



FOURTH SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

of the

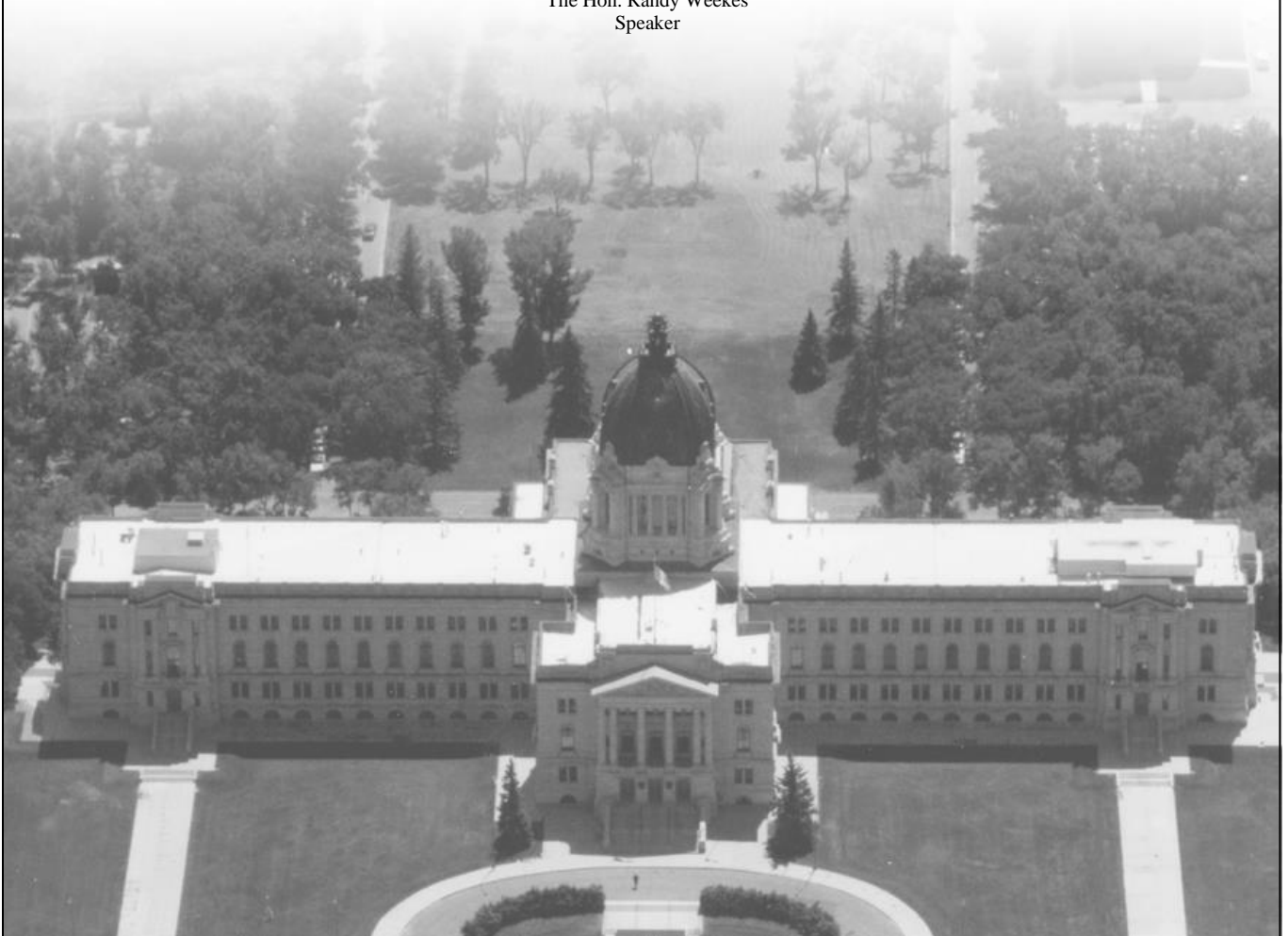
**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

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**DEBATES  
AND  
PROCEEDINGS**

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(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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<b>Harpauer, Hon. Donna</b> — Humboldt-Watrous (SP)	<b>Teed, Nathaniel</b> — Saskatoon Meewasin (NDP)
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<b>Lambert, Lisa</b> — Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood (SP)	<b>Young, Colleen</b> — Lloydminster (SP)
<b>Lawrence, Greg</b> — Moose Jaw Wakamow (Ind.)	

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**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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## CONTENTS

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

#### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Duncan .....	5269
Clarke .....	5269
Harrison, J. ....	5269
Sarauer .....	5269
Ross, L. ....	5270
Burki .....	5270

#### PRESENTING PETITIONS

Goudy .....	5270
Love .....	5270
Teed .....	5270
Sarauer .....	5271

#### STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Language Education Programs to Support Indigenous Success Lemaigre .....	5271
Saskatchewan Youth Curlers Compete at Nationals Clarke .....	5271
Student Loan Forgiveness Program Expanded for Nursing Students Ross, A. ....	5272
Recognizing Mobile Crisis Services and Retiring Executive Director Conway .....	5272
Government Increases Funding for Saskatchewan Parks Steele .....	5272
Saskatchewan's Population Continues to Grow Buckingham .....	5272
Government and Opposition Positions on Carbon Tax Jenson .....	5273

#### QUESTION PERIOD

Cost of Living and Carbon Tax Beck .....	5273
Moe .....	5273
Government's Economic Record and Population Growth Beck .....	5273
Moe .....	5273
Harrison, J. ....	5274
Opposition Requests for Budget Information Conway .....	5274
Harpauer .....	5274
Emergency Hotel Stays Paid by Social Services Conway .....	5275
Makowsky .....	5275
Funding for Education Love .....	5275
Cockrill .....	5276
Population Growth and Government Support for Immigrants Burki .....	5277
Harrison, J. ....	5277
Overdose Deaths and Treatment for Addictions Bowes .....	5277
McLeod, T. ....	5277

#### INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 156 — <i>The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2024</i> Harpauer .....	5278
Bill No. 157 — <i>The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2024</i> Harpauer .....	5278
Bill No. 158 — <i>The Saskatchewan Commercial Innovation Incentive (Patent Box) Amendment Act, 2024</i> Harrison, J. ....	5278

#### ORDERS OF THE DAY

##### SPECIAL ORDER

##### ADJOURNED DEBATES

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

Burki .....	5278
-------------	------

<b>Bowes</b> .....	5279
<b>Grewal</b> .....	5281
<b>Harrison, D.</b> .....	5283
<b>Carr</b> .....	5285
<b>Ritchie</b> .....	5288
<b>Makowsky</b> .....	5290
<b>Ottenbreit</b> .....	5293
<b>Cockrill</b> .....	5295

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

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

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the members of the Legislative Assembly, I'm honoured as Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission to welcome 20 public service employees who are seated in your gallery this afternoon.

They're here to take part in the parliamentary program for the public service. They've had a tour of the legislature; in fact, I think I ran into them a couple of times already today. They'll have briefings presented by various officials from the building, as well as an opportunity to observe question period. I know I'll be meeting with them; I believe a member opposite will be as well.

And these participants are employees from the ministries of Agriculture, Finance, Government Relations, Immigration and Career Training, SaskBuilds and Procurement, Trade and Export Development, and the Legislative Assembly Service.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask all members to welcome these public servants to their legislature. And I would also, on behalf of the government, thank them for the work that they do each and every day in serving the people of Saskatchewan. And with that I would ask all members to help me welcome them to their Assembly.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

**Mr. Clarke:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the minister and welcome these fine public employees to their Legislative Assembly today. Thank you for the work that you do for this province every single day. It matters; it's important. And the people of the province are indebted to what you do. So thank you for that.

I look forward to meeting with you later this afternoon and answering any questions you have about the life as a member of the opposition. And hopefully your questions aren't too hard, but I'm ready. I'm ready.

So I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming these participants of this program to their Legislative Assembly.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Trade and Export Development.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to acknowledge, welcome, congratulate a long-time friend, a colleague, a stalwart, and a mentor to many in this building over the past 17 years. After

nearly 40 years of working in government, Elaine Peake is going to be retiring on Tuesday, April 2nd.

Elaine has lived most of her life in Regina, Mr. Speaker. She started here, like some of us, in 2007. And in her tenure here, many of us have had the pleasure to work with Elaine as she has served a number of ministers, including the previous member for Kindersley, previous member for Martensville, the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy, the member for Saskatoon Willowgrove, the member for Estevan, member for Rosetown, and most recently, the member for Meadow Lake.

Elaine's time here has been spent over many ministries, Mr. Speaker, such as Energy and Resources, Central Services, SaskBuilds and Procurement, and not that I have any bias, Mr. Speaker, but I know her favourite, Trade and Export Development and Immigration and Career Training.

And among the one thing that has followed Elaine to all of those ministries has been her famous red mug, Mr. Speaker. And as much as Elaine has become a staple in this building, so has her mother, and staff often come to check in on Mom, who will be 94 in December, Mr. Speaker. And the treats that her mother sends in regularly are going to be greatly missed.

Elaine looks forward to spending time with her mother and is looking forward to spending her time travelling in her retirement, Mr. Speaker. With deep sincerity, thank you, Elaine, for your service to Saskatchewan, to this Assembly, to this legislature, to the people of this province. And we wish you the best in your retirement.

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

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to join with the minister in thanking Elaine for her service here. I can see her, sort of way over on the side there. Thank you so much for all you have done for the province of Saskatchewan in the work that you have done here in government. I hope you have, on behalf of the official opposition, a wonderful, fun-filled, but also restive retirement full of adventure and family.

Just again as we have said with the other public servants that are here in the gallery today, the life of a public servant is truly a calling, and we, as citizens of the province, cannot do enough to say thank you for your work and for your service. So on behalf of the opposition, we just join with the government in their thanks to you and once again ask all members to join me in welcoming Elaine to her Assembly.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

**Mr. Clarke:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to introduce Team Simpson here, Saskatchewan's under-18 provincial curling champions of 2023. I'm going to have more to say about them in a member's statement, but I do want to give them a shout-out to start.

In the skip position we have Shawna Simpson — give us a wave, Shawna. And her mom, Gaylene Simpson, today joins us.

Gaylene was the coach. We have Makena Bailey who played second and her dad, Scott. We have then Lauren Speidel here. We're missing Katelyn, her sister who plays lead. Lauren plays third position. And then of course Carla, their mom, is here as well.

I had the opportunity to chat with Team Simpson just before we came into the Chamber today. It was a really inspiring conversation. These young women talked about, you know, working for two years together as a team with the goal of getting to nationals, to winning provincials, and then talking about getting to play with their best friends on their team.

So again I'll have more to say in my member's statement, but I'd ask all members of this Legislative Assembly to join me in welcoming Team Simpson and their supporting parents here to their Legislative Assembly.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the member opposite and welcome this lovely team to their Legislative Assembly. We just finished watching some absolutely incredible curling from Team Canada, and Team Canada just doesn't happen overnight. It's teams like this, teams like Team Simpson, that in fact build up over the years to be successful and will one day represent Canada. So congratulations on your team building, the work you do, and just, I wish you all the best in your future. Thank you very much for attending today.

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

**Mr. Burki:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, we have two incredible guests over here in your gallery, John and George. I can't pronounce their last name in Greek and they will be very mad at me if I mispronounce. But they're incredible people over here, community leaders, supporters, very active in communities. Recently they have done a fundraising event for Regina hospitals that was An Evening in Greece. That's amazing. And we love them. You are welcome over here to your Legislative Building.

And I will ask all members of this Legislative Assembly to join me welcoming them to their Legislative Assembly.

### PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

**Mr. Goudy:** — We, the undersigned residents of the province of Saskatchewan wish to bring to your attention the following: whereas the Trudeau Liberal-NDP [New Democratic Party] coalition carbon tax is one of the main causes of affordability issues and inflation in the nation of Canada; that the federal Liberal-NDP government was politically motivated in issuing a carve-out for home heating oil; and that the Government of Saskatchewan's decision to not collect or remit the carbon tax on home heating in Saskatchewan has led to a drop in inflation; further that despite the discussion to not charge the carbon tax on home heating, Saskatchewan families continue to pay that tax out of pocket at the pumps, grocery stores, and more.

Therefore:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: to call upon the Government of Canada to immediately suspend the carbon tax across the nation of Canada and acknowledge its significant impact on affordability and inflation in Canada.

The below undersigned are residents of Yorkton. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do so submit.

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

**Mr. Love:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise again and present a petition to the Legislative Assembly calling for adequate funding for education. Now, Mr. Speaker, the folks who signed this petition know that we've seen in this province a decade of falling per-student funding. We used to be first in the country when it came to providing these supports for our students, but after this year's budget we may in fact be in dead last in per-student funding.

So far during this labour dispute, Mr. Speaker, it's been teachers and parents leading the way, raising the alarm at the state of Saskatchewan classrooms. But yesterday it was students. Hundreds of them gathered on Taylor Street outside the office of the member from Saskatoon Southeast raising the alarm on what they see every day in their classrooms, speaking about class sizes approaching or exceeding 40, talking about their fellow students who come to school and don't get the supports that they need to succeed.

I'll read the prayer, Mr. Speaker:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on the Government of Saskatchewan to provide adequate, sustainable, and predictable operating funds for our 27 public and separate school divisions to ensure schools, teachers, and other caring professionals are able to meet the needs of every student in Saskatchewan.

Today's petition is signed by residents of Beaver Creek, Saskatoon, and Moose Jaw. I do so present.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

**Mr. Teed:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to be on my feet to present our petition calling on the government to address the cost-of-living crisis. Mr. Speaker, the number one issue facing Saskatchewan residents today is the cost-of-living crisis. If you knock doors in any corner of our province, you'll meet residents struggling to meet their basic needs. Worse yet, the '24-25 budget has come and gone without a single new policy or funding allocation to offer relief for Saskatchewan families.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has some of the highest rates of financial instability in the country. Over 50 per cent of residents polled feel more worse off now than they did one year ago. And more and more residents are living paycheck to paycheck as

the cost of everything skyrockets. Mr. Speaker, the time to act on cost of living is now, and the undersigned demand action from their government.

I'll read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on the Government of Saskatchewan to meaningfully address the affordability crisis in Saskatchewan.

The undersigned residents reside in Saskatoon. I do so submit.

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

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise once again today to present a petition calling on the government to improve labour laws in Saskatchewan.

Those who have signed this petition wish to bring to our attention the following: that after the October 1st increase, Saskatchewan's minimum wage continues to be the lowest minimum wage in Canada. In addition, Mr. Speaker, the official opposition has twice introduced paid sick leave legislation since the onset of the pandemic. And paid sick leave legislation, paid sick leave in general, has been proven to save employers money while making workplaces healthier and safer for all workers.

Mr. Speaker, 71 per cent of workers in Canada have experienced workplace violence and/or harassment, and much more needs to be done to ensure that workplaces in Saskatchewan are harassment free.

I'd like to read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on the Government of Saskatchewan to improve conditions for Saskatchewan workers by passing legislation to increase the minimum wage, guarantee paid sick leave, limit nondisclosure agreements which could silence survivors of workplace harassment, and require employers to track and report incidents of violence and harassment in the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, those provisions are all included in our private member's bill, Bill 613, the fairer workplaces, better jobs Act. Mr. Speaker, we do hope that the minister looks at that bill closely and passes all of it into legislation this session; if not, takes parts of it that are very reasonable and passes them expeditiously.

Mr. Speaker, the individuals who have signed this petition today come from Regina. I do so present.

[13:45]

#### STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

#### Language Education Programs to Support Indigenous Success

**Mr. Lemaigre:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to be a fluent speaker of my people's language, Denesuline, but because the policies that were aimed at annihilating the use of traditional languages, many Indigenous people do not speak their language in Saskatchewan. That's why our government is providing over \$108,000 to the First Nations University of Canada to deliver the Dene and Cree teacher education program in Hatchet Lake Denesuline Nation and Waterhen Lake First Nation.

Mr. Speaker, this funding is part of a partnership that allows students in the Dene teacher education program and the Cree teacher education program to study in their home communities. These programs enable students to learn at home in their first language.

Mr. Speaker, when these students graduate they will receive a Bachelor of Indigenous Education and will be able to teach K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] education in an Indigenous language or with a focus on Indigenous practices. The Indigenous teacher education programs are helping build a future where more Indigenous youth can learn in their own language, helping to retain their cultural and linguistic heritage.

Mr. Speaker, we are proud to support Indigenous students and their communities through this important partnership. We are not only creating post-secondary opportunities for students in the North, but we are supporting the success of Indigenous children and their family. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

#### Saskatchewan Youth Curlers Compete at Nationals

**Mr. Clarke:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to recognize Team Simpson, Saskatchewan's under-18 provincial curling champs. Team Sask is made up of Lauren and Katelyn Speidel, along with teammates Shawna Simpson — the three of them all hail from Winston Knoll Collegiate in Regina — and Makena Bailey from Greenall High School. Together they won the provincial championship on December 30th, 2023, and secured a spot at nationals in Ottawa. Gaylene Simpson helped mentor and guide the team as their coach.

In Ottawa, Team Saskatchewan played with determination and class, and they certainly demonstrated that they can play on the national level. Lauren and Katelyn reached out to my office to request some Saskatchewan pins and flags to take with them to Ottawa, and it was a pleasure to fulfill that request.

Curling is a popular sport in Saskatchewan and an important recreational activity to continue to nurture. It provides all generations an opportunity to exercise, to socialize, to build community and, of course, have fun.

Saskatchewan is proud of Team Simpson's accomplishments at provincials and at nationals, and these four young women are role models for other young curlers in this province. I certainly look forward to seeing what their future holds on the ice. I ask all

members of this Legislative Assembly to congratulate Team Simpson for their achievements this season and for their dedication to sportsmanship, skill development, and personal growth through active lifestyle choices. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### **Student Loan Forgiveness Program Expanded for Nursing Students**

**Ms. A. Ross:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall I met with Emily, a former U of S [University of Saskatchewan] nursing student recently hired at the Victoria Hospital in Prince Albert. She asked me why Prince Albert wasn't part of the student loan forgiveness program.

I took that question to the Minister of Advanced Education, and I am pleased to say that, on January 24th, our government announced the expanded Saskatchewan loan forgiveness for nurses and nurse practitioners program to include the five communities of Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, Swift Current, Yorkton, and The Battlefords. This initiative supports Saskatchewan's health human resources action plan, the most ambitious plan in the nation, by providing incentives to work in areas with high recruitment needs.

This initiative also helps nursing students stay in or close to home, like the fourth-year nursing student in Prince Albert who has two children under the age of six. She said when she heard about this program it brought tears to her eyes because of how it would help her family.

We are opening doors for our citizens to pursue a career in nursing, we are easing the financial burden, and we are serving the needs of the residents through our recruitment and retention efforts.

Mr. Speaker, thank you to all those nursing students and nurse practitioner students who choose to stay and work here in Saskatchewan. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

### **Recognizing Mobile Crisis Services and Retiring Executive Director**

**Ms. Conway:** — Today I'd like to shine a light on the incredible work being done at Regina's Mobile Crisis. Mobile Crisis offers a variety of integrated and comprehensive emergency supports and health crisis interventions. They also run the Farm Stress and the problem gambling helplines.

Mobile Crisis is on the cusp of a few changes. They're set to move into a new space at the YWCA centre for women and families in about six months. They're also saying goodbye to their executive director, Janet Thorson, after nearly 40 years with the organization, most of which was spent on the front line beginning as a practicum student.

Jan has led them through some high points and some challenging times as well. I'm grateful to have sat down with the outgoing

and incoming leadership last week at the request of one of my practicum students.

Over Jan's tenure the need has increased. At one point, 50 calls over a 24-hour span was considered an exhausting day. These days they routinely break 100 calls a day. Like so many CBO [community-based organization] non-profits, they do tough work with not nearly enough supports. There's more work and it's gotten more complex. Funding hasn't kept up with the need and they haven't been able to hire additional staff in 20 years.

That said, under Jan's steady hand, the team has never wavered in their deep commitment to offering valuable, often life-saving services to vulnerable communities. I know the team at Mobile Crisis will continue to do good work under their new leadership of Dana Wilkins. I'd ask all members to join me in thanking Jan for four decades of exemplary public service defined by compassion and dedication.

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

### **Government Increases Funding for Saskatchewan Parks**

**Mr. Steele:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For generations Saskatchewan people have gathered at the regional parks with families, friends, and neighbours. We want this tradition to continue. Mr. Speaker, our government has doubled the funding for Saskatchewan Regional Parks Association. A total investment of 1.2 million to support our parks have . . . increase of 615,000. This money will be used to help pay for improvements and maintenance.

And we're also investing 15 million into our capital and infrastructure improvements for our provincial parks. My own constituency will be getting a new playground at Cypress Hills park that will be open this summer. Thanks to the 13.3 million dedicated to capital funding, several other facilities will be also built in other parks.

Mr. Speaker, this funding will be well used by people of Saskatchewan as they set out to experience world-class parks this spring and the summer. Reservations for seasonal campsites are opening April 1st and April 2nd for nightly and group sites, with more parks opening every day until April 9th.

Our government is committed to maintaining our parks well into the future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Westview.

### **Saskatchewan's Population Continues to Grow**

**Mr. Buckingham:** — Mr. Speaker, today we received historic notice about Saskatchewan's growing population. According to StatsCan 2023 Q4 [fourth quarter] data, Saskatchewan's population reached the new all-time high of 1,225,493. From January 1st, 2023 to January 1st, 2024, the population increased by 30,624, the largest population increase in a single calendar year since 1914.

This incredible growth is further proof that our province remains one of the most attractive jurisdictions not just in this nation but



globally. It is no secret that growth is something we didn't have under the previous NDP government. In fact, under the NDP, Saskatchewan's population declined by 22,000 people. Only luggage sales increased under the NDP as young people were forced to flee the province for greener pastures elsewhere.

Thankfully that is no longer the case. Since our government was elected, Saskatchewan's population has increased by 225,000 people, with more increases daily. And as we continue to grow we are meeting the challenges of that growth with a budget that makes record investments into classrooms, care, and communities.

Our government will continue working to ensure our growing province is building a strong economy and a bright future for all residents.

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

### Government and Opposition Positions on Carbon Tax

**Mr. Jenson:** — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This morning our Premier appeared before the federal Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, but not before Liberal and NDP committee members attempted to block the Premier from standing up for Saskatchewan.

The NDP member from Quebec called Canadians laggards in reducing emissions. Did the Leader of the Opposition call her federal leader and stand up for Saskatchewan people? Did she remind her federal brothers and sisters that Saskatchewan is part of Canada and we are not laggards? Did she remind them that Saskatchewan has the cleanest and most ethically produced oil and gas and agriculture products on earth? Did she tell them that if you want a clean environment, you'd buy from Saskatchewan?

Did she stand up for Saskatchewan or does she stand with her own MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] who support a carbon tax when they say things like, the need for a carbon tax is "not up for debate any longer"; "why shouldn't consumers actually pay for the price of carbon for producing food"; and "spoiler: I'm in favour of a carbon tax"?

When will the Leader of the Opposition and members of that party finally find their feet and stand with the Premier, denounce the federal Trudeau-Singh carbon tax coalition, and stand up for Saskatchewan people?

### QUESTION PERIOD

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

### Cost of Living and Carbon Tax

**Ms. Beck:** — Now, Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Premier had a lot to say about what other people should be doing to help with the cost of living. But it's this Premier, Mr. Speaker, who failed to provide any cost-of-living relief in his own budget, and this at a time when 57 per cent of Saskatchewan people are struggling just to pay their groceries.

Mr. Speaker, does the Premier not understand? Doesn't he get

that he has no leg to stand on when it comes to calling out the feds on the lack of cost-of-living relief when he won't lift a finger to do anything here at home?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Premier.

**Hon. Mr. Moe:** — Mr. Speaker, yeah, we were on a committee with the federal parliament this morning discussing the inflationary concerns — that, I think, in fairness we share in this province and across Canada — of the carbon tax. In particular when it comes to a carbon tax that traditionally, outside of Quebec, has been a harmful tax and a harmful policy, but is at least been somewhat fairly applied across the nation. That all changed when the federal coalition government made a decision to remove the carbon tax off home heating fuel, largely impacting those families in Atlantic Canada.

What we had asked and continue to ask the federal government to do is to treat all Canadian families fairly, Mr. Speaker. Remove the carbon tax off of all home heating fuels, all types, which would then allow all families to not pay that harmful tax, at least on the fuel that we utilize in heating our homes.

So what we have done in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, what we've done in Saskatchewan is acted where we can act. And we've removed that carbon tax from home heating fuel that we control — SaskEnergy, Mr. Speaker — so off our natural gas customers as well as any of those, largely in northern Saskatchewan, that might use electric heat, Mr. Speaker.

The savings is about \$400 a year for a family, Mr. Speaker. We feel that's significant. It's more than the \$128 that is being received by an Ontario family, Mr. Speaker, in the reduction of their gas tax, Mr. Speaker. It's significant cost savings, in addition, in addition to the \$2 billion that is present in this budget each and every year.

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

### Government's Economic Record and Population Growth

**Ms. Beck:** — Mr. Speaker, this tired and out-of-touch government is failing to deliver when it comes to the cost of living. And they're failing to deliver when it comes to creating good jobs and growing the economy. Last Friday the year-end numbers for businesses gained or lost throughout the country were released, and in 2023 Saskatchewan lost 372 businesses.

Does the Premier think that it's the sign of a strong economy that we've lost more than 370 businesses last year alone?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Premier.

**Hon. Mr. Moe:** — Mr. Speaker, where we are year over year in this province is we're up over 18,000 jobs, Mr. Speaker. That's over 1,000 jobs each and every month, about 1,500 jobs each and every month here in the province. That's the last year, Mr. Speaker, and we're creating jobs at a quicker pace than we ever have in our history.

Also, Mr. Speaker, more people are moving here, more people are staying here. We're long past the days of where Saskatchewan's fastest growing city was Calgary, Mr. Speaker,

long past those days. Mr. Speaker, 30,000 people chose to move here, stay here just last year. Mr. Speaker, our population is up 30,000 people. We're growing at a rate faster than we have ever grown in the history of our province, Mr. Speaker.

That's because we are a place that is attracting investment into the mining industry, into the ag value-added industry, Mr. Speaker, into even the oil industry in this day and age, which we discussed this morning on the federal committee call that I was on, Mr. Speaker.

[14:00]

So Saskatchewan is really working against . . . working, Mr. Speaker. Despite some of the decisions that the federal government has made, Saskatchewan is having successes in attracting investment, creating jobs, and attracting people to live here in our communities right across the province, Mr. Speaker. That's why you saw a record investment this year in classrooms, care, and communities to ensure that those folks in our communities, Mr. Speaker, those families that are moving to our communities have the supports that they expect.

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

**Ms. Beck:** — It's a lot of words not to answer the question, Mr. Speaker. And no matter how you slice it, these numbers speak for themselves. It's not good news, Mr. Speaker. Regina lost 78 businesses, Saskatoon lost 131, and 163 were lost elsewhere. When this Premier came to office, there were 24,891 active businesses in this province. And since then we've lost 230.

How does the Premier defend the fact that there are 230 fewer businesses in this province than there were when he came to office?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Trade and Export Development.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — There they go again, Mr. Speaker. Every chance they get they try and talk down the economy, they attack our job creators, they attack our businesses.

Today we had some historic news, Mr. Speaker, something that they won't even acknowledge: the fact that our population is growing at a rate that it has never grown at before, Mr. Speaker. Over the course of the last year 30,000 new people are calling Saskatchewan home. That is something that we are proud of, Mr. Speaker. It's something that the public of this province are proud of, and it's something that the NDP are now heckling about from across the floor.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that's says everything you know about the New Democrats, a party that lost population during their 16 years in power, Mr. Speaker. We created 18,000 jobs over the course of the last year. The future in this province is incredibly bright and the 30,000 new Saskatchewan residents know that is the case.

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

**Ms. Beck:** — Mr. Speaker, the minister wants a gold star, but the fact that there 230 fewer businesses with more people, Mr. Speaker, explains why unemployment is forecast to go up in their

own budget. And these are the facts.

And the facts show that this Premier has the worst economic record in the country. During this Premier's time in office, we've seen less than 1 per cent, less than 1 per cent economic growth, and the budget is forecast to be only 1 per cent in the coming years. The Premier also, Mr. Speaker, has the worst job creation record in the country. Now Saskatchewan people, they don't care about spin. They want results.

How does the Premier defend the record on the economy, a record of losing hundreds of businesses?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Trade and Export Development.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — What utter nonsense from the NDP, Mr. Speaker, a party that takes every opportunity to be negative, a party that has no plan for the future, Mr. Speaker. And we know that because when they were in government, they lost people. They destroyed jobs. They sent young people fleeing to Calgary.

Today alone, Mr. Speaker, we have this incredible news. We have added, in the last year alone, a city the size of Moose Jaw — in the last year alone, Mr. Speaker. Over the course of the last 16 years, we have added a city the size of Regina, Mr. Speaker.

They chased everybody out of the province. They nationalized businesses. They had people and companies leaving in droves, Mr. Speaker.

On this side of the House we know — and the 30,000 people who've moved to Saskatchewan know — our future is incredibly bright. And they've chosen to make their home right here in Saskatchewan.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

### Opposition Requests for Budget Information

**Ms. Conway:** — Mr. Speaker, this tired and out-of-touch government is quickly earning the reputation of one that does everything they possibly can to conceal real facts from the people of Saskatchewan. We see that through the way that this government responds to FOIs [freedom of information], how they answer questions in this Assembly. And we saw that last week with the release of the budget.

It's a time-honoured, long-standing practice that opposition members get to attend a technical briefing with government officials in the public service to ask questions about the details of the budget. We asked a number of detailed questions, and undertakings were made to provide answers before the end of the day.

It's been a week and there's still been no answer. When will we finally get answers that we were promised?

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

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Indeed, as the member opposite said, it's been a long-standing tradition that the members in opposition

get a technical briefing with the officials. The morning of the budget they can ask their questions. I do not attend that, Mr. Speaker, so therefore I am not aware of what questions they have asked.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

**Ms. Conway:** — Mr. Speaker, getting answers to basic questions out of this tired and out-of-touch government, it's like pulling teeth. The information we were asking was all very straightforward. Questions like, what is the forest fire budget? What's the breakdown of school division funding? What are the potential costs of the teachers' contracts?

These are basic questions that have clear answers, and the Sask Party should be able to provide them in a timely way. How does the Finance minister justify one week of radio silence on these basic requests for information about her budget?

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

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the member opposite would be very pleased to know that all of those questions can be asked specific to the ministries they apply to and the minister who is responsible for those ministries in budget estimates. And they get to request how many hours they want in each of those budgets, 75 hours in total.

So the member opposite would be very pleased to know that they will get the answers to the questions on that format.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

#### Emergency Hotel Stays Paid by Social Services

**Ms. Conway:** — Mr. Speaker, it's increasingly clear that this tired and out-of-touch government is increasingly allergic to transparency. We see that in the way that they fail to answer basic questions about their budget, and we saw that yesterday in response to my questions about the Thriftlodge motel.

I asked, again and again, how much money did that Minister of Social Services pay out to the Thriftlodge motel, the same motel that the Sask Party member for Regina Northeast is an investor in.

When will we finally get an answer on the payments made in each of the last five years? It's not that hard, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

**Hon. Mr. Makowsky:** — Mr. Speaker, we've been over this many times. I've provided an extensive amount of information to that member. She subsequently asked for more information and, as I indicated yesterday, that will be provided in due course, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of hotel expenditures, Mr. Speaker, in general the amount of hotels, particularly here in Regina, has decreased that are willing to work with — especially on the income assistance side — with challenges with individuals that might be staying

and might need services, Mr. Speaker. And so, therefore as a result there'll be more expenditures in less amount of hotels, Mr. Speaker.

What the member opposite didn't do yesterday as well is answer my question, and when asked about it in the media had absolutely no answer, Mr. Speaker. What is the amount that we should not use to pay for an individual who's in a very difficult situation, Mr. Speaker? The member talked about Mobile Crisis in her member's statement . . .

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

**Ms. Conway:** — Another minister auditioning for opposition. We love to see it, Mr. Speaker.

He says he'll provide it in due course. And indeed, Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the rotunda the minister said finally that he would provide some answers on that Thriftlodge motel, and that the answers would come before the end of session. The end of session, Mr. Speaker.

This is a government that has enough staff to lurk outside our office and watch who comes and goes from question period prep. They have thousands of staff at their disposal in the civil service, and their commitment is to provide five numbers before the May long weekend. What a joke.

Mr. Speaker, there's no time like the present. When will we get these details? When will the minister just rip off the band-aid and come clean with how much he's paid to his officemate's Thriftlodge motel in each of the last five years?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

**Hon. Mr. Makowsky:** — Mr. Speaker, it's interesting, her member statement. I thought it was a great one today about Mobile Crisis and how important they are to vulnerable people in our province. They very often refer people to hotels. So, Mr. Speaker, would that member tell Mobile Crisis that there's an amount that we can't help a vulnerable person in our province, Mr. Speaker? So if she wants to not spend on that, she should say what the alternative should be, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to continue to work on this, Mr. Speaker, first of all, to help vulnerable people. Number two, on the policy side, we're going to increase . . . We're going to look at the amount of hotels we use, hopefully get a better rate going forward, Mr. Speaker. But at the end of the day, it's got to be about vulnerable people in our province, which that member advocates for.

She asked for hotels from the ministry and Mobile Crisis, Mr. Speaker. So again, I ask here: what is the number that she would not house someone for the night in a vulnerable situation?

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

#### Funding for Education

**Mr. Love:** — Mr. Speaker, this tired and out-of-touch government deserves an F when it comes to basic transparency.

And they deserve an F-minus when it comes to their record on education. Now the minister loves to talk about record funding in the budget. We've heard that same rhetoric from the minister before him and the minister before him and the minister before him.

But when you factor in inflation, Mr. Speaker, this budget provides 436 million less in supports than the first budget brought under this Premier's watch back in 2018. How can the Sask Party put classrooms into the slogan for their budget when they've done such a terrible job in providing the supports our students need?

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

**Hon. Mr. Cockrill:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's good to see both the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation] and the NDP this week using letter grades. It's nice to see that they're endorsing a return to letter grades and report cards that can be understood by parents and students alike, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, let me just say this, as I've outlined many times on this floor before. This province — the taxpayers of this province — invest more into K to 12 education per capita than any other province in the country, Mr. Speaker. That means more of their tax dollars, my tax dollars, your tax dollars go into our K to 12 education system every single year, Mr. Speaker, to support our students, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, you know what, it's pretty unbelievable that the members opposite deride this education budget when there's nine new schools, two major renovations, in addition to the capital projects that we already have going on, Mr. Speaker. That shows that our government is going to continue investing in education as we have for the last 15 years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Love:** — And we now have the Minister of Education deriding his own ministry's policies on the floor of the Assembly, and it certainly tracks for a tired and out-of-touch government that has taken hundreds of millions worth of purchasing power away from local divisions. That's a fact.

It's also a fact that we've added thousands more students during that time, hundreds of whom were out protesting this government in front of the office of the member from Saskatoon Southeast. And they're protesting because they see classroom complexity has grown unmanageable under this government. There are more students today than six years ago, more of them who need additional supports. But this minister isn't giving divisions the tools they need to support students. This budget will likely result in more school division cuts.

Will the minister accept responsibility for those cuts, or will he do what the Sask Party always does and blame school boards for those cuts?

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

**Hon. Mr. Cockrill:** — We're not sure who to believe over there, Mr. Speaker. In one breath, people are leaving our province. In

another breath, people are coming to this province and filling our classrooms and filling our hospitals, which is why we need to invest more into education and health care, which this government accomplishes, Mr. Speaker. The largest ever increase to school operating funding, Mr. Speaker, to the 27 school divisions all around the province, Mr. Speaker.

For that member to stand up and say there's going to be cuts, Mr. Speaker, school divisions are still working on their budget for the next school year and are appreciative of the increase that was offered in this year's budget. We look forward to working with those school divisions to ensure that supports reach the classroom, Mr. Speaker.

And again, I would point to the classroom supports funding, Mr. Speaker, and the multi-year funding agreement that we've signed with the 27 school divisions, providing predictability at a base floor of funding for the next four years. Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue working with those school divisions and ensuring that that supports funding reaches our students each and every single day.

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

**Mr. Love:** — Mr. Speaker, we're here talking about this government's failed record in education. Their funding hasn't kept pace with inflation. And it's clear as day in the staffing documents that we had to FOI just to get our hands on. They show that 15,000 new students have been added to our system since 2016, but only one new classroom teacher during that time period. It doesn't make any sense, and it's why teachers and parents and now students are done with this minister and this tired and out-of-touch government.

[14:15]

How does the Minister of Education defend hiring only one classroom teacher for 15,000 new students?

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

**Hon. Mr. Cockrill:** — Mr. Speaker, I don't know why the member opposite would have to FOI the education staffing profile. It's available publicly on Saskatchewan.ca and the Ministry of Education website, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day it is the 27 school divisions that hire the teachers and support staff and professionals that serve our students in communities all around the province, Mr. Speaker. That member would know well, having worked in the education system, that staffing numbers do fluctuate.

But, Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing is more students, more supports, and more teachers in our classrooms all across the province in addition to the additional investments that we're making in education capital. Mr. Speaker, a record \$216 million being invested into education capital in this next fiscal year alone, building schools, renovating schools, and making sure that we have great facilities and great support staff for our students to learn from.

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

### Population Growth and Government Support for Immigrants

**Mr. Burki:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. New numbers out today show that Saskatchewan population growth, which started under the NDP, continues. It's the great news that thousands of people are moving here from around the world. But when you look at the details, it is clear that this tired and out-of-touch government isn't doing enough to ensure that the newcomers come over here to Saskatchewan . . . [inaudible] . . . to this government and be living over here in a good state.

Only 58 per cent of newcomers who arrived here five years ago are still living here. Does the Sask Party government think it is acceptable more than 40 per cent of newcomers pick up and leave this province within the next five years?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Trade and Export Development.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Well I think everybody has just seen exhibit A, why the NDP have no credibility, Mr. Speaker. The member before is standing up demanding more funding for education, saying the population is growing so quickly, Mr. Speaker, you have to put in tons more money.

The member then stands up, Mr. Speaker, and says everybody's leaving. You guys have to get your stories straight, Mr. Speaker. You can't change question to question. The reality is, which we saw today from Stats Canada which is an organization that doesn't lie, Mr. Speaker, showed that 30,000 new Canadians have made their home here in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, something that we are incredibly proud of, something that everybody in this province should be proud of, not criticizing like the members opposite.

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

**Mr. Burki:** — Mr. Speaker, 42 per cent of newcomers leaving within five years, and that number is getting worse. Saskatchewan has seen the largest decline in immigrant retention of all the provinces during the Premier's time in this government. That is a fact. We should welcome our newcomers to this province, but we need to make sure we provide the support that they need.

Why is the Sask Party government seeing the largest drop in immigration retention out of all the provinces in the country?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Trade and Export Development.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Well you know, again, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing why this is an opposition with no credibility, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that this province is growing and this province is growing at a rate that it has never grown before.

Over the course of the last 16 years, Mr. Speaker, we have added 250,000 new people to our provincial population. That's a

growth rate of 25 per cent, something that we have never seen in the history of this province before, Mr. Speaker. Something that we are proud of, and frankly I think something that everybody in this province is proud of, adding a new city the size of Regina over the course of the time that we have had the opportunity and honour of forming government.

And the reason that we have been able to do that, Mr. Speaker, is because we have created jobs. We have created opportunities. We have worked with our job creators to create those opportunities so newcomers, whether they be from outside of Saskatchewan or outside of Canada, can make their home here, build their lives here, have their families here, and have a wonderful life.

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

### Overdose Deaths and Treatment for Addictions

**Ms. Bowes:** — Mr. Speaker, 476 lives were lost to overdose last year. In Saskatoon alone, 85 families lost a loved one to this crisis. But this overdose crisis isn't only happening in our urban areas, Mr. Speaker. It's also happening, changing the lives of people in rural areas like Yorkton, Wynyard, Stoughton, Preeceville, Nipawin, Punnichy, and the list goes on. Nearly every community has been impacted by this crisis in one way or another.

Will the minister finally admit that his plan isn't working and commit to providing evidence-based supports to save lives today?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

**Hon. Mr. T. McLeod:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And certainly our government is well aware that challenges of addictions aren't only isolated to our large cities. They extend across our province, across the country, and certainly across the world, Mr. Speaker. And that's why, with the 500 addictions treatment spaces that we are adding, we're seeing those added across the province, Mr. Speaker. We've added spaces in Lloydminster. We've added spaces in Regina, North Battleford, Estevan. We've added virtual spaces, Mr. Speaker, that individuals across the province can access. In fact one of the spaces that we added, Mr. Speaker, is in North Battleford at Poundmaker's Lodge.

And I would like to thank the member from Saskatoon Centre for her support on that, Mr. Speaker. Here's a quote that she gave CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] when she said:

This treatment centre is from an Indigenous perspective, and as the critic for First Nations and Métis Relations, it's important for me to show support for programming that is being developed here in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan definitely needs this.

Mr. Speaker, we agree.

**The Speaker:** — I'd just like to caution the members in general about your language. So there's three cases I'm going to cite.

And the first one is the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre said, “When will the minister come clean,” and that suggests the minister is not being honest. Will the member stand and withdraw and apologize.

**Ms. Conway:** — Mr. Speaker, I withdraw and apologize.

**The Speaker:** — The second case is by the Minister of Education. He said, “Not sure who to believe” — suggests lying. Will the minister please stand and withdraw and apologize?

**Hon. Mr. Cockrill:** — Withdraw and apologize, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — Third case is by the Minister of Trade and Export Development said, “An organization that doesn’t lie” — inappropriate. Will the minister stand and withdraw and apologize?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Withdraw and apologize.

**The Speaker:** — [Inaudible interjection] . . . Would the minister stand and withdraw and apologize again for what he just said?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Withdraw and apologize.

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### Bill No. 156 — *The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2024*

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

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 156, the tobacco Act amendment Act, 2024 be now introduced and read a first time.

**The Speaker:** — It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 156 be introduced and read a first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried.

**Deputy Clerk:** — First reading of this bill.

**The Speaker:** — When shall the bill be read a second time? I recognize the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Next sitting of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

### Bill No. 157 — *The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2024*

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

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 157, *The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2024* be now introduced and read a first time.

**The Speaker:** — It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 157 be now introduced and read a first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried.

**Deputy Clerk:** — First reading of this bill.

**The Speaker:** — When shall the bill be read a second time? I recognize the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Next sitting of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — Next sitting.

### Bill No. 158 — *The Saskatchewan Commercial Innovation Incentive (Patent Box) Amendment Act, 2024*

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Trade and Export Development.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — I move that Bill No. 158, *The Saskatchewan Commercial Innovation Incentive (Patent Box) Amendment Act, 2024* be now introduced and read a first time.

**The Speaker:** — It has been moved by the Minister of Trade and Export Development that Bill No. 158 be introduced and read a first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried.

**Deputy Clerk:** — First reading of this bill.

**The Speaker:** — When shall the bill be read a second time? I recognize the minister.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Next sitting.

**The Speaker:** — Next sitting.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### SPECIAL ORDER

### ADJOURNED DEBATES

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

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

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

**Mr. Burki:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was the debater yesterday and we finished at 10:30, for the Deputy Speaker was not letting me go on till 11 o’clock and that was heartbreaking. I

guess he was fasting and that's why. He was really more hungry or might be thirsty, but same is on my side too. So we'll start from the point where I stopped.

**The Speaker:** — I'd just like to remind the member not to bring the Chair into debate.

**Mr. Burki:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know the importance of education. Spending money on education is not a cost; it is the best investment ever. And every single person in this Chamber, every member wants to see that their child be growing, their child should be successful. And the launching pad for each and every child in this world is education.

If you look to education in our province compared with other provinces, we can see a lot of deficiency in that. We have to work honestly to make sure we can sincerely work for the future of our children, to make sure our children be successful and thrive.

Most concerns that I heard from the teachers are not regarding anything else, but the only thing that I got, that is the cuts in education, overcrowded classrooms, shortage of teacher assistants, language pathologists, psychologists, ESL [English as a second language] teachers for newcomers. These are all the main concerns, genuine concerns of the teachers.

I would humbly request this Government of Saskatchewan to fully fund our educational institutions, to come to the bargaining table, and sign a fair contract with the teachers so that our students are successful lifelong.

Mr. Speaker, on the budget day we saw approximately 4,000 to 600 teachers with their supporters protesting outside the Legislative Building to call on government to get a fair deal done for our kids. Our kids deserve the best learning conditions to set them up for success.

Mr. Speaker, our kids have spent years in classrooms that have been overcrowded and underfunded. The people of Saskatchewan deserve real results, not empty promises the government has no intention of keeping on the eve of an election.

Mr. Speaker, I heard on the doorstep from a lot of residents that they can't find a job in Saskatchewan. An hon. minister was saying we have a lot of jobs. I don't know why people were telling me that.

Our province has the lowest minimum wage in the country. And the young generation is moving out of province. Young people are the backbone of our communities and our economy and we must retain them in our province by investing in local businesses. And we heard that local businesses are closing. It is heartbreaking. And we have to minimize outsourcing jobs.

Mr. Speaker, we know there's increasing crime and addictions, mental health in our province. Nearly 2,000 people have lost their lives to overdose since this Premier took office — 476 lives lost to overdose in 2023 alone. Seventy-four people have died due to overdose just in January and February of this year alone. Every year we have record overdose in the province, yet this government chooses to make . . . away support that keep our people alive long enough to seek treatment.

[14:30]

Mr. Speaker, we know about the increasing crime in our province. Saskatchewan had the highest rate of violence-related crime, the second-highest homicide rate, the highest rate of gender-related homicide of women and girls among the provinces. This government is not willing to look to the underlying causes of crime; safe, affordable housing; access to support and services in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, we know the contribution of the small businesses in our communities and in our economy. Small businesses in Saskatchewan are still recovering after the pandemic, not to mention skyrocketing cost and budgetary increases from food to fuel, rent, and utilities. Due to these rising costs, many small businesses have been forced to close their doors. The recent SINP [Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program] pause and the slow processing of hard-to-fill skills programs . . . The small-business owners are looking for an option to move to another province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting in favour of the amendment that was moved by my colleague from Rosemont and seconded by the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre. Thank you.

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

**Ms. Bowes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to entering into the debate this afternoon in response to the government's budget. I rise today to express my disappointment with the budget, which I will not be supporting for the following reasons.

Mr. Speaker, after 17 long years of this Sask Party government, nothing seems to be working right in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, despite the government hype of record investments, this budget is really nothing more than a status quo, lacklustre budget. This budget does not even come close to repairing the damage that 17 years of neglecting public services has had on our quality of life in Saskatchewan.

Despite record corporate profits and record public debt, this budget will in no way provide the people of Saskatchewan with a record quality of life. Last year Canadian corporations continued to earn record corporate profits, Mr. Speaker. Yet despite these record corporate profits, the Sask Party government has refused to adjust resource royalty rates so that Saskatchewan people will be able to reap the benefits of their natural resources.

Despite record corporate profits, this government continues to rely on regressive property taxes to fund education. And despite record corporate profits, this government has greedily continued to rake in their expanded provincial sales tax on Saskatchewan residents during an ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Under Scott Moe's management, Saskatchewan is projected to lose nearly a billion dollars in corporate taxes next year, Mr. Speaker.

After 17 years of neglecting our public health care system, the damage this government has caused is stark. Hospitals across our province are routinely facing service disruptions as a result of this government's inability to hire and retain staff. Their four-point plan isn't working, Mr. Speaker. Patients continue to face

unacceptable wait times for tests and procedures, our hospitals are bursting at the seams, and it is impossible for many Saskatchewan people to find a family doctor, Mr. Speaker.

This budget offers nothing more than the status quo, with budget increases that won't even cover the cost of inflation in many cases. The increases to health spending in this budget have been hyped as a record investment in health care, Mr. Speaker. Yet during this time of record corporate profits, this government refuses to find the resources to fix what they broke, to meaningfully invest in our public health care system and to meaningfully improve the quality of life for Saskatchewan people.

After 17 long years of this government neglecting our public schools, student outcomes are declining, Mr. Speaker. Over the past 17 years, students have lost teachers, educational assistants, and specialists. Their classroom sizes have ballooned, all while student needs have become increasingly complicated and demanding on teachers. Underfunded classrooms certainly won't be fixed by this status quo budget, Mr. Speaker.

While the Sask Party government has drastically increased funding for private schools, they have simultaneously put the squeeze on public classrooms. In a time of record corporate profits, if now is not the time to fix underfunded classrooms, then when is, Mr. Speaker? This government has hyped their budget as a record funding increase for schools. Well it sure won't be creating record outcomes for students, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that.

After 17 years of this Sask Party government, more and more people in Saskatchewan simply cannot find affordable housing. Rents continue to go up and up, while new builds are completely unaffordable for many. As Saskatchewan residents are forced to dedicate more and more of their income to housing costs, they are in turn experiencing a sharp decline in their quality of life.

The government's hype with this budget is to fund the upkeep of their existing government housing stock which they have allowed to fall into a state of utter disrepair. Mr. Speaker, it is a shame that in a time of record corporate profits this government refuses to find the resources to truly fix their housing mess and increase the quality of life for Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, this status quo budget does little to address the child care shortage that is facing so many families in Saskatchewan. Child care centres have reported that the grants to create new spaces on offer from this government do not cover their costs, so they simply are not expanding. Child care workers are badly underpaid, making it difficult for child care centres to recruit and retain staff.

Providing child care spaces for those who need them would greatly improve the quality of life for parents in Saskatchewan, but this government simply isn't getting the job done. With record corporate profits, this government should be doing so much more to help parents obtain quality child care for their children, Mr. Speaker.

This budget also creates record tuition fees for university students. Seventeen years ago we had a tuition freeze in this province, Mr. Speaker. And guess what? The Sask Party government scrapped it. This government has provided

universities with budget increases that amount to less, which has caused tuition rates to soar year after year in Saskatchewan.

On top of soaring tuition, students are experiencing huge increases to their cost of living while this government maintains the lowest poverty minimum wages in the country. Students should not be forced to leave post-secondary with mountains of debt, Mr. Speaker. This budget should be addressing the sky-high cost of obtaining a post-secondary education instead of forcing students into record levels of crushing debt.

After 17 years of this government, Mr. Speaker, finding affordable recreational opportunities has become harder and harder. The cost of children's sports, arts, and recreational activities continues to rise, yet this budget sticks with the status quo, offering boutique tax credits only to those who can afford to front the costs for their children's activities. This government should be directing recreational funds towards lowering upfront costs for families. With record corporate profits, what is stopping this government from increasing access to affordable recreational opportunities for Saskatchewan children?

Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise that after 17 long years, this Sask Party government has presented us with yet another deficit budget. They continue to set record levels of provincial government debt year after year. Like clockwork, once again this budget naively projects that next year, next year the budget will be balanced, Mr. Speaker. Fat chance of that happening.

This year's budget marks a full decade of Sask Party deficits, with the Premier increasing the debt by a record-breaking \$3 billion next year, bringing Saskatchewan's total debt to a staggering 34.8 billion. After 17 years of telling us that next year the budget will be balanced, people in Saskatchewan might just make it happen, Mr. Speaker, by voting in a different government to write the next budget.

Mr. Speaker, while this budget creates a record debt level for Saskatchewan, it also fails to deal with the impending cost of the climate crisis. Failing to address the climate crisis now will only cause the cost of addressing it to go up in the future. The failure of this government to act is creating an off-the-books debt that will only have to be addressed in the future.

Investing now in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, investing in remediation and adaptation measures for our changing climate, and investing in measures to reduce pollution now will save us money down the road. If we invest now, we can spread the costs over a longer timeline and decrease the work that will be needed in future, Mr. Speaker. But we won't be seeing that from this government. We can be certain of that.

So let's recap, Mr. Speaker. After 17 long, painful years of this Sask Party government, our health care system and our education system are worse off. After 17 years of this Sask Party government, housing is less affordable, and our minimum wage went from the second-highest in Canada to the lowest — bottom of the barrel. After 17 long, long years of this government, it is harder and harder for people in Saskatchewan to get by. After 17 years, the status quo simply isn't working for Saskatchewan people. After record debt, record tuition fees, and record hype, this budget won't be moving the needle to improve the quality of life for Saskatchewan residents.



Mr. Speaker, with record corporate profits there is no good reason why this government cannot find the resources to make adequate investments to improve our health care system, to improve our education system, to make housing more affordable, to lower tuition fees, to provide better access to recreational opportunities, and to create more child care spaces. The fact of the matter is this Sask Party government is choosing to protect the record profits of their corporate donors instead of investing in public services that will increase the quality of life for all Saskatchewan residents, Mr. Speaker.

So for all of these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting the budget motion, and I will instead be supporting the amendment moved by the member for Regina Rosemont and seconded by the member for Regina Elphinstone-Centre. With that I will conclude my remarks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** — I would like to remind members not to use the person's name. Please use their ministry title or their constituency. I recognize the member from Regina Northeast.

**Mr. Grewal:** — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I want to begin today by thanking the people of Regina Northeast for their ongoing support. Mr. Speaker, when I first came to this country approximately 41 years ago, I started out by doing all sorts of odd jobs. I still remember those busy days struggling with long hours trying to make ends meet. Somehow I still found time to volunteer in my community. It has always been my passion right from my childhood, Mr. Speaker. I am incredibly honoured and privileged to represent Regina Northeast in this legislature. My dedication to public service has always been rooted in a sincere desire to contribute to the betterment of the community.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my family, especially my wife, Seema, and my children — Simran, Indu, TJ, Jag, and Railin — for always taking the time away from their own priorities to help me with my campaigns. Whether it was a nomination, by-election, election, they were always there when I needed them. My heartfelt thank you to my friends and volunteers who have taken significant roles in my campaigns.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to share that I have a new grandchild. Born on March 8th, this new addition to my family is my fourth grandchild, Otto Arjay Grewal. Mila, Niam, and Henry are so happy to have a new cousin and a little brother.

I am very grateful to my CA [constituency assistant], Cheryl, for always helping my constituents, listening to their concerns, and providing support when needed. I would also like to extend a thank you to the caucus office for their support.

Mr. Speaker, last week our government tabled budget 2024, which is focused on classrooms, care, and communities. It is a budget that meets the needs of our Saskatchewan residents today while ensuring a better future for tomorrow.

Many of the residents in my constituency are struggling financially. I'm so pleased that this budget delivers more than 2 billion in affordability measures. Mr. Speaker, tax exemptions provide Saskatchewan people with over 830 million in annual income tax savings, allowing our province to remain among the lowest personal taxes in the country. Our residents will also continue to benefit from reduced education property tax and

programs and services designed to make life more affordable. This includes the active families benefit, children's drug plan, and programs to help fund insulin pumps and glucose monitors.

[14:45]

Mr. Speaker, to make life more affordable for low-income working families, a 17 million investment will deliver the first full year of the Saskatchewan employment incentive program. Our government's decision to stop collecting the carbon tax on natural gas and electric residential home heating will also provide additional relief, as it is expected to save homeowners an average of \$400 a year. To help homeowners with affordability and improve housing availability, additional supports are available, including the renewed PST [provincial sales tax] rebate on new home construction program and the recently introduced Saskatchewan secondary suite incentive grant program.

Mr. Speaker, with a record budget of 1.5 billion for the Ministry of Social Services, an increase of over 112 million compared to last year, this budget supports individuals, families, and communities. The implementation of the provincial approach to homelessness will also continue, supported by an increase of almost 17 million. This includes a 7.2 million increase to support ongoing emergency shelter operations across the province and a 9.5 million capital investment to continue developing supportive housing spaces in Regina and Saskatoon.

The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation will invest 83.4 million to repair and maintain provincially owned housing units, including an additional 9.6 million in provincial funding to prevent and reduce vacancies and respond to the increasing demand for social housing. Monthly income assistance benefits will increase by 3 per cent for Saskatchewan assured income for disability and Saskatchewan income support clients. For seniors, the personal care home benefit monthly income threshold will increase by 100 to 2,500 to help make living in a licensed care home more affordable.

Mr. Speaker, this budget includes the largest ever increase in school operating funding, the largest ever increase in health funding, the largest ever increase in municipal revenue sharing for Saskatchewan communities. And this is possible only because of our strong economy. This shows our dedication to spending where it is needed but in a sustainable way. Strong public services, including health care, have always been foundational to our province.

Mr. Speaker, people are coming to Saskatchewan in record numbers. People from across Canada and the world choose to call Saskatchewan home because of our vast opportunities and reasonable cost of living. They bring their skills as doctors, nurses, teachers, and people working to build homes, hospitals, and schools. Saskatchewan's population is projected to reach a million and a quarter this year. Mr. Speaker, with this vast increase in population, we need to ensure everyone has access to the services we all count on.

For many people, quality health care is at the top of their mind. New pressures are on our health care system including a worldwide labour shortage, a retiring health care workforce, and a growing population. We are taking steps to confront these challenges and strengthen health care in our province.

A record investment of 7.6 billion was allocated to the Saskatchewan health care system. This provides the Saskatchewan Health Authority with nearly 4.7 billion, including an operating increase of 248.3 million compared to last year. Over 71 million focuses on increasing the capacity of the acute care system. This includes a 30 million funding increase to support the Saskatoon and Regina capacity pressures action plans. Mr. Speaker, these plans include measures to enhance acute care, community-based care, and emergency department capacity to support our needs for hospital-based care.

The Regina urgent care centre will receive an almost 10 million increase to support operations. This urgent care centre will be available 24-7 for non-life-threatening illness, injuries, and mental health issues requiring same-day treatment, and will open this summer. Mr. Speaker, funding is also being directed to reducing the surgical wait-lists, working to achieve a three-month wait time target, years ahead of schedule.

It also includes investments in the health human resources action plan to hire, train, and retain more health care professionals in the province. Additional funding in the budget provides credential recognition supports, including streamlined and accelerated assessments, training and licensure pathways, and settlement programming for internationally trained health care workers.

So seniors can live safely and comfortably in their home communities for as long as possible, the seniors' care initiatives will receive a 43.4 million increase. Mr. Speaker, a record budget of 574 million will be invested into mental health and addiction programs and services, representing more than 7 per cent of health care spending.

Mr. Speaker, last year, November 15th, I lost my very dear brother Nirmal to cancer. He was a very kind and generous man. This was an incredibly challenging journey of saying goodbye to my beloved brother who succumbed to the relentless grip of pancreatic cancer. Mr. Speaker, watching the same guy I teased as a child, played with as a teen, and admired as a man slowly lose his life over the course of nine short weeks is a nightmare I would not wish upon anyone.

I am so pleased that this budget includes investments to deliver timely, exceptional cancer care services for our residents. The Saskatchewan Cancer Agency will receive an increase of over 26 million for a total record budget of almost 250 million to ensure patients can access the most effective and cutting-edge treatment options. A 3.5 million increase for breast cancer care and screening includes technology enhancements, new diagnostic imaging equipment, and the establishment of a breast health centre in Regina.

Another area that is very important to my constituents is education. This budget supports students and teachers through a record investment of 3.3 billion for the Ministry of Education, up 8.1 per cent over last year's budget. This is an increase of 247.8 million to support pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students, early learning, child care, and libraries.

Saskatchewan's 27 school divisions will receive 2.2 billion in school operating funding for the '24-25 school year, a record increase of 180 million over last year. This budget is committed

to addressing classroom size and complexity by providing 356.6 million in classroom support. Mr. Speaker, this is an increase of 45.6 million over last year and includes funding for the Teacher Innovation and Support Fund pilot and a specialized support classroom pilot, which aims to improve experiences for both students and teachers.

It includes 793 million in funding for the post-secondary education sector, an increase of 3.7 per cent to enrich the student experience and provide more opportunities for students to train and pursue careers in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, post-secondary students will benefit directly from 46.5 million in financial supports, including a new grant to help reduce financial barriers to completing post-secondary education for low-income students with dependants.

The budget also includes continued support for skills training programs and services for unemployed or underemployed persons, including adult essential skills training, pre-employment programs and services, credentialed skills training programs through post-secondary institutions, and employment for persons with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, this budget spends wisely to continue strengthening health care and education, with record spending on health and education including new and modernized student classroom spaces. To provide high-quality care, meet the needs of a growing province, and ensure our health professionals have appropriate facilities to provide care to the people of Saskatchewan, the '24-25 provincial budget invests a record 516.8 million in health infrastructure such as new hospitals and health care centres. This is an increase of 179.3 million from the previous year and includes almost 22 million to complete construction on the Regina General Hospital parkade and 20 million for Regina's long-term care specialized beds project.

Mr. Speaker, the budget invests 216 million for pre-kindergarten to grade 12 education capital projects, an increase of 41.8 per cent over last year. This includes ongoing funding for 11 projects, three significant renovations currently under way across Saskatchewan, and funding for planning nine new schools and two renovations. Also included is 28.5 million for relocatable classrooms and additional 32 million announced for relocatable classrooms late in '23-24 fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, for cities, towns, villages, and municipalities throughout Saskatchewan, this budget provides a record increase of 42.4 million in municipal revenue sharing. This is an increase of 14.2 per cent from the previous year for a total of 340 million in unconditional support for provincial municipalities.

The budget provides twenty-nine and a half million to support municipalities and industry partners in investing in the provincial transportation system. These investments support economic growth and safety on rural and municipality roads.

Mr. Speaker, there is 719.4 million in this budget for the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. This includes over 228 million to fund RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] operations and 21.6 million for the RCMP's First Nations policing program. It also includes 7 million for the Saskatchewan marshals service in anticipation of beginning operations in 2026.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency will receive funding to renew its current air tanker fleet which will approach the end of its useful life in 2027. The new fleet will support wildfires and assist with other emergencies and public safety needs.

The '24-25 provincial budget continues investment in First Nations and Métis communities throughout Saskatchewan. More than 255 million in targeted funding will be provided for First Nations and Métis people and organizations, an increase of 6.1 million over the previous year. This includes funding to help prevent violence and build safety for Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people, as well as support First Nations and Métis communities in participating in the consultation process.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring a strong economy. This budget illustrates our commitment to many measures. One example is that our province will continue to have Canada's second-lowest small-business tax rate. The tax rate reduction to 1 per cent is being extended until June 30th, 2025 and eligible business income tax threshold tax will remain the highest threshold in Canada at 600,000.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Trade and Export Development will support the economy by expanding Saskatchewan's presence in international markets and attracting investment into the province with a budget of 40.6 million. Expanding into markets outside of Canada is essential to growing the Saskatchewan economy and leads to more jobs and opportunities at home.

Mr. Speaker, this budget includes 53.8 million for the Ministry of Energy and Resources to support the province's growing economy focusing on Saskatchewan's world-class natural resources. It also introduces the clean electricity transition grant and the small modular reactor investment fund. Revenues from the electricity sector will be dedicated to priorities that support the province's clean electricity transition focusing on reliability and affordability.

[15:00]

From across the world, Mr. Speaker, people travel to Saskatchewan to enjoy the province's natural beauty and experience world-class hunting and fishing. To ensure visitors have a great experience, the '24-25 budget provides 15 million for capital and infrastructure improvements at provincial parks in Saskatchewan.

This budget embodies the need to move forward without repeating yesterday's mistakes by striking a balance between the need for fiscal sustainability and growing our province. We make responsible choices to pay down debt, save for the future, and keep our promises simultaneously. Mr. Speaker, budget 2024 proves that we are providing a vision for the future, a future where our children and grandchildren can enjoy the same advantages that we do today.

In conclusion I will say this, Mr. Speaker. We need to remember that all the members in this legislature are just people. As we engage in the cut and thrust of political discourse, let us not forget the family behind these roles, the personal battles that are fought silently, and the toll that public service can take on individuals and their loved ones.

Mr. Speaker, by remembering our collective empathy, we can rebuild a political landscape that fosters a constructive dialogue and a shared commitment to the welfare of our constituents. Baseless accusations and character assassinations are just a waste of time. Spreading disinformation does not help anyone. By working together in a constructive way, we can accomplish so much more. It is my hope that we can focus our energy on the issues that truly matter to the people we serve.

I would like to take this opportunity now to thank all my colleagues for the wonderful years spent together serving the people of this beautiful province. With that, Mr. Speaker, I will support this budget presented by the Minister of Finance and seconded by the member for Saskatoon Willowgrove, and I do not support the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. D. Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to begin by saying that I will be supporting the budget presented by the hon. Finance minister and Deputy Premier, the member from Humboldt-Watrous. Building and presenting budgets takes many hours, days, weeks of hard work for the minister and her officials. To the minister, her officials, and fellow treasury board members, I say thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the residents of Cannington for their support in allowing me the honour to represent them here in the provincial legislature. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would also like to thank my constituency assistants Trisha, April, and Merilyn. They do a fabulous job managing the office, taking calls, and handling constituent concerns and inquiries. I also want to thank the caucus staff for all their support with research and communication, keeping me well informed, and being the central brain trust for all the government MLAs.

As many have already said in this House, we do not serve alone. Family support at home is critical for me to be here, allowing me to serve and represent the great people of Cannington. My wife, Cheryl, and son Thomas are attending our cow herd while I'm away. I know that they're doing a top-notch job, so much so that they are now telling me how we're going to do things. And it's very hard for me to argue when they do all the work.

A few weeks ago at the beef industry conference during one of the coffee breaks, Ryder Lee, general manager of the Canadian Cattle Association, had the quote of the conference in my opinion. It was clearly pointed in my direction. Ryder says, "You just can't have more cows than your wife can feed." And I had to agree. However Cheryl would always feed more cows if there were more hours in the day. Cheryl, I love you and thank you for all you do. Thanks to the rest of my family for their love and support. This means more to me than you can imagine.

I would like to mention that we do have a newer member of the family. Our granddaughter Hallie was born on March 12th — 8 pounds, 12 ounces. Mom and baby are doing very well. This makes number seven grandchild, and the girls are out in front by a four to three count.

I'd also like to give a shout-out to my mom, Eleanor, still living on the home place, keeping an eye out on the cows, feeding her

horses, dogs, and cats. Everyone around knows when you stop for a visit, you cannot leave without getting something to eat. No matter what time of the day, mom will always feed you. Mom, I love you and thank you for being you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank all of my colleagues. You have all made me feel very welcome and encouraged me to be my best. Others have already singled out those not running in the next election, and I must also acknowledge and thank those members as well. I won't tell any stories on them right now. However I want to thank and acknowledge them for their service: the MLAs from Canora-Pelly, Batoche, Yorkton, Kindersley, Regina Northeast, Arm River, Carrot River Valley, Saskatoon Southeast, Indian Head-Milestone, Biggar-Sask Valley, Saskatoon Northwest, Weyburn-Big Muddy, and Humboldt-Watrous. Each of you will hold a special place in my heart and will be forever in my mind. Also to the members opposite who are not seeking re-election, thank you for your service.

I want to give a special thank you to the Deputy Premier — 25 years elected, 17 years in government, and 7 years as Finance minister. That's one heck of a career and a career to be proud of. I've only been here for a few short years, but I have so much admiration and respect for the member from Humboldt-Watrous. Thank you just doesn't seem enough. To all the retiring members, please enjoy your retirement. And for the ones not old enough to retire, enjoy your future endeavours.

**An Hon. Member:** — It's age-related. Come on, Daryl.

**Mr. D. Harrison:** — Yes it is, member from Kindersley. It is age-related. Get to work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget is jam-packed with great news and even better investments in our great province. Investing in classrooms, care, and communities: 9 per cent for education, 10 per cent for health care, and a whopping 14 per cent increase for communities across this great province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know the NDP are doom and gloom and are looking downtrodden, saying there's nothing good in this budget. They appear angry and grumpy. It's like they think they have to do that. Sort of like the little old lady from the old hamburger commercial, "Where's the beef? Where's the beef?" Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can proudly say this budget is chock full of AAA prime Saskatchewan born-and-raised beef — beef raised on our lush Saskatchewan grass, finished on the many bushels of Saskatchewan-grown barley, beef served on a bun made from Saskatchewan-grown wheat, butter and cheese from our world-class dairy farmers, topped off with the best mustard in the world made from the yellow mustard grown right here in Saskatchewan, perhaps even grown near Kipling or Corning.

All these ingredients were made possible due to the hard work of our farmers and ranchers. Our farmers and ranchers use the fuel and fertilizer produced right here in our great province to grow these crops and raise livestock to feed this growing province and literally feed people around the world.

Energy and mining companies building, investing, creating jobs, jobs and wealth right here in Saskatchewan. New investments in value-added ag production: hog slaughtering in Moose Jaw;

canola crushing in Yorkton; oat mills; pulp plants; and many, many more across this great province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, any one of these investments would have been front page news under an NDP government, front page news only because it was very unusual to see any kind of investment.

**A Hon. Member:** — Fiction.

**Mr. D. Harrison:** — Fiction. Thank you. This has changed under our Sask Party. Investment has been welcomed and encouraged. Businesses know Saskatchewan has a strong economy, a growing population, and a stable government. Saskatchewan is a prime destination for their investments. I never want to go back to the dark days of an NDP government again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, record investment in classrooms, care, and communities is only possible due to a strong and growing economy. This 2024-25 budget has record investment without adding new taxes or increasing taxes. A 9 per cent increase for pre-K [pre-kindergarten] to grade 12 classroom education. Our 27 school divisions across the province will receive \$2.2 billion in school operating funding. Record funding for education.

This budget provides 356 million in classroom supports, which is up over 45 million over last year and is a significant commitment to address classroom size and complexity. This includes funding the Teacher Innovation and Support Fund pilot and the specialized support classrooms pilot.

Further to the record operating funding, we are investing and building new classrooms: \$216 million in capital funding for 11 new or consolidated school projects, three major renovations, as well as planning for nine new schools and two major renovations. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have one of those planned pre-K to 12 [pre-kindergarten to grade 12] consolidated schools in my constituency. Residents of Carlyle and the surrounding area are very, very excited and thankful about having a new school in town.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, record investment of \$7.6 billion in the Saskatchewan health care system: \$4.7 billion for the Saskatchewan Health Authority, an increase of 248 million; 574 million for mental health and addictions; 249 million for the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency; \$3.5 million increase for breast cancer care and screening initiatives such as lowering the screening age to 40; \$30 million increase to support Regina and Saskatoon capacity pressures action plan; increased funding for the health human resource action plan to deliver on the commitment to add 250 new or enhanced permanent positions in rural and remote locations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're investing in Saskatchewan. Municipal revenue sharing is a one-of-a-kind, made-in-Saskatchewan solution of stable, reliable funding for municipalities. With this budget we have a 14 per cent increase in revenue sharing, a \$42.4 million increase for a total of over \$340 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our urban municipalities truly appreciate this revenue-sharing model. SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] president, Randy Goulden, says:

Overall, SUMA is very impressed with the budget. The association wants to recognize and thank the government for increased revenue sharing with the cities, towns, villages, resort villages, and northern municipalities that SUMA represents.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, from SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities], the president, Ray Orb, is quoted as saying:

Today's budget includes many priorities that our members have been asking for. Although not perfect, we feel items in this budget go a long way to support our RMs and the people who live in rural Saskatchewan.

[15:15]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this 2024-25 budget, the last budget presented by the member from Humboldt-Watrous, continues to build a stronger Saskatchewan, a budget that has record funding increases for classrooms, care, and communities; a record budget that is only possible due to our strong economy; record spending for education, health, and communities to serve the growing population, the highest population in Saskatchewan's history.

Just announced this morning, 1,225,493 people now call Saskatchewan home. And they're calling Saskatchewan home because of recent investments been announced. Just to name a very few, and I'll start with the big one, BHP starting their mine at Jansen, investing \$18 billion right here in Saskatchewan. A world-renowned company investing in Saskatchewan. Remarkable. Should be headlines for years to come.

Nutrien continues to be a world leader in potash production here in the province. Cameco is a world leader in uranium mining. They've been here for years and they've invested billions of dollars over those years, and they continue well into the future.

Foran Mining starting their McIlvenna Bay copper mine — tremendous investment in our economy right now today for copper production long into the future. Incredible, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Just south of Regina here, Western Potash investing in Saskatchewan. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was at the Saskatchewan Mining Association banquet last night, and I must say they're very optimistic and very thankful that they have a strong, stable government and a strong, stable economy and a growing population to help grow their industry here in this province. We are world leaders in mining, and we aim to get 15 per cent of the Canadian investment into mining here in the province, and we're well on our way.

Turning to value-added ag products, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Louis Dreyfus canola crushing expansion. New pea protein isolation production plant, that's at Yorkton. Cargill just out at the Global Transportation Hub with a canola crush. Richardson, another canola crush at Yorkton. Donald's Fine Foods over at Moose Jaw, a sow slaughtering plant, a much-needed plant, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's very, very important for our ag community to have that kind of plant in our backyard.

And I can go on and on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but all these investments are due to a strong, stable government, a government we never had under the leadership of the NDP. And I never hope

we have that opportunity to live under an NDP government again in this province. I don't want to go back to that. I lived through it and I don't want to do it anymore. That is why I'm here. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could on about that side all, all day.

And the carbon tax debate, I've talked long and hard about that. I know they think it's a good thing. They keep supporting their federal leader, Jagmeet Singh, who continues to support Justin Trudeau, loud and clear. It's going up on April 1st. Our Premier is asking them to please delay, and seven other premiers have asked for the same. And the Premier testified at a federal committee here this morning. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's critical. We know it's driving up the cost of inflation clearly across this country. It's driving up inflation. It's making us less competitive.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Canada is an exporting nation and we export our products around the world. Saskatchewan is the leader in exports in Canada, and we are disadvantaged severely by that NDP-led carbon tax that keeps driving up the cost of production for our growers, producers, manufacturers, miners, oil and energy producers. Each and every year it's going up and they won't do anything about it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are, led by our Premier, testifying in front of a federal committee asking them to halt the increase on April 1st. And there's increases scheduled for many years to come. And it's just going to keep growing our inflation, the cost of food.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are a landlocked province. We rely on the goods we need to come in by trucks, trains, planes, and we also rely on those same industries to get our products to market, to tidewater if you will. There's a cost to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And Saskatchewan people are paying that cost. And we're tired of paying that cost and we need to axe that carbon tax. And they need to lift their hand and demand their federal leader halt, halt that increase. They like to yip from the backbenches there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They like to yip. But it is the biggest single cause of inflation in Saskatchewan. And I won't take it anymore from them.

And that's why I'm here today. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's why I'm supporting the budget presented by the Minister of Finance, seconded by the MLA from Saskatoon Willowgrove. I'm proud, I'm very proud to support it. And I won't be supporting their amendment. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** — I recognize the Deputy House Leader.

**Hon. Ms. Carr:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And it truly is my pleasure to stand in my place today and speak to the budget brought forward by this Saskatchewan Party government, a budget which focuses on classrooms, care, and communities. A budget that I will be supporting. Mr. Speaker, for me, I would like to focus on what this budget means to the constituency of Estevan, the constituency that I am so proud and honoured to be able to represent.

I had the opportunity to host some people from Estevan on budget day. One of the families was Jason LeBlanc, him, his wife Sherrill, and his daughter Gracie. It was actually the first time that Sherrill and Gracie had ever been in the building. We spent a few hours together, and I hope they enjoyed the day as much as I did.

It started out with them getting to the legislature about 11 a.m. We had time to be able to tour around the building. We travelled through the hallways looking at art, talking about the history of this beautiful place, looking at portraits of premiers and former lieutenant governors. After the tour I took them down to our cafeteria where they were able to experience what our kitchen has to offer us on a daily basis.

During lunch Jason asked me, now that you've been here for a while, what is your favourite part of the job and what is your least favourite? I said, hands down my least favourite part is social media. This is one of those things that is in our political world, and it seems to be a necessary evil. For me it's an opportunity to get out our government's message, the facts of what are actually happening — no spin, no leaving out information — just information for my constituents to be able to look at and digest.

But then along with that comes people who feel it necessary to give their full, unfettered opinion, and at times they may say things that they would likely never say to your face. Now I'm all for free speech, but I also have an open-door policy at my constituency office. I've never said no to a constituent or a stakeholder who wants to have a conversation, whether that is better facilitated by a phone call or a face-to-face meeting. That is what my job is. That is what all of our job is: here is to listen to concerns of all people and take them seriously.

Then the favourite part of my job, the answer I gave to Jason was, the ability to serve my community. And that's where I left it. But as I got thinking about that answer after the fact, I should've definitely expanded on what I said. And it is not just the favourite part of my job but is the most satisfying part my job, especially when we have successes in helping people out.

When I talk about serving my community, there is so much involved in doing that. It could be something as small as directing a constituent to a website for some type of application that they've been looking for. And if they don't have the ability to navigate a website, we're more than happy to print information off and have them pick it up or have it delivered to them.

Or it could be directing someone to the quality-of-care coordinator when they're having issues with a flow in the health care system. And at times we may have to elevate these issues to a minister's office for them to take a look into it. For the most part, we are able to resolve the issues that people are having.

Then after lunch it was time for the LeBlanc family to line up, and they were fortunate enough to get a spot on the floor of the House sitting right behind the opposition. When all was said and done, they came back to my office and we had a chance to talk about what they saw. And I asked Gracie specifically, because it was her first time in the House and the first time seeing question period, and I said, what did you think of that? And she said, I did not understand what was going on. She was talking specifically about question period. And I said, well you're probably not the only one.

I took a little bit of time to explain to them what the budget meant for our community. I believe it was a good day for the LeBlanc family. I look forward to hosting them again, maybe on a day that's not quite so busy.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to focus on things that affect my constituency directly. While there are no actual dollars placed in this year's budget for the MRI [magnetic resonance imaging] in Estevan, government has provided commitments to proceed to further work with St. Joseph's Hospital through Emmanuel Health to move forward with their proposal to install an MRI scanner at St. Joseph's Hospital. Once the new MRI scanner is installed, government is also committed to providing the ongoing operational funding required to operate that MRI scanner.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very grateful for the generosity and support that we have received from communities and individuals alike, but a special thank you needs to go out to Elaine Walkom for the \$2 million that she is putting towards this project and for her continued advocacy. She is doing this to give back to the community and region that has given so much to her and her family. She is doing this in the memory of her late husband, Grant. She said it is because of the success that their business had serving southeast Saskatchewan, so she would like to give back in his memory. The generosity of the people and the communities in the Southeast never ceases to amaze me.

This is good news for Estevan and all of southeast Saskatchewan. What it means is people will not have to travel to Regina or Saskatoon to receive MRI services. It means that the wait-list will be reduced. It means that the people of southeast Saskatchewan will have one more set of services to be able to utilize. And as I think about the investment being made, it is only because of a strong economy that all of this is possible. It is because of a strong economy that the Walkoms were able to have a successful business and be able to give back.

As well when it comes specifically to our constituency of Estevan, we have an additional \$2.5 million so the detailed design phase of the new nursing home can be carried out. We will continue to work closely with the committee to ensure the facility meets the needs of our community. This is a prime example of how the Saskatchewan Party government is helping make our communities better.

Mr. Speaker, you will also find another \$1.9 million included for planning and crushing of gravel for Highway 18 west of Estevan. This project would plan to be completed in the summer of 2025. The length is approximately 22 kilometres, and it goes from Estevan to Outram. And once that is completed, Highway 18 right from the Manitoba border all the way to Highway 6 will have been resurfaced.

And then, Mr. Speaker, there is a more holistic investments that not only my constituency but also helps the entire province, one of them being community-based organizations. This budget gives a 3 per cent lift in operating dollars for those groups so they can continue to serve our communities.

As well, the health care budget has been increased by over 10 per cent. And in that increase there is a focus on getting more individuals trained so that we can continue to work on reducing wait times in all sections of health care. There's also a focus on continuing to help those with mental health and addictions issues. So on both of these initiatives we have been making progress, but there is more work to be done. And thanks to a strong economy, that work will continue.

We also have an 8.8 per cent increase for our education system. This has been a big topic of late but, as you can see, funds are being put in place to help address the issues facing education, specifically for class size and composition. I anxiously await for a resolution to the negotiations taking place so life can get back to normal for students and teachers.

Agriculture is also recognized in this budget by the fact that we are funding all business risk management programs. As well, we have an enhanced crop insurance program for intercropping and silage. These are programs that our producers rely on when unexpected things happen.

And municipal revenue sharing is up over 14 per cent from last year. The city of Estevan alone will receive over \$2.5 million. This amount represents approximately 10 per cent of their annual operating budget. Municipal revenue sharing is a formula based on PST dollars that have been collected by the provincial government, a formula that is stable and predictable.

[15:30]

So what this tells us is our economy is growing. I would also note that every city, town, village, and municipality receives this stable and predictable funding.

As well, the Ministry of Energy and Resources is putting in some incentives to encourage more development. Right across the province, and in Estevan, we have oil production taking place. Saskatchewan has a growth goal of increasing oil production by 25 per cent to 600,000 barrels a day. That is why Saskatchewan is introducing a new multilateral well drilling program to grow incremental oil production in the province. In an article by Brian Zinchuk of *Pipeline News*, he says, and I quote:

“Are multilaterals the next big thing in oil? Saskatchewan bets heavy on it with new incentive program.”

This is the largest change in oil royalties in decades, as the government hopes to incentivize activity and production. It's a big shift for government that, for its entire 16 years in office, has said it wasn't touching a thing when it comes to royalties.

Let me put this into perspective. For the several years Bill Boyd was Energy minister, he always gave the same speech, which basically went like this: “The Premier told me to say thank you. Thank you for the jobs, thank you for the taxes, and thank you for the royalties and the investment. And we're not touching a thing when it comes to royalties.”

Usually, whenever someone mentions royalty changes, it's not with the intention of raising them. This is the opposite, providing a royalty incentive, not a holiday, to get more activity and more production going. This, folks, is swinging from the fences.

Mr. Speaker, for anyone who wants to read the entire article, you can go to Pipeline Online. He gives a detailed description, with pictures I might add, of exactly what a multilateral well is. And I'm sure you'll be able to find many other interesting articles on there. So thank you to Brian Zinchuk for continuing to be an advocate for the industries we have here in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly touch on the debt that our province is carrying and would also like to preface it with the fact that, because we do have a growing province, we need to be building more hospitals, more schools, more long-term care facilities. And as everyone is likely aware, these are things that we do not have the ability to pay cash for. So we need to borrow. I akin it to taking out a mortgage on the items that will get amortized over a long period of time but will take a few years to pay off.

Now would I like to say Saskatchewan has no debt, it's all been paid back? You bet I would. For that to happen, it would have to increase taxes by a large amount to be able to facilitate that. I know I'm not on board with that, and when we are talking about affordability, that will not help anyone. But that is likely what an NDP government would do. Of course I'm just guessing, as they have no plan on how they would pay for anything they suggest. But the money has to come from somewhere, Mr. Speaker.

Currently Saskatchewan's projected net debt as a percentage of GDP [gross domestic product] is 14 per cent. Now to put that in perspective, it's second lowest in Canada. The only one lower right now is Alberta. They're at 9.7 per cent. And an interesting fact is that not too many years ago, Alberta had no debt. They were at zero. Now in contrast to Ontario, who's at 38.2 per cent; or Newfoundland, that's at 42 per cent; I'll remind you we're at 14 per cent. The country of Canada is at 46.8 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

One more comparison I would like to make is how things are relative. The NDP like to go on and talk about the size of our debt. As I stated, right now ours is 14 per cent. Back in 2007, when the NDP last had the honour to be in government, would you like to know what that number was for them? It was 28 per cent. That is twice the actual size of what we have today. So even though they like to compare the number of the debt, when we talk about what is actually relative, it is a fact that their debt as a percentage of GDP was twice the size of what it is today. So they were actually technically carrying twice as much debt.

Once again, would I prefer to have no debt? Of course. But it is also important to see how we stack up to other provinces, the country of Canada, and of course the former NDP government of Saskatchewan. There are so many other things I can highlight, but the most important is that Saskatchewan has a strong economy, and with that comes a very bright future.

Now just briefly back to questions that constituents ask. This one stands out in my mind: what keeps you awake at night? And the answer is easy. It's the fear of disappointing someone. Now there are a lot of things that I can do to help resolve issues, but there are times that an issue cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of a constituent. But, Mr. Speaker, I know that when I go to bed at night, I have done the best job I can do and try to resolve those issues for my constituents. So while it may keep me awake at night knowing I could not resolve the issue, I can sleep well knowing I did the best I could do to try and resolve it.

At the end of the day, what matters are the people of our province, classrooms our children attend, the care we provide, and the communities we live in. And for all those to be successful, we need to have a strong economy, and that is exactly what our province has. Now there's more work to be done because we

have a growing province, and that is what this budget does. It sets our province up for success and the ability to continue to grow a province with a strong economy and a bright future.

In closing I will not be supporting the amendment, but I will be supporting the budget brought forward by the Minister of Finance. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you, mister deputy deputy speaker. It's a pleasure to be on my feet entering into debate on the 2024-25 budget. You know, it's a budget that is allegedly about classrooms, care, and community. It's an interesting tag line for a government that, you know, in the past has been focused on build and protect. And now we see this about-face over into sort of a space that seems really not that credible in terms of the track record of this government, in terms of how it has eroded funding for education in our classrooms.

We have an ongoing labour dispute with the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. It's been going on for months. The government side has not been bargaining in good faith and unwilling to negotiate on class size and complexity, preferring instead to negotiate on Twitter and on billboards and anywhere else other than at the bargaining table. And so I'm not really sure that putting out a budget that says that you're focused on classrooms is really going to be believable to the people of this province because what we've seen is historic underfunding.

We saw it back in 2017. We had decreases then. In 2021 after the last election, the first thing the Sask Party did was increase our education property taxes and reduce funding to education. So there's been promises made and promises broken by this government and so when they make, you know, promises in the public domain about funding education, they can't be trusted. And so it's been important that the teachers' federation demand that these commitments be reflected in the contract instead. So I'm not sure why the government thought it was such a bright idea to focus on classrooms as part of its budget debate.

But then we can look at care, in the care area, and the spending promises that have been made. And after years and years of cutbacks, again, whether that be into social services, into the health care realm, we're not seeing a government that cares about the people of this province. We're seeing quite the opposite.

And so when you look at a government that has basically broken our health care system and broken our social safety net and has rolled back funding, put community-based organizations on the brink of failing, you know, the reality really shows quite a different picture. And so I'm not quite sure what this government thought there was to be gained by talking about care. We've even heard the Premier himself say he doesn't care, to a chamber of commerce audience in Prince Albert when asked about his response to the climate crisis.

And people are starting to pick up on the disingenuous disconnect that we're seeing between the messaging that we're seeing coming out from this government and the reality that they are experiencing in their daily lives when they try to access health care, pay their bills, and make really difficult choices about —

on a monthly basis — the bills that are going to be paid and you know, the things that they're going to put in their grocery cart at the grocery store.

I've been on the doorsteps a lot in my constituency, in Saskatoon Nutana, and heard many stories of the difficulties that families are facing, whether that is addressing the cost-of-living crisis, whether that is in accessing health care services. They're concerned about the rates of homelessness in our communities, mental health and addictions, and they're not confident that this government is taking the right approach in terms of how they are addressing these issues. What we're seeing are major gaps in the continuum of care for people experiencing homelessness, mental health and addictions. And a government that is investing, you know, millions of dollars into one end of the continuum on recovery is going to fail so many people.

We've heard it from our mayors and in councils as well. They identify mental health and addictions and housing as key issues that they are looking to the government to solve. And I've been out engaging with those leaders across the province, listening and hearing from them in terms of what their priorities are, and where they see the need for more care, more investment. It's in addressing these issues that have been offloaded to them by the provincial government and leaving them with very little means in which to address those issues.

Now I think, you know, then we look to whether or not this is a budget that truly does, as I say, focus on communities. And I've been very fortunate to have the opportunity to get out into many of these communities over the last couple of months, as I've been undertaking engagements on my private member's bill, a bill respecting a comprehensive wetland conservation policy that is truly going to meet the moment and meet the needs in terms of preserving water, preserving wetlands, and dealing with the host of factors that we're facing right now as a society. And I'll get into some of the details of that in a moment.

But I guess the thing that's really struck me as I've undertaken these consultations is that communities are frustrated. Communities are divided. Communities are struggling to be heard, and they're concerned about winners and losers in terms of a policy framework that the government is advancing, that is going to pick winners and losers. And there's an unfairness there. But more than that, it's creating conflict, conflict in communities. I had one individual say to me in a consultation recently that we can't have potluck dinners anymore.

[15:45]

Between issues around COVID and water, people can't talk, people have been threatened, and people's livelihoods have been put at risk. Because of an issue that has been mismanaged by this government, an issue of ensuring that we have safe water, that we have good policy and good governance. And I'm not seeing anything in this budget that's going to address those issues.

But furthermore, if we're going to talk about how we preserve communities, how we support communities, having good water policy is essential. And I listened with interest to the member from Arm River yesterday talk about a book that I have also had the great privilege to read and take some advice from. The book is called *13 Ways to Kill Your Community*. And it's kind of



interesting because step one . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yeah, well the interesting thing about this was that step one in protecting your community is ensuring safe quality water — number one, before anything else.

And yet as I go across the province and I talk to community members, they tell me that water is a source of conflict, not a source of community building. And I know, deputy deputy speaker, you're familiar with this issue too. You were the former minister. And I do recall being told by you in the past that you have to worry about, you know, getting a black eye, getting punched in the face. And I'm supposed to accept that as a reality here in Saskatchewan that if I want to talk to my neighbour about an issue as vital as water that I have to expect that maybe I'm going to end up a fist fight.

And that doesn't even make any sense to me in terms of . . . You know, we live in a rule-based society and the people of this province expect us to be leaders, to put forward governance structures that are going to lead towards resolutions of conflicts — not their escalation but their resolution.

And we had a provincial audit report going back to 2018 that identified the lack of policy around wetland conservation as a gap. And yet six years on, you know, we still don't have a policy. And that at a time when, you know, we're seeing increasing concerns about water on the landscape.

We had a budget announcement of \$1.15 billion towards an irrigation project for the Westside project. That was after the election promise that came out before the 2020 election, where they estimated \$3 billion to expand irrigation in three phases. They went off afterwards and had some engineering analysis, some financial analysis undertaken, and now we see costs, you know, looking like they've tripled where I've seen only one phase of that project go forward at a cost of \$1.15 billion. We see no matching money from the federal government, and now they're looking for private producers and investors to help partner on that.

Fine, so who benefits from that? Like is that an equitable . . . There's many questions. There's many questions about the soundness of that major project undertaken. We still haven't seen the engineering reports, the financial analysis. The government is holding on. They're not finalizing the reports. I, as a water critic, can't even take a look at those reports because they haven't been tabled.

And yet there are serious questions about a commitment that's being made in this budget towards funding an irrigation project where the numbers haven't been scrutinized. And I think as members of this legislature that we all have the right to review and scrutinize the reports before we make such a significant investment.

A lot of communities are asking questions, a lot of individuals are asking questions about water supply. They're asking questions about the ongoing drought, how that is also impacting our provincial budget, how that's impacting the forecasts in terms of production from agriculture.

We saw how much was paid out last year, and so when we look at these forecasts of a budget that is going to have a small deficit,

you know, it hinges on numbers that are . . . You know, they take a very optimistic view, and I think we would be better served by a little more realism and conservatism in our projections. We saw how we swung one and a half billion dollars in last year's budget. And then what happened? We had the largest drought relief payments in the province's history. We had record wildfire occurring. We had communities that people had to be just relocated from because of wildfire smoke, and indications are that we are going to continue to see these sorts of conditions. The forecasts are showing us that, you know, the wildfire season again this year is going to be a critical one.

And so when we look at all these pressures, they ultimately are budgetary pressures on a budget that's making very optimistic projections in terms of how much money is coming in and how much money is going to have to be spent out. Interestingly enough, that's during an election year. What a coincidence. A rosy budget that makes optimistic productions and then, I mean it even, you know, looks out in terms of the following years in terms of very sluggish economic growth, increasing rates of unemployment. We even see corporate tax revenues falling by half a billion dollars and, you know, grave concerns. I mean last year a \$1.5 billion, you know, off the mark. And what in this budget gives anyone confidence that we're actually going to be able to find ourself in the position that is being projected?

And despite all of that, there's been no affordability relief for Saskatchewan people. No affordability relief. And we continue to have records being broken in terms of the social indicators across our province, so many indicators where we're worst in the nation. And we are going to be seeing more homelessness, more child poverty, longer wait-lists for health services, and ongoing lack of access to family doctors. One in six Saskatchewan residents does not have a family doctor. We see a — shockingly — reduction in life expectancy greater than anywhere else in the country, as well as the worst crime levels.

Certainly we are seeing in many respects that people are struggling. People are not better off. People are experiencing serious harms, and there's nothing in this budget to point to added relief, either on their bottom line or in terms of better access to services.

And as we've been talking to people across this province, you know, we've listened to front-line workers. We hear they have the solutions. This government won't listen to them. They turn around instead and invest \$14 million in a marshals service that hasn't added a single officer to fight crime, and it won't until 2026. That money would be better spent being redirected toward the existing police services that exist in this province, not creating another whole layer of bureaucracy and an added cost. It's waste and mismanagement.

We see a \$12 million advertising campaign in airports and in other provinces and countries. I mean, how does that contribute to the interests of the province? It doesn't. We see an \$11 million settlement with a local business over the government's actions in Wascana Park. I could go on and on. This government has been wasting money, money that could be spent on providing affordability relief to Saskatchewan residents who are struggling to put food on the table and making difficult decisions about whether to keep the lights on or pay for Johnny's runners for the school year.

It's a budget that provides a rosy forecast based on hope, but certainly the people of this province have lost faith in this government to provide any hope for the future. And you know, people are ready for change. And we're ready to deliver on this side of the House.

And we'll be happy to share our solutions and our platform when the time is ready, based on what we're hearing from front-line workers and people who are, you know, full of hope and optimism for the future and know how to truly make Saskatchewan a greater province, one that meets the needs of all people in ways that are compassionate and caring and don't make the hard kinds of trade-offs that we've seen from this government that's seen social metrics plummet across the piece. And we're ready to do that. We look forward to that opportunity.

I think my time is almost up, mister deputy deputy speaker, but before I end, I want to take a moment to thank my constituency assistant Kerry Schaefer and alternate CA McGinnis Reeve for all of their help and support in my office, responding to constituency's concerns, helping me with the stakeholders and keeping the office running in shipshape throughout the year.

I want to thank my family, as so many have already done here today and in these budget responses. Of course none of us serve alone, and I'm so grateful for their support as I do this work.

I want to make a special mention of my mother, Eleanor Ritchie. She's having a 90th birthday this year. We're really excited about the opportunity to celebrate her life, and she's certainly been an inspiration for me. And we'll be celebrating that in June, and I hope to get her here as a guest in the Assembly before we break in the springtime. And I just want to thank her for being such a great mother and raising us all so well, and I look forward to celebrating her birthday later this spring.

I also want to thank my constituency executive and all the work that they do to ensure that we're ready for that next election, that, you know, we continue to have outreach going on throughout the year, and just all the various ways that they support me in the work that I do here, providing lots of good feedback and advice in terms of policy areas as well. I couldn't do this work without them either.

And so with that, I'll wrap up my remarks. I will not be voting in favour of the budget. I will be instead supporting the amendment put forward by the member for Regina Rosemont and seconded by the member for Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

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

[16:00]

**Hon. Mr. Makowsky:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Always a pleasure and honour to rise up in the Assembly and say a few words. I thank the Whip for the chance. It's getting late in the speaking order here, but a chance to say a few words on behalf of my family, my constituents, and the folks that work hard every day here in Saskatchewan particularly.

Along with myself, I have a lot of people I get to work with that do, like I said, yeoman's work. They're very dedicated and

special people, particularly in the minister's office here, and of course being the Minister of Social Services. There is some great work being done.

It is often very challenging work, and the folks in the political office here at the legislature, the 1,900 or so employees at the Ministry of Social Services in different areas, helping the most vulnerable people in Saskatchewan. And we thank them for their often very difficult, often overlooked work that is so, so important, and again I thank them, and thank them that we're all working together to make things a little bit better in our province.

If I have time, I'll talk a little bit more about the budgetary expenditure in the Ministry of Social Services. And I almost forgot — on the constituency side as well there's folks that do great work right across the province in so many different offices, helping people that may need some help or some advice and with casework or whatever it may be, so a lot of that goes on. And thanks to all those, including the folks I work with. So thanks so much for them.

It's a pleasure to be able to represent an area of Regina and have been able to do that for the next 12 years, Mr. Speaker. Hope to be able to do that again past the fall. Of course there's an election coming up. Let my name stand, but I know that that will be another challenge I certainly look forward to, Mr. Speaker. I know Regina is one of the most affordable places, larger centres in our entire country, that is very affordable, relatively speaking, understanding there are challenges out there. I understand that. I hear from constituents and certainly in the file that I am able to serve in, I hear that quite a bit. But again, no new taxes in this budget, Mr. Speaker, helps on that affordability side.

And then maybe later on I'll talk about a few more measures that we were able to bring forward. But in terms of, and it's right in the budget documents, in terms of affordability, Mr. Speaker . . . and we're hearing a lot of that, and I understand that. But on the tax side, Mr. Speaker, on the utilities side, on the housing side, Mr. Speaker, we're in decent shape here in Saskatchewan.

So appreciate representing the, being an MLA in Regina. And speaking of that, I know I'm roughly 10, 15 minutes to get home each and every day. And as a Regina member, obviously we get to go home every evening — well not every evening, but it's more of a normal situation than many of the members that serve. And I think I don't take enough time to think about that. I know I'm on the road a little bit here and there, Mr. Speaker, but these members are . . . many members are on the road all the time.

And at this point I'd like to thank all the members that aren't running again and all the amazing work that they've done on behalf of the people of the province. They're really good people, each and every one of them, just salt-of-the-earth folks that want to give back to their community, and that's been my experience. And I had a great time getting to know them a little bit, having conversations about what's going on in their area of Saskatchewan.

And thank you to their families for their sacrifice as well. I know what that challenge can be. I'm sure . . . again I don't fully know exactly about that, but very privileged to be able to be so close to home and be a part of kids' sports and being able to coach and do all those sorts of things. But the sacrifice that some of our

members who have been in government, or been serving rather for 25 years — and some record holders even for the amount of times they've . . . length of time they've either been serving or been in executive government. And we thank them for that and learn so much from each of those folks. So I wish them certainly the best and look forward to a chance to say hi to them when we're, either they or myself are not in this business anymore.

But, Mr. Speaker, I thought I'd talk a bit about my family just real quick, Mr. Speaker. A few minutes ago probably Tami got home. Just put in a shift at 811 HealthLine. She mentioned to me, we want to ensure that right in the budget speech 811 HealthLine was mentioned, and the support that the Minister of Health brought forward to help that particular entity within the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] who do outstanding work to help not have as many folks show up at emergency, being able to talk to a health care professional to hopefully diagnose and help make decisions as to where is the best place to access services in our province.

So she's been doing that for many years. And speaking of many years, Mr. Speaker, in a matter of days we'll be able to celebrate our 25th anniversary, Mr. Speaker. The time has just clicked by so quickly, but obviously that's an important day, and looking forward to that.

My three boys, one is still in high school. I can't remember if I got a chance to mention, but I've got to get on the record permanently, Mr. Speaker. I can't remember when the football season ended last fall and if I got a chance to speak and mention it, so I'm going to do it here just to make sure. Able to coach. And my youngest son this time was on a championship, provincial championship football team, Mr. Speaker. And so the Miller Marauders were able to squeak out a victory up at SMF [Saskatoon Minor Football] Field late last fall for the 6A provincial championship, third year in a row.

And so that was a lot of fun, able to coach the O-line [offensive line] with that great group of kids. Had a lot of fun and look forward to the upcoming season where we will have some fun again, Mr. Speaker. My oldest son will be in grade 12 so that's again . . . Speaking of time clicking by, I'll watch the clock here. I better.

And the other area I was going to . . . My two older guys, they're at the U of R [University of Regina] and both with the U of R Rams program, so a busy fall. It's always busy in our family and look forward to that. And of course I mentioned the upcoming campaign — looking forward to that challenge as well.

Speaking of the U of R, Mr. Speaker, in terms of what's in the budget, my colleague just across the aisle here, the Minister of Advanced Education . . . I was just at an event a couple of days ago with him where he talked about where the provincial government was able to . . . On top of the four-year funding agreement that the Ministry of Advanced Ed had with the post-secondary sector, there was a signing ceremony that the minister was able to bring a bit of a top-up, a \$12 million top-up to that four-year funding agreement, Mr. Speaker. So again with his work that was a really good announcement and a very much appreciated part of this budget that was being announced. So that is good news for that very important sector.

I should note also that next year there's some pretty important anniversaries, and it just kind of coincides with some of the meetings I had or events I've gone to. That one, the U of R, 50 years old next year, as well as in '25 the U of R is hosting the Vanier Cup. The Vanier Cup is coming to Regina and so look forward to that next fall. The 60th anniversary of the Vanier Cup is going to be celebrated along with the 50th year at the U of R, so very much looking forward to that. We'll see how that goes. But congratulations to the University of Regina, the Rams and the Cougars and all that — great programs. And they're taking on a big deal, and great to have those events here in the Queen City, Mr. Speaker.

Another event I was able to go to . . . And I told my seatmate here, the Minister of Agriculture. I'd mentioned the cattlemen were here for a bit of a gathering to talk about things that are important to their industry. I certainly am not even close to an expert in that area but had some great conversations about what their priorities are, how they run their businesses.

It's always great to engage in those things. You learn so much and you meet a lot of great people, and we have a lot of great people in the ag sector and the cattle sector. And I wish them all the best this time of year, and hopefully rain is part of their very near future and into the summer. So I had a great situation with that.

The president certainly had some interesting things to say about the minister's work, but also the work being done internationally and how important that is to that agriculture sector and how that opens doors. I know there was a few members opposite there. They must have felt a little sheepish based on what was presented there by the cattlemen's association and how they're not interested in any international outreach and expanding our markets, Mr. Speaker. But we're going to continue to do that, and that's again part of this budget, Mr. Speaker.

I was able to attend an event. I was invited to another anniversary situation here. It's a trend going. SaskAbilities had a bit of an announcement on what they're doing in terms of connecting disabled people with being able to work, to get a job and do what they can to the best of their ability. And that is helped by the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training. But the amazing work by SaskAbilities in our communities for the past 75 years. Next year's going to be 75 years of helping so many vulnerable people in our communities.

And they have a lot to offer, Mr. Speaker. Of course SaskAbilities does, but so many citizens out there, and it's great to see that they're making those important connections in our communities every day. And just love that work and what's happening there. So congratulations to that organization, and what a great group. I just think that those type of organizations just epitomize Saskatchewan. They care so much. They're so ingrained, involved in their communities, and they're just good, good people that want to help out. And so that is outstanding to see that work.

I had an opportunity to open another group home here recently in Regina, Mr. Speaker, Chip and Dale Homes who do wonderful work. It's a day program space that they had renovated with some money from the Ministry of Social Services, Mr. Speaker. I could certainly go on and on with those types of things, and it's an

honour to be able to attend those events and, like I said, learn.

Just in terms of the Ministry of Social Services, the area I'm honoured to serve in, Mr. Speaker, there are a few highlights I'd like to mention, get on the record. And I know many members have talked about this. They did a great job in their speeches in the House.

Autism funding, that is going to be increased by \$4 million in this particular budget. There is certainly a need out there. And this is a program our government brought forward to have individualized funding for families to be able to decide what's best for their child that is . . . that has some . . . They have some needs out there, is what I was trying to say, Mr. Speaker. And this is funding that they can decide what is best for their child in this particular situation.

There's \$17 million to help those who are trying to choose work in a low-income area. Low-income families, there is costs to going to work. We understand that, Mr. Speaker, and so we're able to come up with 17 million additional dollars to help with those challenges for folks who qualify.

We'll be able to help them either stay off income assistance or move off income assistance with some support, with a cash or grant amount each and every month to help with those costs, Mr. Speaker, but also at the same time be able to have those families stay on supplementary health benefits, which we know was a bit of a gap to be able to come off of those core income assistance programs. So we'll monitor that, and hopefully there is uptake and we're able to help people be able to stay employed, Mr. Speaker.

The personal care home benefit goes up again for the second year in a row. This is a subsidy for low-income seniors to be able to stay in private care homes, Mr. Speaker. So there is, again, on top of the \$1.5 billion we're spending this year, 112 million increase in the Ministry of Social Services budget.

There's increases to the core income assistance programs, SIS [Saskatchewan income support], and SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disabilities]. That has increased the last three years that I've had the pleasure to serve as the minister, Mr. Speaker. So in the SIS program, the individuals on that program . . . meant to be, again, a temporary program, and we hope that the employment incentive program will help ensure that is a temporary program for individuals that are having a bit of a challenge for a period of time.

[16:15]

But that has increased again for the third year in a row. A 26 per cent increase has been put forward in the last five years or so. Since about the summer of 2019 when the SIS program came online, there's been a 26 per cent increase to those benefits for those individuals who need a little bit of help out there, Mr. Speaker — again meant to be an income of last resort, and it's part of that social safety net that we have in our province, Mr. Speaker.

Many of the programs I just mentioned are new programs. There was no distinction under the previous government about those who have permanent disabilities and those who are temporarily

on income assistance, Mr. Speaker. There was no personal care home benefit. There was no seniors' income plan under the NDP. There was no individualized funding for autism, Mr. Speaker. There was no funding for individuals trying to join the workforce, Mr. Speaker. And so these are all new programs to this government but, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to point out that there was absolutely none of these programs under the members opposite.

Some of the other things, Mr. Speaker, we were able to invest in, just real quickly. We know how important Mobile Crisis is to the most vulnerable in our province, Mr. Speaker. Able to come up with a \$500,000 increase, again listening and working with our stakeholders. That was an important initiative we were able to come up with, Mr. Speaker.

The FASD [fetal alcohol spectrum disorder] network got some funding to have . . . They do great work in prevention services in our province. And they are able to do some more outreach with a cash injection on top of what we normally do, again, but this is new money within this budget.

In this budget there is again funding for mobile outreach workers on the income assistance side of our ministry, Mr. Speaker. That has been well received by many of our community-based organizations. And this is about having workers out in the field, meeting people where they are and helping them within our communities. So that has been, like I said, well received within the sector, the income assistance area. That has been doubled with this budget, Mr. Speaker, so we're going to have more people out in our community on a daily basis and helping people wherever those caseworkers might find them.

And again, at the top I thanked the wonderful workers within the Ministry of Social Services. I'm going to do it again. They do great work.

Increased funding on top of the funding from last budget for trusteeship, Mr. Speaker. And this is a program where we partner with third parties to be able to deliver money, help, to be able to have individuals learn about budgeting and using their funds to the best use possible, and even have trustees be able to make those payments directly to whoever it may be. And that program has seen some success. We want to expand that. We're hearing, Mr. Speaker, about individuals having a difficult time paying bills or being able to, you know, budget and work on those type of things, Mr. Speaker. So this is almost as much educational as physically doing some of that work.

So I could certainly talk more and more about some of the things we're able to do. One last thing, Mr. Speaker, a provision for ID [identification]. We're hearing from the sector, from people on the front line that individuals experiencing homelessness not being able to access supports. One of those things is identification. Whether it gets stolen or it gets lost, people who are having challenges out there, ID is a thing. So this provides funding to be able to pay for ID for those on the SIS program.

Mr. Speaker, all of these supports are only available and sustainable into the long term because of our strong and growing economy. It simply can't happen, or it can't happen for very long. So I think the Minister of Finance did a great job balancing the need out there with the reality that we have to find a way to pay

for it, Mr. Speaker, and have it sustainable going into the future.

Really quickly, some of the capital projects in Regina, I want to mention them once again. The last thing I'll say, Mr. Speaker, General Hospital parkade, room for over 1,000 stalls. The urgent care centre going up on North Albert, Mr. Speaker — been there several times. It's looking great and, my understanding from the Minister of Health, opening very soon. Long-term care beds procurement is under way here in Regina. Regina North school, a joint-use school combining four schools here in our community. A French school, Mr. Speaker. Harbour Landing School. Planning for a joint-use elementary school in east Regina, which is going to be of very interest to my constituents, as well as preplanning for a southeast joint-use high school, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Finance has paid off in recent years two and a half billion dollars of operating debt, second-best debt-to-GDP ratio in the nation of Canada. Our finances are strong, and that's why with a strong economy we're able to invest in all of the things.

I could have talked for way longer, but I've taken enough time, Mr. Speaker. The Whip has given me a bit of an eye over here, Mr. Speaker.

But this budget allows us to work on our priority areas and invest in people in our province.

So, Mr. Speaker, thanks for the opportunity, to my constituents once again for being here. Thanks to my family. Thanks to all the people who work in the social services area. What would we do without you?

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be supporting the budget.

**The Deputy Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Yorkton.

**Mr. Ottenbreit:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's an honour to join in to what will be my 17th I believe and my last budget debate of my political career. And it's been an honour to serve in this Assembly since 2007. I sought nomination in 2004, elected in . . . nominated in 2005, and elected in '07. It's been a fairly long career, not as long as some of my colleagues who I appreciate so much, but it has truly been an honour, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As is customary, I'm not going to go into much detail on the family and things and even some of my colleagues. I'm going to save that for my final speech that'll be coming in a few weeks from now. But again, to acknowledge the support and the love of family is first and foremost and why we're able to serve in this place.

And a reason that I'm . . . partly why I'm not going to seek re-election came to me last night when I had to miss my granddaughter's 9th birthday. And it's not a huge deal, but for us, we're a tight family and it was enjoyable to watch the family's celebrations from afar. But number 10, I'll be there for Wynn.

Again, staff, whether it's Laurretta and Rachelle back at home or the staff that supports all of us here whether through the ministers' offices, the caucus offices, or Executive Council,

whatever the case might be, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they're just so appreciated. And of course, all members of one team, one family that works together to serve the people of this province.

My executive back home, which may be changing a little bit in the next little while, there's a new nominated candidate for Yorkton that will be running in the election this year. So I'm just so appreciative of the executive I've had, to see who's staying, see who's going to be coming on, and to see that team build for the next election. And of course, all the constituents that have placed me here over the years.

When I first ran in '07, I made a commitment to my family and local people, four terms, that was my cap. In fact, the former deputy premier, a friend of mine to this day, Clay Serby, kind of confided in me that, you know, after four terms even some of his strong supporters were getting tired of him. Before I get to that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's time to go on to whatever the Lord has for me next.

You know, and saying that, looking at some of the results that Clay went through over those four terms, we've been blessed in Yorkton — 59 per cent in my first election, 71, 73, final election, 75, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I'm going to get out before it maybe dips a little bit. You know, that's great.

And you know, the three people that put their names forward to fill my position, I'm so appreciative of them. Kaitlyn Kitzen, a young lady with a lot political knowledge, agriculture business background, put in a heck of a challenge. Darcy Zaharia, I've known for most of my life in Yorkton, a city councillor and a football coach and very community-minded. You know, he was a very good adversary.

David Chan, a young man, 42 years old. First generation Chinese gentleman with a young family, two girls. I'm not spoiling, I don't think, anything by saying he's got one on the way as well, probably only a couple months before the election. But he's going to be a great representative who I believe will win the next election and will be sitting on this floor on this side of the House when that does happen.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I get into the throes of the budget, you know, a few comments on some of the things I've heard across the floor. And I appreciate the input of the opposition members. You know, a lot of it is pretty good. Some of it, I really scratch my head. But you know, over and over, I've heard them refer to this as an election budget, election budget. All the other input I've seen from business input or media input or community leaders, they were kind of shocked. They said, you know, it's kind of steady as she goes, pretty almost boring. You know, it's what you wouldn't expect in an election-year budget.

Granted, there's some significant increases in specific areas, but as my colleagues have pointed out, that's for specific reasons. A strong economy is what we have. We were able to put together a \$20 billion budget this year to build on classrooms and care in our health care community and of course in our communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Specifically, our revenue sharing is up huge amounts, the highest it's ever been. Again, revenue sharing, something that was non-existent under the members opposite when they formed government. But again a very common-sense budget and a very steady-as-she-goes budget is what I've heard.

Quite often I hear the members . . . [inaudible] . . . we're back-patting. Well I have never seen anybody on this side of the House back-pat. You know, they ask, what have you done? What have you done? You mention what you've done, then they turn it back and now you're patting your backs. We're reminding the people of this province what's happened under the leadership of Premier Wall and now the current Premier. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have to continue to remind people.

If they listened to the members opposite, and you know, some of the stuff that the media report that the members opposite are saying, they would not have the whole story, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So we have to continue to remind people what it was like in the dark days of the NDP, what it's been like the last 16 years under this government, and what they can look forward into the future with a strong economy, and again, investments in our province through classrooms, care, and communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Again I'm going to forgo some of the acknowledgements of my retiring members, my current members, although I'd like to take a few shots. Maybe the member for Kindersley. Melville-Saltcoats wasn't bad. Melfort was okay. Moosomin, he's on the edge, but I'll leave him alone till maybe towards the end of this session.

You know, and some of the comments from the members opposite. You know, everything's fine, everything's . . . We're not saying everything's fine, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We're saying there's definite challenges. We're up to the task of addressing those challenges. This budget is specifically pointing to those areas that we're going to focus on to address those challenges.

But for goodness' sake, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have to acknowledge where things are good, if things are going in the right direction. The glass isn't always half empty. The glass can be half full from time to time, and I think it's important for our own mental health, for the mental health and the knowledge of the people of this province, acknowledge the good stuff. Acknowledge and build on that. Protect what has been built, but also recognize where there are challenges and focus on those challenges. And I think this government, directly to the point, has over the last 16 years addressed those challenges in pretty significant ways.

So again, mister . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Thanks, buddy. Fred didn't tackle me down yet. Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a large budget with significant investments on behalf of the people of the classroom and many different areas.

You know, I'm just going to just kind of breeze over some of the stuff that is really going to impact our home community of Yorkton. Fourteen per cent increase in revenue sharing, again something non-existent under the NDP. We're seeing significant . . . Because of that strong economy that enables us to build on our investments in classrooms and care and communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we see investments in Yorkton that have never been seen in the past.

You know, Harvest Meats, a stalwart in the area, is expanding quietly over time. You see their products everywhere. You look at Grain Millers, quietly doubled in size. Richardson Oilseed's canola crushing has doubled in size and added other services.

You look at Louis Dreyfus has doubled in size, and now they're adding a half-a-billion-dollar pea-processing plant. Our government has significantly invested to make sure that that growth continues, that goes on, the investment continues in our province and my home community.

But also in infrastructure, the Minister of Highways, previous and this one, has addressed a lot of the infrastructure needs around Yorkton. There's more to do. We've invested through the rural integrated roads for growth program on Grain Millers road that has some challenges, but we're looking at addressing that with the partnership of the RM [rural municipality] and the city in the future. You know, we look at the construction, the renovations that have happened in our schools and in so many different areas, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You know, I'm not going to touch on too many of the other specific areas that my colleagues did, but again looking at some of the investments around the province that impact people locally.

As many know, I'm a cancer survivor. I currently have a brother that's going through a significant battle. And you know, a small thing to some but significant to the Cancer Agency and to me and to people that are affected, colleagues that have been affected, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That increase, quite a large increase to the Cancer Agency, is another example that we're focusing on care to support the people of this area.

[16:30]

I looked at the education funding, the significant increase that's going to contribute to Good Spirit School Division, the Roman Catholic school division, Mr. Deputy Speaker — definite benefit. Some of the general investments in health care, we know that the region is talking about bringing orthopedics back to Yorkton, expanding services.

And one thing before I do leave my feet, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is another million-dollar investment through this Finance minister who I just so much appreciate and respect. I've built a friendship. I've worked with her in many different files over the years. Another million dollars for planning and continuing the project in Yorkton, so I look forward to that going ahead in the future, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You know, I'm just going to close my comments here pretty quickly. You know, we have to really, again, realize what the history was like under the NDP. I grew a family. I ran a business under the former NDP years of influence over this province, and I can tell you it was not an easy task. When all of my friends were leaving the province, I stayed. I ran my business, grew my family.

But seeing how they flourished over the last 16 years under this government, how businesses have flourished, how my former business has flourished, you know, we've got to focus on that. We've got to not be dragged back by the NDP. We can't allow them to take us back to those dark days, crash our economy. We've got to continue to focus on the plan that was put in place by our former premier Wall.

The next plan that was put in place by this current Premier, the

best, the most, I would argue, maybe second on the polls right now, but the second-most popular Premier in the province. The speech I saw him do at SARM, the speech I saw him do or the presentation I saw him do on committee a good part of this morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, makes me proud to be involved with this party, with this group of individuals, friends and family, and this Premier, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I will be supporting this budget. I will not be supporting the amendment. And I look forward to the continued time of the last few weeks I have in this House, the few months I have serving the people of Yorkton, and I look forward to the next Sask Party government. As was conceded, I think, by the member for Saskatoon Centre time and time again in her speech, talking about “when those members come back and the next budget they present.”

So I'm really, really hopeful that her prophetic vision takes flight and we do see that strong Saskatchewan Party representation come back in the end of 2024 and continue for many years to come. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

**Hon. Mr. Cockrill:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be on my feet today to respond to the 2024-2025 budget, Mr. Speaker. You know, I just want to begin my comments today just with a few thank yous for people who play a very key role in my role as an MLA. And you know, obviously first of all I'd just like to thank the constituents of The Battlefords, the constituents who sent me here in 2020, and really the reason that I serve every day and get up and get excited about coming to work.

You know, I didn't grow up in my community, Mr. Speaker, but it didn't take me very long after moving to my community to realize that we've got a pretty special place and a special region of the province, Mr. Speaker. And I have always defended and stood up for The Battlefords, and you know, I continue to do so. And I hope that I have the honour of continuing to do that as long as I have the privilege of serving as an MLA.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to thank my family. And you know, when I was elected in 2020, it was just my wife and I. And since then we've added one to that, part of the Saskatchewan growth plan. And you know, Mr. Speaker, that little guy, Bennett, he was here the other day last week clapping and banging his hands on the bench up in the gallery. Mr. Speaker, he's really the highlight of our lives every day, and watching him learn and grow is quite something. And so we are, Meagan and I are incredibly blessed to have Bennett in our lives.

You know, and I'll just say in my current role I've certainly been in the spotlight more in the last several months. And you know, I'll just say, you know, the work that we do here as MLAs and as ministers of the Crown, it is important, but it doesn't come without some cost and sacrifice to our families. And you know, I would say that Meagan has been absolutely steadfast over my whole time as an MLA but certainly over the last several months. And I know that there's probably many days in the last year that have been harder on her than . . . It's been harder on her than it has been on me many days, so I really appreciate, really appreciate Meagan for the role that she plays in my life.

You know, and I would just say too beyond Meagan, I know that, you know, my family, my extended family and her extended family play a very large and generous role in terms of being our support network, and I want to thank those folks as well.

I'll just quickly thank some folks that I get to work with every day. In my ministerial office we've got Holly and Amy and Hunter and Aaron and Mitch. And then in my office in North Battleford we have Gail and Claudette. And you know, I'll just say these couple of offices have probably been some of the busier constituency offices and ministerial offices over the last year.

And you know, I want to thank every one of those people in North Battleford and here at the legislature in Regina who have been responding to people, to calls, to emails — sometimes less than cordial ones — really with a high degree of patience and grace. And you know, obviously, I mean it's my name on the door, it's my name on the bottom of the email, but at the end of the day these folks play a very significant role in the work that I do. And I thank them for that.

You know, I'd also like to just thank the ministry officials that I've had the opportunity to work with. I mean, my time serving as minister of Highways and minister responsible for Saskatchewan Water Security Agency, I worked with some fantastic people in that Crown corporation and that ministry.

And you know, it's funny. You run into these folks that you've had the opportunity to work with. You run into them at the SARM convention or at other events, and you know, you really grow in respect for the work that they do each and every day.

And I'll say the people that I get to work with in the Ministry of Education have been absolutely fantastic in my time, and I'm sure the former minister can speak to that as well. But really, you know, helping me navigate some interesting times in the sector and then also again supporting our different sector partners.

You know, I know many of the members who have spoken have talked about the folks in our caucus that are not seeking re-election. And again, it took me a few . . . I had to go through the list. Just wanted to make sure, you know. I checked it twice, thrice. You know, Regina Northeast, Canora-Pelly, Carrot River Valley, Arm River, Weyburn-Big Muddy, Saskatoon Southeast, Saskatoon Northwest, Indian Head-Milestone, Humboldt-Watrous, Kindersley, Batoche, Yorkton. And Biggar-Sask Valley, of course, Mr. Speaker.

You know, and I'll just say I spoke about the member from Arm River when I had an opportunity to reply to the Throne Speech in the fall. But you know what's amazing? I look at that list and I think I have had the opportunity to tour pretty much every constituency, at least every rural constituency for sure, with those members. And I think about, you know, the member from Canora-Pelly and I, we went on a bus tour from the town of Arran, and we met with a whole bunch of rural municipalities and toured all around there.

I remember I picked up the member from Batoche in Wakaw one day at the gas station. Him and I went for a little drive down Highway 225. We went to Bellevue and we went over to the Batoche National Historic Site and then south back. And I think back it's Highway 312 that comes back into Wakaw. And you

know, that member from Batoche is just a wealth of knowledge about the history of this province. You know, barely got . . . I drive a little fast sometimes, Mr. Speaker, but I slowed down a little bit because I was missing so many things that he was pointing out along the way. And I learned a lot about his part of the province just in those few hours with that member from Batoche.

And I think that is, you know, the gift that those members — and really I'd say all the members on our side — have given me as an MLA. And again, I mentioned earlier I didn't grow up in this province. I didn't grow up in my community. So as somebody who's relatively new to Saskatchewan, to receive the gift of all these people showing me their home communities, their constituencies, what's special, what gets them excited about serving as the MLA for their respective constituencies, that's been a real gift for me. That has been an incredible gift to learn about the province in that way. And really that's really the highlight, I would say, of my work.

You know, I'll just speak specifically about I've had the opportunity previously to serve on treasury board. And so I've had first-hand the opportunity to really see . . . There's a few folks that aren't running again that I had the opportunity to serve on treasury board with: the member from Indian Head-Milestone, the member from Kindersley, and of course the Deputy Premier and the member from Humboldt-Watrous.

The member from Humboldt-Watrous is absolutely an incredible servant to this province. You know, the encyclopedic knowledge of different ministries, you know, when they come to treasury board and go through that budget development process, it is remarkable what that woman has retained and what she has learned. And wow, it's something that we're going to certainly miss as a caucus and as a cabinet. But boy, I have tried to glean as much knowledge out of her as I can, certainly over the last few years and last several months.

The same is true for the member from Indian Head-Milestone, somebody who was elected the same time as the Deputy Premier in 1999 and has served in several different ministries. And the absolutely impressive recall ability of these folks to think back to something that happened in 2004 and kind of go verbatim on what happened in 2004 or 2008. It's been, I would say for the other members that were elected last time, it's been a real educational opportunity — right? — to learn from these folks.

Also, you know, the member from Kindersley . . . It's interesting. You know, I was a new MLA and I was given the amazing privilege of serving on treasury board. And so I ended up spending a lot of time with the member from Kindersley in those first few years. I don't know if that was a good thing or a bad thing.

But you know what? I was thinking about it. I don't know, I don't know if the member plays more of a father figure or a brother figure or just, you know, the friend who chirps you kind of all the time role. But I'm sure glad that I got to meet this fine gentleman, and looking forward to continuing our friendship in years going forward.

You know, a thank you to the member for Yorkton. And you know, the member for Yorkton, I had the opportunity to just

follow him here in the speaking order. But again, as a new MLA, you come to the building, you're trying to figure out your way. And the member from Yorkton kind of ended up in our office space, maybe not by choice, but he ended up in 140.

And you know what? I'll never forget. You know, the member always says, bitter and better, the difference is only one vowel. And you know, I'm sure grateful that that gentleman wakes up every morning and chooses to be better because it really has made our caucus and our government better for it.

So anyway I just want to wish the folks that are, you know, not running again, I thank them for their service and certainly for the work that they've done on behalf of their constituents for the betterment of this province.

I just want to talk about the 2024 budget, and then I'll have some closing thoughts about choices and a choice that we have again this year sometime in late October. But I'd like to quickly talk about how the 2024-2025 budget, it was obviously good for the province, but it's great for The Battlefords.

And I'm really excited. You know, this budget, it's a \$20 billion budget. And again, I've had the opportunity to be a part of the budget development process in previous years, but this budget is one that is very exciting for my part of the province. I'll say that because I think what this budget clearly does is it shows that, you know, as our province has grown, as our economy is growing, it means that we can invest in a major way into the services that we all deserve and expect as Saskatchewan residents.

I mean, you think about it, Mr. Speaker: a 9 per cent overall increase to the education budget. A 10 per cent increase to the health care budget, already the largest budget in the province, Mr. Speaker, and we're adding 10 points to it. And then you think about the municipal revenue-sharing dollars, the dollars that go right back into our communities so that our locally elected mayors and reeves and councillors can make decisions on municipal infrastructure.

[16:45]

That, Mr. Speaker, has gone up 14 per cent, and I just quickly looked back. There's a great municipal revenue-sharing dashboard on the Saskatchewan website. I encourage many people to go check it out. And so I just took North Battleford and Battleford, and from 2007 to 2024, how has municipal revenue sharing increased on an annual basis? Well let me tell you. In 2007, North Battleford's municipal revenue share dollars was 1.16 million. Mr. Speaker, in 2024 it's \$3.28 million.

On the other side of the river, the town of Battleford — you know, smaller community — started out in 2007 at \$407,000 and is now at \$1.22 million. Mr. Speaker, think about that for a second. The dollars that are shared with our municipalities so that they can make decisions about roads or rinks or water infrastructure in their communities, in The Battlefords that has tripled since the Sask Party became government in 2007. Municipal dollars tripled since Sask Party became government. And again, what those dollars are able to be invested in.

And you look at, you know, sometimes I hear in my community, what's changed? What's changed since last year? What's



changed since five years ago? I'd say quite a bit has changed. We're improving our infrastructure. We're adding services in our respective communities. And really I see just incredible potential for growth in our part of the province, Mr. Speaker. Now obviously, as I said earlier, when we have a strong and growing economy and we're able to share more dollars with municipalities, there's also other services that are needed, right? We've got more people living in our community.

You know, when it comes to health care, Mr. Speaker, and I have shared these numbers previously in this House, but I just find these numbers to be very important to talk about once again. You know, our Health ministers and the previous Health ministers have done an incredible job in terms of setting out the most ambitious health human resources action plan in this country, Mr. Speaker. And through that health human resources action plan, we have the rural and remote recruitment incentive program, Mr. Speaker.

So you know, at last count there were about 330 positions, full-time positions that had been filled through that incentive province-wide, which is fantastic. Fantastic to see full-time positions in communities in the North, communities in rural areas of the province, and positions in small cities like North Battleford or Yorkton be filled so that we can make sure that more health care services can be offered close to home, Mr. Speaker. Sixty-eight of those 338 positions, Mr. Speaker, have been in my community, 68 of 330. The Battlefords have been the most successful community in the whole province when it comes to recruiting for the rural and remote recruitment incentive, Mr. Speaker.

But you know, in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, and I didn't have the opportunity to share these numbers the other day when I rose in the House to talk about this, but hires outside of the rural and remote recruitment incentive, we've added 30 additional staff to what I talked about not too long ago, Mr. Speaker. Seventeen more continuing care assistants, nine more registered nurses, three more licensed practical nurses, and one more medical lab assistant, Mr. Speaker.

So when we combine those numbers, Mr. Speaker, you know, we have upwards of 50 to 60 new full-time nurses in The Battlefords. That is impressive, Mr. Speaker. And you know, from the other side of the House every single day, Mr. Speaker, we hear crisis and crisis and crisis and crisis. And, Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely more work to do, absolutely more work to do in terms of recruiting the right people to our community, ensuring that the right services can be offered in all of our respective communities but, Mr. Speaker, that is something that this government is working on every single day and our progress is showing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'll quickly also talk about addictions. If I have time later I'll come back to this, Mr. Speaker, but you know when I look at the direction that this government is taking on addictions and recovery in this province, it makes me very proud because we have seen approaches in other provinces, Mr. Speaker, that actually do the opposite of what they're intended to do, Mr. Speaker.

NDP BC [British Columbia], this is a prime example, Mr. Speaker. The decriminalization efforts that have been going on

in BC, they're not working, Mr. Speaker. Again that's the province I grew up in. I have friends, I have family there, Mr. Speaker. At the end of the day, when it comes to working with people who are suffering from addictions in our community, making access to illicit drugs easier, Mr. Speaker, normalizing that, that is not going to result in recovery. It's just a faster path to death, Mr. Speaker.

And I would say in our families, in our communities, that's not what we want. We want recovery, Mr. Speaker. We want people, we want our family members, we want our neighbours, Mr. Speaker — we know many of them are struggling — but we want them to get on a better path and we want them to find recovery so that they can once again be engaged in their families and their communities, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, you know, the NDP approach to this is completely opposite. The NDP approach to this . . . Many of the members on the other side, they want to go to the BC model and then they want to go even further, Mr. Speaker. That's not what is best, Mr. Speaker. Whether you live in town or whether you live on a reserve, that is not the best approach. That approach will kill people in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Every day, Mr. Speaker, members on that side of the House get up and talk about deaths via overdose. Mr. Speaker, those numbers are only going to go up if we follow what the NDP plan is on drug policy, Mr. Speaker. A drug policy that results in more death in our community is not a drug policy. It's a death policy, Mr. Speaker. And that's what the members opposite have, quite frankly.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk about, you know, some additional investments that we have made in the post-secondary space in The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker. We have a fantastic institution, North West College, which has campuses in both Meadow Lake and North Battleford, Mr. Speaker. And what we've seen over the last several years is North West College, which was already a key partner in terms of health care training, become an even more valuable part of the puzzle, Mr. Speaker, as we work to train and recruit and retain and incentivize more health care workers to work right in our community.

Mr. Speaker, since I became the MLA for The Battlefords, we have doubled the number of registered psych nursing seats available every year at North West College. We started in 2020 with 16 seats in the cohort, Mr. Speaker, available every year. We've added to that a couple of years ago, Mr. Speaker. We've added to that in this budget, in this '24-25 budget, Mr. Speaker. Now we have 32 seats available in the registered psych nursing program at North West College, Mr. Speaker. And isn't that fantastic? Because we have a \$400 million provincial psych hospital in our community, one of the largest employers in The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker.

I'd also highlight some changes that we've made to the RN [registered nurse] program at North West College, Mr. Speaker. Through partnerships with the University of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, people who come to North West College can now do their entire four-year registered nursing program right at home in The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker. That is fantastic news for kids that want to stay close to home and eventually work and live in the community they grew up in, Mr. Speaker.

You know, and as I've worked with North West College, as I've worked with my colleagues in the Ministry of Advanced Education and in the Ministry of Health to advance these things, Mr. Speaker, over the last several years, I can't help but think about the incredible opportunities available to health care grads in The Battlefords. Mr. Speaker, if you think about it, number one, there's jobs available. There's jobs available. Whether it is in North Battleford proper or whether it's in Wilkie or Turtleford or Unity, Mr. Speaker, there are jobs in our part of the province. And good jobs, Mr. Speaker, jobs that pay the bills, jobs that pay the mortgage, Mr. Speaker, jobs with really good paycheques, Mr. Speaker.

The other piece is that, you know, again in this province we have a relatively low cost of living, Mr. Speaker. Compared to other provinces, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is a very affordable place to live. You can buy a house here, Mr. Speaker, and start to grow your family in this province.

But then going back to what's available for health care grads, you start to think about the stacking benefits of some of these incentives, Mr. Speaker. So again, the rural and remote recruitment incentive, Mr. Speaker, for a registered nurse or registered psych nurse, that's a \$50,000 cash incentive for a three-year return of service. Then you add the graduate retention program, Mr. Speaker, which I know members opposite have derided and, you know, view with derision, Mr. Speaker. But the graduate retention program is absolutely key in terms of ensuring that our students and our graduates stay in this province and build their lives here. So that's a \$20,000 rebate, Mr. Speaker.

So now we're at 70,000, Mr. Speaker. And if you think about what the nursing loan forgiveness program adds to that, Mr. Speaker, which was just added to North Battleford among several other communities just this year, Mr. Speaker, that adds another up to \$20,000 incentive.

So now, Mr. Speaker, you can receive your full four-year training right in The Battlefords. Then you can get a job in The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker, and there's nearly \$100,000 of incentives available for you as you start your career. That is absolutely incredible, absolutely incredible, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'll move to education. And I speak every day in this House about education and the investments that our government makes into K to 12 education in this province, Mr. Speaker. I've already said we've got the largest ever school operating increase in funding, Mr. Speaker, that this province has ever seen: 8.1 per cent to the 27 school divisions around the province.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? In our community, Living Sky School Division is going to see a year-over-year 6.5 per cent increase to school operating funding. Light of Christ Catholic School Division will see a 9.6 per cent increase. Mr. Speaker, those are significant increases, which means that our local school divisions, you know, now have more capacity to hire more teachers, hire more EAs [educational assistant], hire more professionals to better support students in our part of the province, Mr. Speaker.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I'll also highlight: The Battlefords are one of the focus communities for the specialized support

classroom pilot project, which aims to provide dedicated space in specific schools where students who need additional assistance can be provided with those supports before being reintegrated back into their home classroom.

You know, in our community, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing this work done at McKittrick Community School; we're seeing this work done at St. Mary School, Mr. Speaker. And so both these schools are receiving additional funding to hire more staff to support students and again, you know, to address some of the challenges that we see in our classrooms, Mr. Speaker, but also to make sure kids are better served. Kids and families will be better served through this pilot project, and we look forward to seeing that come through.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I'll maybe just talk specifically . . . I want to talk about the carbon tax very quickly. You know, and the cost — I'm not sure if I've shared these numbers in the House — the cost to school divisions around the province, Mr. Speaker, of the carbon tax, we estimate that to be an \$11 million cost province-wide, \$11 million that's going to pay a carbon tax that doesn't work, that could be spent in our classrooms, Mr. Speaker, that could be spent on buses, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that kids get to school safely, Mr. Speaker.

I was talking with a friend the other day about a lot of politicians have this new-found opposition to the carbon tax, including some of the members opposite, Mr. Speaker. And it's interesting, because you know, my friend and I were kind of chuckling. You know, come election time do you want the real thing or do you want a cheap replica?

And, Mr. Speaker, when I think about the real thing, that's this Premier. This Premier who was Environment minister at the time, Mr. Speaker, who walked out when this policy was shoved down the throats of the province, Mr. Speaker, he's the real thing. The member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the Saskatchewan NDP, is a cheap replica when it comes to opposition of the carbon tax, Mr. Speaker. I don't know about you. And you know what? I've got a lot of respect for the people of this province. They know better. And come election time, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that will show, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I've spent a bit of time recently trying to become a student of British political history. And you know, it's something to do in the evening, something to do on the weekend, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I found a particular interest in reading some of Margaret Thatcher's old quotes, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I just want to share. I want to share one that I believe is relevant, Mr. Speaker, relevant to the choice that we have in October. Let me quote this:

Imagine a Labour canvasser [or an NDP canvasser in this case] talking on the doorstep to those East German families when they settle in on freedom's side of the wall. You want to keep more of the money you earn? I'm afraid that's very selfish. We shall want to tax that away. You want to own shares in your own firm? We can't have that. The state has to own your firm. You want to choose where to send your children to school? Oh, that's very divisive. You'll send your child where we tell you.

Mr. President, the problem with Labour [or the NDP] is that

they're just not at home with freedom. Socialists don't like ordinary people choosing, for they might not choose socialism.

Mr. Speaker, and I think, Mr. Speaker, Thatcher's analysis of the Labour Party of the day in the UK [United Kingdom], Mr. Speaker, is very apt for the Saskatchewan NDP of 2024, Mr. Speaker. They've got lots of criticism on where to spend dollars. They don't know where to find the dollars though, Mr. Speaker. They don't know where to find it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, you know, they have lots of thoughts on how they want to tax windfall profits in the industries that drive forward this province, Mr. Speaker. They have no understanding of how those industries work, Mr. Speaker. And don't be fooled. They will nationalize those industries if they get a chance, Mr. Speaker.

And when it comes to choosing where your children get to go to school, Mr. Speaker, whether it's a public school or a Catholic school or an independent school in this province, Mr. Speaker, those members want to take it away. They want to tell you where you can and cannot send your children to school, Mr. Speaker. And that's just not right, Mr. Speaker. We're going to have a choice in October — socialism or continuing to grow this province, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to be supporting this budget, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** — The time now being 5 o'clock, this Assembly stands adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[The Assembly adjourned at 17:00.]

# GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN CABINET MINISTERS

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**Premier**  
**President of the Executive Council**  
**Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs**

**Hon. Lori Carr**  
Minister of Highways

**Hon. Jeremy Cockrill**  
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Minister Responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated  
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