



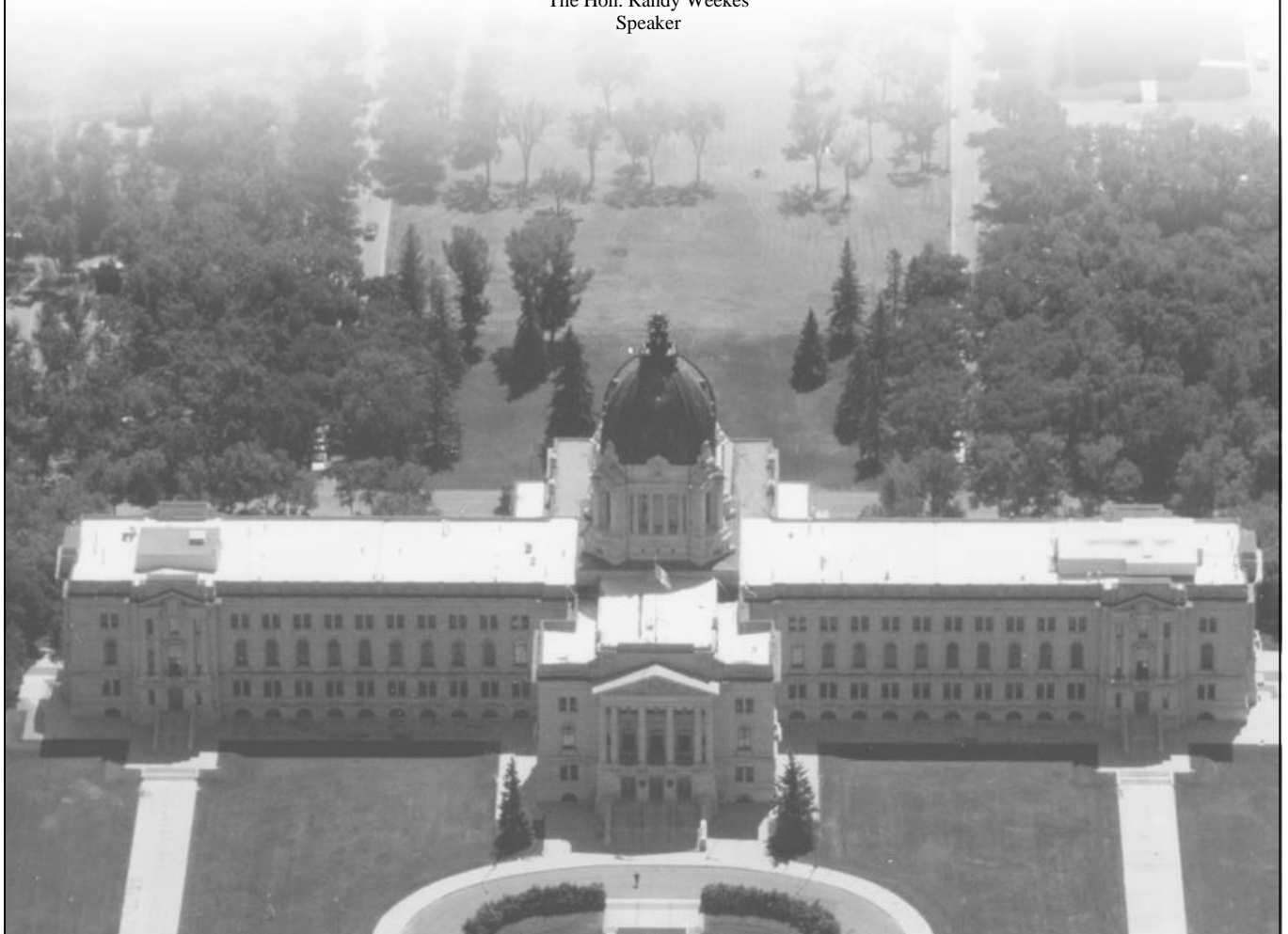
FOURTH SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
AND
PROCEEDINGS**

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



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
4th 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 — Carla Beck

| | |
|---|---|
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| Friesen, Marv — Saskatoon Riversdale (SP) | Ross, Hon. Laura — Regina Rochdale (SP) |
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| Harpauer, Hon. Donna — Humboldt-Watrous (SP) | Teed, Nathaniel — Saskatoon Meewasin (NDP) |
| Harrison, Daryl — Cannington (SP) | Tell, Hon. Christine — Regina Wascana Plains (SP) |
| Harrison, Hon. Jeremy — Meadow Lake (SP) | Vermette, Doyle — Cumberland (NDP) |
| Hindley, Hon. Everett — Swift Current (SP) | Weekes, Hon. Randy — Biggar-Sask Valley (SP) |
| Jenson, Terry — Martensville-Warman (SP) | Wilson, Nadine — Saskatchewan Rivers (Ind.) |
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| Keisig, Travis — Last Mountain-Touchwood (SP) | Wyant, Hon. Gordon — Saskatoon Northwest (SP) |
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| Lawrence, Greg — Moose Jaw Wakamow (Ind.) | |

Standings

Government Caucus: Saskatchewan Party (SP) — 44; Opposition Caucus: New Democratic Party (NDP) — 14;
Independent: Saskatchewan United Party (Ind.) — 1; Independent — 2

Clerks-at-the-Table

Clerk — Iris Lang
Law Clerk & Parliamentary Counsel — Kenneth S. Ring, K.C.
Deputy Clerk — Kathy Burianyak
Principal Clerk — Robert Park

Sergeant-at-Arms — Lyall Frederiksen

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[The Assembly resumed at 19:00.]

EVENING SITTING

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — It is now 7 p.m. Session will resume.

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 Deputy Chair of Committees: — I recognize the member from Regina University.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Was she finished? I'm sure a question folks are familiar with. But no, I wasn't finished, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But where did I leave off? It's hard to remember. We were really going through it.

But I think the main point that I wanted to close on here is the most disappointing part of this budget of course was the lack of any real concrete measure of relief for cost of living. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it does not bring members on this side of the House any great pleasure. In fact it's disappointing. It's hard. It's the casework that fills our offices, our inboxes, our phones. People are struggling right now, Mr. Speaker, and in this budget, we saw not a stitch of relief.

We see a budget that is still focused, that is still supported by the biggest tax increase in Saskatchewan's history; biggest expansion of the PST [provincial sales tax] which, as we canvassed earlier, was hiked by 1 per cent; a PST revenue which has grown by \$2 billion since 2017. PST revenues, as we referenced earlier tonight, have increased 17 per cent in 2024 alone. This and that government's industrial carbon tax are what is helping this budget stay away from being another billion-dollar deficit, Mr. Speaker.

And this economic record — which is the only thread we've seen through some of the budgetary responses here tonight, this defensive, kind of wounded-animal stance around their economic record — it's not good, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And this budget underscores that fact, and it reinforces how poorly people are doing, by completely ignoring anything approaching a cost-of-living relief measure, Mr. Speaker. And let's be clear, it's not just one poll or two polls, or one or two key economic indicators. It's all of them, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mortgage arrears leading the nation by a multiplier. Food bank use leading the nation by a multiplier. Child poverty, interpersonal violence, job creation, GDP [gross domestic product], capital expenditures, rural jobs, housing starts, exports, female employment, electrical price increases, wage growth, immigrant retention, Mr. Speaker — it's all abysmal.

And these are important things because the economy matters. It's the economy that supports public services that people rely on, that supports the things that people need — not the wants, but the basics that people need. Medical care where and when you need it; a good education system for your children, something we can and should be proud of here in this province; roads; a life you can afford; and all of those extra, fun things that people in this province work so hard for and are struggling to afford.

I'm going to go back, Mr. Speaker, to the first meeting I had when we wrapped last year after session. The first meeting I had with a constituent was a woman who had just lost her job and her family was struggling despite being, you know, a dual income upper-middle-class household. But they were struggling. She'd lost her job. And her concern . . . This is not someone who was desperate; this is not somebody who was, you know, in that kind of grinding poverty.

But she was looking at having to cancel her Disney+ subscription for her kids. And she said, "I work really hard, and I just want my daughter to be able to watch *Frozen*." And this is a family, an upper-middle-class family that is struggling, and they can't afford the movies for their kids that — God knows I know — keep them occupied sometimes when you're making dinner.

And like I said, this isn't a family in abject, grinding poverty, but this is a hard-working middle-class family who can't afford movies for their kids. And those are the small measures that make people angry. Those are the small things that make people frustrated when they work so hard. And of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are people doing considerably worse.

I jinxed myself earlier this evening when referencing the fact that I haven't had my children here with me. My daughter's sitting in the lounge. I pick her up downtown at preschool every day. I drop her off and I pick her up. And in the last month alone, I've gone from seeing what we all see, the stark increase in visible poverty — homelessness, addictions, people in mental health crisis, people sleeping outside, people sleeping rough, people obviously in the throes of addiction — to now I see people openly smoking meth on the corner.

Two weeks ago I started seeing people openly using intravenous drugs downtown. And yesterday, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I went in to pick up my daughter from daycare, and I saw some people outside having a smoke and one of them slumped over. In the 10 minutes it took me to go upstairs, get her, walk her downstairs, I came outside and that poor fellow was in, what I assume, the full throes of an overdose. He was on his back, people doing chest compressions. The fire department rolled up, and I'm not sure what happened to him. I hope he was okay.

But this is at 4:30 in the afternoon, downtown Regina, outside of my daughter's daycare. And we got in the car and she said, "Mom, why is that guy sleeping? You think if we turn up the music, maybe that'll wake him up?" And I said, "I don't know, buddy. I think he's just like probably having a really bad day."

But people are not doing well. Anyone who goes through our downtowns and main streets will see that. And it is from those people living with the worst of addiction, of mental health, of homelessness, of that abject, abject devastating poverty up to the

upper-middle-class families who might not be able to afford activities for the kids, who might not be able to afford a vacation, who might not be able to afford Disney+ for their kids. And those are really terrible choices that families are having to make. And those are the 6 in 10 people who are saying that they're worried about their bills. Those are the one in five Saskatchewan people who have gone hungry since 2021.

But again we've seen it throughout this budget. We've seen it throughout the budget responses in this Assembly thus far. There's no humility. There's no recognition that perhaps things aren't going well.

And I suppose, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where I want to end is I do want to recognize one thing that I thought was good in this budget. One thing, small but mighty. I think our regional park system in Saskatchewan is absolutely fantastic, and I was thrilled. The people who support those parks, the people who do that work I know have advocated long and hard for this, and I am thrilled to see that budget double. I think our regional parks are hidden gems. I think they represent the best of what localized economic development tourism in Saskatchewan could be. My favourite one I want to give a shout-out to — I assume it's in the constituency of Cypress Hills — but Pine Cree Regional Park is just absolutely magnificent. I hesitate to say it into the record because I want it to stay a hidden secret.

I have made a commitment before I wrap up today, Mr. Speaker, to my daughter. We're walking in and I told her I would raise her main public policy concern here. And it actually is a real one, and it's something I actually hope might be in the government's control. But my daughter, I think like many people from probably the ages of 3 till 37, and probably the parents of 37-year-olds as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are still mourning the loss of the late, great Megamunch. Megamunch was an institution here in Regina. He was an institution in a small way in the couple years that I've been privileged enough to be a parent.

And I would submit to this tired and out-of-touch government, Megamunch was not tired and out of touch. That janky, perfect animatronic dinosaur has probably generated more economic activity for this capital city than many members in this Assembly. I don't know what it would cost to bring him back out of retirement. I've heard many competing stories about why he was retired. But Megamunch to me really represents the best of Saskatchewan.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I made that commitment to my daughter. She asked me if I would come here and if I would fight for Megamunch, if I would use my words at my work and make a case for Megamunch. So I would like to put that ask to the minister for parks, culture, and tourism. I'll put that ask to the entire cabinet, to the Premier. If there's anything you can do to bring back Megamunch for the thousands of Saskatchewan people who are still mourning his loss, I know there is at least one little girl who would be absolutely thrilled.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up my comments. Unfortunately I will not be supporting the budget put forward by the government, but I will be supporting the amendment moved by my good friend and colleague, the member for Regina Rosemont.

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would ask for leave for a brief introduction.

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — Member asked for leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — Leave has granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, very often in this House we have the opportunity to introduce our family that love and support us in the work that we do here on the floor. I would clarify that my family is not here today; however there are three individuals here that do have a family member that serves on the floor of this Assembly, and that is the children of our Minister of Crown Investments Corporation, the children of our member, the most popular MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] ever from the community of Weyburn and the constituency of Weyburn, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have with us Jack, Ephram, and Penelope Duncan, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to welcome them to their Legislative Assembly. I have seen Jack here before as we had the opportunity to have a floor hockey game in the halls of the rotunda late one evening or after supper one evening. We won't tell anyone about that, Jack. And if anyone is wondering what the red button down by the cafeteria till there does, you can ask Jack. He knows what that button does. And again we won't tell anyone if someone may or may not have hit that, Mr. Speaker.

But I would like to thank these three children that are attending school here in the city of Regina. I want to thank them for doing what they do each and every day to allow their father to serve on the floor of this Assembly for what will be 18 years very shortly. Dad is going to be home a whole lot more, probably unemployed for a period of time. But he's going to be able to spend a whole lot more time with the three of you.

And so I would ask all members on the floor of this Assembly to welcome Jack, Ephram, and Penelope Duncan, the children of our Minister of Crown Investments Corporation.

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

Mr. Francis: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well here we

are, spring 2024, post-budget day in what will be my last session. Very, very hard to believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Presented by our very own political superstar, the longest serving current female cabinet minister in the country brings down her last budget.

I'm honoured to be able to say that I was present for her last seven budgets, although Ryan Meili and the opposition walked out of one of those prior to the tabling. Nothing like using a pandemic to make a political statement, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not to mention how he and the NDP [New Democratic Party] wanted to shut down the entire economy indefinitely. Could you imagine the damage he could have caused if he was premier? Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, Ryan Meili has left. But unfortunately his ideology remains alive and well in the NDP. New leader. Same old fear and smear. Same old NDP.

Mr. Speaker, up to this last budget I was truly honoured to sit on treasury board alongside this Finance minister. What an impressive lady, Mr. Speaker. We've heard it so many times that what an impressive wealth of knowledge. Her irreplaceable corporate knowledge is very much an understatement.

Since this is my last budget, I would like to reflect on my time on treasury board. I must say that this was likely the most time-consuming, challenging but also the most rewarding position the Premier put me in. The responsible handling of spending and taxpayer dollars has always been a top priority for me and this government. So many governments tax and spend or borrow and spend. They bake in and build structural deficits with short-term policy and short-term thinking and then pass it on, passing on that pain to future governments and future generations of taxpayers. Not this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Not this Finance minister.

Yes, we spend. Yes, we borrow. But here's the big difference. We spend responsibly. We borrow responsibly. We build, and we build for a better tomorrow — not just today, not just tomorrow, but a better future overall for the folks in this great province.

Now that's something the NDP simply cannot or will not care to comprehend. Mr. Deputy Speaker, fortunately this opposition hasn't had the opportunity to develop a budget. They really could have benefited from financial literacy in the classroom that's upcoming. When you haven't run a farm or a business, you wouldn't know that revenue and expenditures can fluctuate from year to year. Despite your best projections, things can and will change, sometimes quite drastically. I know we've seen that over the last few budgets.

So when we have large bumps in our non-renewable resource revenue, as we've had in the past few budgets, we've chosen to pay down debt. As a matter of fact, over the past couple of budgets we've retired \$2.5 billion in high-interest debt, debt service and savings that can be reinvested into programs, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The NDP think that's a bad idea, and we have no idea why.

[19:15]

Now we've heard over and over again how the NDP hates debt. They harp on how we have skyrocketed the provincial debt. But what they leave out of the conversation is the long, long list of infrastructure projects that have been built over our time in

government. Mr. Speaker, the list is huge. Anyone who hasn't been to Saskatchewan in a while is quite shocked at the marked improvement this province has undergone since punting the NDP in 2007.

And why are we not surprised when they leave out important facts and figures, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Well the true facts perhaps don't fit their doom and gloom narrative, for one. But I think the underlying answer is simply embarrassment, embarrassed by their record versus ours. For example, take debt-to-GDP ratio. It's a metric used to measure financial stability, shows the ability of a government to pay off its public debt. Our current debt-to-GDP ratio is second best in the nation. And here's an even staggering stat — it's half of what it was under the last NDP government. What a sobering statistic, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Small thinking and a small economy, small budgets and big debt is their equation to success. It does not work.

And what did the NDP have to show for it, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Fifty-two rural hospital closures; 176 school closures; crumbling highways; a declining population; a decade and a half of chaos, closures, and crashing the provincial economy. Now in fairness calling it their record perhaps isn't exactly accurate. Their party's record is perhaps more accurate.

Now most of their members are quite new, others not so much. For example, the members from Rosemont and Cumberland, they're hardly new. Opposition fixtures for 16 and 17 years respectively, I believe — talk about old and tired. You know that linoleum or wood panelling that your parents had in the basement? It's really tough and durable but horribly out of style and quite embarrassing when you have your friends over.

But of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't really mind those old guys actually. I'm one of them. But for the new ones looking for a crisis every day, it literally drives me up the wall. And I'm not even kidding.

I will share a story. A couple weeks ago I was having a bit of chest and arm discomfort during the week of session, and I thought it really wasn't much to worry about. It would kind of come and go and never get too bad, but you know, at this age a person should probably not ignore the warning signs.

So I was on my drive home to Kindersley, and I stopped in Rosetown and visited the ER [emergency room]. And I told the staff about my situation, and they ran all the typical tests and everything was clear. Lovely lady doctor said that you're perfectly healthy for a guy your age and asked me if I had a stressful job.

And I countered with, "Do you know the MLA for Rosetown?" She didn't. I said, "How about the Health ministers?" She didn't know them either. Then I told her I work in government. And then she asked, "Were there any times when you feel the symptoms are worse than others?" And then I thought about it and sure enough, it was listening to the NDP across the aisle. I never knew socialist-induced angina was a thing, but fortunately the doctor gave me some good coping skills and some advice about not letting those bullies trigger my anxiety attacks.

But, Mr. Speaker, let's for argument's sake compare the disastrous NDP administration of the 1990s and early 2000s to

this new class of New Democrats. Now you might think this new-to-you NDP is different, fresh, so to speak. Well, Mr. Speaker, they're trying to be new. They have a new fondness, a new-found fondness for pipelines, a new-found opposition to the carbon tax, a new-found misalignment with their federal counterparts and their policies.

It's funny how their minds are quickly changing. Perhaps it's the federal polling numbers. Virtue-signalling policies exhibited by the Liberal Party, along with their NDP coalition comrades, is coming home to roost, and even the provincial NDP are noticing. Perhaps self-balancing finances and governing from the heart out does not equate to economic success after all. Perhaps a carbon tax does make everything more expensive and it makes us less competitive.

It's pretty clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this NDP wants to somehow miraculously shape-shift into a centrist party in order to garner support and votes, just like the federal Liberals did in 2015. And we know all too well how that turned out. True colours will shine through. Their "What would you like us to be now?" mantra. "Yeah sure, we can be that" is straight out of the Justin Trudeau and Jagmeet Singh blow-in-the-wind-like-a-weather-vane playbook, and one that the Leader of the Opposition seems to want to mimic to her voters. Talk about out of touch and tone-deaf.

Mr. Speaker, the trouble is, of their caucus of 14, it's hard to find more than two or three that share a common ideology other than fear and smear. That unites them. Now in fairness, their leader is trying to unify and rally the troops. I wish her luck. Not really, but sorry, I am quite skeptical that she can organize the multiple mini-activist factions that are within that party.

We've seen a concerted effort, and I use that term rather loosely, to tune in or appeal to rural voters. In principle that's a pretty good idea, except for the fact that they are even more clueless when it comes to rural Saskatchewan than ever before. I'm afraid showing up at SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] with your plaid shirt and your blue jeans doesn't make you a farmer. And again, using the Prime Minister's Mr. Dressup script doesn't work so well in Saskatchewan, let alone with rural voters. They see right through the facade.

They've tried to fit in, Mr. Speaker, and it wasn't surprising to see them at the SARM convention. They should be there. But I must say it warmed my heart to see the looks on their faces and their STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation] campaign team faces when one of the delegates during the bear-pit session told our Education minister to please stop allowing our children to be turned into little socialists by the education system. Now I didn't see it, but apparently the member from Rosemont was clapping so loud along with the crowd following that statement. Good for him if he was. I always thought he maybe wasn't quite left enough for that crew over there.

The NDP simply does not fit in rural Saskatchewan. After 17 years they still don't, and it's no wonder. Their efforts are perceived as disingenuous. They are just as out of touch as they were 17 years ago. What is genuine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is their day-in and day-out bashing of the provincial economy and the talking down of this great province. Everything is terrible and only they can fix it. They don't have a plan, but they're ready.

There's a job to do and they're ready to do it, but they have no clue what the job is, and they have no clue how to do it.

Refusing to accept the actual economic statistics instead of cherry-picking the worst portions of years or months to paint a negative picture has been a very go-to move for them of late. To quote my colleague from Saskatoon Stonebridge-Dakota, please stop pretending that everything is bad. It isn't. It is in fact quite positive, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so positive that more than 200,000 people now call Saskatchewan home, something the NDP said was impossible, a pipe dream. It's so bad here, Mr. Speaker, our population has risen by 25 per cent since 2007. The NDP have shown that negativity and no plan builds nothing. Here's the equation: NDP plus negativity, plus no plan, equals zero.

However, Mr. Speaker, over the past 17 years Sask Party math is positivity, plus good people, plus a plan, equals success. Yes, that's Sask Party math, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that's math everyone understands. Private investors understand it. Our foreign trade partners understand it.

So let's stay with the positive message that is the continuing success story that is Saskatchewan. There is in fact lots of good news, lots to be thankful for, and lots of things to look forward to here in the province, pages and pages of proof from cover to cover in this latest budget document. It's all in the name, Mr. Deputy Speaker: classrooms, care, and communities. What an all-encompassing theme. Literally something for everyone across the province.

I did a post-budget radio interview last week back home, and the reporter asked me, well what's in the budget for Kindersley? And I thought for a second and it was easy — everything. Every person, every town, every city, every RM [rural municipality] has a vested interest in this budget. Better education support, better support for health care, continuing support in revenue sharing for communities in our province. And that's what sets this budget apart from some of the others, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And the Finance minister said herself last week, "Would I have liked my last budget to be balanced? Sure." But she knows full well balancing budgets just for the sake of balancing them is flawed ideology. That would usually mean cuts or somebody would lose. Not in this budget. Quite the opposite, actually — enhancements and funding for services in three critical areas, putting classrooms, care, and communities ahead of everything else at a time when it is most needed.

I honestly thought to myself, wow, I'm really proud of this budget, even though I had nothing to do with it for the first time in three years. I know full well the treasury board members are on the exact same page as I am, and I felt the decisions that were made were very well aligned with my own.

So to be perfectly honest, when I was on a holiday in January, I had serious FOMO [fear of missing out] for you guys sitting in treasury board. I know that sounds a little bit odd, but it does give me great comfort as I wind down my political life knowing the province is in such capable hands, and my colleagues on this side are in control and not the folks on the opposition side.

Now there will be some massive shoes to fill this fall. The Deputy Premier, the member from Indian Head-Milestone, Weyburn-Big

Muddy, Saskatoon Southeast, Saskatoon Northwest, my good friends from Arm River, Canora-Pelly, Carrot River, Batoche, Regina Northeast, and my little socialist Tommy Douglas doppelgänger from Yorkton, thank you very much for your exemplary service, but even more so for your friendship. And even the members on the other side that aren't running again as well as our current Speaker, thank you very much for your service.

But back to the budget to wrap up, no matter how simple the math or how clear the statistics are, the members opposite refuse to admit the cold, hard facts — even though there are some current challenges, we're living in quite good times here in this province. The province continues to thrive, again largely due to the fact we have not had an NDP government in 17 years.

For seven years in a row, seven budgets in a row, the opposition has claimed the budget contains nothing of value. That is simply insulting, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This budget is anything but bad news. How could providing record funding for challenging classrooms equate to no value? How is a 9 per cent lift of education overall of no value?

Now the teachers' union won't even admit this is good news at all either. They seem to be totally on the same page as the NDP. It's funny how they line up so well during election years. It maybe seems the STF is more worried about playing politics than to look after our students. They're very content with continuing to make demands and disrupting the school year for parents and students.

Mr. Speaker, a 10 per cent lift to our already massive health budget, apparently zero value. We need more doctors, more nurses, more diagnostic professionals. We need more mental health and addictions support. We're providing that. No value. This budget supports all of those things, yet hold no value to the NDP.

I look forward to hearing from my colleagues as they outline what matters to them in this budget over the rest of this week. Only through a strong provincial economy can we afford to pay doctors and nurses. Only through a strong economy can we provide classroom supports to pay teachers and EAs [educational assistant]. Only through a strong economy can we grow this province.

We continue to be open for business, and we have what the world needs and wants. That is how and why this budget works for everyone in this province. Again the single biggest barrier to our provincial success continues to be socialist policies like those of our federal government and the members opposite. Do not be fooled by the members opposite. They align perfectly with their federal Liberal-NDP comrades. Our government has seen and continues to see Saskatchewan's potential. This budget is absolute proof that vision sets us up for success — not just for today, but also into the future.

I want to thank all the officials in each ministry for your hard work to get this budget to the place it landed. Once again, to the Finance team and the ministry folks, a big thank you to you for your preparation, execution in this budget document. To the treasury board members, thank you for your time and input. It's a big task.

[19:30]

And one final thank you to the Deputy Premier, our Finance minister. Congratulations on another great budget, an even better career, and all the best to her in her professional grandma duties. That beaming look on her face holding that 8-day-old grandbaby was all that needed to be said. Enjoy your next chapter, Madam. You have earned it.

I wholeheartedly support the budget motion as presented by the Minister of Finance and seconded by the member from Saskatoon Willowgrove, and I will not support the amendment put forward by the opposition. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — I recognize the member from Kelvington-Wadena.

Mr. Nerlien: — Ditto. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's always a great pleasure to rise in the Chamber and have an opportunity to speak to the budget, also to the Speech from the Throne and many other opportunities throughout the year. This year I'm going to probably do something a little bit different. I'm going to leave my condemnation of the opposition until the end. So bear with me for a few minutes.

I'm going to begin with talking a little bit about family. We have that opportunity to do that from time to time. Obviously I want to thank my wife and my family for their support. It means a great deal obviously to us to know that the home fires are well looked after and the family is in great shape and great stead, largely in part to their mother. So I really appreciate her support and the engagement that we have with our family. We've got two grandchildren now, so we're just really excited about that part of our life.

I might talk a little bit about something I don't think I've mentioned before, for no particular reason other than it's something from a long time ago. I want to talk about my mom and dad. I grew up in an entrepreneurial environment. My dad was a farmer. When I was six, he struck off with my mom and started to grow some businesses. And over the course of the next few years we added a garage, cafe, deli kind of thing, bit of a grocery store, post office, welder dealership, fast-food operation. Built a golf course. And in his off time, he invented a rock picker and modified the washing machine, I think, if I remember right.

But he died when I was 14. So I had eight years of entrepreneurial exposure and the farm background obviously. And I think in those eight years what I learned most was, it's not good enough to just show up. When you get up in the morning and look in the mirror, your objective should be, what can I do to make the world a better place today?

And so I've tried to take that with me through my life, and I've had many opportunities. And the other thing I think I learned is that you learn far more from failure than you do from success. And I think each and every one of us who has been in business or who has, you know, sort of . . . I always use the expression "You're a conservative when you finally sign the front end of a cheque, not the back end."

And I think that when you start doing that, you're going to make some mistakes and you're going to learn a lot from them. And I

think that, I hope I've brought that to this place because I firmly believe that we should never leave a stone unturned. We should always be looking to improve what we do, how we do it, why we do it, and look for ways to do things better and to improve our relationship as a government with the people who pay our way. I have a strong sense of responsibility to the taxpayer. And I think long and hard about that. The taxpayer is who we should bow down to. We have a responsibility to the taxpayer.

My colleague from Canora-Pelly was having a little bit of fun earlier and talking about "throw two, sweep six." I take issue with that. And he and I have had many discussions about this. But I think if you throw two and sweep six your entire life, nothing changes. You just stay the same. You know, you're treading water the whole time. Once in a while you've got to step out and throw three. And I firmly believe that that's our responsibility is to get up and try to make a difference.

So you know, my mom carried on obviously, single mother, and worked hard to get us through school and all of those things. But you know, my life experience has been invaluable, and I truly appreciate everything that I've had the opportunity to do. And the family and all of that has been really, really important.

I want to talk just briefly about my extended family. I've probably mentioned this once before, but my wife is from a large family. I think there's somewhere around 140 or so in the immediate family now. And so amongst those we have quite a few teachers; I think 15 retired and active teachers. We have doctors and nurses and LPNs [licensed practical nurse] and RPNs [registered psychiatric nurse] and CCAs [continuing care aide] and some support people in the health and education system. We have farmers. We have accountants. We have . . . I don't think there's a lawyer; probably need one.

And we've got people that work in all fields. And so when we get together — and we do get together at least once a year — when we get together, the conversations are always fascinating because it's from every angle. We are, I think, representative of the population of Saskatchewan, and almost all of them live in Saskatchewan. And so we do have some very engaging conversation about, you know, all of the things that matter to the people of Saskatchewan.

So when I look at the budget that the Minister of Finance put forward, I'm just really proud to say that I kind of thought beyond the words "classrooms, care, and communities," which are extremely important. They're the theme of the budget. And I look at the budget as being one of just pure opportunity. Everything in this budget is about opportunity for Saskatchewan. It's all about opportunity.

Everything is about more opportunities in education, more opportunities in health care, more opportunities in advanced education, more opportunities through the Sask DLC [Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre], you know, more opportunities to grow and build Saskatchewan. Because as we've all mentioned, it's because of a strong economy we can do the things that we need to do for the folks that need a little support, need a little help.

And I do want to mention that I think the health budget this year, I believe, is 38 per cent of the budget, education is 22, and social

services is 8.8. So roughly 70 per cent of the budget is in those three most important — you know, not to lessen the importance of highways and policing and all the other things — but really, really critical services that we provide.

And my constituents, I think, would tend to say the role of government, by and large, is to do the things that make life a little bit better and get out of the way. Get out of the way. Let us do what we do best. Let us run our businesses. Let us be the employees of choice. Let us make the differences in our communities. Let us, in our communities, work together to make the community a better place to live.

And we all on this side certainly experience that in every community that we go to where there's a fundraiser or there's a project going on where we're trying to make a difference for our community, for the people in our communities, and more often than not, for the people who are less fortunate in the community. So I think that's extremely important.

There's one other thing that I'm particularly proud of in this budget is the first steps to the new Sask Poly in Saskatoon. I'm an alumni of Sask Poly, so I have a particular care for that institution and so I'm very excited about that opportunity that's coming in Saskatoon. And I think it's going to make a huge difference to the province.

There's a lot of things that are in the budget that I think I just want to touch on real quickly. And I'm going to touch on them from the perspective of, why do they matter to the people from Kelvington-Wadena? Over the last few weeks, I've had the opportunity to meet with communities throughout the constituency and the health care team from SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority], their management team in the area. And those conversations have been incredibly important and valuable and frankly, very positive in the sense that we've got almost to a point where we're staffed up.

We've got the doctors in place. We've got the CLXTs [combined laboratory and X-ray technologist] in place, the CCAs. There's a couple of spots here and there where we can still add a few, but by and large, we're in pretty darn good shape. And that is reflected in the attitude of the folks around the table. They're all speaking very positively.

And frankly I was talking to one of the senior leadership team from SHA last night, and the conversation got to sort of, what's the morale like in the health care system now. And it's vastly improved over the last couple of years. And that's so pleasing to hear. Despite what they're saying on the opposition side, it's really pleasing to hear that the people are feeling better about getting up and going to work, and that's what's really important.

But there's some other things in the budget that matter to the people from Kelvington-Wadena. And in no particular order, things like passing lanes on highways. We don't have any in Kelvington-Wadena, but every time we go to Saskatoon or Yorkton or Regina, those passing lanes save lives. Those are extremely important to us.

The new P.A. [Prince Albert] hospital, I bring it up at every meeting I'm in. That is going to take pressure off of Saskatoon, which means a great deal to my constituency because my

constituency's typical treating area has been, you know, sort of Tisdale, Melfort, Saskatoon. And by having that new facility in Prince Albert, it's going to service the North, but it's also going to take pressure off Saskatoon — hugely important.

You know, even a little thing like the improvements to the entrance to St. Paul's Hospital, it doesn't seem to resonate a whole bunch, but you know what? It's about safety. It's about security. It's about that feeling that the folks there care and are welcoming. And so I'm really looking forward to that.

You know, we've got some businesses in our community that are growing and building and adding things. Tisdale, not in my constituency directly, but they're working on an ag zone on the west side of Tisdale. Really important for the whole area.

Wheatbelt in Wadena, they added a facility to assemble some of the larger equipment that's available to the ag industry these days. And it's making a huge difference to all the people that work there, and they've added some staff accordingly.

We obviously have BHP. We've got the canola crush facilities and things like that happening around us. Hugely important to us. A company called ProSoils is building a blend plant just outside of my community. We've got continued, sustainable production from companies like Olymel and Sofina Lilydale, and folks like that across my constituency. And each of those is huge employers making a difference to the community.

One other thing I wanted to mention, the children's hospital. Hugely important to my constituency and to every single one of us across the province. And the member from Saskatoon Willowgrove threw out some statistics the other day, and I just want to repeat a couple of them because I think they're so important: 80,376 visits; 29,342 emergency room visits; 968 neonatal intensive care patients; 5,305 children born; 499 communities served. That facility has made a difference in Saskatchewan. And we can't do those kinds of things, we can't build facilities like that if we don't have a strong economy. We have to keep building our economy.

[19:45]

So I'm going to probably talk just a couple of things about trade. The member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre the other day said, and I quote, "How does an ad in a Dubai subway help the people of Saskatchewan put food on their table?" Oh, my God. You know, when you look at the world from that perspective, you might as well just shut her down and go home.

There was, I think — what? — yeah, 197 countries represented there. 197 leaders from countries around the world in those facilities for a week, 10 days, whatever it was, and they saw Saskatchewan. They saw Saskatchewan as an independent economic region that they wanted to speak with. Best in the world. Best in the world. Sustainable story on production of resources, agriculture, potash, energy, ad infinitum.

I also want to talk about something else that comes up from time to time. And had the pleasure of meeting the ambassador from Vietnam today, and it reminded me that one of the most important things in trade relationships in Asia . . . And I've talked to a senior sales executive in Taiwan, and he was telling me about

this. And I may have mentioned it once before in a speech, but I think it's so important. When in Asia and when you're dealing with trade issues, the business card is extremely important.

You speak to the people at your level of your business card. You don't speak up in Asia. So sending the Premier and the Deputy Premier or the Minister of Trade and Export Development matters. It's not about the trade offices, necessarily — they're good, they're bad, whatever. It's about sending the right people with the right business card to make the right decisions and the right deals for Saskatchewan.

How much time do I . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay, I'll get to the scolding part. I do want to mention, you know, it's interesting. The members opposite, they keep coming up with all these radical statements about, you know, what we may or may not have done in the last five or six years.

I want to remind them of what the global economy has looked like in the last few years. 2016: commodity crash, resource revenues dropped by a billion dollars, international markets, Brexit, the Chinese stock market crash. The rise of the US [United States] oil production and OPEC [Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries], 2016 into 2017. 2020 to 2022: coronavirus and the fallout from that right through to late 2022, two droughts, right?

So it hasn't been an easy ride for the Minister of Finance, but she's done a remarkable job as has the folks on treasury board who worked endlessly. And we really appreciate all the work that goes in.

That's another thing. I think the members opposite think that the budget's written on a napkin and then, you know, you just show up one day and you read it off.

An Hon. Member: — Well it was when they were in government.

Mr. Nerlien: — Well it probably was, yeah. But it takes months and months and months of enormous amount of work to make that come together. And there's hundreds and hundreds of agencies and boards and associations and groups that come together to create those budget numbers.

A couple of statistics that I think are important. My colleague from Kindersley sort of touched on this, but the net debt-to-GDP — this is really important folks; pay attention — the net debt-to-GDP was roughly 14 per cent this year. Do you know what the net debt-to-GDP was in 2007? 16 per cent. Oops. I think we're going in the right direction, folks.

You know, I tend to think about . . . You know, I want to mention the relationship between the NDP provincially and the NDP federally, just to remind folks. They keep denying that they have this relationship. The NDP membership in their constitution, section 1.2: "The Party shall constitute a section of the New Democratic Party of Canada." Section 1.5: "In any matter not dealt with by this Constitution, the Constitution of the New Democratic Party of Canada shall prevail." So deny, deny, deny, but the reality is that if you have a New Democratic membership card in your pocket, you support the feds. So if you don't like it, cut up your card and walk away.

Just one other thing. You know, on February 7th, here's something here. Just to show you how radical, crazy the NDP are, on February 7th the NDP member Charlie Angus introduced Bill 372 to ban oil and gas promotion. And I quote, "It is prohibited for a person to promote a fossil fuel, a fossil fuel-related brand element or the production of a fossil fuel . . ." So if you are wearing the "I love Canadian oil and gas T-shirts," you could be thrown in jail. The reaction from industry, from First Nations, and literally every common-sense person in Canada except the Saskatchewan NDP was, are you crazy?

Imagine even the Federated Co-op would have to cancel their ads for their Co-op premium lubricants which are designed to withstand the toughest manufacturer tests and provide the ultimate in durability and protection. Cancel that. Done.

Anyway I'm going to just wrap up on . . . Well no, I've got two congratulations for members from the other side. I want to congratulate the member from Regina Rosemont who went to the Belanger university and got a degree in bombast, bluster, and hyperbole. And I also want to congratulate the members from Regina Elphinstone and Regina University who attended the classes put on by the former member from Elphinstone on how to do drive-by smears.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I fully endorse and support the budget put forward by the Minister of Finance and thank her for her years of service. And I had the pleasure of working a little bit with her and the previous Finance minister closely, and I truly appreciate her leadership. Thank you so much. I support the motion, the seconding by the member from Saskatoon Willowgrove, and I certainly do not support the amendment from the opposition. Thank you.

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

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees. It's an honour and a pleasure to enter into the debate here tonight on the provincial budget.

I'll start with a few brief thank yous. First of all, thanks to the constituents of Swift Current who I am honoured to represent as their MLA. Just very grateful for the feedback and the consultation and the discussion and collaboration that I have with the amazing people of the city of Swift Current. And again, every day I'm honoured to be able to represent them here in this legislative Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, my family back home, my wife Anita, our kids Raven and Adler, our grandson Axel who brings so much joy to our life, and who, as all of us in this Chamber I think have said, would not be able to do this job without the support of our family and our friends back home in our constituencies and across this province.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my constituency assistant back at the MLA office. Nola Smith, I've had the pleasure to work with for a number of years now and who holds down the fort when I'm not there and is the face and the voice of the office on so many days. And I'm just grateful for Nola's continued work in the MLA office.

Staff here in the offices in Regina that myself and the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, and Rural and Remote Health and Seniors share staff. My chief of staff, Clint Fox; Cheyenne Quam who's in charge of communications in my office; Angela Pasiechnyk; Lisa Birnie; Elias Nelson who's the chief of staff next door; Cole Blatter; Nolan Slusar; Savanna Smuk; Stephanie Fuchs; and the newest recruit Franz Dela Cruz. And quite a staff that we have here at our ministers' offices, Mr. Speaker, and who help us so much — myself and the Minister of Rural and Remote Health. And I know all members in this Chamber, whether they're in cabinet or a member of caucus, we would not be able to do these jobs that we are doing without the assistance of our staff.

Mr. Speaker, thank you to the Premier, the best Premier in Canada, who we are so fortunate to have leading this party, leading this province, and who I just can't say enough positive things about. And we're just so very grateful to have the member for Rosthern-Shellbrook as our Premier here leading this government.

Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier who has received many accolades here — tonight and last night, I know, during the afternoon — from other members of this government for her continued work not just on this budget, Mr. Speaker, but on so many budgets here, and who is always a leader when it comes to the Ministry of Finance, but in our caucus, in our government team, and frankly, who always has the door open for us, whether we're members of the cabinet or caucus to be able to walk into her office and have a conversation with her.

And to the Deputy Premier, thank you so much for your friendship and your leadership for so many years. I've been lucky. I've had a chance to know the Deputy Premier since 1999 when she was first elected. I know it's a long time ago, and I served as a staffer, starting off as a constituency assistant in Swift Current, and have always greatly admired and respected her and will continue to do so.

And of course, Mr. Speaker, the rest of the colleagues here on our side of the Chamber, what a great team we have. A great team of MLAs here as part of the Saskatchewan Party caucus here and the government. And not only a great team of hard-working MLAs that do such valuable work on behalf of their constituents, but who in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, have become friends, very close friends to myself and to others.

And it's just amazing to be able to walk into a room each and every day when we're here sitting, and outside of session to be able to pick up the phone and have those conversations with our colleagues who are also our friends. So thank you to our caucus members who are here tonight and all of them here who support this government and the work that we do.

Mr. Speaker, I'll get into the budget itself now. As we've heard here tonight, and throughout the past number of days: classrooms, care, and communities. That's the highlights, the highlights of this particular budget. It's the theme. And I think, Mr. Speaker, I would say it couldn't be more telling of what this budget is and what the priorities are of the people of Saskatchewan, what we hear from our constituents, from people right across this province. And I would say, Mr. Speaker, and I would argue that this budget speaks directly to those priorities

and responds to the challenges of a growing province and does so by reinvesting the benefits of a growing province.

And as you've heard other members talk about here tonight, and I will say again, it would not be possible without the strength of the economy that we have in Saskatchewan right now and a growing economy. This budget, Mr. Speaker, delivers the largest ever increase in school operating funding, up \$180 million or nearly 9 per cent to \$2.2 billion. The budget delivers the largest ever increase in health funding, up \$726 million, more than 10 per cent, Mr. Speaker, to \$7.6 billion. And the budget delivers the largest ever increase in municipal revenue sharing to Saskatchewan communities, up \$42 million or 14 per cent to \$342 million. Record funding increase to schools, record funding increase to health care, and a record funding increase to municipalities, Mr. Speaker.

Start with the classrooms and the education sector of Saskatchewan. This '24-25 budget supports students and teachers, again not able to do these sorts of investments or make these sorts of investments without the strength of a growing and strong provincial economy, with a record level investment of \$3.3 billion for the Ministry of Education. That's up over 8.1 per cent over last year's budget and is an increase of \$247.8 million to support pre-kindergarten to grade 12 schools, early learning, child care, and libraries. Saskatchewan's 27 school divisions, Mr. Speaker, will receive \$2.2 billion in school funding, operating funding for the 2024-25 school year, which is a record increase of \$180 million over the previous year.

Locally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what does this translate to back home for the constituents of mine who are in the city and the constituency of Swift Current? Well, Mr. Speaker, it is \$84.8 million for the Chinook School Division, an increase of \$4.8 million, or 6 per cent. And I want to thank the people back in the Chinook School Division, the teachers, the administrators, all of the parents and students and everyone that's . . . the support staff for the work that they do in Chinook. And this increase will help support Chinook, the school division in Swift Current and across southwest Saskatchewan.

[20:00]

In addition to that, \$27.8 million for the Holy Trinity Catholic School Division, of course which a portion of that falls within the city of Swift Current boundaries and a number of schools there, an increase of 2.3 million for Holy Trinity, or a 9 per cent increase for that school division.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, there's also funding for nine new schools and two major renovations across the province, and one of those, Mr. Speaker, is in Swift Current. It is a funding being allocated for a major renovation to the Swift Current Comprehensive High School, some planning dollars being allocated in this year's provincial budget, and we're very grateful for that in the city of Swift Current, Mr. Speaker. That total project is estimated to be a \$39 million renovation project and one that I have heard about as the MLA when I have conversations with people in the Chinook School Division and also others around the community, and we're just very grateful that this major, major renovation project to the Comprehensive High School in Swift Current will be proceeding.

Skip ahead to communities, Mr. Speaker, and what that means to people in the constituency of Swift Current. Cities, towns, villages, and rural municipalities throughout Saskatchewan will receive a record increase of \$42.4 million in municipal revenue sharing. That is an increase, Mr. Speaker, an increase of 14.2 per cent from the year before, a total of \$340 million in unconditional support for municipalities in the province. As I said, Mr. Speaker, it's a double-digit increase. These are significant increases for municipalities right across this province.

City of Swift Current will receive \$3.9 million in municipal revenue sharing. That's an increase of 494,000 over last year, Mr. Speaker, or 14.3 per cent, this increase driven entirely by the strength of the economy. It's based on a dependable, predictable formula that was introduced by this government that sees municipalities receive a share of the PST.

And, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity last week to speak about the budget in front of my own local chamber of commerce in Swift Current last Friday and talk about specifically all the investments that are happening by the provincial government into a variety of areas, but also indicate, Mr. Speaker, how that translates into that funding and how the economy is strong provincially. Because if the economy is doing well, then municipalities do well as a result of this revenue-sharing formula, Mr. Speaker. And again, I know when I mentioned that and spoke to the crowd about that, they understood that that does have an impact, that a growing economy does translate into dollars that come directly to the city of Swift Current.

And, Mr. Speaker, and I just want to say that it is unconditional funding because this provincial government has trust in the local municipal elected leadership, that they will invest these dollars in the right areas. And I know in Swift Current, we've seen that time and again by the mayor and his administration and his city council. And I'm grateful for the leadership that we have locally, municipally. And we're proud to be able to support municipalities through that municipal revenue-sharing agreement.

So that's the support for classrooms and for communities, Mr. Speaker. Now I'll turn to the area of health care, which I probably will spend a little bit more time on of course. And I think as I talk about some of those investments when it comes to health care, frankly, Mr. Speaker, we're only going to be scratching the surface because there is so much in this budget that is new, that builds upon previous investments into health care, whether it's programs, whether it's services, whether it's the people that we need to operate and deliver the services in health care right across this province. And again, due to the strength of the economy. We would not be able to make these decisions, Mr. Speaker, responsibly if we did not have a strong and growing economy that brings in revenues to the provincial government so that we can have these conversations and have meetings with people and communities about what the pressures and the needs are and how do we fund those.

Fortunately, because of a strong and growing province and a strong and growing economy, we are able to make these significant strategic investments into health care — \$7.6 million . . . or sorry, billion dollars. That's a massive mistake there. \$7.6 billion into the Ministry of Health, Mr. Speaker, an overall increase of \$726.4 million, 10.6 per cent increase in the health

budget over last year, Mr. Speaker.

We have made — and we've heard some of the members talk about it here today, the impacts in their own constituencies here, Mr. Speaker — we have made great strides in recruiting and retaining health care professionals through the health human resources action plan. Since September of 2021, 262 physicians have been recruited to Saskatchewan from outside of our borders while we've also attracted 40 physicians from outside the country. It includes 107 family physicians, 155 specialists, and we're committed to continuing to recruit more health care professionals, Mr. Speaker.

And that will be a continuing plan that we'll be moving forward on as we know that there is still work to do, and we're committed to doing that work and continuing to develop that plan as we go forward and hire more health care workers into our provincial health care facilities. As part of that, the health human resources action plan will continue to deliver on the commitment to add 250 new and enhanced permanent health care positions in rural and remote communities.

This is something that we initiated nearly two years ago, Mr. Speaker, and it came as a result of — at the time the former minister of Health and myself — dozens and dozens of visits to communities across this province, meeting with front-line health care providers, meeting with patients, meeting with local leaders to find out what else we can do to help support them. Some of that, Mr. Speaker, circled around . . . was around . . . centred around, I should say, around the hiring of more staff so that we can fill some of the vacancies that are out there, build stronger health care teams, and be able to help provide support that way.

These are annualized positions, 250 new and enhanced permanent positions, many of them in rural and remote communities, some of them also supported by the up to \$50,000 incentive program that was also created as part of that health human resources action plan, and again new and enhanced permanent positions in rural communities.

Surgical wait times. We continue to make progress in this area, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the first nine months of the current fiscal year from April 1st to December 31st of 2023, 71,850 surgeries were performed — a new record for the province and an increase of 6,000 procedures over the previous year. We continue to make reductions in the overall provincial wait-list for surgeries. We continue to make reductions in the wait times for, whether it's hip replacements, knee surgeries, you name it. We still have work to do to reduce that wait-list, but the numbers are trending in the right direction, Mr. Speaker, and we are so grateful to the health care teams, the surgeons, the operating room staff, everyone that helps make this happen. And very grateful for their commitment to this, because the government is committed to making sure that we're working with our health care providers to get these surgeries completed for people across Saskatchewan who are waiting for these surgeries.

Mr. Speaker, this year's budget will also deliver timely, exceptional care for Saskatchewan women. That includes in the area of cancer. The Saskatchewan Cancer Agency itself will see an increase of \$26.1 million, for a total budget of \$248.9 million, to ensure that patients can access the most effective and world leading-edge oncology drugs, therapies, and treatment options.

Includes a 3.5 per cent increase for breast cancer care, the establishment of a breast health centre here in the city of Regina, enhancements to the breast health centre in Saskatoon, the addition of screening initiatives that will include technology enhancements, new diagnostic imaging equipment, the development of the breast health centre, as I said, here in the city of Regina, that will serve women right from across southern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And that is significant.

As we've heard from surgeons and other front-line health care providers, that will help not only provide this very important service on a timely basis for women across southern Saskatchewan, it will also help with the recruitment and retention of health care professionals. We've heard that directly from surgeons and others who have said just how significant this is. We've heard it from patients, and that's why we are proud to make this investment. And we'll continue to make investments into this area of health care to support the work that is done by those in the field of breast cancer care.

Further, Mr. Speaker, we have also provided some additional funding for enhanced gynecological cancer therapies. That is new funding, Mr. Speaker. A million dollars for ovarian cancer research in Saskatchewan, building on a previous million-dollar investment into ovarian cancer research, and proud to support the good work that is being done in that area.

There's more, Mr. Speaker. New funding for the BridgePoint Center for Eating Disorders in Mildred, Saskatchewan, which I had the opportunity to visit a couple of years ago, to visit with the team there, see it first-hand, understand the work that they do supporting people across Saskatchewan that suffer from eating disorders. And we're proud to be able to provide some funding that will support the virtual care aspect of their work.

Funding in collaboration with the Ministry of Advanced Education, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for a new occupational therapy training program right here in Saskatchewan, again something that I have heard about as a local MLA talking to a local occupational therapist. I know that other members on this side of the Chamber as well . . . and they have advocated on behalf of their constituents and talked to me and the Minister of Rural and Remote Health about the significant need for not just occupational therapists here in Saskatchewan, hiring more, but also training them. Because right now we buy those seats out of Alberta.

And very grateful to work closely with the occupational therapists, and had a meeting actually this past fall, the Minister of Advanced Education and I did, to talk to the occupational therapists about what that training program might look like. And just so very happy to be able to say that we'll be moving forward on that, on establishing the occupational therapists training program at the University of Saskatchewan, training occupational therapists right here in our province, and hiring them here in our province as well, Mr. Speaker.

Couple of other highlights I want to get to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before my time is up here. Specific to the city of Swift Current, continued funding for a pharmacy pilot project that is under way there right now. Work being done to establish another pilot in another city in Saskatchewan. But in Swift Current in partnership with Shoppers Drug Mart, who brought that pilot project idea to

us based on some other operations they've done in other parts of Canada where, through some of the work that we are doing as a government to create greater access for patients to be able to access primary care, for example, through pharmacist scope expansion.

And as a result of that pilot project getting off the ground in December, now allowing a pharmacist be able to provide some treatment in the area of COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease], Warfarin medication management, mental health as well. And just very excited about what that is doing to provide additional access for patients in Saskatchewan outside of the great work that they can . . . and care that they can receive from family physicians, but from other health care providers. And by all accounts that program is working very well as a pilot, and I am looking forward to seeing that be rolled out in other pharmacies in other communities right across this province.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, continued funding for the Patient's Medical Home pilot, \$4 million for this particular initiative, about a million of which or just under a million of which, will be going to the Associate Family Physicians Clinic in the city of Swift Current. They had some money to kind of get that program operating in the current fiscal year and launched it in October, Mr. Speaker. And it has had just amazing results thus far.

I had an opportunity, was invited by one of the family physicians, Doctor Tara Lee, who is the lead on this, to participate and be part of their Monday morning meeting, I guess they'd say, their kind of kickoff meeting for the day, sort of a staff meeting as they get their day under way. And it was . . . excited to be informed that, as a result of this particular pilot, that they've been able to . . . And what they've done is they've brought in an RN [registered nurse], an LPN, a medical social worker I think as well — a medical office assistant perhaps it might be — and what they've been able to do is make sure that they have patients not just see the family physicians in that clinic, but also give them the opportunity, perhaps they're better served by seeing the RN in that particular clinic. And so you might not necessarily see your family doctor. You might be better served by another allied health care professional in that clinic, whether it's an RN, whether it's a nurse practitioner.

And what that has done, Mr. Speaker, and I'm guessing at numbers now because when I was there earlier this winter they had freed up over 500 physician visits as a result of that. It's probably north of 700, 800 patient visits right now, Mr. Speaker. What that does is, by directing the patient to the right health care provider they're able to free up more appointments for family physicians, for other patients who are on the wait-list, and potentially for patients who might not have a family doctor and thereby increasing access, Mr. Speaker. It's initiatives like that that will get the right patient in front of the right provider at the right time, Mr. Speaker, redirecting them from perhaps their family physician if they'd be better served by another health care provider, redirecting them from emergency rooms, getting them the care they need, primary care on a timely basis.

It's why, Mr. Speaker, expanding more nurse practitioners in this province, as we've said in the budget, 25 more nurse practitioner positions funded in Saskatchewan. And that's a start, Mr. Speaker. There's going to be more to come, I would say. The establishment of a couple of pilot clinics where they're led by

nurse practitioners, independently operated, publicly funded, you're going to see more nurse practitioners employed in this province as well, Mr. Speaker, again having more health care provider options for patients of Saskatchewan to get the health care, the primary care that they need in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think my time is winding up here and I want to cede the floor to other members on this side of the Chamber, Mr. Speaker. I would just say that we'll continue to invest in the areas that matter to the people of Saskatchewan. And it's in classrooms, it's in health care, it's into our communities, Mr. Speaker, and it's driven by the strength of the economy. That's the only way that we're able to do these sorts of initiatives, to make these investments in a responsible, a fiscally responsible manner, is by making these significant investments and trying to balance the needs of the province of Saskatchewan with the demands and the finances that we have.

[20:15]

So Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the motion being put forward by our great Minister of Finance, and seconded by the member for Saskatoon Willowgrove. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — I recognize the member for Saskatchewan Rivers.

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are here to address the budget and the record of mismanagement under this Premier and his government. We have witnessed a startling departure from the conservative principles of sound financial stewardship and prudent economic governance that should be the hallmark of any responsible government. Instead we have witnessed out-of-control, liberal spending and the wreck and neglect of our communities and our public services. Just look at the numbers. They speak for themselves. When you factor in the 757 million of newly authorized spending, last year's budget resulted in a \$2 billion shortfall from what was projected.

This isn't just a one-off with this Premier, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Six of his seven budgets, six of his seven budgets have resulted in deficits, a far cry from the Premier's promises of balanced budgets and responsible economic management. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Premier is the biggest spender Saskatchewan has ever seen. With his latest budget deficit, this Premier has accumulated a staggering 15 billion in new debt, doubling the province's total debt to 31 billion. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Premier has nearly accumulated as much debt as all other premiers before him combined.

Who else does this remind us of? Justin Trudeau's Liberals have also doubled the debt federally. Is this Premier and his government getting their fiscal strategy from the Trudeau's Liberals? Does the Premier also think the budget will balance itself?

The results speak for themselves. There is no other way to describe this level of waste and debt accumulation than blatant mismanagement. Mr. Deputy Speaker, our spending is out of control. The deficits keep growing bigger and bigger every year, and we've doubled the debt under this Premier.

And what do we have to show for it, Mr. Deputy Speaker? This government cannot even keep its hospitals open. We have rolling brownouts for emergency services, where emergency rooms are closed on the weekends. Where are the new schools and the world-class education you would expect with this level of spending, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Where are our police services? Where is the infrastructure of roads, bridges, and telecommunication services for the billions and billions of debt this government has racked up?

So what do they have to show for it, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We have a government that has grown so big that it can no longer efficiently function or offer sound management. We have more bureaucracies, more ministries, more committees, boards, offices, commissions, and agencies than ever before. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the only thing we have to show for the Premier doubling the debt is the wreck and neglect, wreck and neglect of this province.

It's scary to think about the huge debt, the huge burden that will be for our children and the grandchildren of Saskatchewan. We must get a handle on this before it's too late. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we cannot trust those who created the problem to solve it. Saskatchewan needs new management.

This wreck and neglect isn't just because of the rate of spending, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's because of what they are choosing to prioritize and spend things on. The Premier and his government continue to focus on the wrong things, like their net zero by 2050 agenda. Their budget proudly announces committing 140 million to transitioning our energy grid to the net zero: "The Ministry of Environment has allocated 140 million to support clean electricity projects that accelerate our transition to a net zero emissions electricity grid by 2050."

This government's pursuit of net zero agenda by 2050 is being bankrolled by the pockets of Saskatchewan residents through higher SaskPower bills. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government is actively funding the destruction of our energy sector. And yet on this floor they can't even be transparent about their agenda any longer. As a result of this government's directives, SaskPower will completely transform and transition away from our proven, reliable energy sources of coal and natural gas to wind, solar, and the completely unproven small modular reactors.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in case the government and those ministers need a reminder, let me read to them the following statement on SaskPower's website, "In 2020 the federal government set a target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. We're committed to reaching that target."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they go on to state their goal is to decarbonize our energy grid. They state, "To reach net zero, we must transform our entire power system." Furthermore they state their plan to replace half of our energy grid with 3000 megawatts of wind power by 2035. Half of our power grid is to be made up of an unreliable power source that cannot be stored or depended upon. Ask Alberta how their transition is working out for them. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the wreck and neglect of our province that the Sask Party is actively funding. Future generations are going to experience the consequences of these foolish endeavours.

They tell us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that their small modular nuclear reactor project will save us. Their new small modular reactor investment fund will bring us another step closer to zero-emission baseload power. This initiative seriously raises questions about the costs of nuclear technology. Small modular reactors are a new, untested technology that could bring massive financial liabilities to this province. By allocating hundreds of millions of dollars to this fund, the government is gambling with public money on a nuclear venture.

While our party is not opposed to nuclear energy, the true costs of developing, constructing, and operating these small modular reactors are unknown, yet this government has committed to shutting down all our reliable coal-fired plants by 2042. This is not sound management, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Saskatchewan is sitting on cheap, clean coal that doesn't require billions of taxpayer dollars to be spent on unproven, experimental projects. Promoting wind, solar, and unproven nuclear technology is an irresponsible energy policy. This is a failed management strategy for our energy sector and must be ended immediately.

Now let me turn to taxation. During the Premier's tenure, he has imposed a staggering 2.4 billion in new taxes on the hard-working people of Saskatchewan, directly contradicting the Premier's promises of tax relief. Times are tough right now for regular folks, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Prices like the basics for groceries, rent, heating your home, just keep going up and up.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sask United has been calling on this government to cut its PST by 1 per cent across the board since the last budget. They still have not done so. We have been calling on them to cut their 15-cent-a-litre provincial carbon tax on fuel, and yet they will not act, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Like the Trudeau Liberals there doesn't seem to be a provincial tax out there that they don't like. If they can't cut taxes when they are receiving massive revenues from record resource and commodity prices, when will they cut taxes?

Instead of trying to help make ends meet for families and small businesses that are already stretched so thin, this government has decided to pile even more cost on the good folks of Saskatchewan, on their shoulders.

When it comes to health care we have seen costs spiral out of control, placing immense burden on taxpayers. A staggering 726 million increase in health care spending is projected for the upcoming year, a rise of over 10 per cent, a rate that is simply unsustainable without comprehensive reforms and innovative solutions.

The hospital in Prince Albert is now more than three times over budget. The current cost for the expansion is now projected to cost taxpayers 900 million. That works out to be approximately 13 million for each new bed added. Is that the going rate for this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 13 million for a hospital bed? This mismanagement of our health care is unacceptable.

Health care is a prepaid service. Saskatchewan citizens have been paying into their health care all their lives, yet when they need it they can't access it. With record high wait times, our people are forced to end up going to other provinces for treatment, or south of the border to pay for surgeries out of their own pocket. This is not the sound fiscal management of health care that the people of

Saskatchewan deserve, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The latest numbers from the government on the Lake Diefenbaker irrigation project are shocking. They are recklessly squandering 1.1 billion on the first phase of the Lake Diefenbaker irrigation project. This project is ridiculously expensive. We're talking a mind-boggling 44,000 per acre. At these costs, it'll drain our public funds dry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the time has come for a change. The people of Saskatchewan deserve a common-sense conservative government that truly understands responsible fiscal financial management and prioritizes the well-being of all of its citizens. Saskatchewan residents must demand transparency, accountability, and a commitment to fiscal responsibility that will safeguard Saskatchewan's economic future.

I can no longer stand by silently as this government recklessly spends our hard-earned tax dollars without delivering tangible results or relief for the struggles faced by everyday Saskatchewan families. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's time we said enough is enough with this government and its misguided policies and empty promises.

Saskatchewan needs a fresh start, a common-sense approach that gets our fiscal house in order, reduces the size of government, cuts out wasteful spending, and puts the needs of regular folks first. As Sask United's leader, I'm proud to hold this government to account by standing for these principles. Our party will not shy away from the tough decisions and necessary reforms required to put Saskatchewan back on a path of sustainable growth and economic security.

[20:30]

We can forge a future where our children and grandchildren are not burdened by unsustainable debt, our health care system is accessible and affordable, and our education system truly prioritizes the success of our students. It's time to end the wreck and neglect of our province.

Thank you and may God bless the great province of Saskatchewan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dennis): — I recognize the MLA from Cypress Hills.

Mr. Steele: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today to support the budget. I'll start that at the beginning and I'll do it at the end. But I've got a few people I'd like to thank, and you know, talk about some of the historical things from 2016 till now. I'm very, very fortunate to represent a constituency that, you know, to me it doesn't seem like a job. They're so supportive. We talk about different issues and things that are happening, and it's just the way it is.

And you know, with our executive I have down there — for the two terms that I've been in the House here now — they're just amazing. You know, they step up. They get out there, we do what we need to do, and we've been successful twice.

And I'd like to mention, acknowledge my first CA [constituency assistant], Twila Wedrick. She would've liked to stay but she had

a vision, and she wanted to have her own bakery and tea shop, so after the first term — I got to commend her — she went out and purchased a business in small-town Saskatchewan and put it together and she's doing very, very well. She delivers her bread all throughout the Southwest and possibly other places, but it's pretty amazing how Twila's business has flourished and moving forward.

And then, second term, Sean Checkley. I think everyone here has heard Sean's name quite a number of times.

An Hon. Member: — Every week.

Mr. Steele: — Every week, yeah. They were talking about, you know, giving him a stall somewhere. Stall . . . [inaudible] . . . but anyway. But Sean is amazing. He gets on the phone; he gets the details. He talks, he's talked to the chiefs of staff. He's into the minister's office and gets the legwork done. And we forward and go through. And you know, actually today he sends me a text and we had a couple files and he said, it's done. And the constituents are happy, dealing with the few issues that they had to deal with. And those are things that make you feel good. You're not going to win them all, but you know, in the same breath these successes are pretty awesome.

You know, and then being here in Saskatchewan, like I'm pretty fortunate, like they say, being in the constituency of Cypress Hills, but Saskatchewan overall. My family's been here in Saskatchewan five generations, farm, come as homesteaders and we live on one of the homesteads of my grandparents. And that's pretty amazing in itself, you know.

And I've had the opportunity to take part in, you know, community groups or services as far as like being an RM councillor and a reeve. I've been on credit union boards. I've been on, you know, school boards. Quite a number of years ago I was on a school board for a couple terms. I believe if you're going to raise concerns you should be able, you better step up and take part, you know, put in the input and see how you can get things solved.

And you know, it's not always easy. There's always issues. There's money. There's different things you've got to deal with, you know, staffing and whether it's dealing with, like you say, on the school board or the credit union board. And we went through some pretty tough times in the '80s, droughts and different things and double-digit interest rates which I went through that myself. And you had one job so you took on two other jobs to kind of, you know, make ends meet. My wife worked besides, off farm, just to get to where we are today to be able to, you know, possibly be here and to try and help our communities and our area grow.

It's so important, and like I say the province of Saskatchewan is special in my heart. And I know everyone in here is the same, you know, whether it's us folks on this side or the folks on the other side. I'm sure we don't always disagree, or we agree on some things but we disagree. But at the end of the day I'm sure that our feelings are, you know, the same about our province overall.

I've acknowledged some people I worked with, my executive, and I'd like to acknowledge my family. My wife, she worked in

the education system 35 years. We've been married 42 years. I know on the days when I was on the SARM board over here and a councillor, I was away a bit. And we had a mixed grain farm and that was interesting. Being a city-raised girl, she never really cared for cattle that much, but she did what it took, you know, and that's what Saskatchewan is. Saskatchewan people are that type of people that when things get tough, the tough get going.

And you know, like I say, she worked 35 years in the education system. And we'd sit at night; she'd come home and talk about what's happening at school. And she talked about some of the kids coming, you know, they were half dressed with their jackets done up and their shoes aren't tied — her little orphans.

And they had a breakfast program. And you know, I think it's likely the same in a lot of schools across the province, but you know, it's like the teachers and the staff step up to do what's needed a lot of times that's maybe lacking in another place with the family. And they'd come, and you know, Mrs. Steele, could I get something to eat? So there was a group — and this is in Gull Lake, Saskatchewan — that they took care of. Some were transient and come and then they'd be there for a period of time. Some maybe stayed for the whole . . . were employees for a whole session.

And you know, that's where I say like, right now in education right now and trying to sort this out. It's so unfortunate that the kids are caught in this situation, that they're between adults trying to agree on something, and them not being able to take part in things they worked hard for over the year, whether it's fundraising or other things. You know, it's a big part of their education year that, it helps them come and be part of something that . . . Well you know, maybe not everyone wants to go to school. I was there. We went to school, and you know, it wasn't always your most important part of your day, but it's something you really need to have.

So you know, hopefully we can get through these things. And with the budget, with what we put into education, the numbers and the dollars and stuff we're trying to get through this, working with agreement. But you know, they shouldn't be held at ransom. We should be sitting down as adults at the table and get this settled and move forward. It shouldn't affect the graduation. It shouldn't affect a field trip. And it shouldn't affect things that they worked for and were moving forward.

So you know, these are things, like I say, in the budget, we are trying to get the dollars into place. And my dad . . . Growing up when we were, you know, doing things as a young guy, well we got to buy this, got to do this, and spend money. And you know, yeah, I was doing it. And then I had to have three jobs to pay for what I was doing. And you know, we did it.

So but, like I say, there's good debt and bad debt. And the money we're putting back in our communities, whether it's health care, education, and transfer payments into the communities where they're going to spend the money and they're allowed to take and put those resources to what they need with their decisions, by making the decisions.

And like down home, you know — it's like I say, it's right across Saskatchewan — there's very capable individuals out there that can make decisions, whether it's RM council, town council, like

SARM and SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association].

You know, we were over at SARM. Like I said, I was part of SARM for quite a while. And I felt that the response that we received from the delegates was very, very positive. They really were standing behind it. The bear-pit session went well. It was just, it was relaxing. I'd been around there for a number of years. And they come and they talked, and you know, it was just so positive. And positive is good. I think we all agree, positive . . . The negative is not good.

You know, and like I say, take a chance. You don't want to take incentive away from people that want to go out and invest. You come down home, we had a couple fellows come in here from Calgary and they're resource industry people. And having conversations during the budget, after the budget, and they were so happy or pleasantly surprised in how things were rolling out. And they were going home and their plans are to reinvest in Saskatchewan. And you know, by them investing, it employs people.

I sit in here day after day with the rest of my colleagues and we hear from across the way that . . . you know, jobs. Well you can come down home in the Southwest and I guarantee you can find you a job of any type, whether it's in industry or agriculture or working in whatever, you know. And it can work, and you'll have a job and it'll be a good-paying job. And there's accommodations and things that people will . . . You know, it could be a career move, basically, that will continue on for you.

So I don't understand where this information that there's no jobs, you know, in Saskatchewan. And you look at the numbers, like BHP, the investment and dollars that they put in. It doesn't make sense in my mind, you know. And I think moving forward we'll see a lot of things happening more than we've seen so far.

And then like we're talking about the marshal program, for example. Well the marshal program is to assist . . . My son and my daughter-in-law, they're in the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police]. You know, I'm very proud of where they're at. My son, he is specialized in the RCMP. He's a trained sniper and all these types of things, and he deals with a lot of things like a lot of officers do, a lot of the rougher side of life. And you know, he goes all over, out of country and those types of things. He trains, they call it the ERT [emergency response team] team. He's an instructor with the ERT team. It's like a SWAT team with the RCMP. And he trains fellas in there — well not just fellas, you know what I mean — cadets to try to get into that type of work.

And you know, like the RCMP, if you really think of it, we're talking about . . . The RCMP shouldn't be going anywhere. With the marshal program, the marshal program is to assist the RCMP. Like you got the drugs that we need to deal with and a lot of things into our province that, you know, are beyond what you can imagine. I know when I sat on a crime reduction committee, and there was a few other MLAs, we went around the province and we did that. I think you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you were a part of that.

And we seen, I was quite surprised on the crime and the issues that were in other communities rather than down home. And like I say, with the RCMP and the marshals, you come down home

and our detachments are short — not because the members don't want to be there — whether, you know, it's time off, health issues, and all that. So if you have a detachment that has so many members, you could be . . . Only two that are actually out there.

And then my constituency is 15,000 square miles, so when you have an accident or maybe a crime, well response times depending on where the location is can be a long ways away. So whether you're assisting with an accident where there's people that could be hurt, or whether it's break and entering. So we need boots on the ground. It shouldn't be based on stats. It should be based on so many members in so big an area to be able to take care and assist the public and themselves. And you know, that is so important, like I say.

So and then we take a look with the RCMP. I get letters and questions and asking about . . . You know, we support the RCMP. Well of course I support the RCMP. I have family members. I had a brother that was in there 30 years, and you know, and I have nephews and nieces and there's other members here. There's a fella over there, he's got a son that's in there and working, you know.

The RCMP, if you think of it, that red serge. If people were watching the funeral for past prime minister Mulroney, what was following the car and the folks? RCMP and red serge, marching in the snow.

[20:45]

That red serge represents Canada before the flag even existed, actually, the Canadian flag. So you had Fort Walsh. You had down there, the North West Mounted Police were in western Canada here. Well and we have the training depot right in Regina. Like we'd be fools to not be in support of the RCMP and what they, you know, deliver to our communities, our province and right across Canada.

So you know, we're not a government that's trying to remove the RCMP. We're there to assist the RCMP with some complications they have that's maybe directed from somebody. We won't mention names, but maybe a little down east that way somewhere. Same guy that got the carbon tax, I think.

So like I say, people send you a letter, they support the RCMP. You try to explain that yeah, we do too. We're trying to fill in the gaps and the voids as a province, just like what we did for our constituents and our consumers on heating fuel. Well why not? That's what we're here for. I'm proud to be part of that. I was elected to do what I can with my colleagues to support our people and our province. We're a growing province.

We talked about health care. Well I don't know, to me, like with health care for example, we put more money in health care. But we're trying to, you know, tighten up the loose ends, make it more efficient, working along with the experts and get it so, you know, that the dollars that the taxpayer and we as government are putting into it, that we can get it . . . Like, the lady that was here today and the wait times, you know, we need to get that dealt with. And we're trying. In a perfect world, we could snap our fingers and it was cleaned up. But it's not that way.

You know, and I'm not going to sit here and dwell on, well the

opposition closed this 170-some schools and 56 hospitals. Do I have that reversed?

An Hon. Member: — 52.

Mr. Steele: — 52. You know, well that was a decision made likely before a lot of those folks were out of school yet, over there. Right? But it's history and we're not going to go down that road. You know, 72 . . .

An Hon. Member: — 170.

Mr. Steele: — 170? Oh, they had it wrong. No. No. But anyway, that's another day. But like I say, that doesn't help us get to deal with the issues or deal with the issues here today. But you learn from history. I was so fortunate as a young councillor when I got on RM council, half the council or more were older gentlemen that knew their ropes and knew what was going on. You learn from people that have experiences. You don't destroy history. You learn from history. And that's what we're trying to do.

And with a growing province to keep up with taxation, well we can't keep going back. There's one taxpayer. And we can't go back to them and over and over and over. There's nothing more than I'd like to see than, you know, someone keep 80 per cent of their income or their salaries to use on their families and purchase things to, you know, make themselves happy and support their families.

So you know, I better look back down here and check what I got here. I mean it's . . . [inaudible] . . . You know, there's so many good things in this province to be proud of. Like I say, the health care situation, you know, response times and all that, we got to understand in a province the size of Saskatchewan there isn't going to be an ambulance there like that. It might take some time.

So EMS [emergency medical services], one of the things that I'm so happy about, my fellow colleague from — oh yeah, that guy — Wood River. I remember back, you know, we mentioned nurse practitioners. Well him and I were on a board, a committee, with an organization, and this come to us in a proposal by nurse practitioners in general. Totally makes sense.

You know, if you go down into the Southwest, down into Consul — like we just had some folks here today that were from Consul in Reno, RM of Reno, down there in Maple Creek, down through there — you've got ranch wives that are trained RNs. And if we offered maybe assistance to help them, you know, get to be a nurse practitioner, they're stable in your community. They understand the community. You know, they're part of it, and they're going to be there and they're going to give you service.

And you know, we've had that mentioned to us a number of times, and this is a great opportunity to look at some of that. You know, I sat on the — well I think I mentioned this one other time in here — but I sat on the physician recruitment committee.

You know, in respect to the physicians that come from other countries, their family comes too. And their families, it's a real culture shock. They go out to Reno or Consul, Saskatchewan in the RM of Reno, that's about 8 miles from the United States border. And then when you get on the other side of the United States border, it's like another how many miles to another

community, but it's kind of a drastic change, you know. So these folks live there. They ranch. They do their part of it. So you know, I think this is such a great idea, and it's long overdue.

But you know, and like they say, this is like the internet and fibre and all that stuff . . . This fellow right here, he's from somewhere around Saskatoon here. I've got to check it out there, Saskatoon Westview guy. But him and myself had an opportunity to work on a fibre deal, delivering fibre and quality internet services to rural Saskatchewan. We were pretty successful in a lot of it, and we've still got a long ways to go. You know, it's quite a workload, and you know, we respect you, SaskTel, in getting this done. The five-year plan and proposal have tightened up, and they're getting right at it.

So you know, what a better place, what a better place to live when you think of it — rural Saskatchewan. We've got the cities, we've got a number of cities, but we've got . . . So when we build a city, we add the city, we've got to have some green space. Well you go to rural Saskatchewan, you got a lot of green space. But if you can have quality internet, it gives you the opportunity to work from your resort communities, or you can work from small-town Saskatchewan and still do your job. You know, enjoy where your kids can walk to school. They're not worried about things and they, you know, have a lot of ample hockey time in the rink because there aren't a whole lot of people booking time and stuff like that.

So you know, these things, we put a lot of time working. Then the money's coming into it. Like I said, the member from Kindersley hit bang on when the gentleman phoned and they said, well what was in this budget for us? A lot. Everything. I look at it that way. It doesn't have to be right here on my doorstep, but little things will come with changes we make, you know. And that's what we need to do and not argue. We're going to, you know, we'll listen to the . . .

But anyway I know I've got a couple . . . I want to talk on regional parks. Regional parks were, you know, that is something that I'm very proud of that we did too. And I think, like, the member across from me mentioned that too. You know, regional parks were started in our communities when we didn't travel a lot of distance. They were parks that were started in a maybe a nice treed area, or there maybe was a body of water where people could gather with their friends and neighbours and have something. They didn't have a, you know, plan to travel like to Banff or some other thing. This is how they gathered because that was their community.

It's changed now today, and that type of thing. And it was all done with volunteerism and hard work and working together. So you know, I think that was a home run. I think that was one of them. What do you think there? A home run? Yeah. That's good stuff. All right. No, I'm going. I'm going. But anyway, yeah. I was just hoping they're going to swap the Chair there. Yeah.

Oh, I got to thank, you know, I've got to thank . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Page 2. No, I ran out of that. They moved them. But anyway, well anyway what I got to say, I've got to acknowledge the colleagues that are going to leave. Like that was an amazing lineup. I got to say, you know, since 2016 I've learned a lot and seen a lot and heard a lot. And you know, you guys are all going to be very much missed. I honestly . . . You

know, we go around the caucus table and where you look, some are late. Some are on time. You're not here. Some do a lot of talking. Some don't do much. But you're a heck of a group.

And then there's that . . . Maybe I shouldn't have . . . Well the guy from Kindersley, right. That guy there. He's always got something to say. Either under his breath or not, but it's pretty good. The member from Regina Northeast, have I got that right? Yeah. Well that's what it says on the document I have. You know, you're going to be missed. And then Canora-Pelly, of course. I'll send you an email. How does that work?

And then we've got the Battle of Batoche here, the fellow from Batoche. He's been around a long time. He's one of the longest MLAs on the list. And, Mr. Yorkton, you're always interesting at caucus time there, young fella.

And then the . . . Where is he? That guy, he didn't last long. The fellow from Arm River. Arm River — R-M River. I don't know what somebody did to him, but I come in to work that one week, and he says, "I'm pulling the pin." Oh well, you're going to be missed there, you know? You're a colourful character.

I know then there's a young fella from Saskatoon southwest . . .

An Hon. Member: — East.

Mr. Steele: — Oh, east. I can't see. It's so little. Southeast. I can see why, you know, they've got a place for him in the lodge. No that wasn't . . . I didn't mean that.

And then the fellow from Indian Head-Milestone. That's a little bigger, right? And you know, he's going to be missed.

And then there's Donna. Oh, Humboldt-Watrous. Okay.

I already mentioned the guy that's late, Weyburn-Big Muddy. And Saskatoon Northwest.

But anyway, I'm going to wrap 'er up because I'm going to . . . You know, I didn't want to be too harsh. I just wanted to make a couple points there. And you know, all you folks at home that are watching, I will be supporting the budget and I will not . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Pardon?

An Hon. Member: — And not the amendment.

Mr. Steele: — And not the amendment. And I will, thank you very much, pass the torch over to whoever's next. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dennis): — I recognize the MLA from P.A. Northcote.

Ms. A. Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a pretty tough act to follow here tonight, but I'll do my best. I'm really pleased to be able to stand tonight in support of the budget put forth by the Deputy Premier, the longest serving female cabinet minister in Canada.

Before I start though, there are some people in my life I would like to thank. Thank you to the constituents of Prince Albert Northcote. You know, it really is an honour when you're elected to a position like this and the trust that they put in you when they

bring forth concerns. And you know, I really do my best and I'm honoured to be in that role for the people of Northcote. You know, I was at a function for the Indian and Métis fellowship. It was their 60th anniversary. I was just there over the weekend and I met so many truly wonderful, appreciative people. So I have a lot of people like that in my constituency.

I would really like to thank my family. As everyone said, this is not something we can ever do alone. My son Rob stays with me. He's having some health issues so he's staying with me right now, and he's really good at keeping me in line and giving me some, often . . . He's my best critic, maybe is the best way to put it. So he keeps me on my toes. He's very smart. He's usually right with what he says. I will give him that credit.

[21:00]

And I've never had a sister, but I have someone in my life I consider to be the sister of my heart. And, Mr. Speaker, Rose and her husband, James, they are just the best friends I could ever have. If I'm having a bad day or if there's things going on in my life, it's a really safe place to go. They're hard-working, salt-of-the-earth people. They run a business out of their farm and they just treat everyone who comes there so well. I really am blessed to have them both in my life.

And my Alberta family, I have three boys and two of them still live in Alberta. And you know, it doesn't matter what position I have, I put my heart and my soul into what I do. And it's very difficult to be able to get away sometimes to be able to visit them. And of course with COVID, in my previous work, and now with this work, it's that much more difficult.

So what I give thanks for, for them, is the patience that they have with me. The fact that I just mailed my grandson . . . I have one and you know what? I'm very blessed to have one and I may only ever have one grandchild. And he's the most interesting little dude you could ever meet. He's his own unique little soul. But I mailed him his Easter package here just the other day because I wanted to make sure he has it for Easter. And then, because I just . . . It's a long way to drive to Calgary and back for three days, and it's hard to do that all the time. So I really thank them for their patience. You know, they're very supportive of what I do, and I can't thank them enough. I know I'm not as president in their lives as I would really like to be.

And I'd like to thank all of our caucus members, our Legislative Assembly staff, the officials in the offices, you know, everyone who works in this building, because the support that's provided for members of both sides is really incredible. And none of us could do any of this without all of those, all of those individuals.

And I need to thank my colleagues. You know, this is a great team, and we hear all the time, like we're kind of . . . There's lots of boys here. But you know what, I raised three so I'm used to having lots of boys in my life . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . You're very much like boys, I tell you.

But you know, it's like a big family. And you know what big families are like. We don't always agree, but you know, we have fruitful discussion. We come to some terms and we work it out. And never have I been treated with the degree of respect and support that I have had from my colleagues in this position, and

I really thank each and every one of you for that.

And I'd like to congratulate and thank the retiring members. Like what a legacy. You know, I know we have retiring members on both sides, but what a legacy, especially those who were here from the beginning. Like those were dark days when they first came into power. Like we'd had mass exodus, rapidly declining populations, school and hospital closures.

And I was one of the ones who . . . you know, I exited in the previous years. Those were the days if you went to a football game in Calgary, there was more green shirts than there were red shirts. And there may still be; I haven't been to one for a while. And the big joke was, and I used to get it all the time, so did you remember to turn the light out when you left? Yeah.

But that two thousand and . . . election brought change to this province, and it brought hope to this province. And that is when that wee province that you inherited started to blossom.

The Sask Party's guiding principles of a strong economy means a brighter future. A strong economy means more jobs and opportunity for the people of Saskatchewan. A strong economy allows government to invest in vital services for the people of Saskatchewan. Those principles created growth in our province, and Premier Wall was right. Hope does beat fear.

Saskatchewan has thrived under this government. We're no longer the place to be from, but we are the place to be. With investments, record investments in potash, uranium, agriculture, mining, the future here is bright. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is open for business.

And the growth and strength of this growing economy has allowed this budget to be put forth that focuses on three very important areas in investment for the people of Saskatchewan: classrooms, care, and communities. This isn't an ideology; this is a fact. This budget has record investments in funding increases to classrooms, to health, to communities. And all Saskatchewan is growing. That wee little province has grown by almost a quarter of a million people since those dark days of the NDP.

And you know, the rest of this time I'm going to talk about Prince Albert because that's where I live. But we're seeing growth there too. People now see . . . of Prince Albert are seeing the promise in Saskatchewan. Some are coming back like I did. And we have a lot of people moving in from other countries.

We have a large Filipino population in Prince Albert. I have spoken about my students before, when I was teaching in the CCA program at Sask Polytech. They came to this province because of the potential and promise that they saw here, the hope for a better life for their families. They're all working. They're working really hard. They're buying houses; they're buying cars; they're going on holidays — things that would not have been possible had they not relocated to Saskatchewan.

Some are buying businesses and encouraging family members to come here as well. I have a favourite . . . One of my favourite coffee shops in downtown Prince Albert are owned by a Filipino couple, and he also has a repair business on the side. But when I was in here just a few days ago, he said . . . He was so excited. He said, ma'am Alana, my cousin is coming. She actually is

coming through part of the human health resource action plan and she's coming here as a nurse. And she's going to be going up to La Ronge once she's credentialed. And her husband is coming too, and he is going to be looking for a small business to open here in Saskatchewan — something they never ever dreamed could ever happen for them.

We have an active East Indian community, heavily invested in the food service industry in Prince Albert. And that's one of my other favourite restaurants. They make the best little cheddar and chive scones you could have and it's not very far from my office. Unfortunately I'm there too often.

We have an active Nigerian community. Many of our physicians are professionals, have moved their families to Prince Albert and the surrounding areas, and they originally came from Nigeria. They've embraced . . . they love it in and around Saskatchewan and they're encouraging other professionals to relocate to the city as well. Children from all of these groups, they're active in the schools. They're active in participating in sports and in the arts. They have become such strong, productive members of our city. Prince Albert and Saskatchewan really has become their home.

So the focus on this budget, Mr. Speaker, is classrooms, care, and communities. We have three school divisions in Prince Albert and all are benefiting from this budget. Sask Rivers has a 4.5 per cent increase in their operating. Prince Albert Roman Catholic Separate School has a 9.7 per cent increase. And this isn't the proper name, but for my lack of French, I've forgotten everything I've ever learned I think. The French school is getting an 11 per cent increase.

Saskatchewan Rivers is also receiving \$2.6 million in preventive maintenance and renewal. And the Prince Albert Catholic Division is getting almost \$790,000. And great excitement for the French community in Prince Albert. École Valois, new site planning continues, and that school will soon be replaced. And it's in dire need of replacement. It's in an area of the city where they actually have to go and sweep for needles every day before the kids come. It's not safe for the kids to go there on their own. So everyone is looking forward . . . The community is so excited because they're going to be moving up to a new location with a new school to offer more opportunities for the students there. And there's also funding in the budget to begin the design and construction of the improvements on the St. John Community School.

And I'd like to take this time too to thank the teachers for the good work and the dedication they have to their students. You know, we're going through a tough time right now, but we have to remember that we're dealing with the STF; we're not dealing directly with the teachers. And you know, our teachers put in a lot of time. I've got teachers in my family. I have friends who are teachers. And when I see their devotion and how concerned they are for students missing out on events, you know, it's sad that they aren't able to have the voice they would like to have. They would like things to be done.

Prince Albert is also benefiting in this budget in health care, the caring part. An additional new 150 beds to support the ROSC [recovery-oriented system of care], system of care for recovery will be added to the existing 150 which is a huge benefit for the province. Just because those beds aren't in Prince Albert, it

doesn't mean we can't access those beds. So that is a very, very important addition to the province.

I had the privilege of touring the recovery community when I was out in Red Deer at the recovery conference last year, and the work that they are going to be doing is absolutely incredible. And you know, the conference itself was incredible because every presenter there was someone in recovery, someone who had hit rock bottom and who sees the value in recovery for addictions.

And you know, the phrase that they used — they used a couple phrases there — that really, really resonated with me, and one of them was, “harm reduction without recovery is palliative care where basically supports someone to die.” And that really struck a chord with me. And it's something we should always think of when we're thinking about recovery. And something else they talked about is, there's no such thing as, you know, a safe injection when you're using illegal drugs. There just isn't because you never know what's in those drugs. So those were very important things that came to me out of that conference.

In terms of mental health, there's \$2.4 million being invested for psychiatry supports in Prince Albert and Saskatoon, and I've been assured that there's ongoing recruitment for the new pediatric psychiatrists in Prince Albert. It's going to continue until we find the ones we need. And this is a highly competitive field, so we are competing with cities from across North America for this position.

The pediatric unit and the neonatal intensive care units received \$1.6 million to increase pediatric programming, as well as \$497,000 to enhance staffing capacity for the ICU [intensive care unit] and non-salary costs at the Prince Albert Victoria Hospital. Increased investments of \$11.6 million for new positions in high-priority positions in the rural areas, including Prince Albert.

Investments in women's health in the province, including ovarian cancer research. Women diagnosed with this terrible disease only have a 44 per cent chance of a five-year survival, so that research is going to be extremely important for all women. With the announcement of the new breast care health unit in Regina, that will provide increased access for the women in southern Saskatchewan, but it will also increase access for the women of the North and for central Saskatchewan, because we've only had one centre up until this time, and that's the Dubé Centre in Saskatoon. So again, the entire province is going to benefit from the opening of that facility.

[21:15]

So the Rose Garden Hospice in Prince Albert, an absolutely beautiful facility. I was there; I had a tour. I had a meeting with the Chair of the board here just this past weekend. Like, just an absolutely wonderful place, like that home environment and providing wonderful care. They're receiving \$2 million in this budget for operating to help them provide that service to the people who are requiring end-of-life care.

I spoke with an amazing young nurse, and I think her name was Olivia. I'm not the best with names sometimes, but . . . And she was explaining how important it was to be able to provide these services, you know, to be able to have the time and to be able to provide that support not only to the clients but to their families,

because that's what palliative care becomes. We provide comfort for the patient, but then we also provide that support in this difficult time for the families.

Like I was very blessed. My last actual direct care nursing role was in palliative care, and I was the coordinator and director for the hospice in Red Deer. And the care that we were able to provide there was . . . it was just absolutely incredible the support that we could provide. And now we're just so blessed to have that due to the hard work from many people, including my colleague, the MLA from Carlton. We're so blessed to have that facility in Prince Albert.

The big highlight for this budget though is the funding announcement of \$180 million for the start of construction for the Victoria Hospital renewal project. That's a huge thing for Prince Albert. This build is going to provide improved services to Prince Albert and the entire northeast part of the province. The new tower that is being built will increase overall capacity 140 per cent, from 173 to — oh, it's just 40 per cent — from 173 to 242 beds and will include a rooftop heliport, an expanded emergency department, larger operating rooms, pediatric units, maternity and NIC [neonatal intensive care] units, new medical imaging, and a First Nations and Métis cultural space.

This project is so needed for Prince Albert and northern Saskatchewan, and I am so pleased that Prince Albert Grand Council supported this initiative and provided valuable support for the cultural centre so that we're doing that area the way it needs to be done. This new facility is going to be such an integral part of our community, and it's important that it has space that is accessible and provides appropriate cultural services to all. Local and Indigenous vendors will also be engaged in building this facility. And this expansion will offer enhanced services closer to home for not only residents of Prince Albert but for all the North. So it's going to be absolutely incredible.

The strength of our economy allows us to invest in revenue sharing to support our communities. The \$4.2 million or 14 per cent increase in municipal revenue sharing with provinces, cities, towns, and municipalities bring this year's total to \$340 million in investment, and that was very well received at the SARM convention. And I had a meeting with our city manager this past weekend when I was at home and she was very pleased to hear about this.

Our government is also working to make life more affordable for those who may need additional supports. I have a number of residents these initiatives will benefit from in my community. Increases to the Saskatchewan income support program sees benefits — the adult basic benefit, the shelter benefit, and the alternative heating benefit. The Saskatchewan assured income for disability, or SAID, which ranks in the top five in the country for similar programs and did not exist until the Saskatchewan Party government was in power, will increase by \$55 per household. The senior benefit has quadrupled since 2007 and is now \$260 per month. The personal care home benefit, another non-existent program under the opposition, has increased to \$2,500 a month. A new investment will support low-income students with children under the age of 12 and dependents over the age of 12 who have a permanent disability.

Our government is working hard to make life more affordable for

those who may require some support, and this is significant for a number of residents in my constituency. Increases to the Saskatchewan income support program sees increases to the adult basic and shelter benefit and the alternative heating benefit. The Saskatchewan assured income program for disability or SAID — whoops, I think I just repeated myself — ranks in the top five in the province and will increase by \$55 per household. This program was non-existent prior. The personal care home benefit, another non-existent program under the NDP, has increased to \$2,500 a month.

Prince Albert will also receive \$2.6 million to rebuild the Meadow Green family building that was destroyed by a fire in 2021. The YWCA in Prince Albert provides much-needed programming, including supports for the homeless population. This budget allocates \$1.8 million to provide 45 enhanced spaces for a Stepping Stone Shelter. I've been to that shelter. They do amazing work there. Mobile crisis also provides critical delivery of after-hours services to Prince Albert and they will receive \$167,000 in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, I have highlighted just some of the announcements that impact the people of my constituency, but I know my colleague from . . . the hon. member from Prince Albert Carlton, may have much more to add.

The strength of Saskatchewan's economy enables our government to make these important investments for the Saskatchewan people. Saskatchewan today is a far cry from the dark days of Saskatchewan of the NDP government where people were fleeing the province in droves, many never to return. But I am proud to say that due to record investment and the strength of the economy in our province, the lights are shining brightly in Saskatchewan in 2024.

I will be supporting the budget put forth by the Deputy Premier and seconded by the member from Saskatoon Willowgrove, and I will not be supporting the amendment.

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — I recognize the member from Prince Albert Carlton.

Hon. Mr. Hargrave: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And there goes my Prince Albert stuff. That seems to be already taken up, so that makes my life a little easier.

But anyway I want to start like many others just with the thank yous and a few people that I want to thank. You know, one, the constituents of Prince Albert Carlton who have brought me back a couple of times and maybe one more, and so I'm hopeful for that. And Prince Albert has just been an incredible city, and we've got so much going on in that city right now. And whenever I'm meeting with people and talking with the mayor and talking with other people, it's pretty incredible what's going there and they're all excited.

They're excited about the new Victoria Hospital renovation and expansion. That's just going to be a wonderful thing for our city and the economy in our city. Not only is it needed — it's long overdue. But it'll help the economy of the city. Rose Garden Hospice, which is near and dear to my heart and Alana, both of ours. I mean we both think it's an incredible facility and it's nice to see that up and going. You know, and the forestry industry is

kicking in and with the OSB [oriented strand board] plant coming. And there's other things in the works, so it'll be really nice to see that.

So I want to thank those . . . the constituents there of not only of Prince Albert Carlton but of all Prince Albert. They've been very supportive of both Alana and myself, so we're pretty grateful. I'm pretty grateful for that.

I want to thank first — next I guess — and probably the most important person is my wife, Fran. She is truly wonderful. I mean I just couldn't manage without her. She works so hard. She gives so much. She is my biggest supporter by far. Yeah, I just . . . We've been together for 30-some years, married for 28 years. Thursday's her birthday. She's much younger than me, and . . . much, much younger.

But she's there. She works at the . . . and oversees our dealership in Melfort. She oversees the house. We're doing some renovations at the house and at the lake and whatever. She oversees everything, arranges everything. And I just sort of swoop in at the end and say, great job, because she does a wonderful job. And so I just . . . yeah. I just couldn't be without her. She's just incredible. I love her so much and she is truly the love of my life.

The rest of my family, they're all incredible as well. I love them all dearly. And we have four kids, seven grandkids. My son Trent is the oldest, and you know, he runs the dealership in Prince Albert and does a great job. And him and his son Elias, I mean they travel down here. They were here for budget day actually. My grandson's 15 years old and it was his first opportunity. Well he come in when I was first elected in 2016, but he was pretty small then. And now he's taller than Grandpa, so that's . . . yeah, and growing. So it's pretty wonderful.

My daughter Angela and her husband, Joe, are a great couple in P.A. as well. They're involved with the dealership as well. And their two kids Noah and Layla — and wonderful kids as well — doing extremely well. Layla's in pretty much everything. She takes band. She takes dance. She takes sewing. She takes everything. If you say, hey, you want to try this? — she says, yes. So she's just an incredible young lady and getting to there.

And then there's my son Colby, Colby and Becky. They're in Prince Albert as well. And their two kids, they're just incredible. We went to the track meet in Saskatoon on the weekend. Hannah was competing in there in hurdles and in long jump. And I don't know how anybody jumps over them hurdles, but she's pretty fast and she can do it very well. And then their son Myles, and Myles is a very special boy. And we just . . . They're special people, Colby and Becky and their two kids.

And then there's our youngest — well she's not that young anymore, but she's 38 — Jill and Greg. And they're good. They're busy. They're two people that are just on the go constantly. Jill's a project manager with Eecol Electric and Greg is a technician at Dodge City in Saskatoon.

And their two kids are the smallest, the youngest, and you know, Madilyn is just an acrobat. She takes cheer in Warman and she is one of the young ones, but she's one of the few that can do cartwheels across the room. If you wanted her to do five in a row,

she can do five in a row. They won't, in fact . . . She's the only one in her group that they let do cartwheels because she can do them consistently, and she can do three or four or five in a row without blinking an eye, and she is just a little, real girl. I mean she just loves life. She's got a smile on her face all the time.

And then there's little Lucas. Well Lucas is the youngest. He's three. And Grandma takes him and spends lots of time with him, takes him to swimming, does, you know, that sort of thing with him. And he gets to stay with Grandma and that's his sort of favourite place in the house. He's got a special spot he puts all his toys and whatever he needs and he knows what he's doing. And he is quite the little man, that's for sure.

So the other people I want to thank is a lot of the staff around the building. There's my ministry staff, Denise Macza and all of her staff. There's about a thousand people over there that work at SaskBuilds, so I won't name them all. But Denise and her staff are incredible to work with and I'm enjoying that very much.

[21:30]

Then in my office there's Sean, Kamel, Bonnie, and Josh, and it's been a real pleasure working with them. They're just, again, great people doing a good job and are committed to the government and committed to making Saskatchewan a better place. So they're great.

And our caucus staff, you know, led by Angela Currie. And Ang has always done a fabulous job, you know. And she used to be my chief of staff for a number of years when I was the Minister Responsible for Crown Investments Corporation, and is doing a great job in our caucus, running our caucus office. So that's always great for her and it's great for us and great for our party and great for me.

Anyway I will want to reflect on a few things based on my portfolio and just to talk. So let's take a moment to reflect on the significance of the decisions made within the chambers of our Legislative Assembly. The '24-25 capital budget isn't just a financial document; it's a road map for our province. With an allocation of \$4.4 billion, it represents the largest investment in Saskatchewan's history, a testament to our dedication to growth and progress.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of SaskBuilds and Procurement, I would like to draw your attention to a significant comparison between the budget allocations under the previous NDP government and the '24-25 budget set forth by our government. Our debt-to-GDP ratio is 14 per cent, half of what it was in the final year that the NDP was in government. There is no new operating debt in the budget, and capital debt is retired over time. The final NDP capital budget was \$535 million, which is about a quarter of what we just introduced.

Mr. Speaker, when the NDP stand up and criticize borrowing for capital, what they're actually saying is they do not think P.A. should get a new hospital. They don't think north Regina should get a new school, and they think that people should just fix their own roads.

The disparity between the capital budgets under the NDP government and our government highlights our commitment to

transformative change and progress. This \$4.4 billion capital budget invests in classrooms, care, and communities that will build a strong economy and a brighter future for all in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to begin my discussion with health care, the bedrock of a thriving society. Our government's commitment to the well-being of every Saskatchewanian is unwavering, which is why we are allocating \$516.8 million to health care capital projects. This significant, significant impact in investment marks an increase of nearly 180 million compared to the previous year, a testament to our dedication to ensuring accessible, high-quality health care for all.

These funds will support vital projects such as the construction of the Prince Albert Victoria Hospital redevelopment project, the Weyburn General Hospital replacement project, and the La Ronge long-term care project. By investing in health care infrastructure, we are not just building hospitals and clinics; we are building a healthier, more resilient Saskatchewan, a Saskatchewan where every citizen can access the care they need when they need it most.

I want to bring something to your attention when I say about getting the care and the care they need when they need it most. I happened to be in BC [British Columbia] a couple weeks ago for my brother-in-law's funeral, and he passed away from cancer, which was tragic but it does happen. Anyway so I'm a news junkie, so I watch the news. And believe it or not, they trot out some people out there, and they were going, complaining on the air. This is about the BC government, where they couldn't get a family doctor, and they had to wait two years to get in to a specialist, and how the government was just so terrible that they weren't doing that.

Then I talked to my friend, my oldest and best friend for all of my life. We're about a month apart in age and grew up about 50 yards away from each other. And he moved three years ago out to the island, out to Vancouver Island. Him and his wife moved out there. Three years and he still doesn't have a family doctor.

Now you've got to remember, this is a strong NDP government with a good plan of how to make those . . . everybody has a family doctor. So I don't know how the members opposite think that they're going to make that big change. But there's a big demand for doctors and nurses and specialists, and there's like a bidding war out there. You know, articles are on the news all the time about smaller communities unable to keep doctors because bigger cities manage to just spend more money and attract the doctors. So it's just all, you know, one of those things that we just . . . that is sort of happening within our culture these days.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to, you know, talk a bit about the Victoria Hospital project. That's really close to my heart, Mr. Speaker, and you know, it's the constituency I represent right now. It moves into Northcote in the new boundaries but, Mr. Speaker, my fellow members and I have heard many, many of the members opposite stand in this Chamber, almost every day, and complain about shortage of beds and health care infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, in fact it's the NDP which has made the people of Prince Albert and the whole of Saskatchewan suffer from a shortage of health care services when they were in the hospital-closing program.

The people of P.A. in this province still remember when the NDP closed 52 rural hospitals. They closed the 55 beds at the Holy Family Hospital in Prince Albert, and they weren't just satisfied to just close the Holy Family Hospital. So the next year they closed the 303 beds at the Plains hospital right here in Regina with no plans to make up for those closed beds.

Mr. Speaker, it is our government which is building back Saskatchewan one step at a time. The Prince Albert Victoria Hospital is one step. The Weyburn General Hospital is one step. And yet there's many other hospitals in the planning, Mr. Speaker, and that's going to make the difference in this province.

Mr. Speaker, education. Education is the cornerstone of progress and prosperity, and it is our duty to ensure that every child in Saskatchewan has access to world-class education. That is why we are investing 216 million in education capital. Mr. Speaker, since 2007 our government has made record investments of over \$2.6 billion in schools and education infrastructure. This record investment has resulted in 85 new major school infrastructure projects including 69 brand new replacement schools, 32 major renovation projects.

In the '24-25 budget we have allocated \$170 million to support ongoing projects including 11 new or consolidated school projects and three major renovations, 8.8 million in funding to begin planning for nine new schools and two renovations, 12.8 million for minor capital renewal projects that allow school divisions to address structural repairs and renovations to prolong the life of schools across the province. Mr. Speaker, I would go in and name all these projects but there's far too many to name. Needless to say it's significant, and we're very proud to be able to do that for the citizens of our province.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's population is growing at an historic rate. With this incredible growth comes increased pressures on our public service like our K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] education system. Saskatoon, by the way, alone . . . I was talking to Mayor Clark the other day, and he says Saskatchewan alone grew over 14,000 people just last year, Mr. Speaker. And that's pretty incredible. And that just shows you why there's the need for ongoing hospitals, ongoing schools, and long-term care facilities.

In response to this pressure between the amount budgeted in the '23 budget and the additional investment recently by our government, there will be an additional \$48 million for 70 relocatable classrooms that will be up and running by the beginning of the '24-25 school year to address class size pressures in our faster growing areas. Seventy relocatable classrooms, Mr. Speaker. That's going to make a significant difference on classroom sizes.

Mr. Speaker, this budget invests in the classrooms, care, and communities of a growing province, and it's only possible because of the strength of a growing economy. This budget will ensure a stronger economy for a brighter future for all residents of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, our government believes that education is the great equalizer, the key to unlocking the full potential of our people and our province. By investing in education infrastructure, we are investing in the future of Saskatchewan, a future where every

child has the opportunity to succeed regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances. Mr. Speaker, we will not take any lessons from the opposition because, as we all know, the NDP closed 176 schools when they were in government. Mr. Speaker, that's roughly one school a month.

Mr. Speaker, I feel very proud standing here telling my fellow members and the people of Saskatchewan about the great projects in our province. In addition to health care and education, we are also investing in critical infrastructure projects that will lay the foundation for future growth and prosperity. Projects such as the construction of the Regina General Hospital parkade and the Saskatoon urgent care centre are aimed at improving access to essential services and enhancing transportation networks.

Furthermore we are committed to advancing projects like the St. Paul's front entrance expansion project and the Estevan long-term care redevelopment projects, which will further strengthen our health care infrastructure and support our communities' needs. These advancements are not just about building roads and bridges; they are about building a stronger, more connected Saskatchewan, a Saskatchewan where every community has the infrastructure it needs to thrive, Mr. Speaker.

But our commitment to progress doesn't end there. We are also planning for transformative projects that will shape the future of Saskatchewan for generations to come. From the construction of the Regina long-term care specialized beds project to the planning for new schools and renovations, we are laying the groundwork for a brighter, more prosperous future.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that 82.3 per cent of contracts have been awarded to Saskatchewan-based companies. In fact when there was a Saskatchewan bidder, Saskatchewan companies secured the contracts 92 per cent of the time in the competition. These projects are using the best local Saskatchewan workers, creating jobs and employment opportunities for people of our great province.

These investments will not only support our previously announced capital projects but also pave the way for new initiatives that will address the evolving needs of our province. Whether it's expanding health care infrastructure, modernizing educational facilities, or improving transportation networks, we're committed to building a Saskatchewan that works for all.

Mr. Speaker, the disparity between the capital budgets under the NDP government and our government highlights our commitment to transformative change and progress. The NDP get up every day and call for new schools, new hospitals, and more spending. In their last term in government their entire capital budget was roughly the same amount as what we have invested in health infrastructure alone. It's no wonder our roads crumbled, our hospitals and schools were shuttered, and people fled the province in droves. We're never going back to those dark, dark days of the NDP, Mr. Speaker. Our government and this Premier will always stand up and deliver for the needs of our people and resist those who want to drag us back to the days of decline and destruction.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the '24-25 capital budget for Saskatchewan is more than just a financial plan. It is a blueprint for progress, prosperity, and the well-being of all

Saskatchewanians, with a record \$4.4 billion capital budget investments in classrooms, care, and communities. Let us seize the opportunities before us, and in courage and determination, let us work together to build a Saskatchewan that is inclusive, resilient, and prosperous for generations to come, Mr. Speaker.

And in conclusion, I want to also thank many of the members that are retiring and not seeking re-election on both sides of the House, members that have served. And I believe everybody that puts their name forward to serve deserves credit for doing that. Whether they're NDP, they're independents, they're Sask Party, it doesn't matter. It takes a lot of courage and commitment to be able to do that.

We all — I don't care which side of the House you're on — we all take heat. We all are meeting with people constantly, and it just takes a lot out of a family and out of a relationship. And that's why, you know, I mentioned my wife and how important she is to me because she's my rock and she keeps me grounded and keeps me going. And when I have a bad day — and we all do — she's there to pick me back up and put me on my feet again. And so that's why our family is so important, because without them we just can't do this job.

[21:45]

Now I want to also thank all the rest of the members. Like I say — I mean, I think there's 15 members or 16 — there's lots not seeking re-election, Mr. Speaker. I won't go through the list again. It's already been gone through a number of times. But I want to thank them for their service to the government and to Saskatchewan, mostly to Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

So I want to say this and I will say this because we always have to: I will be supporting the budget motion put forward by the Finance minister and seconded by the member from Saskatoon Willowgrove, and I will not be supporting the amendment from the members opposite. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Teed: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be on my feet here this evening, a little late in the evening but an honour nonetheless to speak to budget '24-25. Mr. Speaker, before I dive into my critique of budget '24-25, I also have some thank yous and family I wish to thank.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we say it here all the time. We don't do this work alone. You know, we're heading into the Easter weekend and I'm very much, as we all probably are, looking forward to time with our family, with our friends over food and dinner, you know, this weekend, Mr. Speaker. We have my mom, Carolyn, my sister Melissa, my mother-in-law, Kim, and James's youngest sister, Katie, joining us at our house for dinner. And then we've got James's . . . The matriarch of James's family is in town, so we'll be gathering there with his grandmother and assorted aunts that I'm sure will be travelling from all over different parts of Canada to attend Easter dinner. And so I have to say a huge thank you to all of them for their tremendous support. We don't, again, do this without that support.

Of course I would be remiss . . . You know, thanking the family

for their support, I'd be remiss not to thank my partner, James, mention him here. I've mentioned him before in this Chamber. You know, he's keeping the home fires alive back in Saskatoon. You know, it doesn't seem like a far drive, but some days by the end of a Thursday in this building, you kind of just want to head on home and see the fam. And so I'm just so appreciative of his support that he gives me. As I've said, when I told him I wanted to run, it was not "if" but "when." And I think he's still supportive. I think so. I think so, 100 per cent.

You know, he keeps his cards pretty close to his chest, Mr. Speaker, but I do think, you know, he says what's on his mind. I don't know if he's watching tonight. I texted him, said I was up. I don't know if he's watching, but you know, he says what's on his mind but he keeps his cards pretty close to his chest. But I do think he misses me a little bit by the time Thursday rolls around. He might not say it.

But you know, he's keeping pretty busy with our two dogs, our cat as well . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well thank you, yes. Yeah, I'm hoping. He just says "I'm proud of you" when I'm not around. You know, he's been busy taking care of our house, the pets. He's also jumped into a brand new career as I'd mentioned. He's actually started as a real estate agent in Saskatoon, so I'm so proud of him for jumping into something new. You know, he supported me 100 per cent when I decided to spend my summer campaigning, running for a nomination, running for an election, and jumping into this world. And so now it's my turn to offer him that same support.

And you know what I . . . Something really interesting that he messaged this morning was, in this new career he has, he says there's only 400 detached homes for sale in Saskatoon right now. We are in an absolute housing crisis in this province. There are no houses to buy, and so something to think about as we look at budget 2024 and the lack of housing support, lack of money that we're investing in building new houses in our province. But I digress, Mr. Speaker. I'll jump into the critique in just a moment.

I want to say a huge thank you to all my friends. You know who you are. I'm sorry that I'm always brushing you off, saying I'm in Regina when you're texting to hang out. I love you all and I appreciate the support that you give.

I'd also be remiss not to thank, say a huge thank you to my CA, McGinnis Reeve, who does such a fantastic job for the people of Saskatoon Meewasin. She's a huge advocate and I'm so grateful to have her in my office covering the leave of my former CA, still current CA but on leave, Jason Hicks, who's gone on to lead COPE [Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union] 397 as their interim president. I know I introduced him once in the House, probably talked way too long, but Jason is so well deserving of that praise. And I know he's doing great things in the labour movement as the interim president, COPE 397.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm so honoured to be part of this team. I want to thank this team of MLAs, our leader, our caucus office staff. Such great people to work with, so dedicated to the cause. Such an honour to serve alongside you all.

And lastly I want to thank all the residents of Saskatoon Meewasin for putting their trust in me, a fresh new face showing up on their doorstep during a summer by-election. It has been an

honour and a privilege to serve in that community and get to know so many more people in my Saskatoon community, Mr. Speaker.

Now I hope I haven't forgotten anyone. I admit that we're creeping up on the old bedtime here, but if I haven't thanked you, know that you're an important part of my life.

Mr. Speaker, as we always say, it is an honour to be standing in this Chamber. It's an honour to be a member of this official opposition, critiquing and entering into debate on the budget that has been recently presented. Mr. Speaker, this is a budget dubbed communities, care, and classrooms. Now I had to say this is quite a stark departure from their now universally panned "growth that works for everyone" tag line and the most recent "build and protect" language from budgets and Sask Party tag lines of past. It would seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that they're trying to present a softer side of their government, one branding itself as caring for those communities and those classrooms.

But we're hearing a much different story coming from government members. It doesn't give me much hope. I would say that these tired talking points and the old rhetoric coming from government benches on this year's budget is more telling of the direction that this Sask Party government is going. If you are a government member, it seems like budget talking points this year seem to be, everything is doing great in Saskatchewan, but beware of that Sask NDP bogeyman who will ruin everything that we've built. Because you know, like 17 years ago followed by some growth, build, protect . . . Oh, and by the way, after all those years we care now too, ahead of an election.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, it's almost shocking that these government members stand in their places and they talk more about us than they talk about their budget. Like they're kind of obsessed. I think the member from Kindersley needs to find some help in his retirement because he's a bit obsessed with us. I mean I don't know to be flattered, or I don't know if I should . . . Maybe I think . . .

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — I caution the member to use the good choice of words, please.

Mr. Teed: — I will choose my choice of words more carefully about the obsession that the government seems to have with us here in our opposition. But I mean, Mr. Speaker, we could go back in time all day long. Let's remember the dark days of Grant Devine. I know it's a name no one on these benches wants to say because we crashed the economy, nearly bankrupted the province. They had to change the name of their party after that fiasco.

I was just listening on the radio, after the passing of the late Rt. Hon. Brian Mulroney, to a former premier who spoke so highly. He said — Premier Romanow — that as he took office in Saskatchewan, he had to have those phone calls with the PM [prime minister] at the time, Brian Mulroney, about the state of Saskatchewan. We almost had to hand the keys over. You know, so we can go back in time all day, all day and talk about these things.

Mr. Speaker, on the heels of this election-year budget which seems to firehose cash in every direction to show that this

government cares, government members have returned to tired talking points, an old narrative that we've all heard before, designed to scaremonger an electorate ahead of a provincial election, all in an effort to distract from their abysmal record.

In fact neither the Premier nor the Finance minister nor members of this government seem to be able to point to one ingenuitive policy or funding allocation to celebrate. No new taxes is supposed to give us all a sigh of relief after years of PST . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh we'll get to education funding in a moment. After years of expansion of the PST to almost everything, this time it's no new taxes. It's supposed to make us think ahead of an election that they have our best interests at heart. But let's peel back the layers of this budget and expose what's beneath the Sask Party's shiny veneer.

I was inspired by a constituent who told me to bring more art, more beauty to the legislature. So as critic for Parks, Culture and Sport I think it's on point for me to go to the arts for inspiration. So as Shakespeare wrote and so many have said on stages around our world, "There is something rotten in the state of Denmark." Now, if you analyze this quote, Shakespeare is referencing the state, the political situation of Denmark and its leaders.

Here in Saskatchewan we are doing the work of state right here as we enter into debate analyzing the plans laid out in a budget that is supposed to chart the course forward for our province. The political landscape is one of a tired and out-of-touch government that for 17 years has been led by the Saskatchewan Party, an unholy coalition of defected Liberals and PCs [Progressive Conservative] of Shakespearean proportions. Deeper analysis of Shakespeare's quote and the use of the word "rotten" reveal he is referencing a corroding, decaying, and unhealthy condition of Denmark at the time.

Mr. Speaker, "unhealthy condition" seems to be a fitting analysis for Saskatchewan under this Saskatchewan Party. They talk a big game. They talk about growth and prosperity but the reality, Mr. Speaker, is far bleaker for so many in our province. Saskatchewan is languishing at the bottom of almost every economic and social metric, thanks to the abject failure of this government.

In Saskatchewan our health care system is in crisis, our education system is strained to the point of breaking, and our social fabric is tearing at the seams. It's abundantly clear that the Sask Party has lost the plot. They are clinging to tired rhetoric and empty promises in a desperate bid to cling to power. Their feeble attempts to deflect blame onto the NDP of yesteryear only serve to highlight their shortcomings and failures.

And so I'd like to invite the members opposite to join me in a little thing I like to call living in the here and now. Let's paint a picture of Saskatchewan after 17 years of Sask Party rule. Let's look a little deeper at what's rotten in the state of Saskatchewan under this Sask Party government. It's not a great picture, Mr. Speaker.

So the record of the Sask Party in 2024, one where our province has fallen last or second-last on so many social and economic metrics. After 17 years, Saskatchewan is at the back of the pack no matter what these government members will tell you.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to preface this all by saying that I love this province. I love Saskatchewan. Every single day, we as an opposition show up here because we love this province.

And the members opposite are laughing. They're laughing, Mr. Speaker. They are laughing at this statement. We love this province and we know its potential. We want to see the lives of its residents improve . . . Still laughing, Mr. Speaker, still heckling about our love for Saskatchewan. I was not elected in this position to watch my province fall to the back of the pack or be second last in the country. You know, I'd have to think that the polling numbers that these members are seeing might be having them running a little scared, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: — They're triggered.

Mr. Teed: — It's a trigger warning over here.

But when the government has failed so miserably on so many fronts and pushed us so far to the back of the pack on so many metrics, it only serves to light the fire of wanting change more than ever before in this province. Because, Mr. Speaker, after 17 years under this Sask Party government, our health care system is in crisis.

[22:00]

People can't find a family doctor. One in six are without a family doctor. Health care graduates are leaving at record rates, higher than ever before. There's been an exodus of nurses and physicians from rural Saskatchewan since this Premier took office — 21 per cent of nurses, Mr. Speaker, and 14 family doctors have exodused out of this province. They've left.

Because of their failure to invest in health care, women are being sent out of province on 16-hour road trips for basic mammogram services. Our surgical wait times . . . Yeah, they sigh. It's the truth. Our surgical wait times, no matter how high the record number of surgeries we can put through this province, are the last in the country. People languish on a hip- and knee-surgery list in Saskatchewan longer than any province in the country. Our constituents . . . My constituent laid on the kitchen floor waiting for an ambulance, not even sure if one would ever come.

After 17 years, the Saskatchewan Party government thinks that they are experts. They have become insular and they have failed to listen to local voices in the health care system. The state of our health care system after 17 years falls solely on the Sask Party government that created this mess, and no amount of election budget dollars can convince the people of Saskatchewan that they will be the ones to fix it.

Mr. Speaker, on social metrics, after 17 years of this Sask Party government, more and more families are resorting to the food bank than ever before. Saskatchewan has the highest food bank use by children in the country. Mr. Speaker, members opposite are blaming food bank use on the carbon tax.

We have the highest rates of HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] in the country. We see 20 cases per 100,000 in Saskatchewan. That's twice the next province. It's five times the national average, Mr. Speaker. That should cause us pause. That should cause this cabinet pause.

We have the highest . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh, we have the highest rates of intimate partner violence, domestic violence in the country, but the member opposite said I should just read *Harry Potter* to the room. Well, I could read *Harry Potter*; it would be almost the same as their budget at this point, you know.

An Hon. Member: — Work of fiction.

Mr. Teed: — Work of fiction. Magic. We can just wave a wand and all the problems in Saskatchewan will disappear under this Sask Party government. Well it's been 17 years and this is their record, so I mean, I guess, should we be renewing the lease? If these were your economic managers, you'd be firing them at this point. It's time for the people of Saskatchewan to make a choice.

Mr. Speaker, we have the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the country, yet we have cancelled, we've removed sex ed from our curriculums. Bill 137, Mr. Speaker, has removed sex ed providers. It has also banned children from being who they are in the classroom. We continue to underserve the most vulnerable in our communities with some of the lowest rates of social support and disability in the country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Sask Party's impact on education the last 17 years has also been shameful. We have teachers striking on the steps of the legislature because this government won't get back to the table and sign a deal. They have failed families and students in Saskatchewan by digging in their heels and have shamefully, shamefully villainized the federation representing our province's hard-working teachers on the floor of this legislature. It's shameful, Mr. Speaker, shameful the way they act.

And even with this record election-year budget allocation, our per-student funding will actually get worse, Mr. Speaker. We will slip from eighth in the country per-student funding to 10th in the country for per-student funding — last in the country, Mr. Speaker, on per-student funding. We will be last in the country when it comes to per-student funding, another last-in-the-country metric for Saskatchewan under this Saskatchewan Party government.

And the lasts or second-lasts don't even stop there, Mr. Speaker. On the economy, Mr. Speaker, the government's 17-year record has been one of being the worst economic managers in the country. Our GDP growth after six years under this Premier: second last in the country. Six years under this Premier, we have the worst job creation records in the country. We have the lowest wage growth in the country, the lowest minimum wage in the country — dead last on minimum wage, Mr. Speaker.

We are seeing fewer and fewer housing start-ups during a housing and rental crisis, Mr. Speaker. And small businesses, they're closing at alarming rates — even more so in rural Saskatchewan. And the most telling indicator of the state of Sask Party Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan has projected a loss of 950 million in corporate taxes next year as companies and workers suffer under the poor economic record of this Sask Party government. Under this Sask Party government, Saskatchewan is dead last. Shameful, Mr. Speaker.

If last in the country, Mr. Speaker, on so many social and economic metrics weren't enough, we have some of the worst

rates of financial instability in the country as we live through a generational cost-of-living crisis. The number one issue facing Saskatchewan people? Knock doors in any corner of this province and you will talk to people who can't afford their basic necessities. More than 50 per cent of Saskatchewan residents polled say they feel worse off, more worse off now than one year ago. These are some of the worst numbers in the country. Saskatchewan has the worst rate of mortgage arrears in the country, Mr. Speaker.

Nowhere in this budget does this budget miss the mark more than on the complete lack of cost-of-living relief for Saskatchewan residents. During a generational cost-of-living crisis, when inflation continues to be the highest it's been in decades and more people are living paycheque to paycheque, this government has chosen to bring forward zero new policies or programs to address cost of living. I'm going to say that again, Mr. Speaker, for those in the back. Zero new policies or programs to address the cost-of-living crisis, the number one crisis facing Saskatchewan people. No new ideas, no new dollars, nothing.

We've been clear and propositional in this area, Mr. Speaker. Members opposite always like to say they have a . . . Do we have a plan? We've been clear. Utility rates frozen to provide budget stability for families and small businesses. Those 32 new tax and fee hikes that were raised — the largest PST expansion in this province's history — scrapped. And we would give families a break at the pump by suspending the 15-cent tax on gas and diesel, just like our neighbours to the east, just like our neighbours to the west, and just like a Conservative premier in Ontario is doing in his budget right now. Real solutions to help families navigate the cost-of-living crisis.

Instead, the Sask Party has consistently made life in Saskatchewan more expensive, with years of PST expansion and tax hikes. They are collecting an additional 476.1 million in provincial sales taxes this year alone. Mr. Speaker, that's a 17.5 per cent increase in PST received by this government over last year. Instead of providing solutions, we see cost of living ignored in the budget '24-25.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as the official opposition critic for Parks, Culture and Sport, I have to also say that I am deeply disappointed in the stagnant year-over-year funding to the Sask Arts Board. As I've said on this floor, I've met with many arts organizations across Saskatchewan that were calling on this government to offer support for this industry in crisis. While these organizations are thankful they didn't see direct cuts to their allocation, by maintaining stagnant year-over-year allotments that do not meet cost-of-living increases, this funding allocation basically amounts to cuts. Organizations will continue to do more with less as the cost of everything skyrockets.

Mr. Speaker, the effects of the pandemic have left our performing arts organizations in Saskatchewan in crisis. Audiences have not returned like they once did. With the expansion of the PST on arts and culture — everything arts and culture, from Roughrider tickets to museum memberships to theatre tickets — organizations have either had to pass those costs on to their cash-strapped patrons or they've had to eat those extra costs in an already fragile environment.

Inflationary pressures mean that absolutely everything involved

in the performing arts is costing more, from building sets to hiring actors. Organizations need stable operational funding now more than ever. Mr. Speaker, the arts give us so much. It's time to give back to the arts.

And from an economic standpoint, investment in the arts creates huge economic spinoff for the communities, large and small, across our great province. It was calculated that an investment made . . . that from investments made to the Sask Arts Board, arts organizations generated 74 million in economic output within Saskatchewan. This means that for every \$1 invested, the arts generated \$13.50 in economic output. I've said it on this floor before. That's a pretty good return of investment to me.

SK Arts-funded orgs supported 850 FTEs [full-time equivalent]. For every \$100,000 invested by the government in SK Arts, 15 full-time equivalents were created. And now more than ever, with the recent 32 new tax and fee hikes brought onto arts and culture, the arts contribute even more to the public purse than ever before, all to the detriment of those organizations.

Mr. Speaker, arts organizations and the official opposition have been calling on the government to scrap those 32 tax and fee hikes. Arts organizations, at the very least, have asked for even a portion of those dollars to be returned to an industry in crisis. Mr. Speaker, when arts organizations like the Regina Symphony Orchestra close, they will be closed for good. They will not come back. These are industries in crisis.

And what are the first questions that are asked by CEOs [chief executive officer] moving to Saskatchewan? Where does the professor who is looking at taking up a posting at one of our universities ask? They say, where can I go to the theatre? Where can I send my kids to art camp? The arts provide quality of life well above their significant economic impact.

As the Sask Arts Alliance put in their budget release:

A status quo budget for a sector in crisis is simply not good enough. Funding to SK Arts is flatlined and well below historical levels, approximately 383,000 less than a decade ago.

Budget '24-25 misses the mark for a sector in crisis.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if being last in the country or having struggling industries unsupported by their government wasn't enough for the people of Saskatchewan, what should concern residents the most of this province is the total lack of innovation in this year's budget. There are no new ideas to solve the big problems facing families in our province. Nothing new for families. Nothing new for health care. Nothing new for education.

We need new policies and programs that will address these crises. We need to start listening to the local voices who work in these fields every single day. That Sask Party government can firehose money in every direction in an election year to make it look like they care, but they have missed the mark if there is no new innovation to back this up.

Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party government can promise balanced budgets in election years, but we know if re-elected it will be

deficit after deficit. If re-elected all those dollars sent to education and health care will be slashed, just like we saw in 2016. How do we know this? Mr. Speaker, it's their record, their 17-year record.

[22:15]

They have no new ideas. They are tired, they are out of touch, and they don't care. And if there are no ideas to be had, Mr. Speaker, it's time for change.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear to me that this party that broke our hospitals and brought our health care system to its knees won't be the one to fix it, no matter how many election-year budgets they can post. The party that has crippled our education system won't be the ones to save it. That the party that has overseen some of the worst social and economic metrics in the country won't be the ones to reverse those trend lines.

Mr. Speaker, if this Sask Party government can't think outside the box, can't innovate to find solutions to the problems, Saskatchewan New Democrats are ready to take up that challenge as we always have.

Lastly I will leave you with this thought. We cannot have a strong economy when so many people are left behind and are left out of the best our province has to offer. We cannot have a strong economy when so many people are leaving, when they can't find quality health care, or when our education system is so strained.

It was Sask New Democrats who built the social fabric of our province and set Saskatchewan up for so much success. It will be Sask New Democrats who will fix this province after 17 years of neglect and cuts by the Sask Party government. It's time for change, and this Sask NDP official opposition, under our leader, the member from Regina Lakeview, are ready to deliver that change.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I will not be voting in favour of this budget. Instead I will be supporting the motion by the member from Regina Rosemont, seconded by the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre. Thank you so much.

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my honour and pleasure to be standing on my feet here to present, to be a part of the debate on budget 2024.

I want to thank my family, especially my wife, Shamim Mahnoor Burki, for her support. Without her support I would not be able to achieve success. I'm very proud of her. Most of the time she takes care of our children, pick up and drop off from schools, libraries, doctor's appointment. And thank you to all my daughters for their support at each and every step with me and with my wife.

I do understand that, as an MLA, our life is very busy and we all have less time to spend with our families. On the other hand it is a pride and blessing for all of us in this Chamber that we are focused and committed to the best of our ability for the well-being of our communities. I am very lucky that my wife and kids

understand the nature of this work, and I'm very proud of their support and care.

Mr. Speaker, as the MLA from Regina Coronation Park, I recognize my constituency assistant, Bre Litzenberger, who has done a great job providing services to our constituents. Bre is a very committed, hard-working, energetic, and rolling-up-the-sleeves-attitude kind of person who is always willing to help people who desperately need help.

Thank you to all ministers and their offices and staff for co-operation and support in addressing their issues.

I would also recognize my colleague the member from Walsh Acres's CA, Erin, and all of her co-operation, communication, and thoughtful support in our shared office.

Mr. Speaker, I would also say thanks to our Regina Coronation Park executive: Alayne Dubord, our president; Kelly Hardy, our vice-president; Khalid Awan, our treasurer; Cheryl Stecyk, our secretary; and all our executive, Billal Malik, Darin Milo, Jason Hammond, Saadia Burki, Bre Litzenberger, Corrina Ward, and Randy Ward. Thank you for all the time they're spending over here for developing of our community of our constituency.

And a thank you to our leader for her leadership, valuing and listening to various communities and organizations province-wide. People trust her for her caring attitude, for being their voice and hope. Thank you all my colleagues for their guidance and support, especially the member from Rosemont who helped me all the time in this new role. He's a great fan of hunting and ice hockey. I might be getting a hunting licence very soon, but it is very hard for me to play ice hockey because I don't want to break my legs at this age, and waiting lists are long enough already.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very lucky that I have been serving my constituency and surrounding area as a driver educator since 2009 to 2023. Most families in the constituency I know very well before I took on this role of MLA. Thank you for all their support, advice, co-operation at each and every step.

Mr. Speaker, our constituency is one of the most diverse and densely populated constituencies. We have five high schools — Thom Collegiate school, O'Neill High School, Regina Huda School, Harvest City Christian Academy, and the francophone school Laval. I am very proud to be connecting with all those schools from time to time.

Mr. Speaker, during the by-election at many doorsteps, the number one concern of the constituents was affordability, not a pronoun policy. Right after the by-election, the Premier's response to the media was that we heard the message of the people loud and clear, then immediately respond . . . of this government was to bring the pronoun policy and using the notwithstanding clause to distract people from the cuts in education and classroom class complexity crisis in our school.

They totally ignored the most important issue of affordability. Mr. Speaker, most of the people living in Regina Coronation Park, working-class families, with the current high rate of inflation, skyrocketed grocery prices, power rates, and utility bills, they are living paycheque to paycheque. Mr. Speaker, people are looking for a second job to put food on the table for

their children. Most of the families can't afford to keep their children in sports or extracurricular activities as the prices of everything is increased.

Mr. Speaker, seniors are going through a very hard time of their life. They are wondering whether to pay for their medication or for food. Our seniors should not be in such a miserable situation as they are now. They must have a life of respect and dignity. They spent all their energy to build their province, which we call our home. It's heartbreaking.

The recent increase to the groceries has put a significant strain on the food bank, but unfortunately, no relief for the people in this budget. Due to the high interest rate, it is nearly impossible for young people to become a homeowner. We have subsidized houses sitting empty while the homeless crisis is worsened, and yet no relief for the people in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier is increasing the debt by 3 billion and still not delivering a dime of cost-of-living relief to working families. No relief to the Sask Party fuel tax for families struggling, rising costs. The Premier is making life even more expensive by collecting an extra half-billion in the PST this year alone.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of people have concerns about the long waiting time at emergency departments in our hospitals. A lot of people are not able to find a family physician. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all witnessed our colleague from Saskatoon Centre, last year in the fall session, fell on the front of the stairs of the Legislative Assembly and could not get an ambulance immediately. People are without hope and taking patients to the hospital's emergency in their own vehicle, which is not safe and it is not acceptable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one family told me that they were waiting for a hip replacement surgery, but because of the long waiting list they decided to go to Türkiye where the operation took place immediately. This speaks volumes on the current state of our province's health care system. Mr. Speaker, one other family were waiting for MRI [magnetic resonance imaging] for their loved one but were told that they had to be waiting at least for six months. They went back home to their own country and they did over there, the MRI, next day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a constituent also told me that the knee replacement in Alberta is much faster. However by receiving treatment in Alberta, Saskatchewan doctors will be not providing a patient with follow-up care. Instead they tell patients to return to Alberta for the following care. This does not seem right to send patients to another province. We need to maintain our patients and our doctors here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to prioritize our Saskatchewan residents in professional education. We should be training Saskatchewan people for health care jobs, I think specifically for rural people and Indigenous people, people who are going to stay in the communities where they live. The more professionals we have locally, the more our province will be self-sufficient in the workforce, which is truly a long-term solution.

The current state of things is that women are waiting for too long to get their mammogram, MRI, biopsy they need. Some women are being booked for a mammogram a year away. It is very

frustrating and disappointing. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate seeing plans for a new breast health care centre being built to support women in our province instead of sending people to Calgary.

But this has meant too much trouble and heartache for too many. Mr. Speaker, it is time to please listen to the health care workers, doctors, nurses, first-aiders and paramedics, lab technicians, and aide care to handle all those concerns in the way that the people of this province deserve. Mr. Speaker, the party that broke our health care system cannot be trusted to fix it. People have been suffering, waiting for surgeries, waiting for mammograms, struggling to find a family doctor. The people of Saskatchewan deserve real results, not empty promises.

Mr. Speaker, our beloved seniors who have spent their lives building this province to what it is today deserve respect and honour. Last year in my constituency, the 60-bedroom Lutheran care home was stated to be closed. The SHA were planning to relocate seniors into care homes without consulting the seniors, staff, and their families.

As we talked to the seniors at their care home, they told us that, we cannot move from this place; this is our home. Some of them were very close relatives who want to stay together, and most of them were friends and they didn't want to be apart from each other. Thank you to all seniors, staff, and families that they stayed rock solid, and eventually the SHA took their decision back. Mr. Speaker, all those seniors who have paid taxes all their lives and raised their children and built these communities deserve much better treatment.

Mr. Speaker, we all know the importance of . . .

The Deputy Chair of Committees: — It is now 10:30 p.m., and this House stay adjourned until tomorrow 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:30.]

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Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

Hon. Lori Carr
Minister of Highways

Hon. Jeremy Cockrill
Minister of Education

Hon. Dustin Duncan
Minister of Crown Investments Corporation
Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission
Minister Responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Government Insurance
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Power Corporation
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