heating bills.

When the price of carbon reaches \$170 a tonne by 2030, that equates to 45 cents a litre on fuel purchases. We have no choice but to purchase these products, Mr. Speaker. Many people tout electric vehicles as a way around this. But the reality is, Mr. Speaker, they are not feasible for myself and many people across this province. I have to drive 32 miles round trip for a jug of milk. And I am not unique. There are many rural residents with similar commutes like mine.

This was a long and harsh winter, Mr. Speaker, and I think many of us saw the social media posts about people trapped in their vehicles during that blizzard. Fortunately, most people had full fuel tanks and were able to stay warm. Many of them were trapped for over eight hours, Mr. Speaker. Now just imagine being in an electric vehicle and having the heating system fail after a few hours. This is a huge safety issue, Mr. Speaker, and it is a serious one.

[19:15]

Technology will evolve and improve, but we have to realize there are inherent weaknesses in existing technology dealing with our incredibly harsh climate. I've said it before, Mr. Speaker, and I will say it again: taxing people to heat their homes is morally wrong.

For the members opposite who are in favour of carbon taxes, the Leader of the Opposition has publicly supported carbon taxes — my apologies, Mr. Speaker, the interim Leader of the Opposition — and talk about the rebate cheques they receive. The carbon tax touches every facet of our economy. They do not reduce emissions, and all costs are passed on to consumer. No rebate system will ever accurately tally the costs, and if you genuinely believe that you will get more back than you pay, Mr. Speaker, well I have some lakefront property for sale in the rural municipality of Tullymet for you.

This is not just mine and my colleagues' opinions, Mr. Speaker. This has been reaffirmed by the parliamentary budget officer, Yves Giroux, a non-partisan civil servant. The carbon tax is a federal government policy, but policies can change. After listening to many of my constituents, I will never back down on demanding that this unfair form of taxation end.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is a budget that is good for the people of Saskatchewan. We see health care increases. We see improvements with education, increases to expand crime reduction, establishing Saskatchewan's trafficking response team, and investing in our economy.

Two and a half million for the Re-Skill Saskatchewan training subsidy; 2 million for Skills for Success; \$475,000 to create the Saskatchewan Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation. This

offers \$75 million, Mr. Speaker, in loan guarantees for private sector for the Indigenous communities to invest in natural resources and value-added agricultural projects.

Mr. Speaker, our government is on track to ensure that Saskatchewan people have every opportunity. We want this province to continue to grow and flourish. We want to ensure that when people hear "Saskatchewan," they think of success, opportunity, and growth.

This is why we must support our Saskatchewan resources, unlike the members opposite who openly profess their dislike of our oil and gas sector, who do not support a pipeline to get our fuel to ports, who most recently decided they want to complain about taxes, but they sit here in this very Chamber and continue to support a federal carbon tax that is literally crushing every person in this province.

COVID was tough on every person across this country. However, we as a province will ensure that we all come out stronger and back on track, Mr. Speaker. It is because of this government's forward thinking, planning for the future, and the resilient people that we as a province are able to get back on track.

I want to thank all the members of the treasury board, Mr. Speaker, and all the hard work that they do. This is why, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting the amendment put forward by the members opposite, but I will be supporting growth. I will continue to support investment in our economy. I will continue to support the prosperity of this province. And I will be supporting the budget put forward by our Minister of Finance, seconded by the member from Moose Jaw North. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Fiaz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to speak to budget 2022-2023. Mr. Speaker, before I speak to the budget on behalf of people of Regina Pasqua, I believe it is essential to speak a bit about the situation in Ukraine.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to condemn injustice war on Ukraine by Russian regime. The whole world is watching the barbaric missile attacks on a daily basis, day and night. This atrocity by Russian regime will not be forgotten forever. Where children, women, and old people have to run for their lives, leaving their homes, their relatives, and everyone at home and leaving without destination, and do not know where they're going, and migrating to other countries.

Mr. Speaker, I do understand, and my family do understand what is meant by migration, that you have to leave your home, where you cannot practise your democratic rights by your government or another government, or you cannot practise your faith. And I do understand that, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my family, on behalf of Regina Pasqua, I would like to offer prayers for Ukraine for victory and peace.

Mr. Speaker, the pandemic once again was here after a hundred years. The time we will not be forgetting in our life. The time we all as a nation went through was difficult more or less for everyone. Communities and people of Saskatchewan collectively work together and look after one another. Doctors, nurses, and

medical staff at the front line have been working day and night. Teachers, through their virtual classrooms, school staff have done a remarkable job. And I would like to say thank you for all you have done for this nation. Small and big businesses kept our economy rolling despite facing pandemic challenges. In fact, post-pandemic, they are keeping our unemployment rate second-lowest in the country.

Here we are, Mr. Speaker. We're back on track. Our economy has rebounded and moving forward after the biggest pandemic economic shock in the world. The budget 2022-23, while having some effects of pandemic, it is a well-serving budget for people of Saskatchewan. In this budget, our commitment for building a strong Saskatchewan, where \$3.2 billion record investment for building hospitals, schools, and highways, and many more needed projects in Saskatchewan. Our commitment for health infrastructure in urban, rural, and remote areas of Saskatchewan, supporting ongoing health projects; hospital in Weyburn, Prince Albert; urgent care in Saskatoon and in Regina, Mr. Speaker; long-term care homes throughout Saskatchewan.

Also expanding emergency care in urban and in rural and remote areas, adding 11 ICU beds, and we promise 110 ICU beds by 2025. We increase emergency medical services in urban and rural Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, more doctors, more nurses, more medical staff, more equipment. And, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to bring surgical backlog wait time back to pre-pandemic by March 2025.

Mr. Speaker, we secure the future of our nation by investing in education infrastructure. This time it is a record investment of \$3.8 billion for education: building new schools; hiring more teachers and staff, early learning school and child care staff; more support for inclusion of children with disability. For diverse classroom, we are supporting 200 additional full-time education assistants. Increasing teacher salaries, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, we announced many capital projects. One of them is one new school in Regina Pasqua in Harbour Landing community. It will be a new joint school. And it is in the hands of SaskBuilds, and it's coming very soon.

Mr. Speaker, the province's economy is back on track with the 3.7 per cent real GDP [gross domestic product] growth projected in 2022. Saskatchewan has the second-highest rate of job growth in Canada so far. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan products are in demand in the whole world, and we are committed to promote the quality and sustainability of Saskatchewan's agriculture and natural resources export. Helium and lithium are the two new additions in it.

Also growing is Saskatchewan exports in the manufacturing sector, Mr. Speaker. I would like to mention recent capital investment in Saskatchewan. There's the \$2 billion Federated Co-operatives Ltd. partnership with AGT Foods, renewable diesel fuel and canola crush plant, projected annual 450 000 tonnes of oil from canola facility. This will create more than 2,500 jobs during the construction and 150 jobs once it's in operation in Regina.

Mr. Speaker, \$12 billion BHP Jansen potash mine, projected annual production of 4.4 million tonnes, which creates 3,500 jobs during construction and 600 jobs once in operation. Mr. Speaker, my friend, the member from Melfort, shed enough light on BHP

Jansen potash mine, where Ryan can get the job, and I believe there's many other people can get the jobs here in the Jansen mine in Saskatchewan, in Regina, with all these new capital investments, Mr. Speaker. It is about the quality of life of our people of Saskatchewan and affordability for the families.

We are building a better Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and in this government there are many good things happening. Cargill's new canola processing facility in Regina, Red Leaf Pulp wheat straw pulping technologies, is the first of its kind in Regina. The pulp mill is coming back in Prince Albert — we all know that — creating more than 1,600 jobs, Mr. Speaker, and plus the economic spinoff in the city. One Sky's timber mill, creating 700 jobs, Mr. Speaker, and the lumber saw mill expansion, where 240 jobs in Carrot River.

Mr. Speaker, we believe in a strong and growing economy. We are supporting people, the quality of life of people and affordability, and we are supporting families. And, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the motion brought forward by the Minister of Finance and seconded by member from Moose Jaw North. And I'm not supporting the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Jenson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be on my feet tonight to give my remarks in response to our government's budget and a road map for the year that lays in front of us.

But before I begin, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to recognize some pretty special people in my life, including my wife, Angela. A year ago we were here as MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly], essentially full-time residents of Regina and unable to go home to our families and friends on weekends. That lasted about six weeks, and quite frankly it was the longest six weeks of my life, without being able to see my wife or my kids. A lot has changed in the past year and it's great to be back in a Chamber like this and able to go home on weekends.

[19:30]

Mr. Speaker, Angela's birthday is in April and I was unable to spend it with her last year. She was really disappointed but she also understood the reasons why, and why we're here, and continues to be supportive of the work our government, along with my colleagues, do on behalf of the people of this province.

It's been said many times before and it's so true, Mr. Speaker, that we don't govern alone. It's because of the support I get from Angela and our son, Asher, and daughter, Kolbie, that I'm able to be away for so many days out of the year, working to make sure that my kids and the thousands of others like them around the province have a place to call home here in Saskatchewan in the future.

Mr. Speaker, this budget does get our province back on track, back on the way to fiscal balance and continued economic growth. I'm supportive of the measures our Finance minister has taken to invest substantially more in the areas that require it, such as health, mental health, and education, as we emerge from two

years of incredible instability thanks to this pandemic.

I'm also more than pleased that our government will maintain fiscal responsibility, Mr. Speaker, and not maxing out our credit card today and leaving our children and the generations that follow with the job of tackling debt, like our federal counterparts somehow think is perfectly acceptable.

In my constituency of Martensville-Warman, we've been blessed with continued, strong population growth. It's no secret that our province's greatest resource, and really the greatest resource of any jurisdiction around the world, is population growth. Mr. Speaker, the growth of my constituency, as witnessed over the last 15 years, has been nothing short of amazing. But with that growth comes challenges, unique challenges, in the areas of infrastructure and services.

I know some back home are watching — or maybe not — but, Mr. Speaker, I want them to know that I'm working hard each day as their voice in our government to deliver on the projects that are needed. And that work will continue in the weeks and months to come, Mr. Speaker, to ensure communities continue to grow and thrive.

And growing we are, Mr. Speaker. In 2021 the value of residential and commercial construction in Martensville alone was \$20.1 million, an increase from the year before by over \$7 million, in the middle of a pandemic. In Warman, that growth is even greater, with \$40.1 million, an increase of \$14 million from the previous year.

In the RM [rural municipality] of Corman Park, Mr. Speaker, which I share with a few colleagues on this side of the House, we saw growth in 2021 that was absolutely incredible. In 2020 the RM of Corman Park recorded \$55 million worth of residential and commercial construction. You know what that number grew to in 2021, Mr. Speaker? \$91.9 million, a massive increase of 67 per cent over the previous year, in the middle of a pandemic.

Warman is going to be celebrating its tenth anniversary as a city on October 27th, Mr. Speaker. In that 10 years, the population has grown from 5,300 in 2007 to 12,419 in 2021. This also includes a 12 per cent increase from 2016, making it the fastest growing city in Saskatchewan. And close behind that, Mr. Speaker, is Martensville, the second-fastest growing city in the province. Martensville is now at 10,549 residents according to the 2021 census, an increase of 9.3 per cent over 2016.

Yes, it's a daunting challenge to be the only MLA in Saskatchewan representing two cities, Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Hey, it's a daunting challenge. But you know what? It's also a good thing that I can stand here proudly today and say to my friends and neighbours in the constituency of Martensville-Warman that we will continue to lead the way when it comes to population growth and quality of life.

But, Mr. Speaker, back to the budget and the reasons why I think it's exactly the right formula for the year ahead. The pandemic was a marathon, and no one is going to argue that it took its toll on all of us, with some suffering effects more than others. To that, Mr. Speaker, we're committing more investments in health care to significantly reduce surgical wait times over the next few

years, and additional hospital beds provide more mental health services and continue our work in the areas of addictions.

Mr. Speaker, we know that there are several areas that need to be addressed in health care coming out of this pandemic, and this government is going to plan and build for the future like we always do. We've budgeted for additional nurses to be recruited from the Philippines, Mr. Speaker. Our plan is to bring 300 nurses to bolster our staffing resources across the province while at the same time continuing to fulfill our commitment to hire 300 new continuing care aides to support long-term and expanded home care services for our seniors.

Recruiting from abroad isn't the only solution either, Mr. Speaker. We're also committing \$4.9 million in this budget to add an additional 150 nurse training seats. Mr. Speaker, I can't go through the entire list of health care initiatives our government will be undertaking in the coming year, but let's just say the needs are identified in this area, and our government will take on that challenge like we always do to get the job done.

Another part of our budget that I'm proud to support here tonight is the increased funding for protecting people and property. Mr. Speaker, we all know of someone close to us who has been a victim of crime, whether that be a crime against the person or a property crime. With an increase of \$91.1 million, or 10 per cent over last year, we're committed to making life more difficult for criminals.

One specific area that I think will be a game changer, Mr. Speaker, is the \$50.7 million that will bring together multiple agencies under one organizational structure. Too often we hear of stories from people we know who have concerns about response times. Mr. Speaker, they don't care what colour the stripe is on their pants or what the decals on the response vehicle are. They just want help, and they quite frequently need that help urgently. This initiative will allow branches such as highway patrol, conservation officers, community safety officers, and others to share information and, more importantly, assist people in a more timely and efficient way, Mr. Speaker.

The newly created provincial protective services branch will allow multiple agencies to be on the same page, Mr. Speaker. This will result in efficiencies across the board and provide an even greater protection for our residents while helping free up some RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] resources so they too can become more responsible when a call for help comes in.

Mr. Speaker, we've seen the dark past of the NDP [New Democratic Party] in this province. I was a young adult right in the middle of these darkest times, and I watched as friends and family members packed up and headed west, and sometimes to the East, for opportunities elsewhere. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I believe it was the NDP member from Prince Albert Northcote who was Economic Development minister at the time. He said a decreasing population was actually not a bad thing. Yeah, in his estimation, Mr. Speaker, with people leaving the province in droves, he actually stated, with fewer people here there would be more here for the rest of us. Can you imagine that? From an Economic Development minister, no less. The NDP plan for economic development growth was to literally chase people out of the province so there would be more left for everybody else.

Not only did I have to change the shocks in my vehicle more than the engine oil under the NDP, but I watched everything decay around me, Mr. Speaker. Schools were closed. Hospitals were closed. Highways were riddled with craters and littered with appropriately orange-coloured markers for as far as the eye can see.

I guess what I, and so many thousands of others who lived through those dark times and experienced the anguish that went with it, leads me to this, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend I spent some much-needed time with my family. Hockey season wrapped up for my son earlier in the week and my daughter is getting ready to exchange her cheerleading shoes for soccer shoes.

And speaking of cheerleading — I'm just going to veer off course for a quick moment — I just want to acknowledge the outpouring of support from friends and family that attended the Warman Ultimate Cheerleading club's showcase last night. One of the club's athletes has six relatives who are attempting to flee Ukraine at this very moment. Last night the Warman Ultimate Cheerleading club donated all the proceeds from their 50/50 draw to help cover the costs with getting this young lady's family to Canada and hopefully to our province.

Ukraine is on everyone's mind these days, and I spoke last week about some of the things people here in Saskatchewan are doing to help in whatever way they can. So as our family ate dinner together on Saturday, it gave me a chance to reflect on just how good we have things here, Mr. Speaker. We live in relative comfort without fearing for our lives or the lives of the people that we love. I think it goes without saying that a quick and peaceful resolution is needed for the people of Ukraine. It truly is a helpless feeling as each day passes and more innocent lives are lost. We can only pray that we have peace in Ukraine and that Ukraine will emerge as the independent, sovereign nation it so deserves to be.

But back to the dinner table with my kids. It won't be much longer and they'll both be finished school and entering the workforce. There are thousands of other families like mine in this province, Mr. Speaker, and I think about what life will be like for them when they begin to have careers and families of their own. I don't believe it's fair to saddle future generations with staggering debt and crippling interest costs, as our federal counterparts have shown since 2015 that they are more than happy to do.

Our province's strong finances are a pillar for this government and one that will guide us into the years ahead, Mr. Speaker. With a plan to reduce deficits in the next three years, combined with economic growth and improving our debt-to-GDP ratio even further, my kids, like so many others who are growing up here in Saskatchewan, will have a future here in Saskatchewan. They deserve to drive on roads that don't resemble the planet Mars like I had to do. They deserve to have access to the best health care and education possible. And they surely deserve to lead their best life right here in this great province.

In order to achieve great things, Mr. Speaker, a plan is needed on how to accomplish them. Our government has a plan for growth into the year 2030 to guide us as we make investments and create the environment for success in our people and our industries. I'd

like to touch on some of those actions and how they directly relate to this year's budget, Mr. Speaker.

In order to grow our province and make life better for everyone, I'm proud that our government is implementing a strategy centred specifically on Indigenous inclusion in the economy. Mr. Speaker, a \$475,000 investment doesn't sound like much in the grand scheme of things, but it will be used to create the Saskatchewan Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation. This entity will provide up to \$75 million in loan guarantees for private sector lending to Indigenous communities and organizations so that they can invest and create jobs in our natural resource sectors and value-added agriculture ventures — a \$475,000 investment to create \$75 million worth of economic activity. Mr. Speaker, while there is much more work to be done on this file, this is yet another step and commitment towards reconciliation with the Indigenous community.

And like so many members before me, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention this. To the people of Athabasca I'd just like to say, thank you for electing a true statesman, a gentleman who I'm proud to sit beside in this Assembly . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Right? We've gotten to know each other a little better over the last few weeks, Mr. Speaker, and he's already doing some great things on behalf of his constituents. He genuinely cares about people and is a great voice to have around the caucus table representing the northern part of our province.

Earlier today, Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Advanced Education announced the launch of the Saskatchewan student ambassador program that will allow post-secondary educational institutions to form partnerships around the world. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, this new program will provide support to our student ambassadors to wave the Saskatchewan flag and promote our province, our people, and the educational opportunities that we have to offer. Our province has a great story to tell, Mr. Speaker, especially to young people looking to further their education, and we need to take every advantage we have to ensure that the message is delivered. So I'm very happy that this announcement was made today.

[19:45]

And speaking of international initiatives, another one of the 20 actions in our growth plan to 2030, Mr. Speaker, is our government's goal of engaging internationally to secure access and expand international markets for Saskatchewan products. And we're pursuing that goal as we stand here today, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is in Europe this week meeting with investors and the banking community to tell that Saskatchewan story and attract more commerce and more investment. Trade missions are vital to our province's export-based economy. And if we've learned anything over the last several years, Mr. Speaker, we've learned since 2015 that if you want the job done right, you sometimes need to do it yourself and not rely on the new leader of the federal NDP to mess things up like he quite often does on the international stage.

Saskatchewan has so much to offer the world, and now it's more important than ever that we get in front of those customers and generate wealth from outside this nation and into Saskatchewan. Our newest four international trade offices are now up and running in key markets such as the United Kingdom, Mexico,

Vietnam, and the United Arab Emirates, Mr. Speaker. And the work that is being done is important to our economy. And the exported raw goods, as well as value-added products, those provide good jobs and keep our communities strong right across this province.

Customers are looking for the things the people of our province produce, and it's essential that those connections between producers and buyers are established and continued into the future. The people of our province have always been forward-looking.

The one other thing in the budget that was very interesting was the film tax . . . or pardon me, the film . . .

An Hon. Member: — Creative Saskatchewan.

Mr. Jensen: — Right. We've been told through social media that it will take 10, 15, 20 years to rebuild this industry. It's on social media. There's different people, members opposite have been retweeting that. A quote from Ken Alecxe, the executive director of the Saskatchewan Media Production Industry Association, reads as follows, and I quote:

In the past two years, the COVID restrictions did not stop our Saskatchewan content creators from writing new scripts. Now as restrictions are lifting, multiple projects have been developed and are shovel ready to move into production. We are not going to wait to start producing content.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, the people of our province have always been forward-looking. Looking ahead to next year's crop is always a favourite pastime on coffee row in our small towns. Or hoping for more success during the next football season, which I might add was very popular back in the late '70s and early '80s, when that look ahead usually began before Labour Day. And thank goodness we've got that turned around. Or, Mr. Speaker, just simply looking ahead and looking forward to the trees budding and the flowers blooming each spring like we are right now.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be supporting the budget motion made by the Minister of Finance and seconded by the member from Moose Jaw North. And suffice to say, pedalling backwards would be foolish, so I will not be supporting the amendment made by the opposition. I'm proud to stand with my colleagues and all of Saskatchewan as we lay the groundwork for the year ahead, Mr. Speaker, and look forward to the best years that are before us for the people of our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Requesting leave to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The member has requested leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to members for granting me leave.

It's a pleasure to welcome two guests to the Assembly here tonight. They're seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I'll start with someone that has a keen interest in provincial affairs and the provincial budget and matters within this province. He is a 16-year-old over at F.W. Johnson Collegiate, a grade 11 student by the name of Eric Hamm. Maybe, Eric, give us a wave. He was observing the budget. He has a keen interest in education. He wants to ensure there is adequate funding there, Mr. Speaker. And it's nice to have him here tonight in his Assembly with his dad, Jason Hamm, who has joined us here tonight.

Jason is a manager out at the Co-op Refinery Complex, Mr. Speaker. Of course, such an important economic operation in our community and in our province and in Western Canada is a busy time for Jason and the team out there right now, as they get around to turnaround and spring shutdown, Mr. Speaker, an important time for that operation.

I'd also, through him to his wife, I'd like to thank her for her service to the people of the province as an RN [registered nurse] working with the acquired brain injury program in the province and providing really life-changing supports to people and families all across our province. But to you and through you, Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to welcome Eric Hamm and his dad, Jason Hamm, to their Assembly here tonight.

The Speaker: — Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Keisig: — I would like to join in the member opposite.

The Speaker: — The member is going to ask leave . . .

Mr. Keisig: — I would like to join the member opposite in welcoming Mr. Hamm to his Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: — You were going to ask leave to introduce guests.

Mr. Keisig: — [Inaudible] . . . for leave, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Mr. Keisig: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's after supper, Mr. Speaker. I can't drink coffee this late and I'm a little bit fuzzy. I apologize for that.

I want to join in the member opposite in welcoming Mr. Hamm to his Legislative Assembly. I've worked with Mr. Hamm on many construction projects before I entered this Chamber and before he entered into more of a management role. We were both welders. We both worked with our hands every day, and we did a lot of construction projects on different places across this province together. So I want to join and welcome Jason Hamm to his Legislative Assembly.

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

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY (BUDGET DEBATE)

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

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be on my feet this evening and entering into debate on the budget that's been presented for this year. On concluding my remarks, I will just notify that I will not be supporting the motion put forward in favour of this budget, but will be supporting the amendment put forward by the member for Regina Rosemont.

And before I get into the more substantive remarks that I've prepared for this debate, I do want to start by thanking my constituents and my constituency assistant for continuing to put their faith and confidence in me, and just for the wonderful community that they are in and the great honour that it is to represent them here in the legislature.

It's been such a wonderful opportunity these past 18 months, however long it's been, in this role. And certainly it's one that I couldn't do without the capable assistance of my constituency assistant, Kerry Schaefer. We've been having such an incredible time as we've been learning our roles, developing new skills, finding ways to work together and serve the people of our constituency.

Kerry is such a delight to work with. She has a wonderful sense of humour. She's always up for a new challenge and really cares deeply for the people of our community, and in serving their needs and ensuring that they are receiving the services that they need, and helping to navigate the system and ensure that, whatever problems arise, we're there to advocate on their behalf. And I really, truly could not do this work without her able assistance. And so I do want to start with that acknowledgement and deep show of appreciation for all that she does for us in our constituency of Saskatoon Nutana.

And although it's been difficult through the pandemic to engage in a really close and extensive way with constituents, I've still really valued all of the many tremendous opportunities to meet with constituents and attend events, whether those are city-wide or within the community. Saskatoon Nutana is such a vibrant, vibrant community, whether it's the Fringe Festival in the summertime, the many events in appreciation of arts and culture in our community, the upstanding role that members of our business community play in ensuring that we're taking care of one another.

People really, truly care about one another in Saskatoon Nutana and have really stepped up as leaders in so many ways throughout the pandemic. And it's truly an honour to represent them and serve here on their behalf in the legislature. Bringing forward

member statements and petitions that they've worked and put their heart and soul into and being able to represent them in those ways is also something that I find a great honour to do.

And so you know, as I turn my mind to this budget, and I think about the manner in which it impacts the people of Saskatoon Nutana, and indeed the entire city of Saskatoon and the rest of the province — you know, whether that's in rural Saskatchewan, northern Saskatchewan, southeast Saskatchewan, rural, urban, just across the piece — so many people are struggling. They're really struggling, finding it hard to make ends meet, and were really looking for, you know, positive signs in this budget that would give them some hope about what might be in store for them in their future.

And I have to say, it was rather disappointing to see the numerous ways in which this budget has let people down. From tax increases on a whole range of items, which I'll get into in a moment, or the lack of funding for crucial programs whether in the areas of health, education, social services, we really just have been so greatly disappointed.

And it reminds . . . You know, it's an interesting phrase that the government side has taken for this budget in terms of back on track. And you know, it's an interesting analogy because you think of the obvious children's story of *The Little Engine That Could*. And in that story, of course, we all know that there is a train that's filled with toys and goodies for the good girls and boys on the other side of the mountain.

And so this train is broken down on the side of the train tracks and is looking for somebody or some locomotive to take it over the mountain to the other side where it can deliver those toys and goodies to the good children. So the first locomotive comes along, and the little train says to the big locomotive, oh, will you help me get across to the other side of the mountain? And this big, grand locomotive says, well I'm far too important to take the likes of you over the mountain. I have to go on and do more important work and take care of other bigger, more grander trains, so I won't help you.

So the little train's getting more worried. And the next train comes along. And this one is a very pompous train, very pompous train that feels that it's far too important to be concerned with the likes of this little train full of toys and goodies for the good little children across the mountain, and says, no, I have more important work to do, so I'm not going to help you.

[20:00]

And then the next train comes along. This time it's this old, beleaguered locomotive, and it takes a look at this little train full of all these goodies and it says, I'm too old and frail to take you over the mountain to the good little boys and girls. And so this train is really at a loss, really at a loss until finally there's the little engine that could that comes along to help it across.

And as I think about that story and the moral that it's telling to us and how it relates to getting back on track, what I really see here is a government that feels it's too grand. You know, we heard the Minister for Social Services the other day talk about how, well you know, we only have so much money. It can only go so far; so sorry, but the rest of you are just going to have to suffer. And

I think that whether it's a government that feels it's too grand, too pompous, or just too old and frail, it hasn't shown any interest in addressing the needs of the people of Saskatchewan, people who, according to the Angus Reid poll, indicates are really suffering.

Let me just share a little bit of that polling information. So right now in Saskatchewan, 51 per cent of households are carrying too much debt, and 39 per cent couldn't manage an unexpected cost of \$1,000. That would just break them. They suffer from job insecurity, and debt remains a major source of stress for them, with 35 per cent struggling. Low-income households in particular face huge challenges and are losing hope. They're concerned about rising interest rates, and 48 per cent — that's almost half of Saskatchewan residents — find their living situation tough or very difficult.

And so we see a budget here before us that isn't taking into account the fear and the stress, the concern that people are feeling about their ability to provide for themselves and their families, people experiencing the second-lowest minimum wage in the country, in Saskatoon an average income of \$40,000.

And now to be hit with more taxes, 6 per cent PST [provincial sales tax] on a whole range of things that, you know, as we're coming out of this pandemic, people really rely on. They're looking for an opportunity to be together with other people and enjoy going to things like the zoo or to fairs and rodeos and trade shows and arts and craft shows, even to the gym to, you know, stay well. And now they're facing higher costs, a higher tax burden. This government is expecting them to, you know, bear the burden at a time when they've had to endure so much and really should be given a break, not an extra burden.

But it's not only that. It's not that now we have the PST being applied to a range of outings and events, but also we're seeing the property tax hiked on residential properties, on agricultural properties. We've seen the commercial and industrial property tax increased as well. We see it on tobacco and on vaping products.

And so at a time when people are looking for assistance in coming out of this pandemic, what has this government done? It's made life harder at a time when people are already feeling under stress and the burden of cost of living, an inflation rate that was recently reported at 5.4, 5.7 per cent. It's at a 30-year high.

And you see that stress, you see that on the street, you know. People are on edge, you know. You don't see the same kind of relaxed nature of people when you meet them in a grocery store or on the street. You know, road rage is really becoming more pronounced. And it's because of these financial pressures, pressures with increasing debt, the highest mortgage arrears in the country. And so it's a really hard time, and unfortunately this government is out of touch with these realities.

And you know, we listen to these arguments on . . . well you know, we're having to, you know, move towards a balanced budget and these are the choices that we've had to make. But I think it really talks about priorities and the things that people value, or what this government values over, you know, the lives of ordinary Saskatchewan people who are having such a hard time making ends meet.

And you know, oftentimes part of the justification we hear from the other side of the Assembly is that well, you know, under an NDP government things would be far worse. And yet, and yet, and yet, I mean it's funny how your claque kind of starts and ends at times that conveniently leave out the disgraceful history of your predecessors in government here.

And I remember those days. I remember those days well. I mean I grew up in this province. I lived through the '80s. I lived through the Devine government when they added \$14 billion to the debt at a time when there were massive tax cuts and giveaway grants on programs that, you know, were regressive. And there were handouts; you know, they were putting money in the hands of people that wasn't addressing where the true needs were. Not only that, nepotism abounded in terms of, you know, who was getting hired. And at the end of it, and at the end of it, you had 16 criminal convictions — 14 MLAs, including eight cabinet ministers. Wonder what the RCMP titled "operation fiddle." Fiddle, isn't that an interesting name?

Fourteen MLAs and two party workers charged with fraud, that's the legacy of this government. And so, you know, not only that, not only were these criminal convictions of fraud by your predecessors . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . If you want to go back, let's go back.

But not only that, you saddled us with a debt so that when we had finally a responsible government in power in the '90s under the NDP, under Romanow and Calvert, we had to fix the mess that your predecessors created. So don't ever forget that, when you want to talk about the hard choices that our government had to make when you left us in such a horrible, horrible state.

And you know, they were hard choices, you know, whether it was in terms of highways and hospitals and services having to be rationalized and bring our bank rating back up. I mean we were literally almost on the verge of bankruptcy as a province. Don't ever forget that. Don't ever forget that reality. And so when you left us in such a state and we had to bring it back from the brink so that families could continue to ensure their children had a good education and access to health care, something that has been so sacred in this province, let's remember where that came from.

And I think, you know, when I think about the values of our party and how it's rooted in ensuring that there is equality and justice and that people's basic needs are being met. We're not making a bargain here where people are left on the side of the road, where they're meant to have, you know, such a disgraceful lack of dignity through a revamped SIS [Saskatchewan income support] program with a \$30 increase in this budget. It's disgraceful. I've kind of lost track of time, okay? All right? Oh, I guess I'll go on then. Yeah. Okay, well there was a few other things I wanted to say, and thank you all for the encouragement. I will continue with my remarks.

So I thought maybe it might be interesting just to sort of read into the record some of the comments that some different organizations have made about this budget. And I think one of the things that for me was extremely disappointing was the fact that Prairie Harm Reduction, third year in a row, did not receive funding. That organization is doing such critical work in the Saskatoon area at a time when, you know, we have the highest rates of mental health and suicide and overdoses from drug use.

And so Kayla DeMong is the new director, executive director for that facility, and certainly she was disappointed and was hoping for something different. And I feel really, really badly for that organization, knowing how the great work that they do. They're such an innovative organization and really deserve adequate, sustaining funding for the services they provide.

And you know, we hear about, you know, how vital CBOs [community-based organization] are to the delivery of social services and those with mental health and addictions, and certainly I can't think of a more deserving organization. I really can't. I think it's absolutely shameful that they've been denied funding again.

Okay, let's see. What else do we have here? We have Mark von Schellwitz, the vice-president for Western Canada with Restaurants Canada, said that . . . You know, he even points out the fact that the budget doesn't exactly address affordability for people. And so it doesn't really do much as far as helping consumers with those rising costs. And so I guess, you know, he's pointing out the fact that, you know, it's, you know, whether in the hospitality industry, you know, a number of these taxes are really going to be a disincentive for people to get out and participate.

Tim Reid, the president and CEO [chief executive officer] of Regina Exhibition Association Ltd, or REAL, I guess as they're more commonly known, what did he have to say? He said that:

The last two years have been the darkest time the industry has ever faced. This change will impact business operations and entertainment-goers, the significance of which needs to be fully understood.

So, not really . . . And I guess the other thing about this was that, you know, this was coming as a surprise and a shock. Not, you know . . . There wasn't any consultation. At least we never heard of any when the questions were asked today in question period. And so they're really feeling blindsided by these measures.

Todd MacKay, the prairie director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, said he's disappointed because there is no tax relief for taxpayers. And adding the new PST on some services is an irritant. It's like sticking it to taxpayers on that one.

And then, of course, well you know how the Saskatchewan Roughriders feel about the new tax on ticket sales:

As a non-profit sports team and despite rising inflation costs, we worked tirelessly to minimize the financial impact on our fans. Unfortunately, we know today's decision will impact many in our community.

[20:15]

Those are just a few of the quotes that I wanted to include in my remarks. I mean this has been a budget that I think has been widely, widely panned as uninspired, as out of touch, and one where we're not ensuring that, as we come out of this pandemic, you know, that people's hopes and fears are being adequately addressed.

And I think that's really what it comes down to at the end of the

day. And as I wrap up my remarks on this is that, you know, whether it's the little engine that could and our little train that's trying to make it over the mountain to reward all the good little boys on the other side and, you know . . .

And you think about that as, you know, all the good people of Saskatchewan that know this is a government that doesn't care. It either thinks it's too grand, too pompous, or too old and frail — I'm not sure which of these it is — but certainly I think it's time for a change. And this budget has certainly shown us that really, you guys are out of ideas and you're out of touch.

So with that I'll conclude my remarks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. D. Harrison: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees. It is an honour and a privilege for me to stand in the House today and represent the people of Cannington and provide my reply to the 2022-23 budget. Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Deputy Premier and Finance minister for preparing a budget for all the people of Saskatchewan, a budget that gets Saskatchewan's economy and finances back on track. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, I would like to say thank you to my wife, Cheryl, for her love, support, and encouragement, and for calving the cows out while I'm not there. Thanks to my family for all their love and support as well. It is very much appreciated.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, I would like to thank my constituency assistants, Trisha Schulhauser, April Junk, and Cordelia Patton for their hard work and dedication. They take calls and concerns from constituents, providing them with appropriate information and direction.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, thank you to all my colleagues and indeed the members of the Assembly for their hard work representing and working for the people of Saskatchewan. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, thank you to yourself for keeping everyone on their best behaviour. Thanks to all the legislative staff for their hard work, not only during session, but throughout the year.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, I would like to acknowledge and thank the people of Saskatchewan. Thanks for their patience and understanding. Their hard work, strength, and determination have led our province through the toughest two years imaginable. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, budget 2022-23 gets Saskatchewan back on track. Although not a balanced budget, our plan is back on track with smaller deficits in the next three years, with a planned balanced budget in 2026-27. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, this budget forecasts revenue of \$17.2 billion, up over \$2.7 billion over last year.

Revenue increase is largely due to higher income and sales tax revenue on a stronger economy, as well as higher prices for oil and potash. Expenses are forecast to be \$17.6 billion, an increase of 3.1 per cent over last year. This budget projects real gross

domestic product growth at 3.7 per cent for 2022, growing through pre-pandemic levels, even as Saskatchewan protects lives and livelihoods.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, our small-business owners have been challenged this past couple of years and yet they have been resilient and adaptive. This government reduced the small-business tax rate from 2 per cent to zero effective October 1st, 2020, and it will return to 1 per cent July 1st, 2022, providing \$51.5 million in savings to Saskatchewan small businesses.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, site commission rates for VLTs [video lottery terminal] will increase from 15 per cent to 18 per cent, increasing revenue for bar and restaurant owners by \$6.7 million.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, the community rink affordability grant remains in place and provides \$2,500 per ice surface in about 400 communities across the province. The program assists communities with operating expenses and minor capital projects, helping communities grow and enhance the quality of life for Saskatchewan families.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, through the Saskatchewan veteran service club support program, \$1.5 million in funding will be provided to service clubs across the province. These funds will support service clubs, their members, and families in communities like Carnduff, Stoughton, Creelman, and Fillmore to name a few in Cannington.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, the active family benefit continues, providing \$150 per child enrolled in sport, recreation, and cultural activities. The benefit provides an extra \$50 per child to families of children with disabilities, helping keep life affordable for Saskatchewan families.

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

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, since 2007 personal income tax exemptions have removed 112,000 individuals from the province's income tax roll. A family of four pays no provincial income tax on their first \$53,435 of combined income. We have reintroduced annual indexation of the provincial income tax brackets, ensuring these tax savings are not eroded by inflation, making it more affordable to live in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, social services funding has increased for community-based organizations by 2 per cent or \$11.2 million, funding to help provide services to Saskatchewan's vulnerable people and create positive outcomes and a better quality of life.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, municipal revenue sharing has strengthened communities, providing a stable and predictable source of revenue for rural, urban, and northern communities. \$262 million will be invested locally for building and maintaining community infrastructure in communities across the province. My local urban and rural municipalities like this stable,

predictable funding so they can invest it locally in their home communities.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, the Ministry of Health budget is a record \$6.8 billion, a 5.2 per cent increase, supporting seniors with \$4.1 million to provide high-dose influenza vaccine to adults 65 years and older. Home care services will be enhanced with \$4.8 million to help seniors live safely and comfortably. This is year two of a three-year commitment to hire 300 continuing care aides. The 2022-2023 budget provides \$6.5 million to hire 117 this year. This budget also expands nurse training seats by 150. We are committed to reducing the surgical wait-list, increasing funding of \$21.6 million to fund thousands of additional surgeries, reducing wait times for Saskatchewan residents, delivering the largest volume of surgical procedures in the history of Saskatchewan.

CT [computerized tomography] and MRI [magnetic resonance imaging] scans will have \$4.9 million increase in this year's budget, allowing thousands or more patients to access imaging services, further reducing wait times. The Saskatchewan Cancer Agency will receive an additional \$15.8 million, a 7.7 per cent increase. Their annual grant will be the highest ever at nearly \$220 million.

This budget will establish a new and independent agency dedicated to recruiting and retaining health care workers, building a more robust workforce. \$3.5 million will be invested for physician recruitment and retention initiatives, targeting family physicians working in rural areas; \$12.5 million to increase the number of intensive care beds, advancing towards our goal of 110 by 2024-2025.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, this budget increased education funding by \$47.2 million for a total of 3.8 billion. Saskatchewan's 27 school divisions will receive nearly \$2 billion in operating funding, fully funding the 2 per cent salary increase as part of the teachers' collective bargaining agreement.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, your government continues to support agriculture. Business risk management programs, including Crop Insurance, AgriStability, AgriInvest, and western livestock price insurance, are supported with a \$338.5 million fund. Business risk management programs provide the backstop farmers and ranchers need to work through the challenges and ensure long-term success.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, agriculture in Saskatchewan has had record growth in value-added processing: recently announced canola crushing projects by Richardson International to double capacity in their Yorkton facility; Cargill building a new facility near Regina; Ceres Global Ag adding a canola crush to their terminal at Northgate; Viterro building a combined canola crushing and refinery outside Regina. When we add value to agricultural production, we create jobs. Jobs support communities, and communities grow for future generations.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, adding value to our agriculture products happens in many different ways. In Alameda, a group of ranchers and residents formed a co-operative to transition Davis Meats into a larger abattoir two and a half times the current capacity. They are currently raising funds and finalizing construction plans for a new facility. They will be known as the

South East Butcher Block, providing a full line of consumer-ready products. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, small town ingenuity building a business to serve the people of the province.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in a split decision that the federal government was allowed to impose a carbon tax on Saskatchewan people. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, this carbon tax is a tax on everything. This tax impacts each and every Saskatchewan resident. Each year the cost to heat our homes, schools, and hospitals will get more expensive. Each year the cost to commute to work and drive your kids to their sporting events will get more expensive. The cost of running our community rinks and swimming pools will increase. The cost of producing and marketing food to feed your families will get more expensive. With recent high fuel prices, we have asked the federal government to pause the carbon tax and stop the next carbon tax increase. Now that Jagmeet Singh is the de facto deputy prime minister, we implore the federal government to pause the carbon tax. And we implore and ask politely to please phone your federal leader and stop the carbon tax hike. Make the call.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, the federal government has indicated that they will consider provincial applications to assume control of its federal carbon backstop. We intend to submit a proposal to assume full control of the backstop fuel charge in our province effective January 1st, 2023.

[20:30]

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, this government will continue to work to make living and working in Saskatchewan more affordable. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, as part of our growth plan, we have committed to upgrade and build 10 000 kilometres of the provincial highway network by 2030. This year the budget provides over 1100 kilometres of improvements, keeping us ahead of schedule for 2030.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, Saskatchewan's Crown corporations have invested \$22 billion on major capital investments since 2008. SaskPower is improving the provincial electricity system to meet the increasing demands with a \$1.1 billion investment in the province's electrical system, continuing to grow Saskatchewan. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, SaskEnergy is investing \$272.8 million in the province's natural gas distribution system, including expansion of the transmission system to meet the increased demand in a growing province, continuing to grow Saskatchewan. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, SaskTel is investing \$377 million to improve its networks, dedicated to being the best, connecting people to their world, continuing to grow Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, over a month ago, the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, or the Putin invasion of Ukraine began. This unprovoked attack on the people of Ukraine have us all concerned for the safety and security of Ukrainians. Your government has been working with the Ukrainian Canadian Congress to assist in accommodating refugees from Ukraine and providing financial support for the people of Ukraine. Our thoughts and prayers go out to each and every one of those affected by this needless war.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, the invasion of Ukraine and

the subsequent sanctions against Russia and some of the oligarchs have highlighted the need to have energy security and food security here in Canada. Saskatchewan is rich with both food and fuel. We have the ability to fill the food and energy needs of the European countries impacted by Russian sanctions.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, the federal government has not been very supportive of our oil and gas industry. They would like us to leave it in the ground and never produce another barrel of oil again. Today the light bulb went on — yes, the light bulb powered by fossil fuels — the light bulb went on and the federal government realized the necessity of oil and gas. In fact Minister Wilkinson, as much as I'm sure it pained him to say, said we would increase Canadian oil production by 300,000 barrels a day. Wow. Is this a sign of support for our oil and gas industry, support from a former provincial youth leader for the provincial New Democratic Party?

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, although I am thankful for the support of the federal minister, it is not the federal government that produces oil. It's the oil and gas exploration companies, companies that have been threatened time and time again by the federal government and their friends and recently signed partner, the New Democratic Party. Now if only we had a pipeline that we could safely and efficiently get our oil and gas to Eastern Canada and around the world. What a novel solution to be able to transport oil — pipelines. Keep grain on the train and oil in the pipeline.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, the oil and gas companies are ready to answer the call for more oil. Strong oil prices are creating a stir. Companies are building up their drilling location inventories. Contractors and equipment are ready to roll. Help wanted signs are hanging in every business in southeast Saskatchewan. Great opportunities for everyone to start a rewarding career in oil and gas. With increased oil activity comes the need for more support services, service stations, restaurants, bars, grocery stores, and hotels. We'll see an increase in activity and also the need for more employees. Come on down to the Southeast and start your new career today.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, increasing potash production in Saskatchewan, combined with higher world prices, are contributing 8 per cent to the provincial budget. BHP's constructing their new Jansen potash project east of Saskatoon, making this the single largest potash investment in provincial history. Saskatchewan is ready to backfill the Russian sanction shortfall.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, historically Saskatchewan has been the breadbasket to the world. Today Saskatchewan is much, much more than wheat. We are growing a more diverse group of grains and oilseeds, raising beef, bison, sheep, and goats while increasing our value-added industries, retaining profits, and creating jobs right here in the province. Saskatchewan is feeding the world.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, our ethically produced oil and gas, potash, uranium, and other precious metal mining, forestry growth, and continued growth in agriculture production makes Saskatchewan a world leader. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, Saskatchewan is home to the essentials the world requires — food, fuel, and fertilizer.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, I will not be supporting the amendment put forward by the member from Regina Rosemont. I am proud to support the Saskatchewan *Back on Track* budget as presented by the Deputy Premier and Finance minister, seconded by the member from Moose Jaw North. God bless Saskatchewan. God save the Queen. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees.

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

Mr. Francis: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees. I'm also very pleased to rise today to address and support this year's provincial budget.

And before getting into that, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank my CAs [constituency assistant] back home in Kindersley. They do such a good job, and the last couple of years have been exceptionally tough. So a big thanks to Maxine, Rita, and Judy. And an extra special thank you and farewell to Judy who has been with me the last four years since I've been elected. Judy and her husband, Bernie, are currently in the process of beginning their retirement which includes relocating to the fair city of North Battleford to be closer to family, and especially their grandkids. So The Battlefords' gain is Kindersley's loss. So I wish them all the best.

So tomorrow being her last day, thank you, Judy, for your dedication to me, your job, the people of the Kindersley constituency, and the people of the province. Rita and Maxine will continue on with the good work they do every day. And times are improving, Mr. Deputy Chair. I think they're actually starting to enjoy their jobs again I and many other members are noticing a shift in the correspondence coming into our offices, away from two years of COVID, COVID, and more COVID. I certainly can't speak for every member here, but I believe our CAs deserve an extra-big thank you.

So now we get back to focusing on our usual course of business as MLAs, both in our constituencies as well as here in the legislature. I think the public may have forgotten the pandemic response isn't our only focus or our core focus for a government, but many are judging us solely on that issue alone. In speaking with constituents, I have and continue to quickly point out that all our other pre- and post-pandemic responsibilities of a government were there and are still remaining today, quietly being done in the background while the ranting and raving over COVID takes all the attention.

Mr. Deputy Chair, the provincial budget is one of those critical pieces of our core responsibilities. An incredibly unfathomable amount of time and effort goes into its development. For those of you that know and understand the process, pardon my simple explanation. But for those that don't — say like the members opposite, who thankfully have never had the chance to develop a budget — you maybe should take note on how the process works.

Every ministry pores over and prioritizes their needs and wants while trying to maintain a level of responsible spending. Finance analysts then do a thorough review and provide opinions or recommendations, and we as a treasury board review it all and make recommendations to caucus and ultimately cabinet. Every year this process takes place behind the scenes, so much work for

so many, without much positive public feedback before or after.

This year, Mr. Deputy Chair, the budget process was difficult enough but was proven even tougher with the sudden loss of Arun Srinivas in early February. As we heard earlier, Arun was an integral part of the Finance team that we worked with as a treasury board. By all accounts, Mr. Deputy Chair, it was a huge loss, the loss of a great mind, the loss of a great teammate, and most importantly, the loss of a great person.

The folks in Finance still had to forge ahead throughout the budget finalization process, not only without Arun's expertise and guidance, but also with heavy, grieving hearts. I'd like to think this budget could be unofficially dedicated to Arun, Arun and his colleagues that carried on with this budget from beginning to end. And Arun was key in getting us back on track, so a big thank you to Arun, as well as Rupen, Brent, and the entire Finance team for their tireless work. And of course a big thanks and congratulations to the Minister of Finance. A ship is only as good as its captain, and she's as good as it gets.

So, Mr. Deputy Chair, I'm proud of where we find ourselves with this budget, as proud as I can be about a \$463 million deficit. But considering where we were only a few short months ago, our financial position has dramatically improved from the projections from last year. We are certainly back on track, Mr. Deputy Chair. Strong gains in resource revenue have bolstered the bottom line, once again reinforcing the fact that Saskatchewan has what the world needs. As we come out of the pandemic, we are seeing strong commodity prices, strong job growth, and strong private sector investment. We are on a good path, a path to balance.

Now the members opposite might not understand or follow this path, or agree with the premise of balanced budgets with their new leadership team in Ottawa thinking and openly admitting "budgets balance themselves," and "forgive me if I don't think about monetary policy." It's difficult to comprehend why they support the federal Liberals, those that wonder why inflation is through the roof when they've been borrowing and printing money like there's no tomorrow.

It's often been said there's three types of people, Mr. Deputy Chair: those that make things happen, those that watch what happens, and those that wonder what happens. It's plain to see that the members opposite and the Liberals and New Democrats down east are definitely the latter.

Mr. Deputy Chair, we are seeing the results of that reckless and dangerous ideology. And the members opposite still cling to that ideology, but what I find most disturbing is the hypocrisy in their position, Mr. Deputy Chair — contradiction after contradiction. For example, they want cheaper fuel right now. They demand a rebate, yet support carbon tax. They claim to support business, yet they wanted them all shut down during the pandemic. They proclaim to be the guardians of education but wanted schools closed and students sent home, not to mention the 176 permanent rural school closures that occurred the last time they were in government. They want more government spending, more teachers, more health care workers — more, more, more, but less debt.

Mr. Deputy Chair, what they always fail to do is talk about where

the money comes from, how to pay for their empty promises, while on this side of the House we know that the private sector is the key to a successful and growing economy, not the government. Yes, government can play a role, a supporting role. I guarantee that under an NDP provincial government we would have not seen the level of private investment that we've seen in this province in the last few months. The resource sector that is doing so well right now was stifled or totally went away in the days of Saskatchewan NDP governments.

An Hon. Member: — Or nationalized.

Mr. Francis: — Or nationalized. Not anymore, Mr. Deputy Chair. Fifteen NDP-free years and counting, and what has happened? Growth — growth in the economy, growth in population, a bigger pie, Mr. Deputy Chair, not a bigger government.

The primary difference is the elimination of a stagnated thinking and outdated policy, but not federally. Justin and Jagmeet's socialist bromance is alive and well, propping each other's warped ideologies and boat-buying policies up every day. Not to give the members opposite any helpful advice, Mr. Deputy Chair, but they'd be well-advised to do a federal leadership review alongside their own provincial review.

[20:45]

The constituents of Athabasca sent you a very, very loud message, and we thank them for that. They now have a member on the government side of the House looking out for their interests, Mr. Deputy Chair. And on this side, we have the honour of having an honest, humble, grounded member that is not afraid to speak the truth and does not play identity or wedge politics.

And if the members opposite don't think things can get any worse for them, keep your wagon hitched to Justin and Jagmeet. They might just be able to set a new record for the lowest number of NDP seats in history. What is that number? Nine? Is that the record? Just happens to match the PST, the number, the per cent of PST when they were in power.

So, Mr. Deputy Chair, the PST is a hot topic. Always has been and likely always will be, and I'd like to talk a little bit more about that. I'm not a fan of any tax. I don't think anyone is. But Mr. Deputy Chair, it is one of the few taxes we pay that 100 per cent goes back into government programs and services that we all expect and rely on when we need them — health care, social services, education, Mr. Deputy Chair, core services that require steady, predictable funding.

This government shifted away from heavy reliance on resource revenue for a good reason. The volatility of those revenue sources does not make it easy for budget development, so we shifted to PST for that stability and predictability in the 2017 budget to create a more balanced revenue forecast process.

The negatives: an expansion to the PST base in this current budget, yes. But it's going to pay yield and dividends going forward. It's going to give municipalities a predictable revenue-sharing formula which to plan their budgets. It's a far better system overall. Yes, we've expanded it to cover some of the activities that GST [goods and services tax] has always been

charged on. You know it wasn't an easy decision either, but the fact remains that we are facing a nearly half-a-billion-dollar deficit.

And there are three choices: cut programs, borrow money, or make an adjustment to taxes. We chose the latter, small changes that put us back on track, a sustainable, predictable revenue stream that leads us back to balance.

And we also need to pay down debt. The last fiscal, we put 450 million towards our operating debt. We're committed to keeping that a priority and we'll continue to do that as we are able. We are confident that the economy, driven primarily by the private sector, will continue to grow. We also firmly believe that our public finances will improve with that growth.

So I for one, with a family of five that has golf, gym memberships, goes to concerts and sporting events, will gladly pay a little more. And I can feel good about knowing that that \$3 on a \$50 ticket is coming back to me, a family member, a friend or a relative, or a complete stranger for that matter, when they access a public service, when they visit a doctor's office, a hospital, need mental health support or social services benefits. We all benefit from those services at some point in time, perhaps a fact that we maybe take for granted, Mr. Deputy Chair.

For the record, this government does not like tax increases. To be 100 per cent honest, we hate them, but we are also cognizant of the need to maintain and often expand our provincial services. You know, Mr. Deputy Chair, we hear pretty much every day from the members opposite how we are cutting this and shorting that, underfunding here, wasting money there. Every year in the four years since I've been here, there's been record spending in almost every ministry.

Take health for example. Even as we transition out of the pandemic, we see huge investment in health — 6.8 billion in total. Nearly 39 per cent of our entire provincial budget is allocated to health care, Mr. Deputy Chair: 4.2 billion to the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] alone, a 7 per cent lift; 21.6 million to address the surgical wait-list, Mr. Deputy Chair, coincidentally the same value as what the PST revenue initiative will generate.

So that just goes to show, Mr. Deputy Chair, that that increase in the PST is going to go to serve people of this province: 470 million into mental health and addictions, an \$8 million lift from the previous year; 17 million increase for seniors; 4.8 million for home care services; 4.1 million for high-dose flu vaccines; six and a half million for another 117 continuing care aides, en route to a three-year commitment to provide a total of 300 by next year.

Physician recruitment, ICU expansion, 10 new high-acuity beds, 10.8 million for rural and remote EMS [emergency medical services] services, investment in rural Saskatchewan health care, Mr. Deputy Chair, a sharp contrast to the record of the former NDP government, who closed 52 hospitals and put hundreds of health care staff out of work.

Mr. Deputy Chair, false claims of cuts to education is a broken record of doom, gloom, a tune sung all too often by the members opposite. And I do not understand how they interpret or

manipulate those numbers to make their case. It's been a long time since I've been in school, Mr. Deputy Chair, but when my kids came home with the new math, I was a bit confused. But you know what confuses me more? New Democrat math.

This year's budget in education once again sees record investment totalling 3.8 billion, over 47 million up, Mr. Speaker. Down is a cut; up is a lift. Nearly 2 billion in operating for 27 school divisions, up 25 million — up, not down. More for early learning, more for K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12], more for post-secondary, continued investment in our future decision makers, Mr. Deputy Chair, three hundred and thirty-eight and a half million invested in province's business risk management programs in agriculture, 936 million invested to protection of people and property, support for municipalities, support and investment for Indigenous communities and businesses.

The list is very long, Mr. Deputy Chair. I've often said that without a strong economy, governments do not have the ability to sustainably provide necessary services and support to residents. And although the private sector drives this, it is also a responsible government's duty to assist where it can. Government needs to provide a competitive tax, utility, and infrastructure network for the private sector to want to invest and operate here. We will continue with those type of investments.

Among the most important is the investment in our international trade offices. The four new offices in the UK [United Kingdom], UAE [United Arab Emirates], Mexico, and Vietnam will complement our existing offices in Japan, India, Singapore, and China. When your own federal government, which are again backed by the members opposite, won't promote Canadian products, services, or technologies, it's incumbent upon ourselves to sell our sustainable Saskatchewan story around the world.

Whether your focus is economic, socio-economic, environmental, or somewhere in the middle, Saskatchewan products are among the highest ranked in the world in all categories. And it's high time we celebrated and advertised this globally, rather than be embarrassed by it and vow to kill it to score cheap points at environmental conferences.

Mr. Deputy Chair, this budget puts us in a good position to continue our investment in public infrastructure: 3.2 billion specifically for capital projects, again record investment for the province; 156 million in health care capital; 846 million in highways, continuing with the commitment to improve 10 000 kilometres of highways by 2030. This government has diligently whittled away at the enormous highway infrastructure deficit built up, ignored, and left for someone else to worry about, courtesy the members opposite. So much more to do, Mr. Deputy Chair, but we have a plan and we're back on track to carry out that plan, back on track and ready to make our 30 goals for 2030 a reality.

Mr. Deputy Chair, this budget supports people. It supports business. It supports investment. It supports and promotes a strong and growing economy. I will of course be supporting the motion put forward by the Minister of Finance, seconded by the member for Moose Jaw North. I will not be supporting the amendment put forward by the opposition member from Regina Rosemont. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise in my place to speak to the budget that was delivered last week by the Minister of Finance. And before I do, like all members, there's a few people that I want to thank and acknowledge.

First and foremost, in terms of the staff that I have the honour of working with, I want to thank my constituency assistant, Marcie Swedburg. Marcie has worked diligently and faithfully for the people of Weyburn-Big Muddy. As I've said many times in this Assembly, long before I was ever the MLA for the Weyburn-Big Muddy constituency, Marcie has done a tremendous job, especially over the last two years I think, as all members I think have recognized.

If we didn't realize how well we were supported prior to the pandemic, we sure found out in a hurry during the pandemic. And then the member from Kindersley really put it well. In fact I feel like just yielding my entire time to the member from Kindersley, because he sure got on a roll, Mr. Speaker. But I do want to thank Marcie for her work.

I want to thank those that I have the pleasure of working with in this building each and every day: Mitch, Holly, Alexa, Amy, and Sean. They do a great job in supporting me as Minister of Education. I have the privilege of working with them for just over a year now, and they do such a tremendous job in the support that they provide to me and in working with the ministry as well and implementing the plans of the government, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to thank my family. I note that it is nearly 9 o'clock and so I've got to report that at 8 o'clock bedtime was starting. And I can imagine for the first 20 or 30 minutes, possibly two out of three had pyjamas on by that time and Amanda was probably wrangling one to get ready for bed. Mr. Speaker, I . . . just so, so blessed. Jack and Ephram and Penelope are just the most amazing kids. Jack is seven. He's in grade 2. Ephram just turned five, and Penelope will be turning three next month. And it's just hard to believe how time has passed by.

The boys, just a quick update. The boys are really interested in animals. They know more about animals than I think I've . . . just it's . . . not politics, no. We're steering them away from that. But they're just really curious boys, interested in dinosaurs and animals and just the way things work. And geography has become a new one. They're drawing maps and putting them up on their walls.

And Penelope is just right in there with the boys. She's a bundle of joy. And I got the privilege of actually getting home this evening for a quick supper with them, and nothing better than when Penelope runs to the door and greets dad when he gets home. So love them, hope they're in bed here pretty soon.

And we just . . . And I can't thank Amanda enough for her love and her support, and she got the tougher end of this bargain, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I just thank her for all that she does for me and for those kids.

I want to thank and congratulate the Finance minister and all the

members of the treasury board for the work, especially in a trying year, as has been pointed out. The loss of a very valuable team member in the Ministry of Finance, and fortunate to know some people that work in Finance and know how critical Arun was, is, was to the ministry and a trusted friend and a trusted colleague and certainly to the members of the treasury board. I've never served on treasury board, but just in interacting with him over the years during cabinet finalization, came to know and respect him a tremendous amount. And so my condolences to not only his family but all of his colleagues and to the members, our colleagues, who work very closely with the Finance department.

I want to thank my colleagues. I probably have . . . this may sound not right, but I've heard a lot of the speeches that have been delivered so far, probably more than in previous years of either budgets or even throne speeches from the fall. And boy, we are just very fortunate to have such a great group of people to work with to call colleagues.

Our new member from Athabasca, I know he's been singled out for his maiden speech. I've been here now, hard to believe, 16 years. I'm not sure I've heard a finer maiden speech by anybody in this House, and so I want to welcome him to the House and congratulate him. And you know, just really solid contributions from members.

[21:00]

The member from Kelvington-Wadena, just when he speaks, I just think . . . What keeps running around in my mind is the line about those that fail to appreciate history are doomed to repeat it. And so I appreciate the context that he brings to his remarks. And my friend from Melfort, just a servant's heart, and just appreciate him so much and what he adds. And so I . . . Yeah, I just want to congratulate and thank all of my colleagues.

I'll talk a little bit — and I'll be hopefully brief tonight — I want to talk a little bit about first of all my constituency and how the budget is going to impact my constituency and get a little bit of context in terms of what's happening in the Weyburn-Big Muddy constituency.

Obviously members have commented on the invasion of Ukraine and certainly that has had an impact I think on all of us and all of our constituencies. And I have been heartened by the number of my constituents who have reached out to me just wanting to help, whatever that looks like. We want to send money to people that we know and we're having trouble wiring money. Is there something that the government . . . Do you know of anything that can help to fix that situation?

You know, I had an email a week ago from a business owner saying, we have an apartment block and we can probably free up 10 or 15 or 20 apartments if you need it. And just, you know, everybody in the community, community leaders . . . The mayor has been very active in the community trying to prepare Weyburn in the event that we have people from Ukraine come and settle in Weyburn. And so yeah, I just . . . You know, tonight, going home for supper was just another reminder. I can't imagine. I can't imagine the people of Ukraine and what they're going through right now. You know, I couldn't imagine saying to my wife, pack a bag for all the kids and go. I just . . . It's such a gut-wrenching experience that so many in Ukraine are experiencing, Mr. Deputy

Speaker. And so I want to thank and acknowledge my constituents that are prepared to help out in any way that they can.

And this on the heels of what has been two very long years. And so I know that speaking to my constituents there certainly is, despite the circumstances and despite the last two years, there's a lot of optimism for the future. I think that's a part of just being from this province and springtime, hope springs eternal. And the water is starting to run and farmers are starting to itch to get back into the fields. And so there is a lot of optimism in my constituency.

I would note that just as an example of how busy it is getting in southeast Saskatchewan, the . . . We are a part of, in southeast Saskatchewan, we're a part of the national unemployment survey. We're a part of the Regina-Moose Mountain region. And the Regina-Moose Mountain region numbers for February for unemployment came out, and they were 4.7 per cent, which is the 13th-lowest regional unemployment rate out of the 325 regional unemployment statistics that are collected by the federal government. But if you take out Regina from that Regina-Moose Mountain region, our unemployment rate is 2.2 per cent. So it is extremely busy in southeast Saskatchewan and that's certainly reflected all throughout the constituency here this spring.

The budget certainly speaks to the priorities that my constituents have been communicating to me. And it really is obviously a number of priority areas, but highways and health care are really the areas that people want to know what the government is doing, where they're going to invest, and what the plan is moving forward. And so very pleased that the budget was able to provide for funds to begin design, preconstruction work on the additional work that's happening on the Highway 6 and 39 projects. There has been, certainly in southeast Saskatchewan on that 39 Highway corridor, has been a significant amount of work over the last number of years in building passing lanes. And a portion of the project though does call for some twinning, and so I know that there's some work that is beginning this year on that, and lots of interest on seeing that project come to fruition.

And I know that that has provided a lot of comfort to my constituents that travel that highway quite frequently. I know that there was a time before government could make a commitment on that, and it was certainly . . . And I know the member from Estevan would have received the calls and the letters and the lobbying efforts for moving on improving on the safety of Highway 39, and that's our major corridor. It's a major corridor for this province to get into the United States, for moving goods, and so more work is going to take place on that. And 39 east is getting some preservation work; 13 east as well, and 6 south. And I know the constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy are certainly pleased with that.

And in health care, \$6.8 billion. And I note the time that I spent as the Minister of Health and certainly . . .

An Hon. Member: — Two point seven.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Yeah, that was a pretty good year. A 2.7 or a 3.6 I think was probably the high water mark, and can't even dream of what this Health minister now has to work with.

But I want to, in all seriousness, I want to thank him and his team at the Ministry of Health and the SHA. I know a lot of those folks and they do an incredible job day in and day out. And so certainly when my constituents talk to me about health care, I think this budget really does hit the mark in terms of those priorities. In the last especially two years with what has taken place and the things that had to be deferred and delayed because of dealing with COVID-19, certainly surgical wait times is the one that constituents want to know what the plan is and I think have a lot of trust frankly in this government. They have seen it before and they can trust that this government is serious when it comes to reducing those surgical wait times.

And so that \$21.6 million that's in the budget certainly is a welcome relief to the constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy, whether they know somebody or not who is on a wait-list right now and has been delayed in getting their surgery. I think that that was a . . . The surgical initiative and the success that began under the member from Indian Head-Milestone under this government I think was one of those touchstones for the people of this province, that there was a challenge set out before us and they liked the pragmatic approach taken by this government at that time in moving the needle in terms of some of the innovation that we tried and succeeded with. And so I think that people are very, in my constituency, very, very pleased to see that.

The other area is in mental health and addictions. And that's particularly after this last two years, the approach that's being taken by this team and the Minister for Mental Health and Addictions in meeting people where they're at. And that certainly is meaning an increase in the number of beds, in increasing supports, and very, very much well received by my constituents.

And the third area in terms of overall priorities for my constituents that I hear from them is on the recruitment and retention side, whether that be, you know, a community like Weyburn that right now we are doing well when it comes to physician recruitment and retention, but a year ago it was a different story. The SHA has been successful in hiring, I think, six doctors in the last year and really changing the practice in Weyburn so that all the doctors, whether they are fee-for-service or contracted employees of the SHA, are now working under one roof — so with the exception of one doctor, but all the other doctors are now working under one roof.

And it really doesn't matter to the patient how they're being paid or how they're billing or, you know, how that happens, but it's a better system for organizing services in the community. And I know the focus that is in this budget in terms of recruitment and retention, particularly on things like EMS in rural Saskatchewan, will be a great relief to some of those outlying communities like Radville that has at times struggled on in being able to keep their facility open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

And certainly I couldn't pass up an opportunity to thank the Finance minister and the Health minister and the Minister of SaskBuilds — I'll add him to the list too, but — for the \$6 million capital investment in the new hospital in Weyburn, which should hopefully be going to tender soon. And certainly people are excited about that, for that moving forward.

I just, because I know it's been a matter of debate in the House and it probably will be for some time, but I do want to touch on

the area that I have responsibility for, that being Education. And so I just want to note the \$2.88 billion education budget that provides for everything from K to 12, early learning, child care, supports the libraries across the province.

I do want to thank the ministry officials for the support that they have given me as we've gone through this, especially over the last number of months and preparing our budget. Looking forward to seeing the additional supports in classrooms through the supports for learning budget that is increasing in this budget, as well as thank my colleagues for the new fund, the \$7 million for EAs [educational assistant] to be able to add them into the classroom. I think that is going to be a great help, especially as we come out of the pandemic.

And focused on those early years, grade 1 to 3, grade 1 to 5 in reading levels. And knowing that in some cases classroom sizes are . . . You know, I know school divisions try very hard to ensure that those young ages are, you know, not the larger class sizes. But in cases where that does happen, this fund will be able to provide that support for divisions to be able to put an EA into those classrooms to help out, to give an extra set of eyes and ears and hands to help especially our little, smaller, or younger students ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to be able to succeed as they grow through their life.

I do want to just note two smaller investments, but I think they're pretty important. One I think is very important, and one is just something that has come out in this last year and we'll see where it goes. But I do want to mention some people on that one.

The first is the \$655,000 increase to the ECIP [early childhood intervention program] budget. This is going to help to address wait lists for particularly those with developmental delays or other disabilities. And I've seen first-hand the work that ECIP does and has done in my community and the work that that does in supporting families and helping our youngest citizens to get the start that they need. And so pleased to see that that was included in this budget.

And the last one that I do want to just mention . . . This was in the Throne Speech. It's more of a Throne Speech item, but I will never pass up an opportunity to talk about it because I think it's certainly not a large budget item, but I think it has the ability to be an important one, I think, for students but, I think, for all of us.

And so I'll spend just a few minutes talking about the Take a Break campaign that we launched in the fall, and so we'll continue on in this budget year. I want to thank the Premier for his support in this. I want to thank the ministry. I think I raised this idea that I'd been kind of thinking about for the last couple of years with the ministry officials, and they have run with it. And I appreciate all the work that they have put behind it.

And I want to thank Cody Fajardo, the starting quarterback for the Saskatchewan Roughriders. He has already recorded a video. If members have not seen it, I hope they will get a chance to see it. And it's really just a message to all of us, but including our young kids that are probably more engaged with social media than . . . Although I know that there's lots of social media users here in the House. But certainly it's much different today for young kids that have access to technology and all the good things

that can come with that technology. But I think we're learning more and more about some of the negative side of that technology. So I do want to thank . . . I haven't had a chance to meet him and to thank him in person yet, and I look forward to doing that later this summer. But I want to thank Cody Fajardo for putting his name and his support behind this campaign.

[21:15]

We will, just as a teaser, we'll have some more influencers, I think is what they're called. We'll have some more people in the coming months that have agreed to take part in this campaign. And so we'll be rolling more out.

But I think just for the benefits of all the viewers this evening and my colleagues here as well, somebody that I've — and I'll close with this — but somebody that I've tried to follow a little bit in the last couple of years, I think a very thoughtful thought leader in the United States. Ben Sasse is a senator from Nebraska. I'm not quite finished, but I highly recommend his first book. He published it about five or six years ago. It's called *The Vanishing American Adult*. And his second book, which is about a year later, it's entitled *Them: Why We Hate Each Other — and How to Heal*. And he talks about his own use of social media and taking, in his case, a six-month social media break. Full disclosure, I took a social media break about seven years ago and I've never looked back. I don't necessarily recommend that for everybody, but certainly do recommend you take a break from time to time.

And it's funny just how often now I find myself saying to my boys when they're fighting, you need to take a break from each other. And not realizing that it's now just become a part of my lexicon, and I seem to have to say that too often to them. But it's fine.

So in his second book, in Senator Sasse's second book, he writes, and I want to quote. And I think this is something just for anybody that is interested, but I think really an important thing to think about. And then I'll talk a little bit about the rules that his family has kind of agreed upon in their own lives. But he writes:

The big leap forward for our family was recognizing that living well requires the right audience. In everyday life, thinking about audience means asking who is on my mind as I go about my day, who am I putting in front of me. When we're constantly online, it means that the people who are literally physically in front of us — our spouse, our kids, our co-workers — are being sidelined in favour of people who are far away, some of whom we've probably never even met.

And then, so they wrestled in their family with kind of coming up with an agreed-upon rules. And so these are his 16 rules, and I'll just put them into the record.

(1) Your thousandth social media friend won't make you any happier. Your fourth real friend will. (2) Uninterrupted time is life's most valuable limited resource. (3) Most news isn't news. (4) Envy isn't good therapy. Rage isn't good therapy. Working out is good therapy. (5) Do something now you'll want to talk about at the dinner table tonight. (6), and I love this one: political addicts are weird. And then in brackets it says, there aren't many

of them. They're just loud. (7)(a) I'd rather be with the people I'm with right now than with the people I'm not with. (7)(b) If 7(a) isn't true, then spend more time with the right people. (8) Develop the right addictions. Another word for addictions is habits. Habits determine character. (9) Not every bad thing in the world requires a response from you. (10) Not every mean thing said to you requires you to acknowledge it. (11) You're not — I practised this word so much — omniscient. You're not omniscient. Don't assume your bubble of information is the whole story. (12) You're not omnipotent. Taking in bad news you can't do anything about doesn't help anyone. (13) Sports Twitter is infinitely better than political Twitter. (14) Lots more social media is fake bots than social media companies admit. (15) The little old lady on your block probably has an important unmet need today. And (16) Social media isn't great for deep stuff. It's great for humour. Let's be known as a family that laughs hard.

So those are his family's rules, Mr. Speaker. I think we can all learn a little bit from those.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am honoured to work with these folks over here. We work hard and we laugh just as hard. And so with that, I won't be supporting the amendment, but I'll be supporting the main motion. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I want to echo my colleague's comments. We've had some great speeches here on both sides of the House, and I very much appreciate listening to it. The quality of the speeches is getting better and better every time we do this, Mr. Speaker. We've got thoughtful, well-laid-out speeches, and now you're going to get something completely different.

Mr. Speaker, first off, as my colleagues have done, I have to thank my family. They're the reason I'm here. I chose to get into politics to hopefully make Saskatchewan a better place for my children to be able to live. That was the main reason I got into politics, and I think that's why a lot of us got into politics, was to make things better, Mr. Speaker.

So I have to thank my wife, Leane, who is at home right now. We are, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're empty nesters now. All of our children have moved out of the house, so it's a unique experience. I think my wife enjoys the quietness and the solitude of the house until I come back with all of my extra-ness and all of my issues that I seem to be able to dump on her once I get back, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But it is amazing for her to be able to provide that perspective to me on a daily basis and ground me not just emotionally but spiritually, Mr. Speaker. It's very much something that I value certainly that she is able to do.

And her two girls are both going to university, one in Regina, one in Saskatoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And my son's also going to university, so we've got three out of our four kids in university, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So if I'm wearing the same suit in the next five years, Mr. Speaker, you can completely understand that.

And also my daughter, who has found . . . the best way I can describe it is her new forever home at her group home, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And she's very much enjoying this, adjusting to

her new life outside of school and outside of her family but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, she continually calls me every night at 7 o'clock to 8 o'clock every evening just to be able to check in to make sure whether I'm Regina dad or Saskatoon dad. So I very much appreciate all of her kind words, and it always seems to come with an ask. One of her . . . Are we going to a movie or a Blades game or the Rush game or whatever it is.

But my family grounds me as it does, and none of us could do this without the support of our families. So I want to say thank you to that. Also my parents, Ted and Marie. My dad was in politics for 2003 to 2007, got me keenly interested in the political world and actually advised me not to run in politics just because it is challenging. It is very difficult and it's very hard on . . . But his support and his guidance and certainly my mom's ongoing support, whether it be spiritual, her just words of advice, or her just putting things very bluntly sometimes, certainly keeps me again very much grounded.

Friends in Regina here, my Regina family who is in and around me here every day, I get the opportunity to serve with these great men and women that are leaders in their communities and have my back, which is a very challenging position that I'm in as Minister of Health along with the member from Swift Current. But it makes my job a lot easier when I feel that the team that I get to stand with shoulder to shoulder has my back and is supportive — critical but supportive — of what we are doing here, certainly Minister of Rural and Remote Health and myself.

A couple other thanks yours before I get into . . . I'll go through my office and that. Most importantly I've got to thank our Premier. Our Premier is a pillar within our province but is certainly a pillar within our party. He is the person that calls and checks up and see how you are doing. He wants to make sure that he is involved with what is going on, but he also allows you to make your own decisions and actually to learn and fosters that relationship, which is extremely important that you have that confidence from our leader, who is doing an amazing job.

And as busy as things are, he is still out flying across the pond over in England and in Germany being able to sell Saskatchewan, because for so many years that wasn't the case. Saskatchewan wasn't on the map in Europe. It wasn't on the map even within our own country. People weren't looking to us. Now they are, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and our Premier and Premier Wall before that were out selling our province, which never happened before, Mr. Speaker. And it is great that we are seeing the residual of that coming back, not just in population growth but in investment, Mr. Speaker, and a better life for people in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, and the Minister of Finance who . . . Obviously everybody in this side of the Assembly looks up to this woman who has been here since 1999, just an amazing person. Will sit down and listen to you. She will be very compassionate, but she will be the first one to call you out if she thinks that something is not right. And if she thinks that, that if you're trying to snow her or if something else is up, she has the history and the knowledge — as the member from Indian Head has as well, being around since 1999 — they have that historical knowledge that certainly helps us out and gives us perspective on what has happened. And you know, well maybe we had a great idea, but maybe they tried that a long time ago and it wasn't such a good idea. So we have that perspective.

But the Minister of Finance and their whole treasury board team, they're critical of where we're spending a very large amount of money within our health care system, but also supportive and understanding on what we need to do, how we need to do it, and the why behind we need to do this to be able to create a better life, a better health care system for the people of Saskatchewan. So I thank them and all the treasury board team and all the people at Finance.

But I'd be remiss if I didn't also thank the team that I get to work with, that I get to represent here in the Assembly, which is my ministry office under the guidance of Max Hendricks and the ADMs [assistant deputy minister]. These are people that are very passionate about what they are doing. They're very passionate about helping people in Saskatchewan, in rural Saskatchewan, in northern Saskatchewan.

And they've had challenges in the last two years that they certainly never trained for. They had to adapt very quickly with a brand new Saskatchewan Health Authority to be able to be nimble, to adapt to what was happening, right from our vaccines that were coming in, to our second doses, restrictions, public health restrictions, the removal of those restrictions. It's been very challenging, so I can't thank Max . . . And I know a lot of the former Health ministers have also worked with Max Hendricks, and he is just a great man and great knowledge on the history of Health and certainly how we can do things better in this province.

Again the SHA team, I thank them right from the top: Andrew Will, who's in on an interim, down to the executive team doing a fabulous job and being able to help us through this pandemic. And again pivoting from one position to another, going from being in hospitals to opening up at large facilities and hockey rinks and everywhere around the province, to be able to vaccinate people and also to be able to test people. This is not something we've done before in Saskatchewan, but these are the people that made it happen.

And I also have to thank the front-line health care workers which we have connections to over here, and I know members opposite also have connections. These are our friends and our families and our neighbours that have been doing a tremendous job. It can't be emphasized enough how these people have managed, in a very challenging time, the stress level that they've been under, the shifts that they've had to take, the different positions that they've had to move into, sometimes moving . . . A vaccinator might be in Weyburn one day and in Saskatoon the next and in Yorkton just filling in positions. They stepped up when we needed them. We knew that they would be able to do this. Our job was to be able to support them as much as we possibly can. So for the front-line health care workers, I say thank you from the bottom of my heart. And on behalf of the government, I thank you very much for everything that you've done.

A couple of other thank yours and then I'll get into some of the . . . I also have to thank, and I'd be remiss if I didn't do this, I don't think I've ever done this in any of my speeches, but I have to thank the Premier's office and the executive council team. They were there day in, day out. Text messages at 10 o'clock at night, 2 in the morning sometimes, 6 in the morning, I'm in communication with them. They were able to help myself and the member from Swift Current be able to work through this

pandemic, offering suggestions, offering strategies, looking at what other provinces were doing, talking to other premiers, talking to other members of exec council across the province, in our federal government.

[21:30]

Shannon Andrews, Reg Downs, Julie, and Drew were just amazing to be able to work with through this. We had some long meetings. We had some challenging times, but we all worked together because we all wanted to make sure that we made our province as safe as we possibly can. So I always wanted to thank them. They're the tip of the spear, so to speak, in exec council. There's lots of people that work in behind them, but I have to thank those four individuals for everything that they did to personally help me with the challenges that were laid out for me right after the election.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll get into some of the highlights of different areas of government. We've got a wide variety of investments here that our government has been able to provide, everything from agriculture, government relations, capital investment. The member from Rosetown is working on capital investments, working on schools, hospitals, infrastructure, highways — all of these important things that we need in our province to be able to allow it to grow, Mr. Speaker.

We also have the Minister of Education, who's working on making sure that our schools . . . Advanced Education, which was critically helpful in this budget for us in Health, allocating 150 seats for new nurses, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we need in this province. We need this to backfill the nurses that have been doing an amazing job over the last couple of years and previous to that. But we also need to do a little bit more than that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we need to go around the world and start recruiting, because we have a great story in Saskatchewan here to be able to sell to anybody around the world.

People have been contacting me from all around the world to be able to say, how can I get to Saskatchewan? How can I become a nurse? How can I become a doctor and come to Saskatchewan because you seem to have a good recipe there. You have stable government. We have the food, the fuel, and the fertilizer that feeds the world, and we're on . . . We've been growing for 15 years straight, Mr. Speaker. This is an amazing place to be and it's an amazing time to be in Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're bringing these people that want to come from all around the world and call Saskatchewan home. No different, this is what this province was built on. There was the Indigenous, First Nations community, and we were built from immigration: "from many peoples, strength." And we're going to continue to bring that alive in the next few months to be able to supplement not just our health care but our economic growth. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're going to make sure we grow this province in a very sustainable way for the long term.

Mr. Speaker, in advanced education, as I touched on the 150 seats, they've also dedicated \$4 million for the capital design for the Saskatoon campus for Sask Polytech. These are all investments for the future, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is something that we need as a province to be able to grow. We can't just grow for the sake of growing, as Premier Wall said

many, many times. We have to have a reason for the growth. The reason for the growth is so we can invest in advanced education, so we can invest in our youth. Not just in our K to 12 system, but also in our advanced education system, whether it be Sask Polytech, our regional college, or the universities. We need to be able to grow this for long term.

As it's been pointed out, there was too many years where friends of mine graduated in the '90s and they were gone and they never come back. We don't want that to happen again. We want to have every opportunity in this province for people to be able to do whatever it is they choose, whether that be in the arts or in the economics or even if they choose a career in politics, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And this is something that's certainly near and dear to my heart as I spent a little time there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is Social Services. And the member from Estevan is doing an absolute amazing job in carrying this file forward with increases in the SIS program, also with the seniors' income plan. These are all investments, Mr. Speaker.

But also just making sure that the housing portfolio is nimble to be able to adapt to what is being needed in Saskatchewan right now. The housing portfolio, which I was involved with years ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a huge asset, and we need to be able to make sure that we're utilizing that asset. And the Minister of Social Services is doing an absolute amazing job. It's a challenging file; I've been there. There's some heartbreaking stories that are in that file, and it's very challenging to be able to hear those stories and try to help out the individuals as much as you can. And I know that the member from Estevan is doing an absolute amazing job, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I know that she will continue to do that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I'll talk a little bit about our trade and export because this is very critical to the growth of our province. For us on the health side of things, this is out there actually recruiting. This is making sure that we are recruiting the right individuals for our health care system — our continuing care aides, our nurses, our doctors. But not only that, Mr. Speaker, again as the Premier's doing in Europe right now, they're out selling Saskatchewan because we have a great story to tell and they are out selling that.

We have offices in the United Kingdom now, the UAE. We also have it in Mexico and Vietnam. And the reason that we need to grow this, we need this growth coming in and this investment coming in for Saskatchewan is so we can pay for the programs that the Minister of Social Services, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Rural and Remote Health, that the human services ministries can benefit from this, Mr. Speaker. Because there is a great need out there, and we have to make sure that we have the finances to be able to pay for that ongoing.

But what we're also investing in is not just people. We're also investing in infrastructure. We're investing in the highways. We're investing in capital projects as the Premier's alluded, over \$12 billion which doesn't seem to get mentioned on any of the speeches on the opposition side . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well thank you for the member from Rosemont that he did mention it, and I'd hope he was very supportive of it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But this is a huge investment: \$12 billion in a province of almost 1.2 million people. This is a huge, huge capital investment for our province. This is going to sustain us for years to come. But we're not sitting down just patting ourselves on the back. We're out there aggressively seeking more capital investment, more jobs so we can do the things that we want to do, Mr. Speaker, so we can live in the lifestyle that we want here, Mr. Speaker.

We can't do this without growth. The economy pays for the human services. It's very simple. It's very simple. I wish our federal government would see this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you actually have to have a strong economy to be able to pay for the benefits of the programs. You just can't pay for these programs and not have something to backfill. Then what happens, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We get into something called inflation. That's what we're experiencing right now. And on top of that we layered a carbon tax. But that's for another day.

Mr. Speaker, as I've outlined, we certainly do have . . . And the Minister of Energy and Resources is also very actively out there trying to recruit dollars. We've had mines opened since we've had the privilege of forming government. We have BHP. We have new potash mines. We also have gas and oil exploration going around. We have rare earth elements that are being mined in our province. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the land of opportunity and we're starting to really come into our stride now in Saskatchewan and will continue to do that with investments to make sure that we can continue to grow this province.

What I will talk a bit about is our health investment. Since I came into the Health file, just after the last election — and I'm very honoured that the Premier appointed myself and the member from Swift Current into Rural and Remote Health — we've been working very hard, first of all, on the pandemic. That was a very big challenge that we had to work with our federal government. There was lots of things that were in our control, lots of things that weren't, like the flow of vaccines, the flow of tests. There was many things that we were waiting for, and we were competing on an international market for this.

But what we've been able to do in this is we've been able to invest in what the people of Saskatchewan have asked for. The people of Saskatchewan have been patient for two years. They want their surgeries, so we're investing in those surgeries with an additional \$21 million that was on top of the \$20 million that was there two years ago, that the Leader of the Opposition seemed to think that that was the same announcement redone. It was actually one announcement that was two budgets ago, and this is money on top of that. Just for the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But this is for all surgeries across our province, everything from orthopedics to cataracts, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We need to get these surgeries done. The people of Saskatchewan have been patient. We have about 35,000 individuals out there that are on our surgical list. We are going to work very diligently by increasing the amount of surgeries that are done from 90,000 up to 97,000. If we have opportunity to go higher than that, we certainly will. We want to make sure that we have the capacity. We want to make sure that the surgeons are busy. They have called and talked to me. I have talked to the College of Physicians and Surgeons. They want to get working. They want to get working right away, so we're going to provide them every opportunity.

But we're not just going to do that in the major centres. We're going to make sure that we load-level our surgeries across the province in the smaller centres. If there's an opportunity for somebody to get a surgery in a smaller centre like Humboldt versus in Saskatoon and they can get that surgery a couple months earlier, I would hope that they would take that opportunity and go out there. Because if they don't, I'm sure somebody else will, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Also we've also planned or allocated \$95 million for the COVID response, if things change, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We still have some residual costs coming out of our hospitals. And we also, if there's anything that come up in the future, we'll have that money allocated. But as before, if we go over top of that, then we have to go back to our finance committee to be able to make sure that we can get some extra money to be able to deal with that. But this is a significant investment in making sure that we are also prepared.

The opposition has falsely stated that this government believes that COVID is over. That is not the case. It's right here in black and white on the budget, that we've budgeted \$95 million. The Premier and myself, everybody on this side of the House is saying that no, we are still planning that if things change, we are going to be ready.

The other thing that was identified in the pandemic is our ICU beds. We were at 79. We have now invested an extra \$12 million for an 11 additional ICU beds. Now obviously we have to make sure that those beds . . . There's some capital costs in there, but there's also the staffing that we have to have to make sure those ICU beds . . . In addition to that, we also have 4.9, almost \$5 million, in CT and MRI scans. These are all part of the spectrum. It's not just one thing in health care that we're looking at here. We're looking at the spectrum of health care and the spectrum of surgeries, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We also have set aside \$3.5 million for physician recruitment. We have set up a new agency to be able to make sure that we are out there recruiting health care workers. This is a health care recruitment agency that we are working with, our ministry, but also with the SHA to identify positions and go out and get those positions. This was the recreated Saskatchewan docs. Now Saskdocs was great in recruiting doctors in its time, but we've expanded that out because we need more than just doctors right now. We need care aides. We need nurses. We need LPNs [licensed practical nurse]. We need nurse practitioners. We need a wide variety and a large spectrum of people within our health care system because these are the challenges that we have.

But in saying that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are also in competition with every other province and probably the States and places around the world to get these individuals into Saskatchewan. So that's why we've created an incentive program that if we go over to a place like the Philippines and are able to bring back individuals, we can incentivize them because we are competing against other provinces. And we do have a great story to tell in Saskatchewan, but we also want to make sure that they are incentivized to be able to come to Saskatchewan and join the community here that we call home.

Mr. Speaker, we also have some additional dollars, but not just on the operating. We also have capital additional dollars this year

of \$156 million. These are for our urgent care centres in Saskatoon and Regina. The one in Regina, stay tuned. Later on, coming soon in the next week or so, we will have some more announcements on the urgent care centre in Regina that I know the member from Rosemont, and I'm sure all members in Regina, and not just Regina, in surrounding communities around Regina, will be able to utilize this urgent care centre. We're also working with the team in Saskatoon to be able to pick a spot and get that done for the urgent care centre in Saskatoon. And we'll be continuing to work on that.

An Hon. Member: — You just need to vote yes.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — I'll get to that. We also have \$13 million, over \$13 million for the P.A. [Prince Albert] Vic Hospital. Now obviously this is a hospital in the North. This is something that we have a lot of our . . . From Athabasca and Cumberland constituencies, if they need some care they need to be able to come down, and Prince Albert is that first point of contact. So we want to make sure that we have the capital investment for the P.A. Vic Hospital.

We also have 6.5 million for long-term care beds in Regina. This was something that was identified by the Minister of Rural and Remote Health. And it was actioned right away to be able to find a new centre that we could put in for our long-term care for our seniors to make sure that in Regina, and for the southern part of the province, that we have a centre there to be able to meet their needs. We also have \$5 million for La Ronge and Grenfell long-term care facilities, which I'm sure the Minister of Rural and Remote Health will elaborate on in his speech.

Something that is critically important to certainly the Queen City here is that — and I had heard about it almost the second day after I got sworn in — was the Regina parkade. This is something that the members of Regina certainly need at the General Hospital, is a parkade that I know will be supported, and I'm hoping the members opposite will vote for this. To be able to get this Regina parkade in, we've allocated \$750,000.

And the interesting part is, when we were doing our stakeholder meetings, is the president, Ray Orb, from SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] said that he was very impressed with this parkade because this also helps the rural members when they come in to visit or when people are coming in to work temporarily into Regina that they have access to this parkade, which was not something I originally thought of. I originally thought it was just for the Regina and surrounding area, but SARM is very supportive of this because it's something that they see that their members are going to benefit from as well. And we also have \$600,000 for the Yorkton regional hospital, the replacement . . . some planning dollars for some other things, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[21:45]

But what I really want to talk about here is the opportunity that I have had personally and the personal journey I've been on the last little while since the Premier appointed me into Health minister. I'm not sure if he was mad at me at the time or if he was just looking for somebody to be able to put in there.

But I've really enjoyed this challenge. It is something . . . I can

honestly say I've never been busier in my life. I've never had the pressure of dealing with this. But as I've said before, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what helps me is the men and women that I get to work with, not just in this Chamber but in my office, the deputy minister's office, and the SHA, the people that I get to see that can understand my passion about why I want to make things better for our health care system. And it's not just about dollars and cents. It's about investing in people and people that are in that health care system to make sure that we can run it at the best that we possibly can.

One thing that I also have to say is there's a few people in my office that I have to thank. Also I want to thank Debbs in my office back in Saskatoon, my constituency assistant, who unfortunately I get to see in passing basically when we're in session. Debbs is very busy fielding calls as the constituency assistant for myself. There's always a lot of calls. People call in from all over the province to be able to talk to Debbs, to be able to get their casework worked on, and Debbs is amazing at that. So I very much appreciate that.

In my office here we've had a lot of turnover. There's one individual, David Keogan, who has been in here since the pandemic started, and other than that everybody in our team is new. So this is all people that are young people that are picking up this, learning about casework, having people talk to them very upset on the phone. I just want to go through a few of them.

Lisa is the glue in our office that keeps everybody together, Lisa Birnie. She's just an amazing lady that keeps everything . . . She keeps my schedule straight. She keeps the Minister of Rural and Remote schedule straight, the chiefs of staff. She's just absolutely amazing. Seventeen years with WestJet and came over to the Government of Saskatchewan, hit the ground running, and we're very lucky to have her.

We also have Cheyenne in my office; Dan, who is also is my communications, also got the nickname from the media as a key advisor. And we have Austin, who just joined our office recently. And the Minister of Rural and Remote also that works in conjunction with my team is Jenn, Angela, James, and Aaron.

And one individual I have to thank, which I give a very hard time on a daily basis, and he returns it right back, is my chief of staff Morgan Bradshaw. Morgan has been with me almost since I got into cabinet. And he is just an amazing person to be able to work with. We have our unique relationship of being able to banter back and forth in a very casual way. He knows my strengths and he also knows my weaknesses, which is very important for a chief of staff to be able to do that. But I can't thank Morgan enough. I very much give him a hard time. I really hope he's not watching this, but I did have to publicly say how much I appreciate the hard work that he does.

In reference to the speech, it would be very, very . . . I understand that the opposition has their job to do is to critique this budget. It disappoints me when I hear members get up and say there's nothing in this budget, nothing in this budget for this sector, nothing in this budget. They're not looking. They're just speaking points. They're not looking at what is actually in this budget and the thought that went into this budget. They think that this budget just magically appears.

One of the other members was just talking about this, the member from Kindersley. This process starts back in the fall and continues all the way through. There are discussions. There are consultations. We can't consult on everything because there are impacts on that. But we talk to the people before we start laying out this budget. This isn't just something that magically appears. There are things in this budget that I think that when those members over there dig deep down they're going to say, you know, we should probably support that. But they're not going to. They're just not going to because they're just ideologically opposed to anything that we do over here, which is disappointing.

Because there are lots of great things in this budget for a lot of people in Saskatchewan. This is going to help a lot of people. And I would very much hope that those members over there would support this budget and start to think about what this budget can do for other individuals. I understand this is a room of politics, but this budget helps out a lot of people, record investment in all areas of government, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So in closing . . . I'm not sure if I'm at my limit.

An Hon. Member: — Oh, yes you are.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Oh yes, I am, as the member from Cumberland reminds me. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I very much appreciate the opportunity. I haven't rose for the last budget to be able to speak, so maybe I went a little extra this time.

I certainly, 100 per cent, support our Minister of Finance and the main motion. I support the member of Moose Jaw North seconding it. And I certainly, there's no way I could ever support the amendment. But I appreciate my time. Thank you very much, Deputy Speaker.

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

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — miigwech, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees. Once again I'm honoured to rise and provide my response to this *Back on Track* budget. Before I do that, I wanted to thank those who have stood by me and continue to provide their love and support to me as an Indigenous mother, grandmother, and MLA.

To my husband and sweetheart, Ivan, thank you for your love and support. To my children, Eric, Daniel, Chantelle, and my daughter-in-law, Raquel, thank you. To my grandchildren, Colby, Ava, Ellie, Kaiden, Ciannah, Noah, and Mateo, tootoo loves you. To my family back home, who continue to support me, thank you for your love and support. To my constituency assistant, Shane Partridge, thank you for keeping our office going and for being the first point of contact for Saskatoon Centre constituents. Thank you for your dedication to the people that we serve.

Finally, I would like to thank my constituents of Saskatoon Centre. There are so many to thank, from the grassroots folks, community organizations that are out there helping the intentionally ignored, and the businesses who are finding ways to still operate without meaningful support from this government, thank you. And I thank you, Saskatoon Centre, for standing with me and for the continued encouragement you give me.

I want to bring this up again in the House today. Many of us have grandchildren and small children who are impressionable. It is imperative we show leadership and be a good example for those watching us. We tell our children to not bully, to be respectful. Yet in this House during session, we see bullying in full force, from cross-talking, heckling, walking around visiting, and even saying awful things.

In the fall sitting I was told by the minister leading reconciliation, "Betty, you're a disgrace and she is an embarrassment." And my Métis brother from across the aisle was so appalled that I spoke out against cultural appropriation when I requested everyone at the fall pipe ceremony to not take pictures at the pipe ceremony. Yet he did not show his outrage when his own leader, our Premier, was a no-show at the pipe ceremony.

And on March 8th, International Women's Day, I asked the Premier if he stood by his claim that the need to show proof of vaccination "effectively created two classes of citizens and that this province has never done anything like that before in our history." Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, the Premier of this province turned his whole body away from me, demonstrating his utter disrespect for the only First Nations female MLA.

The Premier did not have the respect to answer this simple question or offer an apology for such an inaccurate portrayal of our history in this province. Instead of offering an answer or an apology, the Premier got his Minister of Health to ramble on and on about nothing that was related to my question.

For the folks watching, this is your leader. Your Premier would instead take an hour of his time to speak with an anti-vaxxer, who is not an elected MLA, and not answer a simple question from the only First Nation female MLA. This is your Premier, folks: a leader who does not — of all days, International Women's Day — answer a simple question from the only First Nation female MLA.

As a leader and more so as a kohkom, I have to walk my talk in being a good leader to show my community, my children, my grandchildren, and those that come behind. Mr. Deputy Speaker, on my recent birthday last week, my grandchildren were here in Regina. They were excited to come visit their tootoo, and they looked forward to coming to the legislature to tour and to watch me in question period. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, while I was excited to have them see their tootoo at work, I was reluctant in having them witness the bullying behaviour that occurs in this House.

You see, my grandchildren were subjected to racist comments while they rode their bikes from school. I did not want my grandbabies to be exposed to these ugly behaviours that are displayed in this House. My grandbabies were disappointed that they could not see their tootoo in this House. And I ask, how many young people are appalled that elected officials are behaving in such horrible behaviours? And what message are we sending when we are being utterly disrespectful, at the same time telling our young people to not bully? I got elected here to represent my community as a leader, and that is what I'm going to do.

Now on to the *Back on Track* budget. Once again, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, my constituents of Saskatoon are left

behind by this government. The most recent budget fails to offer adequate supports and investments that would positively impact the people of Saskatoon Centre.

People are dying from drug overdoses. Our communities have and continue to lose loved ones to COVID. People are living in bug- and rodent-infested homes, even if they have a place to sleep. At a time when people deserve help in the cost of living, this government is ignoring them and increasing fees and taxes. There are 32 fee and tax increases. Families are going to be paying an additional \$1,000 more each and every year since the Sask Party hiked and expanded the PST a few years ago, the biggest tax hike in Saskatchewan's history.

[22:00]

This budget offers little on the needed life-saving investments for mental health and addictions services, including harm reduction. Prairie Harm Reduction has not received funding again in this budget. This is three years in a row. What message is this government sending those who need life-saving investments? The mentality of "we don't care about the most vulnerable" is going to cost the taxpayers of this province more by this government's failure to invest in its most vulnerable citizens.

And as for the SIS program, those individuals will be living on less than half the poverty line. And now, in addition to living on less than half the poverty line, this government is making them pay more in taxes. We've already seen a huge increase in the utilization of food banks. We are going to see an increase even more.

Furthermore this budget offers nothing by way of affordable transportation. Citizens — yes, those in the North as well, especially in the North — they'll be paying more to travel. Citizens of this province are paying \$1.70 at the pumps today. Many of my constituents rely on public transit. Are those rates for public transportation going to increase due to the increase at the pumps? Working people need affordable modes of transportation throughout their community as well as across the province. We are a vast province with a population that is quite dispersed. It is time for investments that reflect this reality.

While this government is enjoying its high resource revenues, it has failed to invest in its citizens. We only have 10 per cent of Crown land left in this province. This government has been selling off Crown land since 2008 despite the objections from First Nations and Métis peoples. In 2017 this government expanded its sale of Crown land through online auctions.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, this government is intent on selling off every piece of Crown land that we, as Indigenous people . . . Let me say that again. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, this government is intent on selling off every piece of Crown land so that we, as Indigenous people, can no longer exercise our inherent and treaty right to hunt, fish, and gather in this province. I ask every elected member in this House, how will my grandchildren exercise their treaty and inherent right to hunt, fish, and gather if there is no Crown land left for them to do that on?

We only have 10 per cent of Crown land left. At the rate that this government is going in selling off Crown land and leases, my

grandchildren and those that come after will have absolutely no Crown land left for them to exercise their inherent treaty right to hunt, fish, and gather in this province. Is it the desire — and I ask you, Member of Athabasca — is it the desire for your leaders, your government to wipe out our inherent treaty right to hunt, fish, and gather? What will your members say about that? Is it okay? Have you asked them if it's okay for this government to sell off Crown lands so that they, your relatives, do not have an opportunity to exercise their right to hunt, gather, fish, and pick medicines? Is this another racist policy and practice to wipe out the Indian in us?

A portion of this high revenue this government is enjoying is from the sell-off of Crown land and leases to the highest bidder. Yet, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, this government has not invested those revenues back into the communities it sold its revenue resources from.

Where is the northern investment? Where is the connectivity that was promised to Ministikwan Lake First Nation 12 years ago by your former leader? Twelve years ago. It's been 12 years ago someone died in that community because a 911 call was dropped. They had no cell coverage. And this government promised Ministikwan Lake First Nation that they would have cell coverage; still it hasn't happened. Is this government waiting for more 911 calls to be dropped and result in more deaths before this government will invest in cell coverage for Ministikwan Lake Cree Nation?

I've heard from people from the North say, what you take from the North, put back into the North. Instead of investing, this government has cut its workforce development by 41 per cent in this budget, a \$16 million cut. Where is the investment for treaty education for MLAs, legislative staff, and senior ministry staff? This would be an investment in ourselves, so that we may finally begin to honour treaties in our province. Treaty education for all MLAs, legislative staff, and senior ministry staff would be an example of working towards meaningful action towards truth and reconciliation.

This government is leaving the taxpayers of this province footing the bills for its mistakes and losses in courts. I continue to receive cc'd letters from Indigenous communities that are challenging this government around duty-to-consult. And when it comes to reconciliation, this government is ignoring the treaties our ancestors signed. They are breaching the treaty relationship and restricting access to traditional hunting, fishing, trapping, and medicine picking.

And they do not care about meaningful duty-to-consult. This government only wants to give money out so that they can check off the box and say they consulted. Consultation for this government is about the number of folks they spoke with, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, and not the quality of those consultations. If this government gave dollars for a gathering of 10 to 100 people and those people say that this does not mean consultation, to this government that is consultation.

So communities, before you apply for those consultation dollars, read the fine print and do not trust this government will act in good faith when it comes to meaningful duty-to-consult.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, if this government wanted to

invest in meaningful duty-to-consult, they would invest in the overhaul of the broken duty-to-consult policy which is an outdated, Eurocentric, and colonialist policy that only serves its colonialist lenses.

There is no investment in ensuring TLE [treaty land entitlement] bands have the first right of refusal on the sale of Crown land and leases — absolutely none.

And where is the government's ownership for the Ile-a-la-Crosse and the Timber Bay residential schools this province operated? Where is the compensation for those survivors that went to Timber Bay and Ile-a-la-Crosse residential school? They are asking, when will this government take responsibility for its part in operating those residential schools? And when will they compensate those residential school survivors that went to those schools?

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, while there is an increase from 400,000 in this fiscal year to 800,000 for MMIWG2S [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People] individuals, working in an interdisciplinary and an inter-agency is of utmost importance. However, if 800,000 was divided between the 6,928 eligible agencies that provided services, that would work out to \$115.47 to protect missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit individuals. How are Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit individuals going to be protected when all eligible organizations apply and receive funding? How is \$115.47 going to protect them?

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, there is also no budget line to address systemic racism in this province. Systemic racism is an ugly part of this province that results in differential treatment and discrimination against Indigenous people and minority people in Saskatchewan. We've seen how the Sask Party continues to chase votes from extreme vote groups while leaving the rest of us behind.

As a proud First Nations woman, I've experienced racism firsthand and have witnessed racism in my personal life, in my professional life, and in my public life. We all need to call out racism. It's not enough to turn a blind eye and look the other way. We also need to stand with those experiencing racism, including believing their stories and offering our solidarity. The status quo is no longer to be accepted, and we need investment to address systemic racism in our government and in our organizations.

This government keeps saying times have changed. Well, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, times have not changed for this government. They continue to leave the most vulnerable behind while ensuring they are helping their friends and voter base.

To not invest in addressing systemic racism in this province is not getting back on track. This government has never been on track when it comes to addressing racism in this province. In fact the only track this government has been on is not investing again in addressing racism that continues to discriminate against Indigenous and minority people in this province.

[22:15]

In closing, I do not support the motion that was presented by this government and will be supporting the amendments presented by

my colleague from Regina Rosemont. miigwech.

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Carr: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees. It is my pleasure to stand before you today and speak about the budget. This year's *Back on Track* budget 2022-2023 sets the stage to get us back to balanced by 2026-2027. It gets us back on track but in the meantime will not cut services and programs that people have come to expect from our system. It contains record investments into health care, education, social services, and the protection of Saskatchewan people to strengthen and protect this wonderful province of Saskatchewan that we all live in.

We see a forecast of a \$463 million deficit, but we also see a \$2.1 billion improvement over last year's budget, Mr. Speaker. And given the set of circumstances that we just came out of, I believe we're in a pretty good position.

First of all, Mr., I guess, Deputy Chair of Committees — I shouldn't call you Mr. Speaker — I'd like to give some thank yous before I get into the budget. As always, my family. I know I thank them every time I give a speech, but we truly cannot do what we do here in this House without our support system, and for me that's my family. Yeah, I hear my colleagues saying the name Bart. That's my partner. And truly he does hold down the fort when I'm not in Estevan and I'm here working, so I thank him for that every day.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, my mom and dad, my children who are actually young adults now, Mr. Speaker, my grandchildren, I have three of them, and I'm happy to say I have one more on the way. And, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, I cannot wait for the day when they're old enough to sit in this House, when they're old enough to watch us debate across the House about matters that are very important to us. And, Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the way I act in this House. And I'm sorry if not everybody is so proud of their behaviour, but I am proud of mine.

I'd also like to thank my constituency assistants. We've all talked about them. We've all said how great they are, but I win. Mine are the best. We're just going to put that out there right now — Rosalie Story and Susan Colbow. I was fortunate enough to inherit them from the previous MLA, Doreen Eagles, that was in this chair before me. She trained them well, and I am served very, very well by them.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to thank all of those that work in my ministry office here and especially those that work within the Ministry of Social Services. Mr. Speaker, they're on the . . . Whether they're in their offices organizing, or whether they're out on the front lines working directly with those individuals that need our services, Mr. Speaker, the work that they do is so invaluable. And words truly cannot express how thankful I am for them.

Mr. Speaker, there's one more thank you I'd like to add after listening to the member opposite speak. Mr. Speaker, our Premier, the member from Rosthern-Shellbrook, he is a man of integrity. He is honest. He is hard-working. And he works for

every single person in this province regardless of sexual orientation, regardless of colour, regardless of anything, Mr. Speaker. Our Premier stands tall and proud for every single person in this province.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, I'd like to get to the budget now. So our government is making a record investment in health care in this budget, providing a 5.2 per cent increase. One of the largest focal points in the budget is centred around the surgical wait times, which has grown over the past two years due to the pandemic. This budget will also invest 21.6 million to address those wait times, to fund those additional surgeries for next year.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, my dad is actually one of those people that was on the wait-list, and he had waited over two years. And he managed to get his date for this past December, so just a few months ago. And he was very impatient throughout that time. I don't know if you know what a 77-year-old man is like when he can hardly walk, and his daughter is in government, and he thinks that she can just make a call and automatically he's on the list and he's in. Well sorry, Dad, you had to wait a couple of years. But he got in. He was treated very well by that system even though they were dealing with COVID patients at the same time. The care was excellent, and he is truly on the mend now.

This year 11 ICU beds will be added to the provincial system, which will ultimately lead to a higher quality of care in the province. And the members opposite would like to criticize the work that is happening within our health care system. But as you can see from what I've just spoke about, there might be some gaps right now, but we have worked very hard throughout the pandemic. And we can see that the ICU beds weren't enough, simply by what happened through there. So that's why we're adding beds and we're committing to getting that number up to a manageable number so that as we move forward with our health care system, we can service all of those that expect those services, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees.

We also have many investments that are being made within our system. \$17 million to support Saskatchewan seniors by hiring additional continuing care aides in long-term care homes. Mr. Speaker, these continuing care aides are in huge demand right across our province, whether they're working for some of our community-based organizations that serve those in need or whether they're in our hospitals.

Our government has also provided significant investments to recruit and retain health care professionals. This will help us get health care services in rural Saskatchewan back on track also.

Specifically within my constituency, there will be an additional \$200,000 invested into the planning for our new nursing home. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately due to COVID the planning has been a little sidelined, but now that we're learning to live with COVID and things are getting back to normal, getting back on track, hopefully the planning should start to move forward a little more smoothly.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, within the mental health and addictions portfolio, it is a priority for this government and it is reflected in our 2022-2023 budget. Our government is making the largest investment ever in this area totalling \$470 million. This investment will provide essential services and programs,

including counselling, treatment, and preventative measures specifically targeting mental health and addictions.

Mr. Speaker, I know first-hand the benefits of these types of beds within the province. I saw the good work that has been happening in my community of Estevan. We're fortunate enough to have 32 beds for addictions services. And I might add that if it were up to the NDP, we would not have them. These beds had to be reopened after the NDP shut down the entire program. Clearly they don't understand the importance of this type of programming.

Next I'll touch very briefly on education because my colleague from Weyburn-Big Muddy did a very good job talking about that in his speech. But, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, I think it is worth repeating that this is a record investment of \$2.9 billion. This will include a 2 per cent salary increase as part of the teachers' bargaining agreement meaning it is fully funded. It also sees an additional 6 million for learning supports for children.

And I think one thing I'll add here, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, is my two daughters are schoolteachers within the province of Saskatchewan. One teaches up in Saskatoon and one teaches in Estevan. And the reason they stayed in this province and chose to work here, one of the reasons is because of the graduate retention tax program. And I think we forget the investment that that has made for the province of Saskatchewan and keeping our young people here. So now they work in this province. I'm blessed to have my grandchildren here. They've set up their roots, and I feel very positive that they are going to stay. And they work within the education system. And they like their jobs, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees.

This is a direct investment in our children and helps teachers to manage diverse classrooms, the \$7 million that we're going to be investing in 200 additional full-time educational assistants.

And I would like to talk about the economy just a little bit because without an economy, everything that we're talking about here today — social services, education, health — we would have none of that money if we didn't have a fulsome economy. So this budget shows that our economy is back on track with a 3.7 per cent real GDP growth projected in the 2022 year. We have the second-highest job growth rate in Canada so far in 2022, which is great to see for our province.

I am going to just skip over to my social services portion of my speech because I do want to get to it. This year's budget contains \$1.386 billion in social services investments. This is an increase of 45.7 million or 3.4 per cent over last year.

I want to start by talking about the changes to the Saskatchewan income support program. The SIS program takes a whole-income approach, as many clients also receive from other sources, including income from working or from federal benefits like the child tax benefit, Mr. Speaker. They would like you to believe that the money they get from Social Services is the only money that they get and that the base amount is right across the board. Each individual is treated individually, as I've spoke of several times before. If you have children, you get a higher allowance for rent, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees.

So we also have our education training incentive. It'll provide

financial and individualized support to adult learners who are clients of the Saskatchewan income support program or the SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] program. Our community-based partners provide money management and trustee supports to up to 300 clients, and we're expanding that to 600 clients.

Child and family services also contains a record investment of 363.62 to invest in those. Keeping families together is one of our top priorities, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, which is why we invested an additional 3 million to support extended-family caregivers. Extended-family care is a critical component of the ministry's spectrum of family-based care and key to the ministry's commitment to collaborate with families and communities.

This year's budget also contains funding to invest in a mobile child-protection workers' unit for northern communities, Mr. Speaker. It also contains two new FTEs [full-time equivalent] to help out with group home operational support.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that there are many more points I could talk about, but I do see that my time is coming to an end. And I just want to go back and once again talk about and thank the leader of this party, the Premier of Saskatchewan, the member from Rosthern-Shellbrook. He stands for this province. He stands for every individual in this province. It's worth repeating. Regardless of sexual orientation, regardless of race, regardless of anything, Mr. Speaker, he stands for every single person within the province of Saskatchewan.

It's been my true pleasure to work with the Minister of Finance and all of my colleagues on treasury board this year. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, we had some new members this year. They caught on pretty quickly. We might enjoy their company at a couple more meetings this year. And it's hard work. It's a lot of hours, but every minute spent there is thoughtful. It thinks about our province as a whole. It thinks about all of the different portfolios, all of the different needs. There is a vast amount of needs, and that money needs to be spread out equally above those based on priorities that we have, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees.

Saskatchewan people are strong, resilient, and optimistic. Every day I get up, I appreciate the job that I have and the work that I'm able to do. I go into it with a positive attitude because I believe having a positive attitude reflects on those around you and not just on yourself. I choose not to be negative even though sometimes that might be easy.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I will not be supporting the amendment brought forward by the NDP, and I will be supporting the motion brought forward by the Minister of Finance and seconded by the member from Moose Jaw North. Thank you, Deputy Chair.

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — It now being 10:30 p.m., this Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow, 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:30.]

GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN

CABINET MINISTERS

Hon. Scott Moe
Premier
President of the Executive Council
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

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

Hon. Lori Carr
Minister of Social Services

Hon. Dustin Duncan
Minister of Education

Hon. Bronwyn Eyre
Minister of Energy and Resources

Hon. Donna Harpauer
Deputy Premier
Minister of Finance

Hon. Jeremy Harrison
Minister of Trade and Export Development
Minister of Immigration and Career Training
Minister Responsible for Innovation
Minister Responsible for Tourism Saskatchewan

Hon. Everett Hindley
Minister of Mental Health and Addictions,
Seniors and Rural and Remote Health

Hon. Warren Kaeding
Minister of Environment

Hon. Gene Makowsky
Minister of Advanced Education

Hon. David Marit
Minister of Agriculture
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation

Hon. Don McMorris
Minister of Government Relations
Minister Responsible for First Nations,
Métis and Northern Affairs
Minister Responsible for the
Provincial Capital Commission

Hon. Paul Merriman
Minister of Health

Hon. Don Morgan
Minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety
Minister of Crown Investments Corporation
Minister Responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Government Insurance
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Power Corporation
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Telecommunications
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Water Corporation
Minister Responsible for the
Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board

Hon. Jim Reiter
Minister of SaskBuilds and Procurement
Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission
Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Liquor
and Gaming Authority
Minister Responsible for The Global
Transportation Hub Authority

Hon. Laura Ross
Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport
Minister Responsible for the Status of Women

Hon. Christine Tell
Minister of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety

Hon. Gordon Wyant
Minister of Justice and Attorney General