



SECOND SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

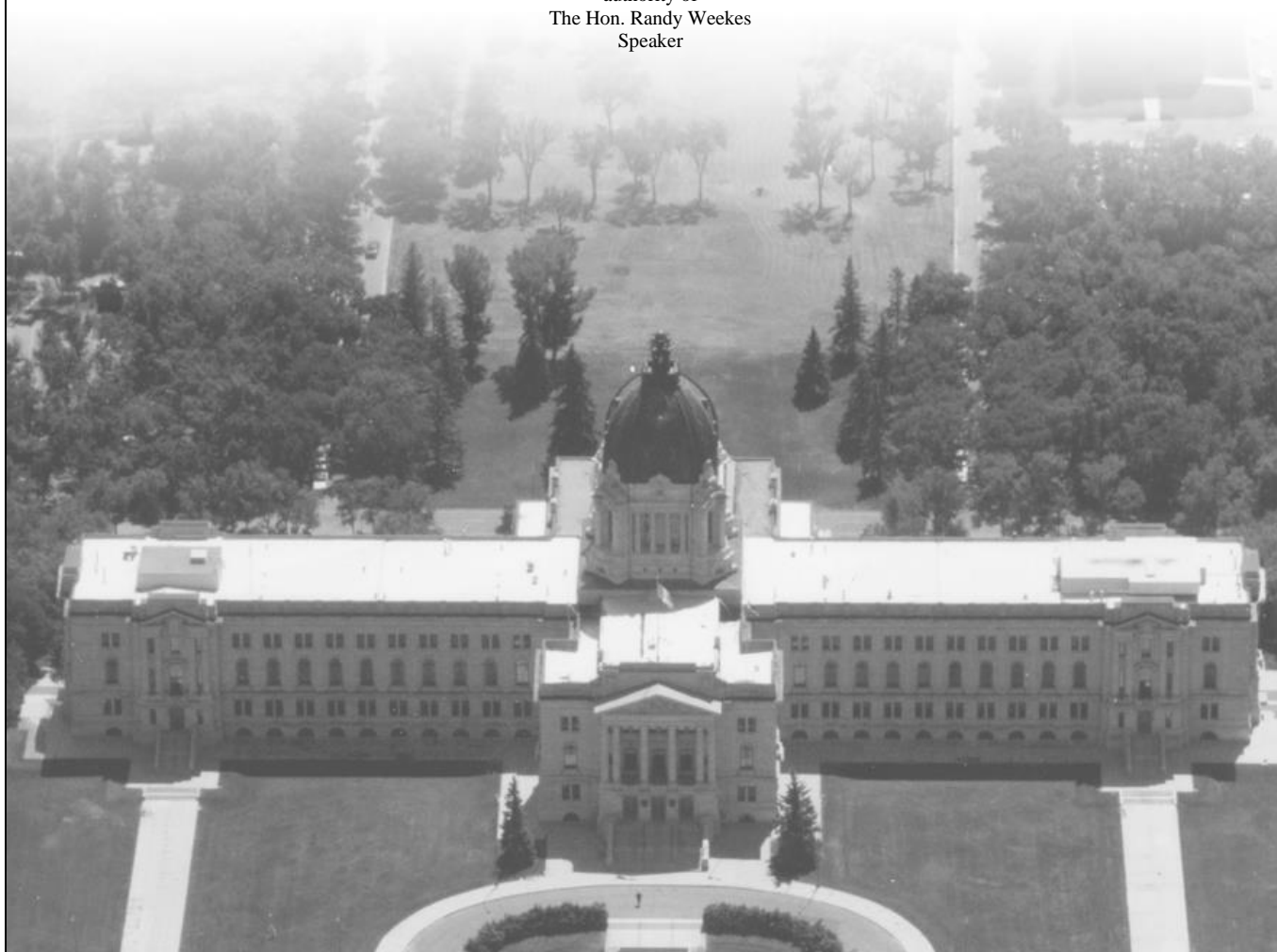
of the

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.

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

Beck, Carla — Regina Lakeview (NDP)	Love, Matt — Saskatoon Eastview (NDP)
Bonk, Steven — Moosomin (SP)	Makowsky, Hon. Gene — Regina Gardiner Park (SP)
Bowes, Jennifer — Saskatoon University (NDP)	Marit, Hon. David — Wood River (SP)
Bradshaw, Hon. Fred — Carrot River Valley (SP)	McLeod, Tim — Moose Jaw North (SP)
Buckingham, David — Saskatoon Westview (SP)	McMorris, Hon. Don — Indian Head-Milestone (SP)
Carr, Hon. Lori — Estevan (SP)	Meili, Ryan — Saskatoon Meewasin (NDP)
Cheveldayoff, Ken — Saskatoon Willowgrove (SP)	Merriman, Hon. Paul — Saskatoon Silverspring-Sutherland (SP)
Cockrill, Jeremy — The Battlefords (SP)	Meyers, Derek — Regina Walsh Acres (SP)
Conway, Meara — Regina Elphinstone-Centre (NDP)	Moe, Hon. Scott — Rosthern-Shellbrook (SP)
Dennis, Terry — Canora-Pelly (SP)	Morgan, Hon. Don — Saskatoon Southeast (SP)
Docherty, Mark — Regina Coronation Park (SP)	Mowat, Vicki — Saskatoon Fairview (NDP)
Domotor, Ryan — Cut Knife-Turtleford (SP)	Nerlien, Hugh — Kelvington-Wadena (SP)
Duncan, Hon. Dustin — Weyburn-Big Muddy (SP)	Nippi-Albright, Betty — Saskatoon Centre (NDP)
Eyre, Hon. Bronwyn — Saskatoon Stonebridge-Dakota (SP)	Ottenbreit, Greg — Yorkton (SP)
Fiaz, Muhammad — Regina Pasqua (SP)	Reiter, Hon. Jim — Rosetown-Elrose (SP)
Francis, Ken — Kindersley (SP)	Ritchie, Erika — Saskatoon Nutana (NDP)
Friesen, Marv — Saskatoon Riversdale (SP)	Ross, Alana — Prince Albert Northcote (SP)
Goudy, Todd — Melfort (SP)	Ross, Hon. Laura — Regina Rochdale (SP)
Grewal, Gary — Regina Northeast (SP)	Sarauer, Nicole — Regina Douglas Park (NDP)
Hargrave, Joe — Prince Albert Carlton (SP)	Skoropad, Dana — Arm River (SP)
Harpauer, Hon. Donna — Humboldt-Watrous (SP)	Steele, Doug — Cypress Hills (SP)
Harrison, Daryl — Cannington (SP)	Stewart, Hon. Lyle — Lumsden-Morse (SP)
Harrison, Hon. Jeremy — Meadow Lake (SP)	Tell, Hon. Christine — Regina Wascana Plains (SP)
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

Clerks-at-the-Table

Clerk — Gregory A. Putz

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

Deputy Clerk — Iris Lang

Clerk Assistant — Kathy Burianyk

Sergeant-at-Arms — Sean Darling

Hansard on the internet

Hansard and other documents of the
Legislative Assembly are available
within hours after each sitting.

<https://www.legassembly.sk.ca/Calendar>

CONTENTS

EVENING SITTING

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY (BUDGET DEBATE)

Domotor	2005
Marit	2007
Makowsky	2010
Mowat	2013
Lambert	2016
Grewal	2020
Hindley	2022
Steele	2025
Bowes	2027
Ross, A.	2031

[The Assembly resumed at 19:00.]

EVENING SITTING

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 Cut Knife-Turtleford.

Mr. Domotor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will now carry on where I left off, speaking about all the great investments this government is making into health care.

Mr. Speaker, this government recognizes that we have to continue to invest and upgrade our provincially owned infrastructure and services that serve our people. That is why this budget's investing 156.6 million into health care capital spending, which includes supports for the redevelopment and replacement of several health care facilities as well as several long-term care centres throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, we will be investing twelve and a half million in new funding for 11 additional intensive care unit beds, bringing the total across the province to 90 ICU [intensive care unit] beds. This is the first part of a three-year strategy to add a total of 31 additional ICU beds across the province to a total of 110 by '24-25. This will help safeguard our citizens when they are in need of emergency care, as well as increase the surgical capacity that we presently have for those requiring non-life-threatening surgeries.

In addition to the extra ICU beds, Mr. Speaker, this budget will invest another 10.8 million into emergency medical services which will improve vital service in rural and remote areas. This increase will fund new paramedic positions for ambulance services, community paramedicine, and will enhance the medical first responder program. Our constituency has seven ambulance service providers that will benefit from this funding by assisting and protecting our rural ER [emergency room] services.

Mr. Speaker, we realize that mental health needs to be further addressed in our province and even more so now in the post-COVID era. The pandemic has affected all types of people differently, and some require more assistance than others. That is why this budget includes an additional 8 million, which will be targeted to mental health and addictions services, including the addiction spaces in high-need areas in treatment centres across the province.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize the contributions made to this province by our seniors. Making life more affordable for them has also been a priority with our government. We will be providing an additional 3 million in funding to fulfill the second

year of our government's three-year commitment to increase the maximum seniors' income plan benefit by \$30 a month to 330 per month, nearly four times what it was in 2007.

Turning to education, Mr. Speaker. We have once again increased the education budget, this year by 47.2 million to a total of 3.8 billion. We are providing record support for pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students as well as early learners and school and child care staff. Of the 27 school divisions across the province, there will be a 29.4 million increase to fully fund the 2 per cent salary increase as part of the teachers' collective bargaining agreement. A new \$7 million fund will allow school divisions to hire up to 200 additional full-time educational assistants for the '22-23 school year to support students and manage increasingly diverse classrooms.

Affordable child care continues to be a top priority for this government. That is why we will be providing 309.6 million in this budget for child care and early learning, which includes funding provided for through the federal-provincial early years agreement. In our constituency, Mr. Speaker, we have 113 child care spaces located in several communities, and this program will be instrumental in creating much more needed child care spaces. For example, the funding I just mentioned will help create an additional 6,100 child care spaces in centres and family child care homes as part of the province's goal to create 28,000 new licensed spaces over the next five years.

This year's funding will also support a further reduction in parent fees as early as September of 2022, which is above the parent child fees which were already reduced by up to 50 per cent in licensed care homes earlier this year, Mr. Speaker.

We recognize that our children are our future and that some children will need more assistance than others to achieve their full potential and goals. In this budget we are providing 2.3 million for early learning and child care investments for the inclusion of children with disabilities. We are providing 8 million for preventative maintenance and repair of child care facilities and 11.4 million for training initiatives and supports for early childhood educators. We will be providing another 655,000 to expand the early childhood intervention program to 200 additional children to address demand and wait-lists for young children experiencing developmental delays and disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, through the Ministry of Advanced Education, we have provided a total of 740.3 million, which is an increase of 5.6 million. This continues a unique multi-year investment into post-secondary institutions and includes student support like the student loan program, student scholarships, as well as the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship program. There's also an investment of 114 million by the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training for training programs that support the development of the labour market, which includes the Re-Skill Saskatchewan training subsidy, a new employer-driven short-term training program.

This budget also builds upon existing support programs, including the graduate retention program, the most aggressive youth retention program in Canada, I might add. It provides up to \$20,000 in tax credits to eligible post-secondary students who choose to remain in Saskatchewan and build their careers right here at home.

Mr. Speaker, we will be investing 168.6 million in education capital spending, which includes 20 ongoing capital projects to build 15 new schools and the renovating of five existing ones. This will include preventative and emergency maintenance funding as well as funding for a new minor capital renewal program that will allow school divisions to address structural repairs, renovations, and additions to prolong the life of schools across Saskatchewan, which includes providing for relocatable classrooms.

We will be spending 27 million, Mr. Speaker, to support economic growth and safety through partnerships with rural and urban municipalities, including the rural integrated roads for growth and urban highway connector program. We will be providing 452 million to improve more than 1100 kilometres of Saskatchewan's provincial highway network, including continued construction and design of passing lanes and twinning projects to increase safety and improve traffic flow as well as repairing or rebuilding 15 bridges and replacing 100 culverts around the province.

There will be 268.6 million in transfers to municipalities to support infrastructure projects through a variety of programs, including the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, Canada Community-Building Fund, and the New Building Canada Fund. Since 2008-2009 approximately 2.5 billion has been invested in municipal infrastructure projects.

In the Cut Knife-Turtleford constituency alone over the past couple of years, ICIP [Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program] projects have benefited the following communities: Turtleford Spray & Play park; Wilkie community centre for an ice plant solar panel upgrade; The Battlefords Provincial Park upgrades to campground, day use area, lift station, accessible campsite developments, and the replacement of the service centre and demo of the old facility. Projects approved, presently in progress, are the town of Unity water and wastewater transmission line replacement. Mr. Speaker, these are all worthwhile projects in various communities that I dare say would not happen if this government did not recognize the importance that rural communities play in the overall success of this province.

The utility services we provide, Mr. Speaker, are important services provided to the residents of this province. That is why over the next five years, Mr. Speaker, the Government of Saskatchewan will be investing more than \$8 billion through the Crown sector to ensure safe, reliable, and high-quality services which will be available for the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture is our most important resource in this province. That is why we support the agriculture community and have provided an agriculture budget of 462.4 million, which is a 19.5 per cent increase from the previous year, driven by a strong crop insurance program and record agriculture research funding. We are providing 338.5 million to fund a suite of business risk management programming, Mr. Speaker, that agriculture producers can access to protect their farm, which includes crop insurance, AgriStability, AgriInvest, and livestock price insurance.

In recognition of the uniqueness of agriculture, as of April 1st of this year we will be making a number of clarifications to the

provincial sales tax as it pertains to farming and agriculture activities, which includes establishing the exemption for the on-farm digging of dugouts, among other various activities. We are also providing the farm and ranch water infrastructure program under which the maximum rebate for livestock producers is temporarily increased to \$150,000, Mr. Speaker, to help address the drought we saw in 2021.

Mr. Speaker, this budget also reinforces the importance of the natural resource sector as a key contributor to Saskatchewan's economy and global provider of responsibly produced and regulated oil and gas, mining, and forestry products. The Ministry of Energy and Resources continue to focus on the goals outlined in *Saskatchewan's Growth Plan*, including increasing oil production to 600,000 barrels per day by 2030, increasing the annual value of potash sales to 9 billion, annual uranium sales to 2 billion, and doubling the size of our forestry sector.

This budget will also provide, Mr. Speaker, 112 million flow-through funding for the continuation of the federal accelerated site-closure program which supports the reclamation of oil and gas wells and facilities and prioritizes Saskatchewan-based oil and gas service companies. Over the life of this program, it's anticipated to support approximately 2,100 full-time Saskatchewan jobs, Mr. Speaker. As of January 31st, 2022, more than 689 Saskatchewan-based companies have participated in this program, which has resulted in the completion of 4,376 well abandonments and almost 8,080 site remediation and reclamation projects.

Mr. Speaker, local government is a vital form of government for the communities that they serve in terms of providing services at the local level, which generally affect the day-to-day lives of those that they serve. That is why this government will provide more than 448 million in direct supports to Saskatchewan municipalities. There will be 262 million in municipal revenue sharing provided in this budget, which represents an increase of more than 106 per cent from 2007-2008. The municipal revenue-sharing program provides predictable, no-strings-attached funding that municipalities can depend on every year and direct to their specific priorities.

Mr. Speaker, further to the supports provided by the municipal revenue-sharing program, additional municipal investments that the province provides include funding for policing grants, provincial libraries, transit assistance, community rink affordability grants, and funding for urban parks.

Investing in the success of our First Nations and Métis people is also a priority of this government, Mr. Speaker. That is why this year we are providing 233.2 million to First Nations and Métis people and organizations, which represents an increase of more than 20 per cent from last year's budget. We will invest 400,000 in the First Nations and Métis Consultation Participation Fund to support First Nations and Métis communities to engage in consultations related to the duty-to-consult. Mr. Speaker, this represents a 100 per cent increase from '21-22.

Mr. Speaker, our residents expect to feel safe in the communities that they reside. That is why this budget includes 936.2 million for the protection of persons and property, an increase of 10.8 per cent from last year. The Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety will promote innovative police practices by

creating a provincial protective services branch that unites provincial peace officers into a single organizational structure, establishing a warrant enforcement and suppression team to target high-risk offenders with outstanding warrants, establishing the Saskatchewan trafficking response team, and expanding the crime reduction teams and the internet child exploitation unit.

Mr. Speaker, parks, culture, and sport are important to the province to support growth in our provincial economy. The Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport continues to invest in programs and activities that directly contribute to the quality of life and well-being of Saskatchewan people. This includes the active families benefit, the veterans support club, and the community rink affordability grant, which is provided to almost 600 community-owned rinks, Mr. Speaker.

This one really hits home for me. This winter I attended 24 Turtleford Tigers senior hockey games which my two sons are a part of, my oldest in the role of assistant manager and coach and my youngest as a defence player. One thing that was noticed in the various rinks I attended in their league was the buzz and the excitement of fans being back in the rink. After the two long years of the various restrictions around COVID, the jam-packed rinks of fans from young to old was overwhelming.

The team may have not received the end result they were hoping for of being league champs this year, but in my mind bringing the community together under one roof and rejuvenating the spirit of people, interaction, sports and activities, and smiles on people's faces supersedes any banner or trophy we can offer to our rink. The buzz of 500 people in a small-town community rink with air horns going off and people cheering brings nothing but satisfaction after a trying and tough two years.

Mr. Speaker, last year saw record-breaking visitation at its provincial parks. This year the ministry will be investing 12.5 million for capital improvements and upgrades throughout the park system to improve visitor experiences. This includes major road upgrades at Battlefords Provincial Park, which is located in the Cut Knife-Turtleford constituency.

Mr. Speaker, this pandemic has been hard on everyone, especially some of our business community members. Those that provide services such as bar and restaurant owners were hit especially hard during the pandemic when they had to totally close down, and I heard from several of them within my constituency. That is why this budget will return more VLT [video lottery terminal] revenue to these establishments, by increasing the total commission from 15 per cent to 18 per cent effective April 1st. This is projected to grow their commissions from 33 million to 40 million.

[19:15]

Mr. Speaker, we realize that with the rising inflationary costs due to world events beyond our control, that people in the province are struggling as we are just making our way out of a global pandemic and learning to live with COVID. That is why we are giving back to Saskatchewan residents a one-time SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] rebate, which will amount to an average of approximately \$100 per vehicle and will provide a little added relief in addition to the already multitude of programs that are in place, such as the Saskatchewan

low-income tax credit, the active families benefit, and reduced income tax, just to name a few, which assist in making life more affordable for Saskatchewan families.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce had this to say, and I quote:

The last couple of years have been a struggle. The Saskatchewan Chamber is happy that Saskatchewan is looking to get back on track and believes the 2022-23 budget is a reasonable step in this direction.

Mr. Speaker, although we have a budgeted deficit in the '22-23 budget year, when you look out to our plan to balance the budget by '26-27, our projected growth to be 3.7 per cent of real GDP [gross domestic product], and the fact that we have the second-highest rate of job growth in Canada so far in 2022, we are well on our way to getting back on track.

When you look at the various companies such as BHP, Richardson International, Viterra, Federated, and AGT Foods, just to mention a few, and their commitment to invest 13.6 billion into Saskatchewan with their various projects, creating an additional 9,000 jobs during construction and 2,330 permanent jobs, Mr. Speaker, I believe this government is on the right path and on the right track and that this budget will support our economic recovery.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance's budget and not the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Marit: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It really is an honour for me to stand here and reply to the budget presented by my colleague, the Minister of Finance, as the representative from Wood River constituency, Mr. Speaker. But before I touch on the budget and some of the details within the budget — and I won't touch on all of them, Mr. Speaker — I do want to really draw some attention to what's happening on the other side of the world.

You know, obviously our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Ukraine and it is really tragic to see what's unfolding for them. And I hope they know, obviously they know Saskatchewan stands with our friends and families and neighbours, home and abroad. And, Mr. Speaker, I know many of my colleagues have spoken about it and I also want to speak about family members within our constituency as well.

I've come to know two young ladies that came from Ukraine and settled in my constituency, hard-working young women. And obviously their family and direct family is still back in Ukraine, and now they are in Poland. And our thoughts and prayers are obviously with the people of Ukraine and my thoughts and prayers are obviously with these young women and their families as well. So we hope and pray that everybody can get together safely.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this time obviously to thank the Premier for continuing to give me this opportunity to serve as the Agriculture minister of the province of Saskatchewan. It is truly

a great honour for me to serve in this capacity, and really serving the people of Saskatchewan in this role. Being a farm boy from Fife Lake, Saskatchewan, it really is a humbling honour to have this bestowed upon me, Mr. Speaker.

And I also want to take this opportunity to thank a lot of my support staff that I have, and first and foremost my CA [constituency assistant] back in Assiniboia, Sandy Kuffner. She has been a real rock star for me and a real trooper through this whole . . . you know, the COVID crisis that, you know, we've gone through and are still kind of reeling from some of that. But, Mr. Speaker, she really has answered the call. And my colleagues would know, when you're in cabinet, a lot of times you're not home when you could be at home and your duties take you away. It really falls on the responsibility of what she does and how she communicates obviously with the clients and with the respective ministries, Mr. Speaker.

I want to continue my thanks, and first and foremost I want to reach out to Jeff Morrow and the entire crop insurance team, Mr. Speaker. Obviously last year producers saw a historic drought here in the province of Saskatchewan, and yet the whole crop insurance team was really up to the task. And you know, just to give some idea on that — and I would like to obviously — you know, we announced a couple of disaster components last year in the crop insurance side with doubling the low-yield threshold and the '21 drought response initiative as well, Mr. Speaker. And I think it really has to be recognized in this way. I mean the team really worked tirelessly to, you know, to process all the applications in a very timely manner. And we heard it pretty loud and clear from our industry stakeholders as well, Mr. Speaker, on what they did. It really is a true testament of their dedication to this province and the producers of this province as well.

And I'll just give you, you know, some very small examples about that. When it came to the drought relief the team processed, just for the drought relief initiative, Mr. Speaker, the team processed more than 20,000 applications and distributing more than \$270 million, Mr. Speaker. Over and above that, even on the crop insurance on that side of it as well, but on the crop insurance payout it was over a \$2 billion payout that the crop insurance team administered and got out the door as quickly as possible. That truly is incredible and they should be recognized for that as well.

I also want to recognize my team that works for me here in the building. And I really do call it a team because we work well: obviously my chief of staff, Grant McLellan, and the team that he had with Jean-Michel and John here; and Regina here in my office as well. But I also want to recognize Deputy Minister Rick Burton and the entire team over there. And what they do to deliver the ag programs and their dedication to agriculture here in the province of Saskatchewan is really outstanding and overwhelming. They don't get enough recognition for the work they do and I just want to take this opportunity to thank them as well.

Of course, last and not . . . obviously not least, but last, I really want to take this opportunity to thank my family. My wife, Lois, I can't say enough about what she, you know, how she supports me in what I want to do and the work that I do here in the role as the MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for Wood River. I just want to thank her, take this opportunity to thank her for

supporting me and being behind me. And our son Jordan, who is a doctor in Edmonton, and his dedication obviously to us and to the family is incredible. And also to our three lovely grandchildren, Lily, Olivia, and Jack — can't say enough what they mean to us and we love having them around.

Now I'll go back to the budget, Mr. Speaker. I do want to obviously give some thanks to the Minister of Finance and the entire team for the work that they did in presenting this budget. But there's also others that I'd like to thank. I obviously want to thank my colleagues that sit on treasury board. I've had the privilege of serving on treasury board myself, and it is a lot of time in meeting with all the ministers in the different ministries, and then obviously with budget finalization and some very tough decisions that have to be made as well. So I really want to take this opportunity to thank all my colleagues. Obviously it has been a challenging and long two years for all of us, but things are finally getting back to normal and we're back on track.

This year's budget precisely shows us that. In Saskatchewan this means a strong and growing economy and more jobs. So we'll continue our commitment to improve the quality of life for everyone in the province of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is back on track, Mr. Speaker.

Our economy is back on track, attracting billions in new investment and creating thousands of new jobs, Mr. Speaker. This budget strengthens and protects Saskatchewan with a record investment into agriculture, health care, education, and highways. And I do want to touch obviously on agriculture, which is my ministry. And I really think it's important to recognize what we have done there.

I really want to take, first and foremost I want to take this opportunity to thank all the producers in the province of Saskatchewan for their dedication and the work they do in agriculture. Obviously the past two years has been a difficult two years, but agriculture really has helped this province get through this past two years, with being really the backbone in the economy in this province.

And I also want to reach out, if I can, to our stakeholders. I've had the privilege over the last two years of really being engaged with the stakeholders, both from the livestock side and the grains and oilseed sides, and having discussions on the challenges that we've been having, and working through those challenges with all sectors, Mr. Speaker. And I think that's why you saw the programs that we did roll out really were a success because we took some very good direction from our stakeholders in that as well.

So obviously, you know, with the past two years and with last year with the drought, the one thing that we did see from all sectors of agriculture, both from the grains and the livestock side, was the resiliency and how we pulled it through. And it's really the dedication of the producers here in the province of Saskatchewan, and we believe in those producers. They're the backbone of the province here, backbone of the economy. That's why our government has released another record agriculture budget.

This year's agriculture budget, as many of my colleagues have said, is 462.4 million, a nineteen and a half per cent increase from

the previous year that is driven by a strong 2022-2023 crop insurance program. This budget includes 338.5 million to fully fund a suite of business risk management programming, including crop insurance, AgStability, AgriInvest, and livestock price insurance. More than 250 million is budgeted for crop insurance, Mr. Speaker.

To provide additional support to producers this year, effective April 1st, 2022 a number of clarifications are being made in provincial sales tax relating to farming and agriculture activities, including establishment and exemption of the on-farm digging of dugouts, among other activities.

Obviously we continued with a record investment of just under 32 million in agriculture research as part of a 71.2 million annual commitment to strategic programs under the five-year agreement under CAP [Canadian Agricultural Partnership]. And we also this year invested two and a half million of additional support being provided for irrigation development outside the irrigation districts, where we can really see irrigation growing and thriving as well, Mr. Speaker.

And we allocated 1.6 million for the Animal Protection Services of Saskatchewan for sustainable animal welfare enforcement in the province. This is an increase. This doubles their budget from 800,000 to 1.6 million. Obviously this will include services to the city of Saskatoon.

Obviously you can see our ag budget is a strong budget. Our ag file is a strong file. And I know one thing: the producers of this province, both from the livestock sector and the grains and oilseed sector, really do trust what this government is doing for the agriculture industry. They believe in what we're doing.

They know that agriculture is a priority for this government and will continue to be a priority for this government, unlike when the members opposite were in government. Agriculture wasn't even really talked about much within their government policy, Mr. Speaker.

I do want to talk about some things that are new and initiatives, and this is . . . I really want to talk, you know, specifically about the First Nation participation in our provincial economy. This budget includes 233 million in targeted investment to help meet the priorities of Indigenous communities, businesses, and organizations. That represents a significant increase of more than 20 per cent from last year.

This budget includes 475,000 to create the Saskatchewan Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation. This corporation will offer up to 75 million in loan guarantees for private sector lending to Indigenous communities and organizations for investment in natural resources and value-added agriculture projects.

I want to talk about the community investment. And I know a lot of my colleagues talked about the revenue sharing, and the 262 million and being really the backbone for a lot of communities. When they look at this funding, it's unconditional. They can use it on any project they want. Something that I know as a municipal councillor at one time, we valued that very highly. That we were allowed that opportunity to spend that money where we felt it really had to be utilized is a priority for us. So I

think that's really important.

The revenue sharing has increased by about 106 per cent since 2007-2008. This budget includes 448.5 million of direct provincial support for municipalities through a number of grants. And I just want to talk about, you know, a couple in my constituency I think really have to be recognized.

The town of Assiniboia is anticipating to open their brand new, state-of-the-art Southland Co-op Centre Arena sometime in September, Mr. Speaker. This is a multi-use facility obviously, a hockey arena. It's something that really is attributed to a work of a lot of people within the community to fundraise and be a part of it, but also the support of communities around it as well. And I think they should be recognized. There's First Nation involvement. There's community, municipalities, both towns and RMs [rural municipalities], you know, where they gave letters of support or they gave financial support, whatever the case may be.

But this is really an opportunity for the town of Assiniboia to grow their community in a lot of respects. When you have facilities like this, it attracts professional people that want to come live there, raise their family there, and have a career there. Whether they are a heavy-duty mechanic for a farm machinery dealership; whether they're a teacher, a nurse, a dentist, a doctor; whatever the case may be, Mr. Speaker, it just gives opportunity. Even, you know, for all aspects of the community, it gives an opportunity for them to raise their family and have a facility like that. So it's really important to have those types of investments and that dedication that we see.

[19:30]

You know, the community of Rockglen saw a significant grant allocation to put in a new ice plant in their rink facility. Otherwise, you know, without this kind of co-operation, collaboration between different levels of government, these things would be difficult for smaller communities to do. So it's important for us to see that.

I do want to obviously talk about highways because I think it's important. When you see this type of investment in highways, with another 1000 kilometres this year to be repaved or resurfaced, whatever the case may be, rehabbed in a great degree, we are getting there. Obviously there's a lot of kilometres of highway in this province, but when you see our commitment and allocation in the dollars that we have spent, now this year's budget is 846 million to operate, maintain, build, and improve over 1100 kilometres.

This budget invests 479.5 million into transportation capital and includes 452 million for improvements on provincial highways, on track to meet the growth plan and targets for 10 000 kilometres, Mr. Speaker. It just says that we're back on track to where we want to get to. You know, even in my community, in my constituency, there's local improvements, and we like to see that. All of us as MLAs all have roads that need improvement, and we try and do what we want to do and can do.

So there's so much more to talk about on this budget, Mr. Speaker. I know even for child care spaces, I know I met with a community in my constituency, the community of Mossbank. And the community was all behind, you know, a daycare. They

had the facility, they had the town, they had the RM, they had everything onside. And I'm pleased, you know, that the Minister of Education has recognized and announced that there will be a daycare in the community of Mossbank.

So we see just more and more things happening. So you know, I could go on and on. And in light of time, I know some have gone long and some have gone short, and I respect the clock. But you know, my colleagues did talk about it, but I think it really has to be recognized, is the record investment that's been made in this province. It's absolutely incredible when you see the business community look at the province of Saskatchewan and say, we're going to invest the kind of dollars that they're going to invest. You know, expecting to see over 9,000 jobs in the construction and 2,300 permanent jobs coming to this province over the next few years.

You know, AGT Foods and Ingredients announced a new oat-milling process in Aberdeen with a capacity of 60 000 tonnes. Federated Co-op and AGT and the announcement of 2 billion towards construction of an integrated agriculture complex of 1.1 million. Viterro announcing the largest crush facility in the world coming to the province of Saskatchewan. Cargill's announcement of a new crush facility here in Regina, plus they expanded the crush facility at Clavet as well. Ceres Global announcing a crush facility down on the North Dakota-Saskatchewan border. Richardson announcing, doubling the expansion in Yorkton.

It's incredible what you see, but there's so much to tell. Red Leaf Pulp really is a story that has to be talked about. You know, they're looking at turning wheat straw into a board product, approximately 182 000 tonnes of market pulp annually from waste wheat straw from local producers. It's a \$350 million direct investment into the local economy with 110 permanent full-time jobs. Then 250 jobs for construction.

Mr. Speaker, this really tells you that Saskatchewan is back on track. We're back on track, and this year's budget investment, by the province and its people, we have a very bright, bright, bright future, Mr. Speaker. I could have got into health care and gone on to everything that we're doing on that side of it too, but I think it's incredible.

So Mr. Speaker, like I mentioned before, Saskatchewan is back on track. This year's budget invests in the province and its people. The future is bright. This is why, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the motion and I will not be supporting the amendment, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Makowsky: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is always an honour to take my place here in the legislature, say a few words about the *Back on Track* budget, Mr. Speaker.

I noticed many of my colleagues have sort of woven in some metaphors from movies and song and the like. And the first time I heard the title of the budget I thought AC/DC "Back in Black," back on track. Well, we're back on track and I hope we, with a little luck and a little determination in this term, hopefully we can get the budget back in black before too long, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, a few thank yous before I really get into the meat of my comments about that *Back on Track* budget. Of course, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank many people that I get to work alongside here in the building and within the ministry. We thank all those dedicated public servants who do a lot of work on behalf of the people in the province of Saskatchewan, excellent people I get to serve with in the Ministry of Advanced Education. In the minister's office, Amanda, Dawn, and Michael are there, and thank them as well. Constituency assistant, Scott, and again all dedicated folks doing good work.

Of course I'd like to thank my family: Tami, Nick, Ryan, and Blake. I won't spend a ton of time because sometimes I get off on that tangent and I miss half the time, though I want to talk about the budget specifically. But as time goes on some of those milestones come up, and my middle guy, Ryan, is in grade 12, soon to be graduating in person this year. Looking forward to that. I know it's been very difficult. Two years we've all talked about that, missed graduations, etc. So I know he's looking very forward to it. Well he really loved his time at Miller. Boy, he is a Marauder through and through. And he played a lot of sports, and I'll get to that in a sec, but certainly looking forward to graduation.

So a couple of events I was physically able to be at, and so glad to physically be at them again, see them with my own eyes. The member from Indian Head-Milestone talked about, well several members have talked about the SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] convention. I was able to go to that.

Now we're fortunate on this side to have quite a few members represent all those rural municipalities, Mr. Speaker. But I always like to see . . . Very fortunate, absolutely. It's an important event, of course, and a lot of work gets done. We thank all those rural councillors and the administration, all the work they do. But I get to represent the world headquarters of SARM. Their head office is in Regina Gardiner Park, and so that's my claim to fame so to speak, Mr. Speaker, but glad to be able to represent the office of SARM.

But at the convention it was again great to see so many people. There was a lot of buzz in the room, people excited to physically be there, and it felt like a little more close to normal. It was interesting, the people you are able to just meet walking down the hallway. Number one, a councillor from Rush Lake whose son also plays with my son on the Regina Thunder. And we were talking, I hadn't met him before, and we get to talk about that sort of angle on things and how our sons are doing and how they're progressing, how they're liking things, what a great program, what a great opportunity to continue to play the sport of football past high school. And that was interesting.

And then somebody else came up to me and told me they were Noah Zerr, his uncle, and I know a little bit about his nephew. He plays for the Huskies. He's an offensive lineman, and he is, you know, he's high projected to go in the CFL [Canadian Football League] draft. We'll see how that goes. But his uncle was so proud of his nephew, of course a great reason to be. He grew up on a farm, and you know, great things are going to happen, I certainly hope, for him into his future if he so chooses to continue that pursuit. I took a peek at the CFL combine and they had it all online and you could watch it later. And he did pretty well, from

my grading system anyway.

So anyway, I think the point there is, Mr. Speaker, that's what's so great about Saskatchewan. Right. I mean we're big enough that we have world-class things here, world-class research, excellent people that change the world all the time. But we're small enough to have those just a couple degrees of separation where we kind of know everybody or we understand where you came from, whether it's Husky football or Yorkton high school football, where there's two kids there that were at that CFL combine I mentioned, Mr. Speaker.

And that's just what's great about it, those conversations and those ties to communities. And they're so proud of what's going on, and that was awesome. So that was a great thing to be part of. I kind of miss that sort of thing. I miss that sort of thing, to be able to talk about those things that are important to people in person.

The other thing I mentioned before about the basketball season, unfortunately it ended early for the Miller Marauders, but this past weekend in Regina, it was the 5A championships. The girls' and boys' side both won, one at Miller, one at LeBoldus. A great tournament. So much passion. And two years have gone by since we had that tournament. The member from Moose Jaw did a member's statement about the 4A final. On the boy's side, all the medallists were from the Regina league, and so that was good.

But I want to focus on one team specifically. Of course it wasn't our team, as I mentioned, but Harvest City. Harvest City is a small school in terms of population. And another one of those little ties, Mr. Speaker, it wasn't always Harvest City. It was at one time Sister McGuigan High School in the north end of Regina, just off 9th Avenue. And the tie there is my wife went to that high school. It was a Catholic high school at that time. Unfortunately it was in the '90s, when there was a school closed a month by the members opposite, and it was one of those unfortunately that met its fate there.

But after several years, a Christian community came together and wanted to open up a school. They are the Harvest City Reapers, Mr. Speaker. The reason I bring that up is some of the key members of that team are constituents of mine. Very proud to be representing first of all their father, Luis Simon, who I reconnected with after years. I played Huskies football with him. When I moved down to Regina, our kids are the same age, starting coaching together, etc. So I represent him.

But his two sons are outstanding athletes. Atlee used to play with the Rams and he, you know, had a great career there. But Luis's son, Isaac is . . . Sorry, Atlee's now the head coach at Harvest City. He does a great job there coaching. He's a new teacher there. Isaac though, he's a great kid. He's a special athlete. And they were just featured in the *Leader-Post* and it's great to see the success they had.

Again, a small school, small by population. They're competing against the Campbells and the LeBolduses with 1,500 kids, etc. And I don't know what their school numbers are, but not nearly close to that. And they go K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] in that school, I believe. And so anyway, by population they should be 1A or 2A, and they have been in the past, but the Isaac Simon factor moved them up to 5A. He had 34 points in the final.

They're the provincial champs, Mr. Speaker, and so congratulations to them and very proud to represent that family here in the legislature.

It's interesting that, Mr. Speaker, within the budget there is provision for independent schools, Mr. Speaker. I know the members opposite in the past have said that shouldn't be happening here in the province of Saskatchewan, having those independent or religious-based schools receiving public funding. I wonder if they're still on that same thought process, Mr. Speaker.

You know, it's a great school, Harvest City. Regina Christian is also in that division, Mr. Speaker, of basketball. So I wonder where they stand on those religious-based schools and the public funding. I know they like to have government monopolies in every aspect of the economy, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to one day hear an update on that, because it would be a shame, Mr. Speaker. Harvest City, Regina Christian, etc., on and on — there's many schools in the province that give a great education with that stream, Mr. Speaker.

[19:45]

I'd like to congratulate, quickly, the member from Athabasca. You know, It's interesting how things . . . You'd think it probably would be very difficult to see in this legislature. And I thought, you know, having a member on for this party from Athabasca, or maybe even from Riversdale, etc. We're starting to see that.

And I think that proves that, you know, things change. But when you have a strong candidate who works very hard and has a good team, good things can happen no matter the odds — or the implied odd — against you, Mr. Speaker.

So I'd like to focus now — just a few things before my time is up — on how this budget might affect, of course, the whole province. And many members have talked about the entire province. Just a few of the things to pick out that I think would interest the people in Regina and specifically Regina Gardiner Park, Mr. Speaker.

One of my favourite announcements or initiatives in the budget was the naming of the sound stage, Mr. Speaker. We all know where that is here in Regina, on Broad and College. And naming it after John Hopkins, what a great legacy and what a . . . He's going to be so missed in our community. He was a tireless worker, worked so hard to improve or bring forward the economy of the Queen City, Mr. Speaker. And boy, again, he will be missed. And a fitting tribute, I think, to someone who was so, so committed and passionate about this city and this province.

On the health care side, of course, it's so important to so many people I talk to all the time in my constituency. Surgical wait times have always sort of been there. We did some great work earlier when I was elected, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously COVID has had an impact on that here, but also right across the country and around the world on the health care delivery side. So it's good to see some work being done on the surgical wait times.

On the surgery side I know there was a bit of a smaller

announcement, but I noticed it: the ability to fund the TAVI [transcatheter aortic valve implantation] procedure. My understanding . . . I know a little bit about that one. It's based on technology that they've been able to come up with where they don't have to do such an invasive procedure to do some amazing things with your heart.

I didn't think that there'd be a . . . Listening to how it's done, I didn't think that would ever be possible in my lifetime. It's just an amazing thing and it can do so many things. And the key is the recovery side where you don't have to completely open up your body to get to the heart. So that's part of that surgical initiative and that's great to see, I think. Money well invested.

The urgent care centres the minister has talked about extensively, I'm really looking forward to that, Mr. Speaker. I think we've all had a scenario where we've had to take our kids or ourselves to the emergency room for whatever reason. Based on what's happening around you, it could take a relatively short amount of time or it could take a long time if you have something that's non-urgent and somebody else has something that is very urgent. That is just the way it works. Not only here, but most other jurisdictions that I'm aware of.

And so helping to triage by location some of the less serious things on the . . . I'm not saying they're not serious, by any means, but something like a broken bone where life is not imminently threatened, or if you need a prescription overnight at 2 a.m. for your child.

My understanding is there will be some mental health services at those urgent care centres as well, again to not have everybody after hours going to the emergency room. So my understanding from the minister, there'll be some announcements on that fairly soon.

ICU bed capacity is an important issue as well, and those 10 high-acuity beds in the Regina area. The Regina parkade — I know the member from Walsh Acres had mentioned that in his speech, how important that is to the Regina General. Of course when the NDP [New Democratic Party] closed the Plains Hospital with its helipad and its, you know, all sorts of parking, Mr. Speaker, that was, everything was . . . A lot of it was moved to the General where it's, I guess for lack of a better term, it's landlocked. It's completely surrounded. It's an older neighbourhood and the parking is constantly an issue for those folks that have to use that facility. Looking forward to some relief on that side of things, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I know there's . . . Not only in Saskatchewan but across Canada and around the world, there is a premium on health care human resources. The recruitment and retention, there's some money for the recruitment of nurses and doctors, Mr. Speaker. The retention side as well is very important; keep those that we already have here.

But also on the training side, Mr. Speaker, and sort of dovetailing to the ministry I'm privileged to be part of, Mr. Speaker. So on the training side, Mr. Speaker, our sector, the post-secondary sector, does excellent work in this area. And they've worked very hard over the past number of years when we've been able to increase in our time in government substantially the number of nurse practitioners, psych nurses, and of course registered nurses

as well. And we're able to, with an investment of \$4.9 million in this year and ongoing, Mr. Speaker, 150 new nurses within the province.

This fall, we're going to be training here in the province of Saskatchewan, 944 nurses in the province of Saskatchewan: 80 registered psych nurses, 50 nurse practitioners, over 800 registered nurses, Mr. Speaker — way more than double than the NDP ever trained in our province, Mr. Speaker. So double, more than double, Mr. Speaker, to try and meet that need in our health human resource side of things.

So important work being done by the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] and the U of R [University of Regina]-Sask Poly program upcoming this fall. And we thank them for all the hard work they do in training those folks, and I know those are high sought-after programs. They're great careers and we want them to train here in Saskatchewan, want them to stay here as well into the future.

On the capital side, Mr. Speaker, in the Advanced Education budget . . . Sorry, actually I'll go back up a little bit. On the operating side, Mr. Speaker, we continue with our multi-year funding agreement with the sector, Mr. Speaker, unique in Canada and, from my understanding from the people I talk to in that sector, the envy of Canada. Stable funding through the four years that we've been able to earn our shot at being government, Mr. Speaker, with a large upfront investment to help with the effects of COVID and to drive some sustainability in this sector going forward.

So that continues, Mr. Speaker, something we said we'd do. We're going to continue to do that. The sector knows what they're getting on the operating side, what the minimum they'll get on the operating side, Mr. Speaker. Of course we increased that with the 150 nurses, as I just mentioned, and the 4.9 million that goes along with it.

On the capital side, Mr. Speaker, increased the PMR [preventative maintenance and renewal] funding, Mr. Speaker. Zero dollars went to PMR under the members opposite. We're increasing it by 10 per cent, and that helps with sort of the routine daily maintenance and important upgrades to avoid the bigger costs going forward for those institutions and those important buildings and the square footage that they look after in order to train our people here in the province.

So also on the capital side, \$4 million to continue work on Sask Poly and their Saskatoon situation with their campus, Mr. Speaker. Look for more design and planning on that with that significant investment from the province. A million dollars to the planning for a dental renovation at the University of Saskatchewan, and \$200,000 to look at some of the needs that Great Plains College has in Swift Current in their auditorium building there. So, Mr. Speaker, we'll continue on the operating side to support this sector, but on the capital side we will continue that endeavour as well, Mr. Speaker.

So all in all, I think a very, very strong budget, Mr. Speaker. You know, I appreciate all the work being done by the Ministry of Finance, the Finance minister, treasury board to come up with this budget to get us back on track, Mr. Speaker. I would note also — I forgot to mention at the beginning — how important the

\$450 million payment on the debt was in-year, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure how many jurisdictions are doing that sort of thing. There's not a lot of them, if there are any, that are making in-year debt payments on the provincial debt or the national debt, whatever it may be. It seems they're just stacking it on as they go.

I mean, if we're borrowing at 3 per cent, that's roughly \$14 million. I don't know what we're borrowing at, but that's 14 million bucks we're not sending to New York or London, 14 million bucks staying right here in the province of Saskatchewan in-year. And that's very, very good work, and I hope we can do that in subsequent years as well, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm really happy with this budget. Happy to endorse it and vote for it when the vote comes later this week, Mr. Speaker. I'm so excited about the future of this province when we look at all the things going in Advanced Education, all the research, just all of the amazing things going on in that sector. And every time I hear about all the projects going on and the new facilities or whatever it may be — the new equipment that one of our institutions has acquired — and of course the students and their instructors that do some amazing, amazing things that, you know, we rely on. We rely on them so much. It's that knowledge, Mr. Speaker, that makes our economy strong and the great people in this sector.

So to me it's not even half full; the glass is overflowing, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite, listening to their speeches, they're pretty down. They're pretty low on Saskatchewan. I think of the old children's stories about Winnie-the-Pooh, and there's that character Eeyore. You know, just everything went wrong, always down, looked on the bad side of things. The glass is half full. Mr. Speaker, I think that's the members over there. They're certainly on that wavelength, Mr. Speaker, even maybe less so.

Mr. Speaker, I'm so excited about the future of this province. I'm so excited about the people we have, the people we're training, and can't wait to see what the future holds, Mr. Speaker. Looking forward to it and looking forward to the work we're going to continue to do on this side of the House to keep Saskatchewan strong and to keep us on track. So again, as I mentioned, I will be supporting the budget and look forward to the rest of session here, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for your time.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my pleasure to enter into the budget debate today. It will be no surprise to everyone in the Assembly that I will be supporting the amendment and I will not be supporting the budget motion. And I'll provide a bit of detail to explain that in the time that I have here tonight.

I'll start, as is customary and certainly warranted, to thank the people around me who have supported me in this role and continue to support me, starting with my partner, Grayson, who's a teacher who rarely has time to view what happens in this space or visit because our schedules align perfectly that he's always teaching while I'm in session. So I haven't had much time to have him around physically, but I do think it's important to note that emotionally he's always there, and I wouldn't be able to do this

job without him. And my dog would certainly be a lot lonelier at home without having him there, too. So appreciate his support, yeah.

And of course we have a lot of staff that work around us to support us as well. I have multiple constituency assistants at the moment because my full-time constituency assistant is still on maternity leave, and she's actually out in rural France having a lovely time with . . . Her baby is meeting all of his cousins and they're seeing all the family. And it's the first time they've been able to connect with their overseas family, so it's been quite meaningful for her.

[20:00]

Although she has been sadly missed, we have had great staff working in the office. I've had two part-time staff, Graham Reid and Jason Hicks, who have both done stellar work in the office. Really motivated to help constituents with casework, to do so on a very timely basis, to advocate for people, to look for every option that is available. And you have to be able to really have that drive when you work in an office such as the critic for Health.

So a tremendous amount of appreciation for those folks and Nadia Ristau, who also works as a casual CA but has ended up filling in more often than not. So thanks to those folks for all the support they provide and the patience they have with my inability to respond to emails in a timely fashion.

Of course there is also the caucus staff who support us here. We have a small but mighty team. I know some of them are back in our office tonight, and every time we have night sitting that also means that they stick around and take care of us and bring us what we need. And I'm always amazed at what they can do with such a small number of folks.

So yeah, I'm grateful for all those people, for my colleagues who are continually supportive. Especially in times when you can't be there, feeling that you have the support of the people around you is important, and I certainly felt that when I was away last week as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

A budget is about more than numbers. It's about people, or at least it should be about people. It should be about priorities and it should communicate what the priorities of the government are, what they value. It should reflect their values.

And after the last two years, Saskatchewan people needed a budget that would offer them some relief. Families, skilled workers, and young people are voting with their feet. We have the lowest growth rate of any province and the highest rate of out-migration. And this should tell us something, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But this budget does not provide relief that is needed for Saskatchewan families. In fact they're being squeezed even more on 32 additional taxes and fees that are being added in this budget. At a time where our non-renewable resource revenues are growing, at the same time people, everyday people are being taxed more and more. And that tells you something about the values of this government.

There's no relief for the fuel price, which we have all experienced, the skyrocketing fuel prices. No relief for PST [provincial sales tax] — in fact they actually hiked it. And no relief for SGI rates. So while they're claiming to be back on track, they're actually leaving Saskatchewan people behind.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about some of the details that were announced in the budget, and then I do want to provide some specific thoughts on health care and the state of health in our province. As the critic for Health, it seems appropriate. But Health also represents the single-largest spending portfolio of our government, so we have a tremendous amount of responsibility to provide that health care. But also because of the amount, sheer amount of money that we spend on health care, we should be spending it as wisely as possible.

So let's talk about what some of the claims are of this government. When you look at the press release, it certainly does, always seems to be a good news story. And the members opposite say that we're Eeyore or Debbie Downers or all of these pieces . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . doom and gloom, okay, yeah. I smile a lot for someone who's considered to be doom and gloom.

But, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day our responsibility in opposition is to hold this government to account, to tell it like it is, to hear from people across the province, to represent vulnerable populations, to speak for people that do not have a voice. And if that seems like a downer to this government, they should be working at doing a better job.

This government likes to talk about how they have strong finances, but there's no acknowledgement of the increase in their revenues that they're getting this year from those non-renewable resources. They claim to be fiscally conservative, but our debt tells a very different story, Mr. Speaker, and very different from the election promises of, oh we're getting back to balance ASAP [as soon as possible]; no concerns here. Tells a very different story. It's going to be a very long time until they're back in black, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I would encourage the minister to take a look at the budget documents to see that.

Investments in education. They tell the story of record investments in education, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but when we look at per-student funding, when we look at the fact that our province has grown, we know that this means there's actually a cut to education. And these cuts are significant. And I mentioned, the fact that my partner is a teacher and we have a lot of teachers around us as well, so I've had the opportunity to hear directly from folks whose jobs have been cut, whose resources have been cut, whose class sizes have grown, whose EAs [educational assistant] are basically non-existent.

There was this work event that I attended with my partner and he said, oh that's one of my EAs. And it was a couple months into the year and he didn't remember the person's name and I said, oh you're such a bad teacher. How do you not know what your EA's name is? And he said, she's been in half an hour every couple of weeks, so it just slipped my mind because she's providing one-on-one support to a child with severe autism for half an hour once every two weeks. And he was saying he's lucky to receive any EA support at all.

It's really rich. We hear about increasing classroom complexity

and size. It's really rich for the government to be boasting about adding 200 additional educational assistants to the classrooms. I was elected in 2017. I remember very well what the cuts looked like in 2017, and the system hasn't recovered from those cuts yet — 350 EAs cut in 2017.

Library . . . the teachers who spend time in the library — teacher librarians, that's what they're called. At my partner's school, they used to have a full-time teacher librarian and that person was cut down to 20 per cent. That hasn't recovered. Kids just can't take books out. People work to try and make up, but it's just additional duties on top of everything else.

And this is their MO [modus operandi], Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is what this government does. They deeply cut something. A few years later they bring back part of it, and then they expect people to say thank you and they pat themselves on the back. But we don't have that short of memory, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

That leads us into the film employment tax credit, which was cut 10 years ago by this government. They're talking about their strong and growing economy, and the first thing they mention is attracting new investment to the film and television industry. They're the ones who cut the film employment tax credit 10 years ago, and we've seen what the results are of that. And now two years into the pandemic they're thinking, you know, maybe there is something to the fact that people want to stream more content now. We should maybe get back in that game. Yeah, Netflix is doing great. It is completely disappointing, and I don't understand how there can be no shame in coming back and announcing this and being boastful about these announcements, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when they're the ones who cut it in the beginning.

The claims about capital, Mr. Deputy Speaker, recycled news, reannouncements. We've read this story before. I've read this book before. I feel like it's *Groundhog Day* every time I hear about capital investments. These are all reannouncements. In most cases we're talking about planning dollars, years away from seeing the results of any of these investments. Slow, slow, Mr. Deputy Speaker. None of these will take the immediate pressure off of our acute care settings.

Of course we want to see this pressure relieved from emergency rooms. We know that this is a very big picture. The health system needs a ton of work. So things like urgent care centres, if they can help to alleviate some of that, great. But we also need to be working on making sure that primary care is there, that people can see their physicians in a timely fashion, that they have a family doctor to make sure that the situation doesn't get bad enough that someone will go to the emergency room when they don't have to be there. And this is about looking at the whole picture, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But there are also things that this government has done in the past that have had some moderate success that they have abandoned. So they had an emergency department wait time initiative that was actually reducing wait times for a while, and then they abandoned that targeted funding and wait times increased. We saw the same thing with the surgical initiative as well.

I started going into health even though I was intending to wait to get there, but let's talk a little bit more about some specific claims

around health care that need to be examined. Overall, what we see this government doing is providing modest increases when we have massive problems. I would call it a band-aid solution, but sometimes a band-aid is the correct solution. If you have a minor cut, you put a band-aid on it. That's the correct solution. But these are very minor changes to pay lip service to the issues when we have very significant problems that exist.

They boast about their record investment in health care, 4.4 per cent increase. But CPI [consumer price index] was 4.7 per cent from February to February. Are we even keeping up with inflation at this rate?

And what matters, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is not what you put in; it is what results you get out. And I have yet to see this government talking about health indicators improving. Are we actually getting healthier in our province? Measurable factors. Are wait times going down? No, in fact the opposite is happening.

Anything that you can measure, it's like basic program review, if anyone has ever been involved in measuring progress. These are the types of questions we should be asking when we are spending the largest amount of money, when we're talking about the biggest portfolio. We should be able to show that these investments are working and that we're putting this money in the right places.

The government seems to talk a lot about focusing on health care resources during the pandemic and how this is sort of the reason for not being able to provide all the health care that they should be able to provide, including surgeries. But we know that these problems existed prior to the pandemic. We were asking about what they were going to do to address the surgical backlog two years ago, prior to the pandemic. We got the answer of, don't worry, here's \$20 million this year to address the surgical backlog.

Does that sound familiar, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Last year I asked the exact same question. We got the response of, don't worry, here's \$20 million. Oh by the way, we didn't spend the money from last year because of the pandemic. Here it is.

This year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're hearing, don't worry; here's \$20 million. But by the way, now we actually have to add 32 taxes and fees in order to foot this surgical backlog even though, you know, they said that they didn't spend the money the year before and that it was just carrying over and sort of miraculously materializing. The numbers do not add up on this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and this was well canvassed in question period.

But the fact that \$67 million is coming from the federal government to also help with the surgical initiative, but there seems to be a lot of . . . There's a lack of clarity on how this is actually going to work, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And the answer cannot be that we're just going to contract out private surgeries. We know that that's not going to work. Where are these staff going to come from? They do not exist. They're not out there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And when you talk to folks who work in the sector, they will tell you that those folks are not out there.

[20:15]

And the retired ones who try and come back haven't been able to get their licences because they can't get enough hours. And when they talk to the Minister of Health about it, silence — crickets, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Maybe we should get a new Minister of Health. I hear someone auditioning for it on the other side. He had the job for a while, yeah.

We certainly agree that we need to address the pressures in acute and emergency care, talked a lot about hallway medicine today, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I feel that. I feel that personally, and I feel that every time patients come to talk to me about it. And what I will say is that this plan will not take the pressure off. This plan is a drop in the bucket of what's needed. The 10 acute care beds that the Health minister is talking about won't do it. Today Saskatoon emergency rooms, there were 44 people that didn't have a bed. The minister's talking about 10 acute care beds that will materialize at some point in the future. It doesn't add up, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It's nice to see them focus on recruiting and retention of health care workers. This is something we've been talking about a lot. We know this is a very serious problem, and we have been highlighting the fact that this is a systemic problem. This is not just one-off communities that are facing these challenges. And unfortunately how it's being treated by this government is as though they are one-off situations. Each community has representatives. They're, you know, good local leadership engaging with the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority], telling them about their needs in health care, and trying to get those needs filled. This should not be the patchwork system that it is.

We used to have a health human resources round table in this province, and in fact, this government, they had their own version of that. In 2010 they established a Physician Recruitment Agency of Saskatchewan, Saskdocs, but they eventually abandoned this as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's just the pattern of short-term. We'll focus on something small but we're not going to deal with the big picture.

I don't know what this agency is going to look like. I don't know about funding. These are certainly going to be questions for estimates, but what we're hearing from folks right now is that we need a global approach that brings everyone to the table. We don't necessarily need a new agency to exist. We need the people who understand the system to get together and put their heads together and figure out what's going on.

We need the ministries of Advanced Education and Health to work together not just on one-off problems, but at a table that they come back to over and over again as they forecast the needs of the province, to work with Economy to forecast what . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yeah, absolutely, market research on what's . . . What is the word I'm looking for? Labour market analysis, which we haven't seen in years. Like, what's the next direction? What's the future of work in our province? Do we have the training seats to make sure that that happens? Can we actually recruit people to those jobs? So are they lucrative, not precarious work as we see with so many job postings because the focus is on trying to save a dime?

But what ends up happening is that people suffer because those positions don't get filled. And then there's understaffing in those communities, and a lot of communities that the members

opposite represent. We need the health human resources round table, and I want to believe that this new agency will get us there. But there are a lot of questions about who's going to be involved, whose voices will be heard, and making sure that those on the front lines will actually be able to contribute.

I see that my time is floating away from me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but there are a number of things that I still want to mention. We have about 40,000 people waiting for surgery in our province. This government at one time, they had a surgical initiative and they targeted funding to get surgical waits under control. And that was abandoned. And since 2015 surgical wait times are skyrocketing.

And it's not just surgeries. It's wait times to see a specialist. It's wait times to get your diagnostics, to get your MRIs [magnetic resonance imaging]. This government said that private MRIs were going to solve all our problems for us. That did not work, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's almost as though all of these evidence-based studies about other jurisdictions that have tried this before were correct. It's almost like there was something to that, that it actually increases the wait-list. And that's what we saw happen in this province.

And not only that, we saw doctors in Saskatoon recently talking about the fact that the private system is competing with the public system. So it's actually taking staff from the public MRIs and moving them to the private MRIs, meaning that they had to reduce their hours. Watch the news. This is what's happening.

So although we would love to see . . . Oh, I could talk about the slant of the media for a long time. I'm not going to go into any of this. Sounds a bit Trump-ish over there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the comments of fake news, and that's very, very concerning to this side of the House.

So we have this surgical wait-list problem. These are real human beings, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We've had a number of folks come through the Assembly here, and every time they're treated as one-off situations. It's just the individual; we'll get your situation taken care of. But what we know is this is system-wide. These are system-wide problems.

And it is encouraging, I will say, to hear the members opposite change their tune a little bit on their dreams for the surgical wait-list. Because a few months ago, they were saying that it was going to be until 2030 before they got the wait-list down to three months, which was their target, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

No word of a lie, I had a constituent who sent a letter — we sent a letter on their behalf to the Ministry of Health — who had been waiting over two years for a surgery, considered elective, but of course debilitating for them. Their mobility completely destroyed waiting for this surgery that was supposed to come and supposed to come. And they got a letter back from this government that said, don't worry; by 2030 we will have the wait times down to three months. Maybe they started to hear some backlash from how ridiculous that is. You might as well not send a response in that case. But that response does not say, we care about you, we're here to provide your care, and you should have faith in our public health care system, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It's encouraging to see some investment into EMS [emergency

medical services]. We have certainly heard from so many folks across Saskatchewan concerns about access to emergency care. And this government has not prioritized ambulance system review, despite the fact that they have reports that date back to 2008. You know, we've seen some minor changes in contracts, but this is very much a patchwork of systems that have been developed. And I'm keenly interested in what exactly is going to come out with this funding and where it's going to be allocated, but we need large-scale system change. And I feel like a broken record, and it feels like *Groundhog Day* because I said the exact same thing in 2018, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Finally . . . Not finally, I've got two more things. Deferred maintenance in health care. This government talks about their capital expenditures, but they're not talking about how much money they're not spending to make sure that the crumbling facilities in health care are going to be able to keep living and last for the full duration that they need to. We have so many facilities that are in dire need of attention, and so many health care workers reach out to me and say, like, how much longer is this building going to keep going? And it is a drop in the bucket of what's needed.

The last thing I want to talk about is mental health care. We talked about this in the Assembly today as well, but we know that there's a smaller percentage of funding going toward mental health care in the global health budget this year.

It's encouraging to see treatment beds opening up that have been promised in the past. It's certainly necessary, but there is a whole segment of our population that is not being served by this province when it comes to mental health care. You pay with your credit card, not your health card, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And there's been so much talk about the struggles of the pandemic and how this has made mental health worse across the board. And if you can't afford to pay for your own counselling, good luck. You're on your own until you hit an emergency situation or the wait times are so long, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that physicians are hesitant to even recommend that you use the public system. That is the state of mental health care in our province, and that's what we're dealing with as we're trying to come out of a pandemic. It is a dire situation that needs immediate attention from this government, not band-aid solutions.

So there's a few reasons why I won't be supporting this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why I will continue to speak up and advocate for people of this province even if it makes the members opposite feel a little bit sad, and why I will continue to remind them of their responsibility in government here and not back down from those statements. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood.

Ms. Lambert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in this House to participate in the budget debate. I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are located on Treaty 4 territory and the homeland of the Métis. I am honoured to represent the constituents of Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood in this Assembly and speak on their behalf.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we do not do our work alone in isolation as MLAs. We are supported by many. I would like to thank the

Legislative Assembly Clerks, the caucus office staff, and all who assist us in this historic building. I am also fortunate to have two constituency assistants who job-share and do such fine work representing me in my constituency office, Candace Forrester and Betty Weller. They are the first voice that constituents hear when they contact my office, and they are patient, efficient, and professional in their work.

I am grateful to have my husband, Jim, by my side. God willing, we will celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary this summer. We were together for five years before we were married, so it has been 45 years that we have walked this life path together. He is a good man, a steadfast husband, and a committed father to our three adult daughters, Amy, Monique, and Janelle. We have been blessed with five grandchildren: Gianna, Isabella, Lukas, Sebastian, and Dominic. And we have welcomed two sons-in-law to our family: Karl Peters and Aaron Wignes. Our dining room table continues to grow.

The war in Ukraine, Mr. Speaker, the dark moments that are devastating that country and its people are ongoing. We began this session with a motion calling for Russia to stop their unprovoked aggression towards neighbouring Ukraine. I know that communities across the province have been showing their support for Ukraine. One of those in the Saskatoon community is Myron Sirman, owner of the Touch of Ukraine restaurant. He is holding two takeout dinner fundraisers for Ukraine. One has already happened last week. I got to know Myron long ago when I would book him to cater lunches at CTV [Canadian Television Network Ltd.] Saskatoon. He has been operating his restaurant and catering business since 1987, and his food is delicious. My personal favourites are the perogies and oven chicken.

Myron's father came to Canada from Ukraine in the late 1920s, leaving behind most of his immediate family. Here's what Myron had to say:

Ukrainians are brave people. They're hard-working people. They're going to fight for their country because they've been under suppression for so many years. I think they've just had it. They're going to put their lives on the line.

[20:30]

Myron said his fundraiser will be a way of bringing the community together through food and Ukrainian culture:

It's comfort food. It takes people back to their childhood remembering baba's kitchen at the farm and the gatherings at baba and dido's home, when times were simpler and more peaceful than they are right now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can relate to that comfort food. My mother-in-law, Kathy Lambert, is Ukrainian. Her mother, Elena Medwyduk, nee Lypka, immigrated from Ukraine and her father, John Medwyduk, was born in Ukraine. Jim and I would make regular treks to Winnipeg and stay with little baba, as Jim's grandmother was called. She lived on Archibald Street in her home until well into her 90s, and she passed away in 2005 at the age of 99. We enjoyed many delicious perogy meals in that small and loving home where she tended her very large garden.

Generations of Ukrainians have chosen Saskatchewan as the

place to call home. Approximately 15 per cent of residents of this province trace all or part of their ancestry to Ukraine. So Ukrainian culture and traditions here have deep roots. We are committed to welcoming those who are fleeing the violence in Ukraine. We will accept unlimited numbers of Ukrainians, and priority will be given to SINP [Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program] applications received from Ukraine.

Our government is working with community members to ensure there is support, programs, and services ready so Ukrainian newcomers are welcome in our communities and experience successful resettlement. Saskatchewan stands against tyranny and stands with Ukraine, its people, and its sovereignty.

It's been two years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, since the World Health Organization described COVID-19 as a pandemic. Here in this province, a provincial state of emergency was announced on March 18, 2020, and this legislature was suspended on that day. We could not have envisioned what was to come. An economic and health crisis of such scope, of such magnitude — lockdowns, school closures, job losses, small-business owners struggling to survive, non-profit organizations trying to meet increasing demands. Many adjectives became the norm in describing these times: unprecedented, uncertain, difficult, challenging.

There are those who remain hesitant to get a COVID-19 vaccine. The Saskatchewan Health Authority has done a good job of answering common vaccine questions from the public and addressing COVID-19 myths. I would like to go over a few of those questions and myths for the record.

Question: how can we be sure the vaccines are safe when they were rushed through so quickly? The answer is, it can seem like the vaccine development was fast compared to other medications, but no steps were skipped during their trials. Globally, governments and manufacturers invested massive amounts of funding and support and removed red tape to create these life-saving vaccines as fast as possible in our time of need. Research to understand the virus has been ongoing since the SARS [severe acute respiratory syndrome] outbreak in 2002-2003.

There's a myth that vaccines alter DNA [deoxyribonucleic acid]. The fact is vaccines cannot and do not change your DNA. Because some vaccines are made with mRNA [messenger ribonucleic acid], there was a myth that it could change your DNA. RNA [ribonucleic acid] is not capable of changing DNA. Instead, it simply tells your cells to produce the specific antigens your body needs to fight COVID-19.

Another question: how effective can the vaccines be if we need a booster? Well the answer is, viruses change and evolve, which is why we have flu shots every year. Initially, being fully vaccinated provided enough protection, but over time variants of COVID-19 began to appear and immunity began to decrease, particularly among the immunocompromised and the elderly. Boosters help to top up our protection against catching and spreading COVID-19. If you look at the number of deaths and hospitalizations from COVID, you will find that fully vaccinated people with boosters are far less likely to become severely ill.

Then there's the myth that people should have the choice to vaccinate because the choice only affects you. Well you do have

the choice to vaccinate, but it doesn't only affect you. If you catch COVID-19, you can spread it to everyone you come near, putting them at risk. You could also become very sick and end up in the hospital, putting an unnecessary strain on our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to spend a couple of moments talking about vaccine efficacy. The following is an article posted by the SHA on March 22nd, just a few days ago:

Vaccine efficacy is a measure of how well a vaccine protects against infection during clinical trials using tens of thousands of participants. The calculation used to determine efficacy is the same for all vaccines. However, with the COVID-19 vaccines there was no way to compare vaccines one-to-one based on an efficacy rating, because the trials were held at different times and in different parts of the world, with different sets of data collected, so they don't share the same conditions.

The goal of a vaccine is to reduce hospitalization and death, not to prevent any infection at all — no vaccine is 100 per cent effective against infection.

There is still some concerns, particularly from parents, about vaccine side effects. As of February 27th of this year, side effects for children aged 5 to 11 in Saskatchewan were 0.09 for 1,000 vaccinations and serious side effects were 0.01 for 1,000. Thankfully it's a very small number of children in this province will experience a serious side effect from vaccination.

So the point here I'm trying to make is if you haven't done so, please don't hesitate, please get vaccinated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to express sincere and heartfelt appreciation to the health care workers in Saskatchewan for keeping us informed, safe, and healthy, and for their continued good work as we transition to living with COVID-19. I also express my deepest condolences to the families who have lost loved ones in this province.

Now the matter at hand, the budget. There are those who call the increase in mental health and addictions a shadow pandemic. As people found themselves isolated indoors for prolonged periods of time, depression and anxiety levels increased. There were reported increases in addiction and substance abuse during the pandemic, with approximately 16 per cent of Canadians reporting that they had been struggling with addiction issues such as drugs and alcohol.

As Colleen Cameron, a commissioner with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, wrote in the 2020-2021 annual report:

COVID-related fears and anxieties experienced by the general population have been amplified and magnified in those with pre-existing mental health and addictions issues. The hard truth of the matter is that it is going to take a long time before we are able to fully grasp the scope of the mental health and addictions challenges born out of this pandemic.

I am encouraged, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this budget includes an additional \$8 million for targeted mental health and addictions services. That includes counselling, treatments, and other

preventative measures. We have increased addiction spaces in treatment centres across the province for \$2.1 million. That brings the total investment for mental health and addictions to 470 million or more than 7 per cent of the total Health ministry budget.

Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of representing the highest density of seniors in this province. I know that it is welcome news to low-income seniors that this government will fulfill the second year of a three-year commitment to increase benefits in the seniors' income plan. The maximum SIP [seniors' income plan] payment will increase to \$330 per month in July.

The record \$6.8 billion for the health budget includes \$21.6 million in order to fund thousands of additional surgeries to address wait times. This is the first year of a three-year plan to deliver the largest volume of surgical procedures in the history of our province. The most commonly delayed surgeries here are knee replacements, hip replacements, and cataract procedures. So older adults will be pleased with this initiative to tackle the surgery wait-list very aggressively.

In the spring 2022 *Gray Matters* publication put out by the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism, the Minister Responsible for Seniors wrote, and I quote:

Saskatchewan seniors have consistently told me they prefer to live comfortably and independently in their own homes and communities. Our government is listening and continues to build and maintain supports and programs to help older adults achieve this goal. This desire to age in our own communities is not unique to Saskatchewan. In fact, it was the number one topic when I met with other provincial and federal ministers responsible for seniors this past month.

It is good to see that there is a \$17 million increase in this budget to support seniors who want to stay in their homes safely and comfortably, and that includes a \$4.8 million increase for home care services. In that same *Gray Matters* edition, John Knight has this advice about growing old, and I quote:

Wisdom is king, and we are the people that have this wisdom. It can only be earned by living and learning. None of us should retire from life. We all have a lot to contribute. As we age we need to keep learning new things, new hobbies, or new careers. We need to learn to live until we die. This is the way to be happy and fulfilled.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I reached a milestone birthday this month. A woman doesn't tell her age. I'm not going to say what it is, but I am going to say I'm going to pay closer attention to that advice that I just read.

It is exciting for the film and television industries that this budget commits to an increase of \$8 million to Creative Saskatchewan for the production grant program, bringing the total of that fund to \$10 million. It is expected that this will result in a significant increase in film and TV production in the province, not to mention the spinoff in economic activity in the hospitality industry, for example, and growth in our IT [information technology] and digital service industries. Only Saskatchewan labour, goods, and services are eligible for support under this

program. That ensures that this investment benefits this province.

Recent employment and population data released by Statistics Canada show that the Saskatoon region is leading the way in both employment and population growth, and that points to a promising future both for Saskatoon and for the province. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatoon government MLAs recently met with Saskatoon City Council. At that meeting, we were given information, based on the January 2022 Statistics Canada labour force survey, that Saskatoon has the highest employment growth rates in the province and the highest employment rates in the country.

Saskatoon saw year-over-year employment changes of 11.4 per cent — the highest in Canada — and an employment rate of 67.4 per cent, the highest of any city in the country. The number of new persons employed year over year represented 97 per cent of Saskatchewan's employment growth over that period. The Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority wrote an excellent article in the winter 2020 edition of the *Industry West* magazine, and I want to share a small part of that article:

Saskatoon has been described as “Sasktech” and the “Silicon Valley of the Prairies.” Our entrepreneurial spirit is rich in our technology sector. We have many successful entrepreneurs who have grown their companies to be major employers, brought in external venture capital, and become important contributors to Saskatoon's economy. We are also home to Co.Labs, Saskatchewan's technology incubator, with more than 30 companies at all stages of growth.

Speaking of jobs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget includes \$3.1 million to fully fund the international trade and investment strategy that will advance the province's economic interests abroad. Expanding our export markets translates to new jobs and new opportunities right here at home. This past year alone, we opened new Saskatchewan trade offices in London, Dubai, Mexico City, and Ho Chi Minh City. They join existing offices in Japan, India, Singapore, and China.

These offices will allow Saskatchewan to increase exports, generate more investment, and engage with new international trade partners. In 2021 we saw unprecedented investment in our province of over \$10 billion. So continuing to build a competitive business environment and grow in our international presence results in new projects, new facilities, and new jobs right here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan exports 65 per cent of everything that it produces. We used to be known as the wheat province, but now we are known as the potash, oil, and wheat province. We are also Canada's export province. We are the world's largest exporter of pulse crops, the leading exporter of durum wheat, mustard seed, canary seed, and oats. We are the world's leading exporter of potash, and the second leading producer and exporter of uranium.

A key driver of our province's economy is our oil and gas sector, which accounts for 15.5 per cent of provincial GDP. One might say that export trade is the lifeblood of our economy. Paul Huber, publisher of *Industry West* magazine, wrote an article in the winter 2020 edition:

Reading an article recently on the downfall of the British Empire, it was interesting to learn the great economic mishandlings that caused its gradual decline. Here stands a great historic lesson that we can learn from. Always strive to be on the side of economic history. It is safe to say that the future is going to be driven by technology. It will also be driven by agriculture as the world's population grows and needs to eat. I strongly believe that Saskatchewan's burgeoning tech sector is a by-product of our excellent resource, agriculture, and manufacturing sectors. The natural home for tech innovation for these sectors is here in Saskatchewan.

[20:45]

Mr. Speaker, this province has a thriving tech sector that is getting attention on a global scale. This budget will continue to invest in tech start-ups through the Saskatchewan technology start-up incentive, creating more jobs and bringing new products to market right here in Saskatchewan. This budget increases the STSI [Saskatchewan technology start-up incentive] tax credit cap from \$2.5 million to 3.5 million.

The Premier spoke on budget day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about how those of us who are privileged to sit in this House, to occupy a seat in this elected Assembly, have a common goal. That common goal is that we all want to see Saskatchewan do well and reach its potential. This is what unites us here as we do our work as legislators. We work together to build a better future for all who call Saskatchewan home. That better future has to include a strong and growing economy, job creation, and high-quality government services.

We are on our way, Mr. Deputy Speaker. New jobs have been created in this province — 30,000 in the past year. We are thankful that the financial picture is also getting back on track, which has allowed us to significantly reduce the deficit and move forward to balancing the budget in coming years. We will continue to build strong communities and a diverse, resilient, and strong economy that will help to build a better Saskatchewan.

In closing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, John Gormley of radio fame delivered a rant last September in response to an article in a local Saskatoon paper. It was about COVID-19 in Saskatchewan. I worked directly with John and his talk show in the early '80s, before he was elected as a Member of Parliament. His words stuck with me, and I would like to share some of those words with the Assembly tonight.

Here's a rant. I'm looking at my local paper, how the fourth wave of COVID-19 beat Saskatchewan. I don't know who writes in these newspapers, and I don't know who writes the headlines, but let's talk a little about beating Saskatchewan.

COVID has tried a bit of beating on us to be sure, but past tense? It has beat Saskatchewan? Do you know where you live, whoever wrote this story and wrote this headline? A land forged by pioneers, who came here from all over the world and often the first winter dug into the side of a hill and lived in a cave. Or they erected a lean-to and they lived in that, and then they pulled enough money together for a plow and a horse and they began to grow things. Sounds like my grandfather.

And they lived through minus 40 winters. Then for 10 years the worst financial and weather crisis in the history of the modern world in the 1930s decimated one province over every other — Saskatchewan.

Two world wars with the highest volunteer rate and death rate of any province. The boys who went and gave their lives, from Saskatchewan. A span of 120 years where when bad things happen to people, when they get sick, when tragedy befalls them, when their barn burns down, what does the community do? It pulls together to triumph and overcome.

You want me to go on about some of the most resilient, hard, unbeatable people on the planet? We lose on the football gridiron, the Riders, hockey club, farmer on the wrong end of the drought. On the ice you might take a beating; somebody gets the better of you, but nothing ultimately beats Saskatchewan. Not drought, acts of nature, politics, perfidy, human wrongdoings. We endure, we persist, and we come back every time.

Thank you, John.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I couldn't agree more. God bless Saskatchewan. God bless Ukraine. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be supporting the motion brought forward by the Minister of Finance and seconded by the member from Moose Jaw North. And I will not be supporting the amendment. Thank you.

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

Mr. Grewal: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm honoured to rise again in the Chamber today. As we transition from the daily management of COVID-19 to learning to live with it, I want to thank the people of Saskatchewan for their ongoing resilience and support, for their patience and understanding during the public health restrictions, and for getting the vaccines to protect themselves and their neighbours. I thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, just as we are endeavouring to return to normal, we have been struck by new uncertainties brought on by the unprovoked attack by Russia on Ukraine. To Ukraine and to our abundant Ukrainian community here in Saskatchewan, I want you to know I feel your pain and I stand with you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my wife, Seema, and my children Simran, Indu, and TJ for their continued love and support. They provide me with eternal stability, motivation, and inspiration that allows me to perform my duties in this job. My wife, Seema, is always willing to lend an ear and an opinion whenever I need it. She has been a huge support since she came into my life almost 39 years ago.

I am also thankful to my constituency assistant, Cheryl, for her continued patience and great support to both myself and my constituents in Regina Northeast. I'm grateful for her hard work and dedication in assisting everyone who needs our help.

I would also like to extend a thank you to the caucus office for their continued guidance and coordination and to the Legislative Assembly Service for assuring all legislative administrative

matters are managed in a very efficient manner. I am grateful to my constituents of Regina Northeast for their continued support.

Since my budget reply last year, I have some great news to share, Mr. Speaker. There is a new addition to my family — the birth of my new grandson, a very good-looking little boy, Henry Tej Grewal. He is my son TJ and his wife, Railin's, first child. My other grandchildren, Mila and Niam, are so very excited to have a little cousin. Mila is always saying, Henry is so perfect. They were so happy to see him in person to snuggle him and pinch his chubby cheeks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my pleasure today to provide a reply to the budget speech that was given by our Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance last Wednesday. I want to commend her on this budget that emphasizes a growing economy, improving finances, and a clear path to balance with significant investments in government services for Saskatchewan people. She always fascinates me by her great vision and intelligence. She has a unique style of explaining complex matters in a very simple way. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find it so difficult to apprehend why the members opposite find it so hard to understand her.

This budget shows how our government is working to continue the progress we have made in building a strong economy and vibrant communities while also improving health care and protecting our most vulnerable. We are back on track. Our economy, our finances, and government service are on track.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have been responsible with our finances and have been able to reduce Saskatchewan's level of net debt. This has been achieved despite going through a global pandemic that no one saw coming. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the 463 million deficit forecast for this year's budget is 2.1 billion improvement from the last year's budget. A balanced budget is achievable and is expected in four years. Through proper management of our province's finances, our government has enabled us to not only survive, but to begin once again to thrive and build our province into the greatest it's ever been. I am so proud of Saskatchewan people's resilience, strength, and compassion for each other. Together we have made it through this pandemic.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, due to global demand our province will benefit with the increased revenue from rising oil and potash prices. We will reinvest this revenue in health care, a record 6.8 billion investment into providing the best possible health care services for Saskatchewan residents. This includes a record 7 per cent increase from last year to the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

An increase of over 20 million is to address the surgical wait-list and to fund thousands of additional surgeries this year. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this will be the first year of a three-year plan to deliver on the largest volume of surgical procedures in the history of our province. This aggressive plan targets the return to pre-COVID levels in surgical wait times by the end of March 2025.

A 17 million increase in this budget will go towards supports for our seniors, including home care services, high-dose influenza vaccines, and additional continuing care aide positions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget establishes a new and independent agency dedicated to recruiting and retaining health

care workers. It includes an increase to support recruitment initiatives with the development of a settlement and relocation incentive program. This program will recruit 150 health care workers to Saskatchewan from the Philippines. It will be the first year of a two-year program aimed at bringing 300 health care workers from the Philippines to Saskatchewan. There is also three and a half million for physician recruitment and retention initiatives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, twelve and a half million in new funding will go towards 11 additional intensive care beds across the province. This will be the first year of a three-year strategy to add 31 ICU beds. An increase of 3 million will fund 10 new high-acuity beds at Regina General Hospital to care for patients with more complex medical needs than a traditional in-patient bed. To enhance emergency medical service in rural and remote areas, an almost 11 million increase in this budget will fund new paramedic positions for ambulance services, community paramedicine, and a medical first responder program.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, over 7 per cent of total health care spending will go towards mental health and addictions programs and services. This is highest investment ever in Saskatchewan for these programs and services. The 8 million increase over last year will fund initiatives to provide effective counselling and treatments and introduce further proactive prevention measures.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is my eldest granddaughter, Mila's, first year of school. She started kindergarten in the fall. I am especially pleased that our government is increasing education spending by more than 47 million from last year. Our province's 27 school divisions will receive almost 2 billion in operating funding for the 2022 school year, a record level and an increase of almost 25 million over last year. And almost 3 billion, up nearly 220 million from last year, will go toward supporting pre-K [pre-kindergarten] to grade 12 students and staff for school and child care.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a new 7 million fund in this budget will allow school divisions to hire up to 200 additional full-time educational assistants to support students and manage increasingly diverse classrooms. Funding for child care and early learning is over 300 million, making access to high-quality child care more affordable. This includes creating 6,100 new child care spaces this year, which is part of our government's goal to create 28,000 new licensed spaces in the next five years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, parent child care fees were reduced by up to 50 per cent in licensed care last month. With this year's budget, a further reduction will occur this fall, putting money directly back into the pockets of working parents, bringing us closer to our goal of \$10-a-day average fee for regulated child care.

This budget will also expand nurse training by 150 seats, including operating and capital grants to post-secondary institutions, and allocate 38 million for student supports.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to help the rest of the world discover Saskatchewan, a 5 million budget increase for Tourism Saskatchewan has been set to target both international and Canadian tourists. By increasing tourism, other provincial industries such as hospitality will also see increased profit, bringing them some much-needed relief.

[21:00]

The rise in streaming services means the time is right to attract new investment from the film and television industry to Saskatchewan. This budget includes an increase of 8 million for the Creative Saskatchewan production grant program for film and television. This was a topic that I heard on my campaign trail during the last election. To ensure these dollars stay in the province, only Saskatchewan labour, goods, and services are eligible for support under the program. The investment is estimated to generate a 50-million increase in film and television production and millions in annual economic activity, including significant increased spending in the hospitality industry which has been hit hard by the pandemic as we all know.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was so pleased to hear that the Regina sound stage, a state-of-the-art film and television production facility, will be renamed the John Hopkins Regina Sound Stage in memory of a great man who was a passionate advocate for our Queen City and the province.

This budget also includes over 3 million to fully fund the international trade and investment strategy. This strategy advances the province's economic interests abroad and is used to operate Saskatchewan's international office network. This year, we established offices in the United Kingdom, UAE [United Arab Emirates], Mexico, and Vietnam in addition to our existing offices in Japan, India, Singapore, and China.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Saskatchewan value-added agriculture incentive has been enhanced and record agri-food exports of seventeen and a half billion in 2021 show the province is on track to meeting its goals. This incentive and others are key to Saskatchewan's competitiveness, attracting private investment from global companies like BHP, Richardson International, Viterra, Ceres Global Ag, Cargill, Federated Co-operatives, AGT Foods, Paper Excellence, and Red Leaf Pulp. These companies and others are investing 13.6 billion into Saskatchewan with projects including a new potash mine, new and expanded canola crush facilities, a wheat-based pulp plant, a renewable diesel facility, a lumber mill, and others.

It is expected, Mr. Speaker, that nearly 9,000 jobs in the construction phase and almost 2,500 permanent jobs will be created. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has the second-highest rate of job growth in Canada. Last year we had 30,000 new jobs created province-wide.

This budget includes 475,000 to create the Saskatchewan Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation. The corporation will offer up to 75 million in loan guarantees for private sector lending to Indigenous communities and organizations for investments into natural resource and value-added agricultural projects.

The cap of the Saskatchewan technology start-up incentive will be increased as part of a merger between innovation agency and Saskatchewan opportunities commission. This tax credit cap increase will help build on the success of the program to date and will allow the continuation of investment stimulation in key areas to promote the province's economic growth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is over 3 billion for capital projects in

this budget, a record investment in Saskatchewan. 156.6 million of this is going towards health care capital, including urgent care centres in Regina and Saskatoon as well as the continuation of construction at the Prince Albert Victoria Hospital, the project to replace the Weyburn General Hospital, and the design and procurement activities for specialized and standard long-term care beds in Regina.

Our budget includes a significant investment of 846 million through the Ministry of Highways to operate, maintain, build, and improve the province's roads and highways. This provides for over 1000 kilometres of improvements on provincial highways, on track to meet the growth plan commitments to upgrade and build 10 000 kilometres of the provincial highway network by 2030. Upgrades include Highway 3 twinning west of Prince Albert and Highway 5 corridor improvements east of Saskatoon. Planning and preconstruction for twinning projects on Highways 6 and 39 near Regina and Weyburn are also part of this budget.

It also includes almost 170 million for school infrastructure, including the ongoing planning and construction of 15 new schools, the renovation of five existing schools, the purchase of relocatable classrooms, and for preventive and emergency maintenance. Mr. Deputy Speaker, through these efforts we will continue to build on the progress we have made in recent years.

A strong Saskatchewan economy and higher revenues have reduced operating debt requirements by 450 million last year, bringing operating debt to less than 10 billion. The 450 million lower operating debt requirement carries through to '22-23 budget forecast as well. With our economic growth in real GDP at 3.7 per cent in 2022, Saskatchewan has the second-lowest net debt-to-GDP ratio among the provinces.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our province also continues to have some of the lowest personal taxes in the country. A Saskatchewan family of four with 100,000 in total income pays 2,084 less this year compared to 15 years ago in 2007. And a family of four pays no provincial income tax on their first 53,435 of combined income. This is more than double the limit compared to 2007. With this greatly improved financial picture and a fiscal plan to return the budget to balance, Saskatchewan is fully back on track.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, last Saturday I attended a new restaurant's grand opening in Saskatoon with some of my colleagues, local MLAs from Saskatoon. It was so good to see people socializing and our citizens showing confidence to invest in new business ventures again. This shows the trust they have in the direction our government is going. Saskatchewan is the right place to invest and grow.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are on the right track. As quoted by Helen Keller, "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence."

With that I am very pleased to say that I will be supporting this budget presented by our Minister of Finance and seconded by the member from Moose Jaw North. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Swift Current.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to put a few remarks on the record tonight about budget 2022-2023. Mr. Speaker, as many of us have all done here, either tonight or previous days, we start by thanking a number of people that we owe our gratitude to, and I would like to do that as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

First of all, thank you to the constituents of Swift Current, who have put their trust in me to serve as their elected representative here in the Legislative Assembly. And I am always grateful and mindful of that trust, and respectful of it as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And again just want to thank each and every one of the members of the community of Swift Current for that support.

Mr. Speaker, my family — I want to acknowledge and thank my family who has been here to support me throughout all of this over the years. My wife, Anita, who is back home holding down the fort while I am here in Regina. We have been together not nearly as long as the member for Saskatoon Wildwood. We have been together for 20 years now this spring. Not married that entire time. She had a bit of a test run there before she, you know, could have decided to kick me to the curb, and against her better judgment made a terrible decision on the 7th of July, 2007. But I am very grateful for her continuing love and support.

Our two kids, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Raven, who has been a bit of a world traveller and now resides in Regina and is working here, establishing her life much to the gratitude, I think, of members of the city of Regina here. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am grateful for her support.

Our son, Adler, who is home in Swift Current and who I am so extremely proud of. He has, in the last couple of years, has managed to get a business off the ground, and has done so in some challenging times in the middle of a pandemic, Mr. Speaker. But he has done very, very well in that, and stuck his neck out so to speak as an entrepreneur. And that is . . . I just have a huge amount of respect for him not only for that, but also for the fact that he has worked very hard as a dad, a new dad as of about four years ago.

And I have spoken on a few occasions about our grandson, Axel, who is now four years old and is an absolute . . . He's a bundle of joy and a ton of fun. We get the opportunity to sometimes take care of him on the weekends or whenever mom and dad might need a little bit of help from pop-pop and ya-ya. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we're hanging out with Axel, he's my little buddy. He's my best friend, and every other care in the world goes away when you're spending time with a four-year-old. You really have no other choice but to focus on what they're doing and try to keep track of them before they get into trouble. They're pretty mobile at that age.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my parents and family back up in northeast Saskatchewan. My mom and dad, Tom and Pat Hindley, up in the Melfort area, who continue to farm up in that neck of the woods, where I understand there's still a lot of snow around. As a matter of fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other day my mom and dad went on a sled dog type of adventure in the area there and sent me some photos back. And they seemed to survive that, and lots of smiles on their faces.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my siblings. My sister Melissa, who lives

and works in Tisdale with her daughter Lizzy, and I don't get enough time to spend with them. I saw them at Christmastime and occasionally will chat with them by phone and send them a message, and it's always good to connect with Melissa and Lizzy to hear what they're up to in Tisdale.

My other sister, Erica, and her husband, Brad, who live on a farm just outside of Melfort, and they're quite the outdoorsy couple, spend a lot of time — probably too much time — fishing in the summertime and a lot of time on their snowmobiles in the wintertime, and doing some ice fishing as well.

And finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my brother Taylor, who lives in St. Brieux, who recently became a new dad as of this past New Year's Day, him and his girlfriend giving birth to a son, Harrison Thomas Hindley, who I haven't had a chance to meet yet, but who I've seen some pictures of, and it looks like he is going to be a handful. So congratulations to Taylor and Elise and Elise's daughter Lizzie on their new addition to their family in St. Brieux.

One other family member I should point out who I think is probably the only one who's paying any attention to this tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is my cousin Darlene Campbell, affectionately referred to as Aunt Darlene, not just by myself, but I know she's got the cell numbers of a few members here on this side of the House. And they will let me know from time to time when Aunt Darlene has texted with her advice and opinions on anything political in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the staff that I need to acknowledge for their support: my constituency assistant, Nola Smith, holding down the fort back in Swift Current, who has been working for us for many years, for myself and for the previous MLA for Swift Current. And I would not be able to do this job without her manning the phones, meeting the people as they come in the office, handling the emails, all of this stuff that we know that is so very important and integral to the work that we do as MLAs.

And then the staff here at the office in Regina: David Keogan, my chief of staff, who kind of leads the team around here; James Cherewyk, who is responsible for communications and keeping me on the straight and narrow; Aaron Hill and Hillary Pachel, who take a lot of the phone calls dealing with casework that comes into our offices and some very difficult conversations, but are always friendly and informative on the phone, trying to solve problems and help people out as best they can.

Jenn Pippus and Ang Pasiechnyk, who are at the front there, answering the phones and greeting people as they come in, and are always a smiling face in our office, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I should also mention Lisa Birnie, who actually we share between our office and the Minister of Health's office. She is the front line, the main point of contact, and is responsible for keeping our schedules in check and organizing all that. I don't know how she does it. I did that in a former life, and it's a challenge, to say, at the best of times. And I'm just grateful for all the staff in our offices.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, of course the staff in the Ministry of Health and the SHA who are helping us day in and day out as we tackle some of the challenges facing our ministries and some of the

work that needs to happen in the months and years ahead.

And I would be remiss, Mr. Speaker, if I didn't thank the team around me here today: the Premier; the Minister of Finance and her team at the ministry; the members of treasury board who helped, along with cabinet and caucus, put together this year's budget; and of course the caucus itself, the members who are in the Chamber here tonight and others who aren't present.

[21:15]

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have an amazing team on this side of the House, and I'm so glad to have them all back on this side of the Chamber. And I can honestly, say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've heard some outstanding speeches over the last number of days. And I can honestly say that when I hear the members speak from our side, that I know that they're speaking for the people that they represent, the members of their communities who have elected them. And we have just a great team around the caucus table and so very fortunate that I have the opportunity to serve with them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I provide some remarks on the budget investments, I just want to acknowledge, as others have done as well, what's happening in Ukraine and the devastation that is happening there and how close to home that hits for so many of us in this province, either that have Ukrainian roots or perhaps, as we've gotten to know those who have immigrated here, perhaps very recently, and how close it hits to our communities. And I just want to put on the record once again how very important this is for us as a government and for us as community members across Saskatchewan to support our Ukrainian friends and neighbours in any way that we possibly can in this terrible conflict that is happening in their country as we speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a lot to talk about in this budget. And frankly, I'm not going to have enough time to barely scratch the surface, let alone even on the initiatives and the investments in this year's budget for mental health and addictions, seniors, and rural and remote health, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But before I get into that, there is some important funding that's happening and helping the community of Swift Current. As an example, you know, there's continued revenue sharing into our community. There's some funding from the Ministry of Advanced Education for the Great Plains regional college, Mr. Deputy Speaker, funding towards some work that I know . . . Some of this work has taken place in previous years and there's some additional dollars, about \$200,000, in this year's budget, Mr. Speaker, to support an auditorium renewal project and some work that needs to be done at the Great Plains regional college.

That particular facility is well utilized, not just by the college itself, but by a number of other community organizations. I know, as an example, the Swift Current Little Theatre has hosted performances there in the past. And there's been a number of other community organizations that have utilized the Great Plains College gymnasium and auditorium, and so those are some very significant dollars. I'm grateful to the Ministry of Advanced Education for providing that support to the city of Swift Current for that particular project to the Great Plains College in our city.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the area of mental health and addictions we are investing yet again another record amount of funding into this very, very high-priority item for us as government. And this year's budget amounts to \$470 million in total into mental health and addictions, investments in supports across this province, including an increase of \$8 million in targeted investments into improving mental health and addictions services.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that includes \$2.1 million for additional addictions treatment spaces. You first heard us talk about that back in the Throne Speech when we signalled that we would be investing in 150 additional treatment spaces in this province over the next three years, and the \$2.1 million commitment in this year's budget is specifically tied to the first tranche of that. We've recently come out of a market-sounding process through the ministry, and very soon we'll be able to indicate how many treatment spaces that will translate into in this budget year, and also where those spaces will be located. We know that there is a need for more treatment spaces in this province, and we need to also look closely at geographically where they are located, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There is a little over a million dollars to support information technology infrastructure, mental health and addictions, to better help the flow of information between various governments, departments, and agencies so that we can better serve the people that are in need of this very valuable service when it comes to mental health and addictions.

Eight hundred thousand dollars, Mr. Speaker, so we can expand the mental health capacity building schools project which started, I think, two or three years ago. It was a number of years ago anyways, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but one of the former ministers . . . And started off as a bit of a project in a handful of schools that were identified, and by all accounts has worked very, very well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in providing some preventive supports and tools for our youth in schools to be able to help address some of the mental health challenges that we know are increasing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we are proud to be able to support an enhanced investment into the area of mental health capacity building in our schools.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, annualized funding of \$500,000 to continue the work of the virtual PACT, the police and crisis teams, in partnership with the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police], many of these happening in rural Saskatchewan. I've had an opportunity to meet first-hand with those who have been part of that particular initiative and who have experienced some of the positive aspects of that. And so therefore it is important that we continue to support that particular project.

More funding for additional detox treatment spaces in this province, Mr. Speaker. Funding to expand the take-home naloxone program in Saskatchewan pharmacies. Recently, Mr. Speaker, we announced that that program has expanded to roughly, I think, 75-or-so-odd pharmacies in the province, 225 locations around Saskatchewan. And this investment will build upon that particular expansion even further.

Also some funding to support the capacity, creation, and resource development for crystal meth treatments, Mr. Speaker. I should also mention that there's a million dollars specifically targeted towards the response, in response to the findings of the drug task

force, which completed its consultations this past fall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and then provided a report and some recommendations not that long ago. So there's some funding set aside for that, Mr. Speaker, and more decisions and announcements to be made, specifically as to how that is going to be utilized.

I can say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that roughly 650,000 of that is going to be targeted towards something known as locally integrated overdose response projects, or hot-spotting, which is based on a model out of one of the cities in the United States, which really allows for a flexible and mobile and scalable approach to trying to really quickly target where there are specific areas and certain geographic areas of the province and of certain communities, to be able to be mobile and to move in quickly to provide as much support as we can. So that is one of the areas of investment.

Mr. Speaker, there's also, as part of the 8 million in mental health and addictions increased funding, there is roughly \$255,000, Mr. Speaker, to expand the Family Service Saskatchewan mental health walk-in clinics. And that will get into an additional eight communities that have not been served thus far: communities of Moose Jaw, Assiniboia, Gravelbourg, Kindersley, Biggar, Leader, Rosetown, and Unity, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the area of seniors there is a \$17 million increase in specific initiatives to support seniors' care. And that goes into a number of items, first of all, 117 additional CCAs [continuing care aide]. This is the second year of our election commitment to add 300 continuing care aides in the province, so there's funding to support the additional hiring of the next tranche of CCAs. Funding to expand the high-dose influenza vaccine to all residents aged 65-plus in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. So that is a new expansion.

Two and a half million dollars for individualized home care funding, also \$2.25 million for support of home care services. Both of these significant initiatives, roughly \$5 million — over \$5 million, well close to \$5 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker — to facilitate seniors being able to remain in their own homes longer. And that is something that I hear consistently from seniors across this province. We also have an amount of funding, \$250,000, to work with community-based organizations, Mr. Speaker, to introduced new community-driven initiatives to also support seniors remaining in their own homes. And that remains a significant area of priority for us, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Rural health care, Mr. Speaker. Some of the other members have spoken about this earlier, but I think it's important to note that there is an expansion to the training of the distributed medical education program in southeast Saskatchewan to add four new family medicine residency training seats. Nine additional training seats to the annual SIPPA [Saskatchewan international physician practice assessment] intake to increase physician recruitment in rural areas, enhancements financially to the post-SIPPA assessment process to provide for improved supports for physicians practising in rural Saskatchewan, and also changes to the rural physician incentive program to better retain physicians in rural communities.

Finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the area of rural EMS, over \$10 million specifically targeted towards increasing annual

funding for enhancing emergency medical services and stabilizing some of the rural EMS services that we have in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is an important area that we are investing into. It will provide for about 70 FTEs [full-time equivalent] across a number of communities, also expanding community paramedicine, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is part of a multi-year EMS stabilization strategy that we are trying to roll out, knowing that we have some pressures in certain areas of the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But our commitment, as it always has been, is to continue to address these issues and restore services in areas where they perhaps have been temporarily disrupted.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've heard other members talk about the \$2.1 billion improvement to the deficit forecast, and how important that is as we inch closer to a balanced budget. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a number of significant investments in other ministries and other areas of the provincial government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, record investments of \$3.2 billion into hospitals, schools, highways, and other capital projects. More support for post-secondary education, including the nursing seat expansion that we heard the Minister of Advanced Education talk about earlier tonight. Two hundred new educational assistant positions highlighting a \$2.88 billion budget in education. More support for Saskatchewan municipalities, more than \$448 million in direct support to municipalities across this province.

Highways that the Minister of Highways is dealing with, \$846 million in that particular budget and more paved highways in the months and the years ahead. A strong commitment to agriculture, nearly a 20 per cent increase, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the previous year that is driven by a strong crop insurance program and more ag research funding. The energy and resource sector, back on track. Funding to support increased support for the film and television productions, as we've heard tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Tourism growth and a \$5 million increase to Tourism Saskatchewan. These are all areas where there have been significant, positive investments into the budget, Mr. Speaker.

My time is nearing an end, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and there's others that want to get on the record. I just want to point out, Mr. Speaker, we heard some of the other speeches last night or earlier this week, tonight, from some of the other members. And you know, they talk about a lot of things. They talk about *Groundhog Day*. They talk about, last night it was train stories, *The Little Engine That Could*, and all these others sorts of flights of fancy, and whatever it is that they are focused on and obsessed with over there, Mr. Speaker.

But the fact of the matter is, there's good news. There are good things happening in this province regardless of what the members opposite say day in and day out, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And you know what? They say things like, well the government's out of touch. And I would beg to differ, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because time and time again, election after election after election, it's roughly the same number of members that get elected on that side of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And they lost another one this spring, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And when they've had the opportunity to speak about, and they've all had an opportunity to speak and to speak about the

budget and also speak about their record, they never do, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They never speak about their record. They also never come up with any sort of solutions or ideas. It's always we'll spend more, we'll tax less, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they never say what exactly they would do or how they would pay for it. They just chirp from their seats over there, Mr. Speaker, and they never actually come up with any sort of tangible, feasible plan, Mr. Speaker. And that is something that is not new, and it's no wonder, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why they continue to sit in decreased numbers on that side of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's the same old refrain from the members opposite, and that is something that frankly is getting quite tiring, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will now allow other members to speak to the budget. We've heard what the members opposite have to say. Just simply can't support their amendment, Mr. Speaker. It's just not well thought out. Frankly it's a crazy amendment, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a great budget, a budget that we are proud of on this side of the House, a budget that many people of this province are proud of, and one that I will be supporting as tabled by the Minister of Finance, seconded by the member for Moose Jaw North. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cypress Hills.

Mr. Steele: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my privilege to rise to speak in support of the 2022-2023 budget.

As I rise today I would like to take this opportunity to thank the great people of Cypress Hills constituency. The people of Cypress Hills are genuine, hard-working, innovative, and generous individuals, and it's a great honour to represent them here as their MLA. Mr. Speaker, I also cannot stand here today without thanking my family. My wife, my children, my grandchildren have always provided me with overwhelming love and support. For that I am extremely grateful.

[21:30]

Mr. Speaker, this year the theme of the budget is Saskatchewan is back on track. And after all the people of Saskatchewan have been through in these recent times, I believe Saskatchewan is certainly more than ready to get back on track. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance presented the budget this week that saw the deficit reduced by \$2.1 billion. Saskatchewan's economy is growing. Over 13,000 new jobs were created in the last year, which I believe is the second best among all the provinces in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to credit the Minister of Finance and her staff. They have worked tirelessly to position our province in a strong fiscal position that we are in here today. We will see the government return to a balanced budget by 2026-27 and are heading to our goal in 2030, the growing plan's objectives.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to use my time to highlight how the budget will positively impact the people of Cypress Hills constituency and our province as a whole. Mr. Speaker, the government investment in Saskatchewan's economy is extensive. We know

that it is through this strong economy that we will be able to fund the most critical programs and services we access as Saskatchewan people, and it is through the strong economy that we'll be able to allocate funding to maintain and develop Saskatchewan's vital infrastructure.

Agriculture is a major player in our economy in Cypress Hills and across this great province, Mr. Speaker. The last year was a difficult year for the agriculture producers. Producers faced challenges year . . . due to large part to severe drought in many areas. For livestock producers, this created poor feed quality, increase in feed costs. Many difficult choices and challenges resulted for our livestock producers who struggled to make ends meet and maintain their herds.

As the drought conditions have improved in some areas, many areas have not been as fortunate. Crop producers have been challenged with poor returns and seen huge increases in inputs. All of this creates a domino effect that causes major challenges for planning and investing subsequent growing seasons for years to come. Mr. Speaker, our government has and will continue to support our agriculture industry. Through the funding of our business risk management programs such as crop insurance, AgriStability, AgriInvest, and western livestock price insurance, our government has put the necessary support in place to ensure that our producers are able to achieve and sustain long-term success and most importantly safeguard their livelihood.

Mr. Speaker, the funding allocation by the government and the growth plan goals set out by the Ministry of Agriculture will set Saskatchewan's agriculture sector up for success as a major contributor in Saskatchewan's economy. Our government is doing so by attracting major investments in our province. Given ag producers' ability to not only operate . . . by growing and thriving, we will move forward as a province.

In this budget, Mr. Speaker, you will see record investments in health care, in the health care system. This is a system that has adapted and sacrificed and championed through the worst recent times and continues to do so. We have heard over many months the concerns and frustrations that many of our constituents have about the increases in both surgical and medical imaging service wait times. Mr. Speaker, this government has shown its commitment to the health and well-being of Saskatchewan by funding thousands of surgeries and creating a driven plan to alleviate surgical backlogs. This is a plan that will get us back on track and return the system to pre-COVID wait times as soon as possible.

Our government is also spending millions of dollars to fund medical imaging services and has committed to a multi-year strategy that will create additional intensive care beds across the province. This is a shining example of our government's commitment to ensure the people of Saskatchewan receive the care they need when they need it.

Further to that point, Mr. Speaker, for those who live in the most rural areas of the province where we rely heavily on consistent and reliable access to EMS care, announced in this year's budget was a nearly \$11 million increase improving Saskatchewan's vital emergency medical services. Improvements will be made by investing in additional paramedic positions to staff ambulances and services.

Saskatchewan will see enhancement in paramedical services and medical first responder programs that will happen . . . to rely on heavily in our rural and remote communities in times of crisis. The funding will save lives. Access to health care is important to all Saskatchewan people, and this budget shows that the government is committed to ensuring care is accessible while also ensuring the health care system is set on track to recover and withstand unforeseen challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, the last two years have shone a light on health care and the needs of the Saskatchewan people, from the importance of supporting those with mental health needs to those who struggle with addictions, to the needs for better care and support for the elderly population and those with continuing care needs. This government has been listening and has created a plan to put the funds in place to help with those who are vulnerable, in crisis, and in need. Mr. Speaker, our government has taken note and put funding in place to make important changes required to improve the quality of life for its people.

Mr. Speaker, our government cares about the education of our children. Our government is showing its commitment to the education of Saskatchewan children by importantly supporting its teachers. This government's providing \$29.4 million required to fully fund the agreement upon the 2 per cent salary increase. Mr. Speaker, this budget provides a record level investment in funds allotted to local school divisions.

As a government, we look to Saskatchewan's diverse school divisions to operate, manage, and allocate funds based on each other's unique needs. We know that the new \$70 million investment to hire 200 educational assistants along with the \$6 million in support for students will increase the quality of education that Saskatchewan students receive through providing support directly to the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, our government has set up the goal of building a better life for Saskatchewan families and communities. The government is proving this through supporting the important work of many community-based organizations province-wide, \$400 million in funding allocated within budget. The programs support Saskatchewan families, therefore strengthening communities.

Our economy has attracted private investments from across the world, with investments from companies like BHP, Richardson International, Viterro, Cargill, Federated Co-op, AGT Foods, Paper Excellence, and Red Leaf Pulp. Mr. Speaker, as these companies invest in our economy, it is important to continue to invest in our infrastructure. Infrastructure investment is crucial to meeting the growing needs of our province and this budget has invested \$846 million into highways, along to ensure safe, efficient travel and transport province-wide.

I would like to take a moment to speak about the exciting resource development in the Southwest. Two companies, North American Helium and Royal Helium, have both been active in the constituency, accessing helium. North American Helium currently operates the largest helium purification plant, located south of the village of Consul near Battle Creek. This investment is welcome and encouraged by our government and our constituents of the Cypress Hills. Adding jobs as this industry

grows will benefit locals and the provincial economy for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, the last few months our government has been consulting with companies on the usage and development of natural gas in the province. In my role as Legislative Secretary to SaskPower and SaskEnergy, we will be looking at how to best utilize current production and explore potential for future development. This work will help government build a strong economy today and for the next generation. Mr. Speaker, energy independence could not be more important than it is today. Saskatchewan has what the world needs, and that includes oil and gas.

Our government is an advocate for the improvement of the internet services in rural areas. Mr. Speaker, SaskTel has doubled its investment plans for the rural fibre internet, now reaching 100 million. For our area, this means SaskTel has committed to bring in infiNet to Shaunavon, Maple Creek, with construction starting within 2022, and into Gull Lake, receiving services in 2023.

Mr. Speaker, this investment will allow individuals the opportunity to invest in rural Saskatchewan through starting new businesses and opportunity to live in rural communities while working at home.

Last month I was honoured to attend the annual Battle of the Little Big Puck between the Nekaneet First Nation and the ranching community of Maple Creek. This game has brought communities together since the 1970s. It is a charity evening with proceeds going towards the local Southwest Integrated Healthcare Facility.

Mr. Speaker, our government has committed to \$233 million to our First Nations and Métis partners in this budget, investing in Indigenous-led initiatives that promote economic development for First Nations and advance reconciliation province-wide. I want to celebrate the Cypress Hills First Nations partners, the Nekaneet First Nation, who are privately developing a truck stop west of Maple Creek along the No. 1 Highway. Mr. Speaker, the construction of this new truck stop will start in May and completed this fall.

Mr. Speaker, the Nekaneet First Nation is a strong community looking for opportunities to invest and return the benefits to their Nation. They promote economic development for their community. I look forward to continuing to work with the Nekaneet First Nation to realize the future of economic opportunities as they continue to consult with industry while looking for opportunities to further develop their resources. Mr. Speaker, I believe working in partnerships with a vision and a path forward is how we build and maintain strong relationships and sustainable growth.

Mr. Speaker, this winter and spring has been busy in the constituency. My constituents are very happy with the paths the government decided to take regarding the removal of the remaining health measures. Constituents are happy to attend arts and sporting events with their children and families. Spirits have lifted as communities have been able to hold important events, returning back to working together and to thrive on. Mr. Speaker, the economy will benefit with this excitement as well. Many

people will be looking to book summer plans. I will say that anyone looking for somewhere to visit this summer must take a long look at southwest Saskatchewan in Cypress Hills.

Southwest Saskatchewan has many unique opportunities to explore and enjoy with their family. In Eastend you will find Scotty in the T.rex Centre to discover. Nearby, the Cypress Hills destination area offers exceptional opportunities to explore historical sites like Fort Walsh or enjoy a family-friendly learning experience through the SaskParks program. This area is also host to some of the most exceptional businesses that will make your stay exciting and memorable.

[21:45]

Mr. Speaker, as I close out my remarks, I'd like to express again how fortunate I am to represent the people of Cypress Hills. Our communities benefit from working together and I would like to say thank you to everyone in the constituency for all that you have done the last while. We are strong and managed our way to better days.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is back on track with better days to come. I will be supporting the plan and the vision of the government. On that note, Mr. Speaker, I support the budget without amendment. Thank you.

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

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to entering into the debate this evening and noting my observations on the budget that's been presented. Before beginning my response, I would like to take a few moments to thank some people who are incredibly deserving of acknowledgement and thanks.

I want to first say to my constituents in Saskatoon University, thank you for allowing me to represent and be of service to you. I am privileged to work on your behalf and to advance your objectives and take up your concerns.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, representing our constituents is of course something we could never do single-handedly as MLAs. There are many people who commit themselves to this work every day in service of the people of Saskatchewan. There is an immense amount of work that is undertaken behind the scenes by others so that we as members of this Assembly are able to fulfill our roles and serve our constituents effectively.

As you know, much of that work is taken on by our constituency assistants who wear many hats and juggle numerous priorities and competing responsibilities every day. I'd like to recognize my constituency assistant, Vita Skvairson, for her important work in our office in Saskatoon University. Vita's educational background is in psychology, Mr. Speaker, and she cares deeply about making our society a better place for people. She's a true organizer at heart, and I am very fortunate to have someone with this aptitude working in my office. We also have Constance Woloschuk and Liz Donnison, who are working out of our office on a casual basis, and they bring many strengths to our team as well. Both are incredibly well-organized and competent, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank our NDP caucus office staff too. The fine people on our staff team manage an incredible workload and an intense level of pressure, especially during session, and always manage to do so with grace. These folks are incredibly talented, hard-working people and our caucus is exceptionally fortunate to work with such a dynamic staff team.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to recognize the staff who work in this building. The competency and professionalism displayed by the many people who work here is truly impressive.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to say how much gratitude I have for my husband, Brian, for his unwavering love and support. I couldn't have asked for a more patient, thoughtful, and kind partner to take on the world with. His companionship is something I cherish very much, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I'll say too, I think the members on both sides know how much this job can take a toll on family life if we don't consciously carve out that time to hold our loved ones close and show them how much we appreciate having them in our lives. This job can be sometimes, oftentimes all-consuming, and it's so important to remember to step back and do our best to keep things in perspective.

Turning now to this government's budget, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things that I would like to take the opportunity as well to put into perspective. Mr. Speaker, as you know, part of the role of opposition is to hold the government to account, and I indeed intend to do so. But before I get into my concerns with this budget, I would like to note a few things which are included in the budget and which show some theoretical promise at least. I'll take a few moments to highlight these things.

While I'm glad to see this government commit in the budget to a new independent agency dedicated to recruiting and retaining health care workers, honestly it's a bit late, Mr. Speaker. Front-line workers have been ringing the alarm bells for well over a decade about chronic understaffing in our health care system, to no avail. Only now when we're seeing more and more health care leaders and front-line workers leaving health care and leaving this province, when our health care leadership and workers have been pushed to an absolute breaking point, does it finally start dawning on this government that something needs to be done. I ask the members opposite: why did it have to come to this? What will the long-term impacts of this government's neglect and starvation of our health care system look like?

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to quote from a recent article the CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] published last Friday around this government's budget promise to create this new, independent agency to address issues with health care recruitment and retention. Renowned health policy analyst Steven Lewis was "skeptical, very skeptical about how this new agency might be able to actually recruit and retain health care workers given the state of our system today."

Hopefully this government will have the good sense to meaningfully consult with stakeholders around this new agency. The people of this province desperately need this government to dial back the politics and start informing their decisions based on the advice of health care experts like the Saskatchewan Medical Association, like the Saskatchewan Health Authority, and like

actual front-line workers, Mr. Speaker. I sincerely hope this government has learned their lesson, will adjust course, and will finally start listening to the experts.

One more encouraging item from this budget, Mr. Speaker, is the increase to educational assistants and continuing care aides in our province, 200 and 300 respectively. These positions are desperately needed, no doubt about it. The thing is, those 200 EA positions are really just making up for EA positions that this government has cut in years past. So I guess I won't get too excited, Mr. Speaker, about patting this government on the back for giving back what they have unceremoniously taken away in previous years.

As for the 300 CCAs, that's all well and good, except for the pesky fact that CCAs have been incredibly difficult to recruit and retain in this province for many years now. So let's hope there's an actual plan in place to actually attract people and keep them in these positions.

Just a little unsolicited advice for this government here, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps a start might be for this government to quit dragging their heels and bring in pay equity legislation so that female-dominated jobs like continuing care aides, like educational assistants for that matter — same boat — would be compensated at levels that are actually fair and equitable.

Or maybe this government could have the decency to bring back the minimum care standards in long-term care that they shamefully cut back in 2011. We need those minimum staffing ratios back in place so we can ensure our seniors are provided with the level of care and dignity that they deserve, Mr. Speaker, and so that health care workers like CCAs aren't continuing to burn out and leave due to chronic understaffing.

Mr. Speaker, I used to represent a lot of CCAs in rural Saskatchewan before I was elected. You would be appalled to hear the stories these workers relayed to me about their working conditions and their heartbreaking struggle to provide safe and dignified care to the people of this province due to understaffing. So would the members opposite, if they cared enough to actually listen to these workers.

And they get letters and phone calls from these workers, Mr. Speaker; I know without a doubt they do. But the political will of this government to provide dignified care for the people of this province is sadly outweighed by their ideological desire to slash our public health care and long-term care systems, to hack away at our public systems until there's little left to salvage, Mr. Speaker, and then privatize, privatize, privatize. That's the Sask Party's MO, and this rigid, conservative ideology always seems to win out for this government, Mr. Speaker.

The truth is it's incredibly frustrating and really infuriating to see this government continue to take the needs of Saskatchewan people for granted. That's what we see as an overarching theme of this budget — a government that has completely lost touch with the needs of everyday people.

We can see this clearly reflected in the 32 tax and fee increases being applied in this budget to products and services, in order to fund this government's chronic and continued mismanagement of our province's finances, Mr. Speaker. Here are just a few of

those taxes, all of which are applications of a particularly regressive form of taxation — the provincial sales tax. Sales taxes are regressive, Mr. Speaker, as they have a vastly disproportionate impact on those who make the least amount of money. But that's A-okay with this government, Mr. Speaker, because the truth is this government doesn't really care about working-class people and the poor. Just have a look at some of things this government has expanded the PST to in this budget, Mr. Speaker.

PST will now be applied to sporting events. PST on concerts, on shows, on movie theatres. PST on museums, on zoos, on historical sites. PST on fairs and on rodeos. PST on arts and crafts shows and on professional theatre tickets. PST on gym and golf memberships, on curling fees. PST on hunting and fishing guides, Mr. Speaker. All new taxes, Mr. Speaker, that will only make life harder and harder for average Saskatchewan people.

Most of them are fun taxes, really. This government seems to be of the view that the hard-working people of Saskatchewan simply aren't deserving of opportunities for leisure. Those things are clearly viewed by this government as unnecessary luxuries for the poor and the working class, rather than things that should be accessible to everyday people; rather than things that contribute to the actual cultural fabric of our province, Mr. Speaker; rather than things that promote happiness, improve mental and physical health, and connection with our fellow community members.

The reality is, what average Saskatchewan people have been saddled with in this budget is being shaken down for what remains of their disposable income, shaking out every last shilling, and being forced to pay the price for this government's mismanagement of our province's finances.

Just have a look at the state of our finances, Mr. Speaker. Public debt, up 2.9 billion from last year and now towering over the people of this province at \$30 billion. Mr. Speaker, the forecasts for the debt continue rising only higher and higher. From public debt of 7.8 billion in 2009 to \$30 billion with this year's budget. Incredible. And let's not forget this government tripled the debt long before COVID had even been born, Mr. Speaker. That's a fact. The harsh reality is that the path to balance this government keeps fumbling in the dark to find just never seems to work out. The old path to balance, that keeps leading to steep cliffs, doesn't it, Mr. Speaker, and this government just keeps stumbling down that same old path, toppling over the edge of those cliffs.

The fact is this government has failed to balance the overwhelming majority of budgets they have brought forward in the 15 years that they have held control over the purse strings in this province. And just how many budgets has this government balanced in the 15 years they've been in power? Four measly budgets, Mr. Speaker. Just embarrassing. And all the while this government has continued to squander our wealth like drunken sailors, drunken sailors on an unrestrained frivolous spree.

And where did all that money go, Mr. Speaker? All that money from a resource boom gifted to this government. It literally fell in their laps like a golden egg. A resource boom that was unparalleled in the history of Saskatchewan. Nobody knows, Mr. Speaker. It's a mystery, a shady mystery, corruption-laden mystery, no doubt. More and more money being snatched out of the pockets of Saskatchewan residents all while people continue

to struggle more and more under crushing, never-ending rises in costs. From housing to food to fuel, Mr. Speaker, people are scrambling just to get by.

People in the far North of our province for example, Mr. Speaker, are paying over \$13 for a jug of milk — \$13. So a northern minimum-wage worker has to work over an hour just to buy a jug of milk. And this government thinks that's just A-okay. No need for any meaningful help from this government for average people, Mr. Speaker, especially if they live north of 60 in this province.

Speaking of the minimum wage, Mr. Speaker, on April 1st, this Friday, Saskatchewan will once again slide back right on into last place with the lowest minimum wage in all of Canada. A poverty wage, Mr. Speaker. Right back on track for this government. Mr. Speaker, I wish I could tell you that this drop back down to the lowest minimum wage in Canada as of April 1st is just some poor-taste April Fools' Day prank being played by this government on the people of our province. But the sad reality is, this is actually what the Sask Party government believes the hard-working people of this province are worth — \$11.81 an hour, Mr. Speaker. Shameful.

Sadly the members opposite have no idea what it's like to try and live off this pittance of a wage and they just don't care, for that matter. Everyone knows it. They'd rather cozy up to their corporate cronies and lovingly scratch their backs than conjure up even one care in the world for average working people in Saskatchewan.

According to Stats Canada, more than 16,000 workers in our province are languishing under this government's poverty minimum wage. And do you know who those 16,000 people are, Mr. Speaker? Are the vast majority of these workers really just teenagers living at home with their parents making pocket money, as the Sask Party would like us to believe? They decidedly are not. The majority of minimum-wage workers in Saskatchewan are in fact adults over the age of 20. And workers between the ages of 35 and 64 constitute the second-largest cohort of minimum-wage earners at 30 per cent of the total.

[22:00]

What's more, women make up the majority of these minimum-wage workers, Mr. Speaker. A full 65 per cent of those who are barely scraping by on \$11.81 an hour are women. And as you've heard me say before, Saskatchewan has one of the highest gender wage gaps in the country, with women making a full \$5 an hour less than men on average. So there's one myth debunked, Mr. Speaker.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we often hear absurd fearmongering from conservatives about how raising minimum wages will kill jobs — a completely baseless claim, Mr. Speaker. The fact is when British Columbia's minimum wage was raised, the participation rate in that province's economy as well as youth employment remained comparable. Another myth debunked.

This sort of fearmongering is designed to intimidate workers and scare them off from demanding fair wages for their labour — a typical conservative ploy, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite would seem to believe that Saskatchewan people deserve to toil

under low wages, that they should just accept their lot in life, just put up and shut up, keep their heads down and be good, obedient workers. No need for simple pleasures in life for Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, is it right that minimum-wage workers in our province should have to work multiple jobs and scramble desperately just to scrape by, just to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table? How is that acceptable?

What Saskatchewan workers deserve, Mr. Speaker, what they should be entitled to by law are legislated living wages. Wages that ensure people are able to obtain a decent and dignified quality of life and wages that actually match the true cost of living in our province.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, not only are workers in our province subjected to the lowest minimum wages in the country, the absolute bottom of the barrel, they are also told by this government that they do not deserve the dignity of paid sick leave, that in the words of the Minister of Labour, paid sick leave would be an unnecessary imposition on businesses. Well the evidence shows this is simply not factual.

I'd encourage the minister to have a look at the report released recently by economist and director of the Centre for Future Work, Dr. Jim Stanford. I've referenced this report before in the House, Mr. Speaker, and I'll reference it again just for good measure. Dr. Stanford's research on the impact of implementing 10 days of paid sick leave for workers in BC [British Columbia] demonstrated that the gross bottom-line cost impact of requiring employers to offer 10 paid days of sick leave would represent a trivial 0.21 per cent increase in total business expenses.

I'd like to say that I'd like to hear what the minister has to say to this report, Mr. Speaker. I really would. But we all know he'd really just keep regurgitating his stale, old talking points. The minister, as you know, Mr. Speaker, is a lawyer. He's a smart man, and he knows how bad his government's sad excuses are on this front. That's why all he can do is read from his talking points like he's told to. I honestly feel badly for him.

But you really have to wonder what is the real reason this government refuses to pass our bill calling for paid sick leave? Do they simply have such disdain for working-class people that they can't even be bothered to look at the facts?

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I have twice now introduced a private member's bill which would guarantee 10 permanent days of paid sick leave for all Saskatchewan workers. Why exactly is it that this government continues to refuse to pass this bill? Why do they keep refusing to get to work making life better for working people in our province? The working people of Saskatchewan deserve answers to these questions, Mr. Speaker.

Moving on, in terms of the lack of funding in this budget for second-stage shelters, I really can't say it any better than SOFIA House did in their March 24th press release, Mr. Speaker, and I quote:

Saskatchewan continues to be one of only two provinces in Canada that do not provide operational funding for second-stage shelters. Despite the fact that Saskatchewan has the highest interpersonal violence rate of all provinces and that thousands of people are turned away from crisis shelters on

a regular basis due to lack of space, there continues to be no funding available to support long-term housing for those who experience violence.

Simply shameful, Mr. Speaker. Why is it that this government refuses to recognize and respond to the crisis that exists for women and children in our province due to rampant rates of domestic violence? Mr. Speaker, women and children remain trapped in violent situations and are desperate for meaningful help from their government. Yet they are turned away from shelters every year — thousands of women and children, Mr. Speaker — due to a lack of operational funding for shelters by this government.

Sadly it's not only workers and women who are left to suffer under this government's latest budget, Mr. Speaker. As the critic for Advanced Education, it is with great concern that I note the continued lack of adequate funding for post-secondary education under this government. While the institutions were offered some level of stability from the multi-year funding agreement that was entered into with the government last year, the fact is that operating grants from the province to the institutions remain far too low, resulting in deficits, cuts, and unsustainable hikes to tuition for students.

The University of Saskatchewan is facing a \$21 million shortfall per year and is bracing for inevitable cuts, some of which I'm told will be "wrenching." Mr. Speaker, the University of Regina is also facing a \$16 million shortfall for 2021 to '22. This government needs to stop shortchanging our post-secondary institutions and most of all our students, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, for the 2021 to '22 year, Saskatchewan had the third-highest increase of tuition in Canada, 5.6 per cent, surpassed only by Alberta and Quebec. And when you look back further, Mr. Speaker, you will clearly see that this is far from a one-time hike. Over the past 10 years, undergraduate tuition fees in Saskatchewan, for Saskatchewan students domestically, have increased by an astounding 44 per cent. For international students over that same time frame, tuition fees have increased by 50 per cent. And keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, tuition fees for international students in Saskatchewan can run up to three times the amount of tuition fees paid by their domestic counterparts. What a disgrace.

After all this government's talk about the merits of their graduate retention program, Mr. Speaker, the fact is, excluding the Maritimes, Saskatchewan has the lowest rates of graduate retention in all of Canada and that goes for both domestic and international students. That's at the one-year mark after graduating and it's the very same at the five-year mark.

Mr. Speaker, taking into account the full suite of student supports that this government administers, including their ineffectual graduate retention program, it would appear that we could actually be providing free tuition for a four-year B.A. [Bachelor of Arts] for every domestic student in our province. I encourage the minister to sincerely look into this, to have his people crunch the numbers. The potential that exists for reducing financial barriers to obtaining a post-secondary education in our province is quite incredible and I hope this government will realize and act on that potential.

Just consider that for a minute, Mr. Speaker. Consider the impact this would have and the opportunities this would represent for young people in our province. I really encourage the Minister of Advanced Education to think about what this could mean, the opportunities he and his government could be providing for Saskatchewan students simply by reallocating the same dollars they are already spending on existing student supports. Saskatchewan could be paving the way for universal access to a post-secondary education for Saskatchewan students, Mr. Speaker. Surely we can all agree this is something that students in this province would benefit from immensely.

I think I'll end my remarks here on a bit of a hopeful note because there is great potential, and there is much left to hope for and work towards in this province, Mr. Speaker. But in order to realize that potential, we will need a government that has the political will to govern in the true interest of Saskatchewan people. I'm afraid I don't see that sort of political will reflected in this budget.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I am unable to support the budget motion. I will instead be supporting the amendment moved by the member for Regina Rosemont and seconded by the member for Regina Douglas Park. And with that I will conclude my remarks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. A. Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in this Assembly today and to enter into this debate on the 2022-23 budget moved by the Hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance, and seconded by the member from Moose Jaw North. First I would like to acknowledge though, tonight we are on Treaty 4 territory and homeland of the Métis people.

Mr. Speaker, before I start into my speech, I too would like to begin by congratulating our newest member of this Assembly, the member from Athabasca. What great foresight the people of Athabasca have had to have elected a representative with such knowledge and integrity to sit in government. It's so great that Athabasca will now be well represented in this House.

I would also like to thank a few people as I start: my CA, Patt, who is very wonderful. She's amazing. She's patient. She puts up with me and everyone who calls. She is truly a wonderful, caring woman. I would also like to thank our member from P.A. [Prince Albert] Carlton and his CA, Joy. It's a pleasure to work with them and we have a really good partnership, so to speak, up in Prince Albert, and we do our very best to serve our constituents up there.

I would like to thank my family. Sadly I only have one son in Saskatchewan, but I have two sons in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. And the reason I have those sons in Alberta is because when I was a younger woman, we had to leave this province because of the state of affairs that were in this province. You know, I've been in the position that I had to decide if I was going to feed my children or if I was going to pay my power bill, and that was very difficult. There was absolutely no supports in this province. You can laugh. You laugh all you like, because none of you lived that. You're too young or you've moved here from somewhere else. It

was tough. It was difficult. And that was the hardest decision we ever had to do because I was born here and I grew up here and all of my family lived here. But we had to move to a province that had hope and opportunity, and we did that.

You talk about CCAs. I worked as a CCA. I worked as a CCA, and I put myself through university, myself. I took out student loans. I learned the value of working for my education. And it was very difficult. So I get very frustrated when people do not realize that you must have a strong economy in order to provide services. And I also get very frustrated when we sit back and people don't understand what those of us have had to do in the past to get to where we are today.

There would not be a chance that I would be standing here today if I had not left this province when it was where it was. I was educated. I was supported. I got to see what supports could really be like for people. And you know, when you have investment in a province and even in a nation, what you do with that is you invest into the people there. But that doesn't mean that people get everything because people also have to learn the value of work. We have to learn those values. We have to learn the values of appreciation in our lives.

And that is something I have done with our children, my children. And you know, I have to say there is . . . My sons do a variety of things. I can't convince them to come back because they still are worried, and they remember what the experiences were like when they were little kids and we were living here and how challenging it was. But they understand the importance of work. And you know, it doesn't matter what you do because every job is valuable. Every job is valuable, but people should also be working towards what their potential is.

So everyone has potential. So I mean if I was a clerk in a store, which I've done that too . . . I've waited tables. I've done many things in my life. People always should be striving to do better. And one of the reasons that we have something like a minimum wage is because people need a place to start. But they also have to understand and recognize we can always strive to do better in our lives.

[22:15]

You know, one of the greatest opportunities I have had — I've got to catch my breath again — has been teaching CCAs. I was a CCA. I went to university and then I had this privilege of teaching CCAs. And you know, the CCAs were international students and they all came here. They all paid their tuition. They all worked really hard.

And a lot of the students I taught actually came with the first group of Filipino nurses that the Saskatchewan Party actually recruited when we came here because we had no nurses. So in the late, well mid-2000s, yeah . . . So they were just coming when I moved back to Alberta. And the nurses came and then, you know, when we recruit from international countries, we get families too. We recruit families, so a lot of their spouses and their children eventually came over.

And it's interesting when you talk about CCAs being predominantly female. You know, the majority of the CCAs I taught were men, because they were the husbands of the nurses

who came. And you know, I learned so much from those people. They're hard-working people. They're prepared. They came to Saskatchewan because of the hope and promise that they saw here compared to what it was like where they were before.

You know, we talked; I learned. They taught me about the health care system, how difficult it was. Like diabetes is one of the major chronic diseases that a lot of family members had there, and so many of their family members actually died from diabetes because they couldn't afford the treatment in order to, you know, to manage the disease. Cancer patients too. I had more than one student when I was teaching them who actually lost a family member due to cancer because, again, they couldn't afford the treatments.

So these men . . . They were predominantly men. So I have to tell you before I go on — and sorry, I'm kind of rambling — I have this big speech here. And it was really interesting. So in my class, in one class, my one class was all M.B.A.s [Master of Business Administration]. Every one of them in there had an M.B.A. Another class that I had, like I had Edwardo. He was the Filipino version of a Navy SEAL [Sea, Air, and Land]. He was a special-ops guy, great big guy, kind, kind man, wonderful CCA.

Hermie was a cruise ship captain. Rod was a media promoter. He worked in the media. I had Elmer, and he was actually an ophthalmologist. Like really, you know, educated, well-educated people. But by coming to Canada, they saw that opportunity. Like they weren't able to get jobs in their field without taking some additional training, so what they decided to do was become CCAs. And they worked hard, and they were very successful. They were very good CCAs. And they worked hard to bring their families over here because they wanted their families to have the same opportunities that they have. They see that opportunity here.

And many of them were successful. They bring families over. Their families go to school here. Their families get jobs here. Their families start businesses here. And they really thrive when they come and when they move here.

So Mr. Deputy Speaker, I learned so much by actually having to leave our province. And I learned so much from people who have had to live through very difficult conditions. And I think that, to me, that's a very valuable lesson that I have learned. But the appreciation when I talk to them is just absolutely amazing. They are so grateful for what they have gotten by coming here and how their families have thrived.

I talked to Yasser here one evening, and he said to me . . . He was actually a policeman who was studying to be a lawyer and he was in security, and he was taking his CCA once he got over here. And he said, you know, Alana, we always thought we would come here; we would work; we would buy a place over there and then we'd move back there to retire because it's nice and warm over there . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . It is. Winters are tough. They're tough for us all. He said, but you know, we've been having second thoughts about that because our kids have so many opportunities here — so many opportunities. So I don't know what they decided to do in the end.

I apologize for any rambling but I just felt it was important. Not everyone is privileged. Some people have to work. Sometimes

you have to go through difficult times, and going through those difficult times is actually what gives us our character. It gives us our appreciation, and it's important. And it also gives us the ability to have compassion for people for the right reasons. And to give people that encouragement to thrive and become the best that they can be, to me that is the greatest gift, and that is what we should all be looking towards doing.

We don't want to enable people to stay where they are, you know, stuck in the right . . . working a part-time, you know, a minimum-wage job. We want to empower people and give them the hope to do the very best that they can do in this life. And that to me is something that's very important.

So I guess I should get on to my speech wherever I can find it here. Now that I've thanked all the . . . So I was going to talk about COVID, but you know, COVID was tough times for all of us. We know it was. It was very difficult. I'm so grateful we had Dr. Shahab, who guided us in every step, got us to where we needed to go.

The people of Saskatchewan, as they always do, they stood up. You know, they did what they had to do. They stepped up. They went above and beyond. They did everything that we asked them to do to get through the worst that we were experiencing at that time of the pandemic and get us to where we are today.

So everyone was impacted by COVID. I know personally my grandson went from age three to age five during COVID, and that was very disappointing for me because I missed him. I used to go once a month out to see him. He lives in Calgary too. Yeah, so those were difficult times.

But you know, despite that and thanks to the dedication of our Saskatchewan people and the leadership of our government, our province is back on track. Our economy, our finances, and our government services are all back on track. We're back on track supporting the people of our province and investing in the future and growing a strong economy to build an even better and stronger, safer Saskatchewan.

So our government, Mr. Speaker, as we've heard from all speakers on this side of the House, we're making record investments so we can continue to thrive in this province. We are investing in the Saskatchewan people by strengthening priority programming. You know, services in health care, education, and social services.

We're making record investments in health care in this budget. We talk about the surgical wait times. Yes, we've had to reduce surgical wait times before. It was when I moved back just after the Sask Party government got in power, because the wait-lists were huge. We know we can do it because we've done it before, and there was no pandemic then. So we're also adding new funding for 11 new intensive care beds, ICU beds, to bring the total to 110 by 2024.

Our Minister of Advanced Education mentioned the TAVI procedure. There's more seats in the TAVI program, and that's really important. I lost a really good friend here. Actually he died the day we were sworn in. He died that day. His wife said, "It was just like he wanted to see you get sworn in, and then it wasn't long after that he passed away." But you know, it was a real

struggle for him while he was trying to get on the program because he was younger than what he should be in order to qualify for the program. So he really struggled. You know, he was a big man, and you know, he looked fit. But he couldn't take his garbage out because he would get so short of breath and have such chest pain. So I was very, very pleased to see that we are increasing seats in that program because it's going to benefit a lot of people.

You know, we've heard that we are dedicating and allotting funds to home care. We know seniors are happiest living in their homes. My mom tells me that every time I go to see her, that she's going to live there. When I take her out, that's it. Yeah. We also have \$6.5 million allotted for the continuing care positions. I had the privilege of saying a member's statement about that in this House.

So our government is going to continue to take steps to provide high-quality care to meet the needs of our residents who receive home care and are in long-term care. The new recruitment agency that we're looking at is very important to try and not only recruit but retain health care workers in our province. And we are again, we're starting recruitment with the Philippines. So we're going to get lots of people and get them here, and people who are ready to work and who are very, very good professionals and will invest in our province.

And I had mentioned already about the families that we get. And again my students describe Saskatchewan as the land of opportunity because their goals are to work hard, support other family members back home until they eventually can relocate here. And each and every one of them that I spoke with talked about that.

One thing that was really important for Prince Albert is that we received funding for additional treatments for the neonatal ICU in the Victoria Hospital. This has been a wonderful project because it allows people with sick babies to stay closer to home, and they don't have to leave their other children and go out of town or go to Edmonton or Saskatoon.

Our budget has major investments in mental health and addictions programs to support people suffering with mental health and addictions. Our minister went over those in quite a lot of detail, but we have treatments to reduce harms associated with substance use, and strengthened proactive prevention measures and take-home naloxone kits.

You know, I had the opportunity a couple of weeks ago to attend the announcement up in Prince Albert of eight new addiction treatment beds that we got up there at Our House. And these are pre- and post-treatment beds, which means that they're beds for people who, once they've detoxed, because when you go in you might go into a facility, you've detoxed but you can't quite get into treatment. And so four for those, and the other four are for when you get out of treatment and it's taking, you know, awhile to find a place to live. So very important beds that we got up there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

For our education we've also seen record investments in education. We have record investments in all of our ministries or departments. We're so fortunate. And with that we're seeing 200 additional full-time assistants hired to support the students and

the teachers in the classroom, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have a lot of working-class people, working-class families in Northcote. And oftentimes both parents are working, and one of the challenges is that they've had is finding reliable child care. And the new federal-provincial agreement is really good for these people, for early learning and childhood funding, and it will help create 6,100 new child care spaces across the province. But in Prince Albert Northcote, we're getting spaces at Cumberland Crossing, at the health co-operative, at PAGC [Prince Albert Grand Council]. And it's going to really help our young families. It was really important.

The post-secondary institutions. Our Minister of Advanced Education had talked about the 150 nursing seats in the province as part of our commitment to train, recruit, and retain nurses for health care, very important. Very important. And you know, we have a U of S [University of Saskatchewan] campus up in Prince Albert, and it's such a huge advantage for students up there.

The Deputy Speaker: — It now being 10:30 p.m., this Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow at 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