



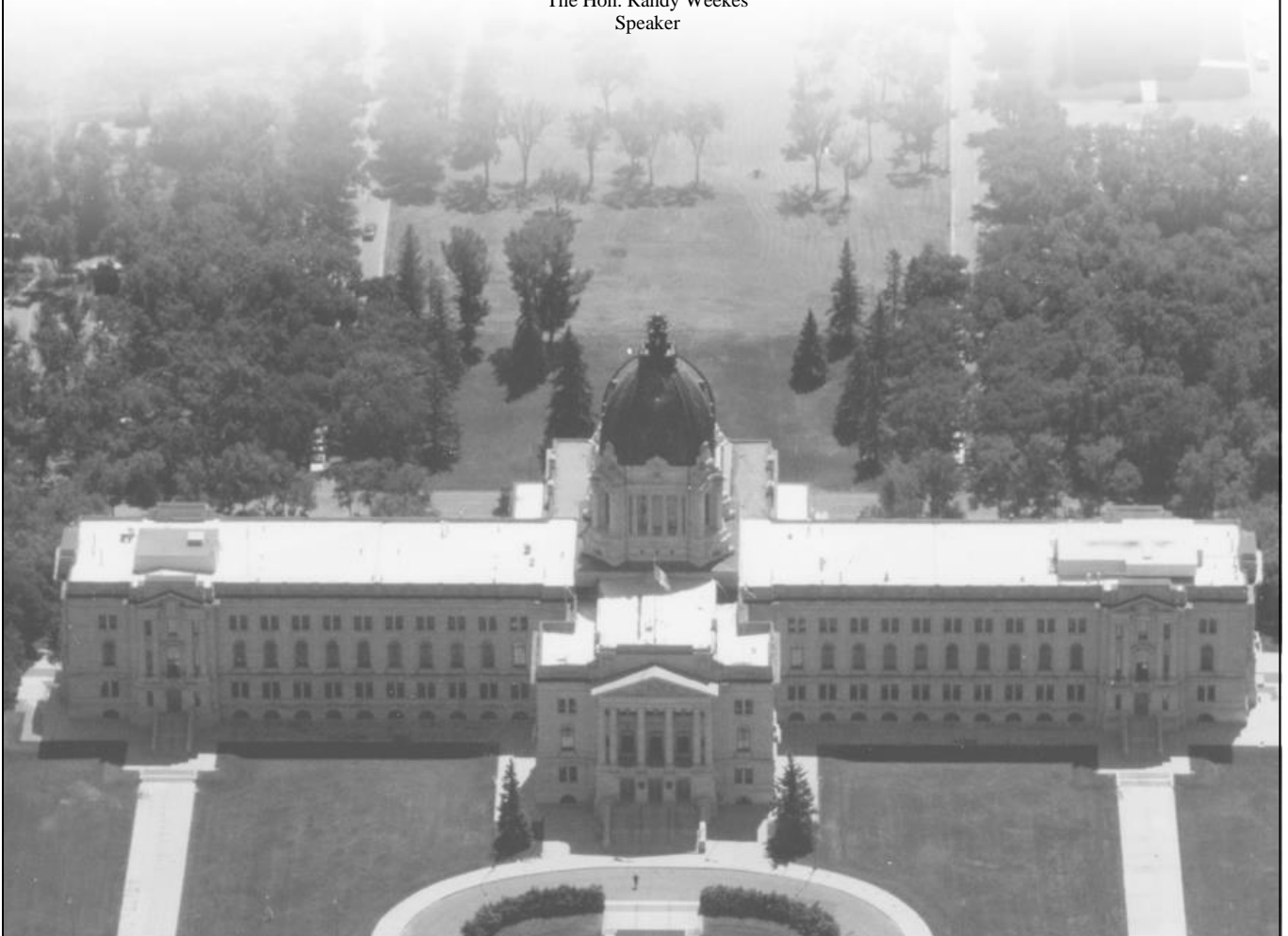
FOURTH SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
AND
PROCEEDINGS**

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



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
4th Session — 29th Legislature

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

Speaker — Hon. Randy Weekes
Premier — Hon. Scott Moe
Leader of the Opposition — Carla Beck

| | |
|---|---|
| Beck, Carla — Regina Lakeview (NDP) | Lemaigre, Jim — Athabasca (SP) |
| Bonk, Steven — Moosomin (SP) | Love, Matt — Saskatoon Eastview (NDP) |
| Bowes, Jennifer — Saskatoon University (NDP) | Makowsky, Hon. Gene — Regina Gardiner Park (SP) |
| Bradshaw, Fred — Carrot River Valley (SP) | Marit, Hon. David — Wood River (SP) |
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| Dennis, Terry — Canora-Pelly (SP) | Nerlien, Hugh — Kelvington-Wadena (SP) |
| Domotor, Ryan — Cut Knife-Turtleford (Ind.) | Nippi-Albright, Betty — Saskatoon Centre (NDP) |
| Duncan, Hon. Dustin — Weyburn-Big Muddy (SP) | Ottenbreit, Greg — Yorkton (SP) |
| Eyre, Hon. Bronwyn — Saskatoon Stonebridge-Dakota (SP) | Reiter, Hon. Jim — Rosetown-Elrose (SP) |
| Fiaz, Muhammad — Regina Pasqua (SP) | Ritchie, Erika — Saskatoon Nutana (NDP) |
| Francis, Ken — Kindersley (SP) | Ross, Alana — Prince Albert Northcote (SP) |
| Friesen, Marv — Saskatoon Riversdale (SP) | Ross, Hon. Laura — Regina Rochdale (SP) |
| Goudy, Todd — Melfort (SP) | Sarauer, Nicole — Regina Douglas Park (NDP) |
| Grewal, Gary — Regina Northeast (SP) | Skoropad, Dana — Arm River (SP) |
| Hargrave, Hon. Joe — Prince Albert Carlton (SP) | Steele, Doug — Cypress Hills (SP) |
| Harpauer, Hon. Donna — Humboldt-Watrous (SP) | Teed, Nathaniel — Saskatoon Meewasin (NDP) |
| Harrison, Daryl — Cannington (SP) | Tell, Hon. Christine — Regina Wascana Plains (SP) |
| Harrison, Hon. Jeremy — Meadow Lake (SP) | Vermette, Doyle — Cumberland (NDP) |
| Hindley, Hon. Everett — Swift Current (SP) | Weekes, Hon. Randy — Biggar-Sask Valley (SP) |
| Jenson, Terry — Martensville-Warman (SP) | Wilson, Nadine — Saskatchewan Rivers (Ind.) |
| Kaeding, Warren — Melville-Saltcoats (SP) | Wotherspoon, Trent — Regina Rosemont (NDP) |
| Keisig, Travis — Last Mountain-Touchwood (SP) | Wyant, Hon. Gordon — Saskatoon Northwest (SP) |
| Kirsch, Delbert — Batoche (SP) | Young, Aleana — Regina University (NDP) |
| Lambert, Lisa — Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood (SP) | Young, Colleen — Lloydminster (SP) |
| Lawrence, Greg — Moose Jaw Wakamow (Ind.) | |

Standings

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

Clerks-at-the-Table

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

Sergeant-at-Arms — Lyall Frederiksen

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Ritchie5351

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Teed5352

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Teed5353

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on a Point of Order

The Speaker: — Yesterday, on May 8th, 2024, the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order, alleging that during question period, the Leader of the Opposition insinuated the Premier was lying, when she used the phrase “. . . despite what the Premier would have people believe.” I committed to reviewing the record. On page 5329 of *Hansard*, I found that the Leader of the Opposition did make that comment.

I will remind members that only three sittings ago, on Wednesday, March 27th, 2024, I asked a member to withdraw and apologize for a similar comment. Disputes over fact are an integral part of debate but when comments in debate insinuate that other hon. members have been dishonest, they are out of order.

Yesterday’s question period included insults and insinuations of dishonesty by a number of members. I caution members on both sides to be mindful of the words they use in reference to each other and to respect this institution and all members in this Chamber.

I will now ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw and apologize for her remarks. I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Beck: — I withdraw and apologize.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — Guests in my gallery today are His Excellency Sri Sanjay Kumar Verma, High Commissioner of India to Canada, and Mrs. Gunjan Verma. Next to them are Sri Manish, consul general of India in Vancouver, and Manoj Kumar.

I recently had the opportunity to attend the 38th annual vegetarian banquet 2024, hosted by the Hindu Society of Saskatchewan. There His Excellency gave a very compelling speech on India and the importance of international relations, trade, and innovation.

Additionally on Sunday, my thanks to Bob Behari, president and CEO [chief executive officer] of EnviroWay, and his wife, Sonja, for hosting a reception for His Excellency.

I would like to congratulate Mr. Manish on his new diplomatic posting. This is his last official visit to Saskatchewan. Mr. Manish has been pivotal in facilitating the official parliamentary visit to Haryana, India. We were well received and hosted by Speaker Gupta and hope to reciprocate the exchange in the near future.

It was my pleasure to accept an invitation last night to be a guest

of Consul General Manish at India House for a dinner reception honouring His Excellency and his wife with other various invited guests.

I ask all members to join me in welcoming them to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan.

I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to join you in welcoming these distinguished guests to our Legislative Assembly, and we are very thrilled to have your presence here today. His Excellency Sri Sanjay Kumar Verma and his wife, Gunjan Verma, welcome to Saskatchewan. It’s wonderful to have you here today. As well as the consul general of India in Vancouver, Sri Manish. It’s our pleasure to welcome you here today.

Of course, this relationship between Canada and India — Saskatchewan, in particular, and India — is very, very important to people here in Saskatchewan, and I know in India as well. Just to get a sense of that, Mr. Speaker, in 2023 Saskatchewan was responsible for over one-quarter of exports to India, things like lentils, potash, wood pulp, and the list goes on and on and on. And we know, you know, in particular we’ve heard how important all of those exports, the potash contracts are to people here for jobs here in this province.

Mr. Speaker, newcomers from India made up almost 20 per cent of those arriving in Saskatchewan, something that is very, very important to us here in Saskatchewan to the economy but also to our communities, joining those who are well established here for decades, who have given back to communities in business and professions. And I think of the Indo-Canadian Cultural Connections event every year, so much raised for charity, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome to this Legislative Assembly and I invite all members to join me in welcoming these very important guests.

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

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Ask for leave for an extended introduction.

The Speaker: — Leave has been requested for an extended introduction. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well I have the great pleasure today of welcoming back His Excellency Sanjay Kumar Verma, a great friend of mine. Had the chance to really get to know each other and spend a lot of time together over the last year and a half or so. High Commissioner of India to Canada and his wife, Gunjan Verma — welcome. His Excellency has served in his role as High Commissioner since November of 2022 and undertook his first visit to Saskatchewan last summer.

I'm also very pleased to welcome back Consul General Manish of India who serves in the consulate in Vancouver. Manish has served in his role as consul general since September 2020 and also has developed a wonderful relationship with government. This is the consul general's third visit to Saskatchewan.

I was pleased to join the Premier in meeting with both the High Commissioner and the consul general this morning to discuss our shared interests, in addition to the discussions we've had over the last number of days. We also want to personally thank High Commissioner Verma for his support of the Premier's recent trip to India. During the Premier's mission to India, he met with senior members of Prime Minister Modi's cabinet. And thank you so much, High Commissioner, for your assistance in that.

This provided an invaluable opportunity to discuss Saskatchewan's long-term strategic partnership with India, which we have both worked very hard to foster, as a reliable supplier of agricultural products, uranium, potash, and to collaborate on new and emerging opportunities of shared interests such as mining, critical minerals, and ag tech.

Our strong relationship with India has led to significant opportunities and benefits for the people of both India and Saskatchewan. With India's rapidly growing economy, it continues to be one of Saskatchewan's top trading partners with exports valued at over \$1.3 billion in 2023. This includes \$672 million in lentil exports alone — and thank you, Consul General, for your role in that — which represents 48 per cent of India's total lentil imports.

This strong trade relationship has grown significantly as a result of the continued collaboration and work facilitated through our Saskatchewan-India trade and investment office which we opened in 2021. As a province which exports nearly 70 per cent of what we produce, we rely on strong relationships with our trusted friends and partners.

I want to thank High Commissioner Verma; his wife, Gunjan; and Consul General Manish for being here today. I ask all members of the Assembly to join me in welcoming them.

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

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will introduce the guests over here in our own language. Thank you very much, Sanjay Kumar Verma and Gunjan Verma.

[The hon. member spoke for a time in Urdu and Hindi.]

Thank you very much for coming to your legislature.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the Indian community is a growing community in health care, in education, and we are very been blessed by having those over here to encourage us. And I would request all members in the Chamber to join me and give them a warm welcome to their Legislative Assembly.

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

Mr. Grewal: — [The hon. member spoke for a time in Hindi.]

Now I will ask all the members to join me in welcoming the High Commissioner of India and the consul general of India and Mrs. Gunjan Verma.

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

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request an extended introduction.

The Speaker: — The minister has requested an extended introduction. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, I would like to introduce three special guests seated in the Speaker's gallery. Joining us today is a very familiar face to a lot of us, Hayley, Hayley Cattell, who previously worked in the building and played a large role in our caucus office. Joining Hayley today is her mother, Patti Sandison Cattell, and her father, Stacey Cattell.

Mr. Speaker, earlier today I had the pleasure of attending the 2024 Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame class of 2024 induction announcement. These incredible, deserving athletes will have their achievements and stories enshrined alongside the incredible men and women who have left a big mark on our provincial sporting history. One figure who comes to mind when visiting the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame is 2001 inductee Margaret Sandison, a familiar face to many people in this city, a female trailblazer and dedicated volunteer, as my colleague will touch on in a member statement today.

Mr. Speaker, this past February we were saddened to learn of the passing of Margaret Sandison. I'm so grateful for her family, Hayley, Patti, and Stacey, for joining us today to celebrate her remarkable life and career. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to invite all members to join me in welcoming Hayley, Patti, and Stacey to their Legislative Assembly.

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

Mr. Teed: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be on my feet and join with the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport as the official opposition critic for Parks, Culture and Sport, and welcome the Cattells to their Legislative Assembly. I want to make a special welcome to Hayley, Patti, and Stacey. Thank you so much for the work that you have done in your communities.

As I'm sitting here just making conversation with my seatmate, I learned that the matriarch of your family, Margaret Sandison — who we are so sad to hear that has recently passed — was a trailblazer for women in sport. And so I just want to congratulate you on the legacy that you carry forward from Margaret. I know that you'll continue to do amazing things. And it's an honour to join with the minister and ask all members to join me in welcoming you to your Legislative Assembly.

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

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you, it's my pleasure to introduce a member from Saskatchewan Post-Secondary Student Council, which has just wrapped up its first year. Mr. Speaker, the '23-24 council includes a total of 21 students from different institutions across this great province.

Mr. Speaker, seated in your gallery is student representative Zohra Zahir — I think I pronounced that right; I had the whole lunch hour to practise, Mr. Speaker — accompanied with her by Kate Thiessen and Carla Groeger from the Ministry of Advanced Education.

Mr. Speaker, Zohra is currently at the University of Regina, having studied in India prior to coming to this province, Mr. Speaker. She wants to be an astrobiologist. Now, Mr. Speaker, I asked her over lunch what an astrobiologist did, and she explained it to me. And we don't have enough time to explain it on the floor of the Assembly even if I could, Mr. Speaker. But she's got a very, very bright future, Mr. Speaker. Just a remarkable individual.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Advanced Education assembled the council to connect with current post-secondary students from across the province, representing many post-secondary institutions. The group of students offers advice and insight and feedback on a variety of topics related to post-secondary education in Saskatchewan, including student mental health and well-being, transitioning in and out of post-secondary education, and funding students' post-secondary education.

[13:45]

Mr. Speaker, key learnings from them are shared with our post-secondary partners and are also used to inform the work done on policies and programs by my officials in the Ministry of Advanced Education.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the council and the work they've done, Mr. Speaker. They are certainly the future of this province, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that everyone in the Assembly join me in thanking Zohra for her participation in the council and welcoming her to her Legislative Assembly today.

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

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to join with the minister opposite in welcoming Zohra to your legislature. I really appreciate the leadership that is shown in post-secondary by you and your fellow committee members, and I hope you enjoy the proceedings today. Thank you so much.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you and to all members I just want to take a brief moment and give a special hello to two remarkably successful, accomplished young women sitting in your gallery, both Zohra

and Haley, who are friends of mine — I cannot see you behind the clock but I know you're up there — doing just absolutely remarkable things.

Haley I've only gotten to know recently, being beach mates out in the great community of Lumsden Beach and having a shared interest in politics and a deeply embarrassing love for Taylor Swift.

And Zohra I've known for years, and just absolutely agree with my colleague and with the Minister for Education, absolutely the best of what post-secondary in Saskatchewan has to offer. She's a remarkable community member, she's cool as heck, and is just doing remarkable things in and outside of academia. And it's such a pleasure to see her back here in this legislature.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, thanks for the indulgence. And I'd like to ask all members to join me once more in welcoming these two trailblazers to their Assembly.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Miigwech, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and present the following petition. The folks who signed this petition wish to bring to your attention: Saskatchewan needs legislature to ensure the provincial duty-to-consult is fulfilled and is carried out with the honour of the Crown; the Sask Party government did not follow its own guidelines on consulting with inherent and treaty rights holders while drafting the current duty-to-consult policy; the Saskatchewan Party government continues to ignore inherent and treaty rights holders, and maintains its position to not address cumulative impacts' effects on treaty rights, making it contrary to developments in the common law and to the requirements contained in both Saskatchewan's 2010 and 2023 duty-to-consult policy framework.

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 enshrine duty-to-consult into law by enacting the meaningful duty-to-consult legislation.

The folks who signed this petition reside in Prince Albert and Saskatoon. I do so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, 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 decision to not charge the carbon tax on home heating, Saskatchewan families continue to pay the tax out

of pocket at pumps, grocery stores, and more.

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.

This petition is signed by residents from Martensville, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to again rise and present a petition to the Legislative Assembly calling for home supports for older adults in Saskatchewan.

Those who signed the petition today would like us to know that when older adults have autonomy over their lives and decisions, that they experience better health outcomes and better quality of life. And that's what this initiative is really about: ensuring that as Saskatchewan citizens age, that they have the ability to make their own decisions about where they live. And what they're asking for is to age in place, in their own homes, in their communities. I believe it's incumbent on this government, and any government, to listen and to reflect these desires in policy and in our budget.

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 work with older adults, stakeholders, and municipalities to design a home support program that will allow seniors to age with dignity and autonomy in their homes and communities.

Today's petition is signed by residents of Regina and Pilot Butte. I do so present.

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

Mr. Teed: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present our petition to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan to suspend the fuel tax.

Mr. Speaker, the undersigned residents of the province wish to bring to our attention the following: Saskatchewan people are struggling to keep up with increased costs of food, shelter, and other basic necessities as wages have not kept up with the rate of inflation; that according to an October 2023 Angus Reid poll more than one-third of people in Saskatchewan are struggling with the cost of living; that in their most recent budget the Sask Party failed to implement any new policy or funding commitments to provide relief to cash-strapped families; and that the Sask Party government could immediately provide cost-of-living relief to Saskatchewan families by heeding our calls for a suspension of the 15-cent-per-litre Sask Party gas tax.

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 suspend the collection of the provincial fuel tax from gasoline and diesel for a period of six months to help families struggling with the high cost of living.

The undersigned residents reside in Moose Jaw. I do so present.

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

Ms. Conway: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm again on my feet to present a petition calling on the Sask Party government to adequately fund education. Budget year after budget year we have seen cuts from this government to the classroom. Election year after election year we see promises made and then promises broken.

As of this week teachers have announced an indefinite withdrawal of extracurriculars, and it's clear in speaking with any educator across this province they did not take that step lightly. Unfortunately we only have this government's disrespect and intransigence to blame. They have flat out refused to send the one impasse issue to a neutral third-party arbitrator so kids can get back to the classroom. They have flat out refused to commit to putting the investments they claim they're willing to make in a contract.

Growing up doing extracurriculars I was taught that teachers were donating their time. I was taught gratitude. If this government feels entitled to teachers' free time, my question is why, after cuts, disrespect, a disparaging billboard campaign, are we surprised? If this Sask Party really values teachers, they need to act like it. If they really value education, they need to start acting like it.

I'll read the prayer:

We, in the prayer, call on the government to provide adequate, sustainable, predictable funding to ensure that schools, teachers, and other caring professionals are able to meet the needs of every student across Saskatchewan.

The signatories reside in Saskatoon. I do so present.

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

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present our petition calling on the government to reverse the ban on third-party sex ed providers in public schools.

The undersigned residents of Saskatchewan would like to bring to our attention the following: that banning third-party providers of sexual health education will mean fewer kids getting access to evidence-based sex ed, which we need given that Saskatchewan has the highest rates of teen pregnancy, STIs [sexually transmitted infection], and HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] transmission in the country, the highest rates of sexual assault and domestic violence in the country as well, Mr. Speaker.

Banning third-party sex health education has broader reach, as this ban impacts additional prevention education programs, programs focused on body safety, consent, and healthy relationships. Mr. Speaker, many teachers have expressed great concern because they are not adequately trained to administer sex health education.

In the prayer that follows, I will read:

Call on the Government of Saskatchewan to immediately reverse its policy decision to ban third-party sex health educators in Saskatchewan schools and listen to experts and stakeholders in developing comprehensive sex education curriculum for all publicly funded schools.

The residents who have signed today reside in Saskatoon. I do so present.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Government's Economic Record

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, over the weekend a very upset resident of Regina forwarded me a fundraising email that he'd received from the Sask Party. What he was so mad about was a paragraph in the letter that reads, and I quote, "Saskatchewan's economy is the best in Canada. We're making record investments in health and education and we did it while keeping taxes low."

Well, Mr. Speaker, we all know this government has the second-worst economic record and the worst job creation record in Canada. Just this past month we lost another 6,000 jobs, and for the ninth month in a row the value of Saskatchewan exports has dropped. So how, he asked, can anyone say we have the best economy?

Furthermore, if you compare the amount actually spent on health and education year to year, the increases are 1.27 and 2.9 per cent for education.

And finally he said what really got his goat was that sentence about keeping taxes low because, based on the Sask Party's own budget documents, PST [provincial sales tax] revenues now comprise a whopping 16 per cent of government revenues, when in 2017 it was 8 per cent. But, Mr. Speaker, that's just another example of Sask Party math that doesn't add up.

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

Honouring Canadians' Sacrifices at Battle of Vimy Ridge

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now for something completely different, Mr. Speaker. On April 9th, 2024, Mr. Speaker, Canada will mark the 107th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Mr. Speaker, the sacrifices made by the thousands of young Canadians who participated in the Battle of Vimy Ridge cannot

be understated. It is said that our Confederation paid for its status as a nation with the amount of blood that was spilled in that battle — 3,598 young Canadians were killed and 7,004 wounded after three days of intense fighting. These young people enlisted from all over our country. Their regiments were tapestries of different people, just like the Confederation that they represented — First Nations, Métis, Inuit, francophone, anglophone, and more.

Just like our province, their strength came from many people. Four battalions that fought were from Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker: the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles; the 5th Battalion, now the North Saskatchewan Regiment; the 28th Battalion; and the 46th Battalion, Mr. Speaker, now the Saskatchewan Dragoons.

Marking today is not just important in showing our respect for generations past, it's also about showing respect and honour to those who continue to serve and fight for our freedom. So, Mr. Speaker, thank you, on behalf of all Saskatchewan people, to those who have and continue to serve. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Celebration of Eid al-Fitr

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to celebrate the end of the holy month of Ramadan for Muslims in Saskatchewan and around the world. Ramadan is a time to reflect and practise self-discipline through fasting from sunrise to sunset for a month. As Muslims, we fast as an act of worship and a chance to get closer to God. It is a reminder of the importance of service, empathy, and compassion for those in need.

Tomorrow Muslims across Canada will celebrate Eid al-Fitr. Eid is a celebration, one of the most important in our Muslim faith, but it is also a chance to recommit to build a better future in this province and around the world. Our province's motto is "from many peoples, strength," and the Muslim community exemplifies that motto. I'm incredibly proud to be a part of this community, and I'm honoured to stand in this House as the official opposition's first Muslim MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly].

I invite all members to join me in celebrating Eid al-Fitr, and please help me give thanks to the Muslim community across Saskatchewan for all they do for our province. Eid Mubarak. Thank you.

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

Remembering Jim Hopson

Hon. Mr. Makowsky: — Last week, many in Saskatchewan were saddened to hear that former Roughrider president and CEO and player, Jim Hopson, had passed away. Jim was a key contributor during a time of monumental change for our province and for the Roughriders organization. After graduating from Thom Collegiate, Jim would go on to play for the Rams and later the Riders. He played for four seasons on the O-line [offensive line] before he retired following the '76 Grey Cup game.

[14:00]

Jim was always proud of his NOD [north of Dewdney] roots, in his own words. He was “Just a Regina guy who was lucky enough to have played all my football here in Saskatchewan.” After a long career as an educator and Riders board member, he took on the role of the Riders’ first full-time president and CEO in 2005. It was this part of his impressive career where he changed the course of his beloved team. His leadership saw a total rebuild and modernization of the club.

Always an eternal optimist, during his time there were several Grey Cup appearances, with wins in 2007 and 2013, and a massive transformation, as I said, and great success on the business side of things. Jim was also a crucial part of the stadium building committee, which led to the development of the new Mosaic Stadium that we all enjoy today.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the Assembly to join me in thanking Jim Hopson and remembering his incredible legacy.

Thank you.

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

Remembering Margaret Sandison

Ms. Lambert: — Mr. Speaker, I’d like to take a moment to recognize the recent passing of a remarkable Saskatchewan woman. Margaret Sandison, known to most as Margie, was born in 1935 here in Regina. She was well known in the figure skating community at a provincial, national, and international level for more than 60 years.

Margie started figure skating at the Wascana Winter Club at the age of three, and began her judging career at 16. Margie was a world-renowned skating judge and the first judge from our province for Triple Gold, Canadian Level Dance, and international singles and pairs. She has served as an advisor for numerous Canadian championship events and judged internationally across Europe and North America.

Many will remember Margie for her passionate and dedicated volunteerism. To name just a few of her recognitions, she received the Sask Sport Volunteer of the Year Award and the City of Regina Volunteer Award. Margie was inducted into the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame in 2001 for her talent, her achievements, and passion for educating, volunteering, and promoting sport across the province. Margie balanced all of this with a successful career in real estate and being a beloved wife, mother, grandmother, and friend.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members to join me in celebrating the life of Margaret Sandison. Her contributions to our community and her legacy as a groundbreaker for sport in Saskatchewan. Thank you.

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

Construction Is Complete on Regina Urgent Care Centre

Mr. Grewal: — It’s another great day in Regina, Mr. Speaker. Just this morning the Premier and many other members of our caucus joined the ministers of Health and SaskBuilds for an

update on the Regina urgent care centre. Mr. Speaker, the care centre’s construction is now 100 per cent complete.

This innovative facility will be open 24 hours, seven days a week for treatment of minor illness and injuries that require immediate attention. Services will include injury care, including suturing services, sprains, and casting; treatment of infections, fevers, flu symptoms, rashes, and dehydration; on-site basic diagnostic imaging and lab services; and mental health services, including screening, assessment, counselling, and connections to resources and referrals for treatment. The mental health and addictions unit will have its own dedicated entrance and intake for discreet and confidential support.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to offering treatment without stigma or shame so that individuals can lead healthy, drug-free lives. Our government will be committing nearly 18 million annually for physicians, staffing, and other expenses. The people of Regina will be well served by this facility once it is fully operational.

Thank you to our partners in the Hospitals of Regina Foundation, Graham Construction, and the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] for their work in getting this project completed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Lloydminster.

Saskatchewan’s Economic Outlook

Ms. C. Young: — Mr. Speaker, it’s another great day in Saskatchewan. But if you listen to the opposition, you wouldn’t know it. So let’s listen to something a bit more realistic. Here’s what Deloitte had to say in their April 2024 economic outlook, and I quote:

The economy of Saskatchewan is poised for relatively strong performance this year compared to the rest of the country. We’re seeing strong investment in the province, driven by sizable investments in its potash industry. Couple this strength with solid population gains and relatively low household debt burdens, and Saskatchewan’s economy is poised to grow.

Deloitte forecasts Saskatchewan’s GDP [gross domestic product] to grow by 1.4 per cent in 2024, tied for second in the nation. The report also forecasts a 3.1 per cent increase in 2025, ranking second in the nation, and a nation-leading 3.6 per cent increase in 2026. Labour force statistics released last week show the province created 10,500 new full-time jobs, a 2.2 per cent increase year over year in March. The province saw an all-time high in labour force, reaching 626,200, and we continue to have the third-lowest unemployment rate among provinces.

But you wouldn’t know it, any of these facts, if you listened to the member from Regina University. She seems to think the entire population of Meadow Lake is unemployed, but that’s . . .

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Fuel Tax and Provincial Economy

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, this tired and out-of-touch government isn't listening to what matters most to Saskatchewan people. Now this Premier has the worst job creation record in the country — 6,000 jobs lost last month, unemployment is up, and thousands are giving up on finding a job altogether.

Mr. Speaker, people in this province are struggling, yet this Premier offers zero relief. Why won't the Premier give families struggling in this province a break and suspend his fuel tax?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, the fuel tax we have in Saskatchewan today is precisely the same fuel tax that was charged each and every day under the NDP administration, the difference being, the difference being today is that all of those dollars are invested right back into our highways, which under the NDP they were not, Mr. Speaker. That's the difference between the government we have today and the government we had previously, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to jobs, the February numbers, jobs in Saskatchewan are up 10,500. That shouldn't be too hard to figure out, Mr. Speaker. With that, that has attracted over 29,000 people to move to Saskatchewan this past year, Mr. Speaker. Those are families that are making their home in community after community across Saskatchewan. And I would point the opposition to the Deloitte quote that was read in a minute ago:

The economy of Saskatchewan is poised for relatively strong performance this year compared to the rest of the country. We're seeing strong investment in the province driven by sizable investments in the potash industry. You couple this strength with solid population gains and relatively low household debt burdens, and Saskatchewan's economy is poised to grow 1.4 per cent this year and 3.1 per cent next year.

Mr. Speaker, end of quote.

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

Management of Health Care System

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, this is a premier failing to deliver on the cost of living and failing to deliver when it comes to health care. And we see that record of failure yet again today with this government firing off yet another press release about the Regina urgent care centre.

[Applause]

Mr. Speaker, predictably clapping for themselves. Another photo op, but they have zero plan, zero plan to actually staff that centre. Mr. Speaker, with chronic short-staffing and burnout at both the General and the Pasqua hospitals, what is this Premier's plan to actually staff that urgent care centre?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, we have the health human

resource plan, the most ambitious health human resource plan in the nation of Canada, showing successes with the hiring of nurses from Canadian . . . not only Canadian graduates but afar, starting to drive down our surgical wait-lists across the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

The Saskatchewan Health Authority understands that that plan is well funded with over \$100 million put behind it, Mr. Speaker. It's showing successes across the Saskatchewan Health Authority, and it's going to be successful in hiring the more than 100 staff that are going to house that first-of-its-kind innovative urgent care centre in Regina.

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

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, that Premier's record has one in six people in this province without a family doctor, and a premier who is clearly, clearly not listening to health care workers. They're burning out and they're leaving their professions because this tired and out-of-touch government refuses to listen. Mr. Speaker, the Premier can't even say yes to a nursing task force that's been called for by the nurses.

Mr. Speaker, as Shannon Orell-Bast recently said when she visited her legislature, and I quote:

You can put in infrastructure. You can put in machines. You can put in whatever you want, but people have to operate these in order to be well.

When is the Premier going to start listening to health care workers so that the people of this province can get the care that they need?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — You need a balance, Mr. Speaker, of infrastructure; you need people; you need training opportunities for those people. All of that is only available though a strong, growing, and vibrant economy, Mr. Speaker, of which this party, this government has been focused on for 17 years now, unlike the members opposite, when they had the opportunity, with the worst investment rate in Canada, the worst jobs rate in Canada, and a population that actually went down 700 people over the course of 16 years.

Mr. Speaker, the investment in the urgent care centre is step one. The investment in the people that are going to offer the services within that centre is step two. And three, Mr. Speaker — and some of the most important step — is the services that are actually going to be delivered to families, whether that be urgent care services, filling a gap in our health care system between making an appointment with your primary care physician and being in the emergency department, filling that gap.

Or secondarily, Mr. Speaker, providing access, providing access for those in our communities and our families that might be having a mental health crisis or unfortunately have entered a life of addictions. And we're backing up that access with 500 recovery beds. We're backing up that access with hiring mental health and addictions professionals across the board, Mr. Speaker. And we're backing up all of that with the most ambitious health human resource plan in the nation of Canada.

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

Ms. Beck: — [Inaudible] . . . read the quote again. You're not going to get there unless you start listening to health care workers in this province. People in this province cannot get the care that they need because of this tired and out-of-touch government.

Mr. Speaker, let's look at surgical waits. New numbers show that Saskatchewan is still dead last when it comes to knee and hip replacement surgery. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has been dead last for almost as long as that Premier has held that seat.

Is it acceptable, Mr. Speaker, to that Premier, that people in this province are waiting longer than any other province in the country for knee and hip surgeries?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to begin by thanking our surgical teams across this province who are helping us to reduce the surgical wait times across Saskatchewan and reduce those waits for patients right across Saskatchewan.

In last year's budget, in the new budget we are making record investments into surgical care. And we're only able to do that, Mr. Speaker, as a result of a strong and growing and vibrant economy here so we can invest over \$670 million into surgical procedures across this province, making sure that patients are getting the hip surgeries that they need, getting the knee surgeries that they need.

We still have work to do, Mr. Speaker, but we have a target to reduce those wait times. We're going to hit that target and we're going to continue to make progress when it comes to surgeries in Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Clarke: — I'm curious to know, Mr. Speaker, when that target's going to be hit. The fact is that we have been dead last in Canada every single year since 2019. Nearly every year since that Premier took office, Saskatchewan people have been waiting longer than any other province. Waiting for surgery severely lowers the quality of life for patients.

Does the minister think it is acceptable that Saskatchewan people have to wait longer for this life-changing surgery than everywhere else in Canada?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said previously, we recognize that there's still more work to do to reduce the surgical wait times, to make sure that people across this province get the surgeries that they need as quickly as possible. And we are making advancements, Mr. Speaker, and progress when it comes to that.

Current average wait time for hip replacement is now 176 days, which is significantly lower than previously reported targets and numbers reported by CIHI [Canadian Institute for Health

Information]. It's lower than the pre-pandemic wait times for knee surgeries, Mr. Speaker. As of December 31st of this past year, over 16,000 orthopedic surgeries were completed in the province, including over 5,300 hip and knee surgeries.

We are on track, Mr. Speaker, to complete the most orthopedic surgeries ever in the province's history, thanks to the great work of our surgical teams across this province. We're going to continue to support them with dollars and other supports necessary to make sure they can do the work necessary to support patients right across this province, Mr. Speaker.

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

[14:15]

Mr. Clarke: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These long wait times for life-changing surgeries are unacceptable. The median wait for hip replacements was 232 days, Mr. Speaker. But 10 per cent of patients were forced to wait more than 619 days or more. How does the minister defend that? Why should anyone in Saskatchewan have to wait in pain for almost two years before they can get a hip replacement that they need?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said previously, we continue to make record investments into our surgical program as a result of a strong and growing and vibrant economy that allows us to make these very strategic key investments into health care. And these are investments that were not happening under the previous government when they had the opportunity to serve the people of this province. We're going to continue to do this work, Mr. Speaker.

Our government has done over 1,000 more hip replacement surgeries than were done in the entire fiscal year of 2006-2007, Mr. Speaker. We have a growing province, more people in Saskatchewan than ever before, a growing population, and a demographic that is accessing our health care system more than ever before, and one that this government is going to continue to support, people right across this province, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Clarke: — Mr. Speaker, those are hollow words for Saskatchewan people sitting in pain right now. The wait times for hip surgeries are unacceptable. But for knees, Mr. Speaker, they're even longer — 318 days was the median wait time for knee replacements. But some people waited 716 days or more. Now these aren't just numbers. These are Saskatchewan people, people who are waiting in pain for surgeries that should have been delivered months ago.

Does the minister think it's acceptable for anyone in this province to have to wait more than 700 days to get a knee replacement?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Current average wait times for knee replacement is 309 days, which is lower than

the wait time reported by CIHI in some recent reports, Mr. Speaker. As I said previously, over 16,500 orthopedic procedures have been completed in this province, including 5,300 hip and knee replacements.

Mr. Speaker, just specific to knee surgeries, we have already completed the most knee replacement surgeries in this province's history at over 3,700 knee surgeries, thanks to the great work being done by our surgical teams across this province, who we meet with on a regular basis to talk to surgeons, to talk to the head of surgery and those that are working in our operating rooms, nurses and other associated health care professionals, Mr. Speaker.

And we're going to continue to work on these targets, reduce those waits, and make sure that people can get the care that they need.

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

Mr. Clarke: — If I understand correctly, Mr. Speaker, the minister is saying that the wait is nine days lower than I was reporting. Big progress there, Mr. Speaker.

Now the Sask Party likes to talk about opening buildings or about record spending in health care, but people don't need a press release or a photo op. They need quick access to health care. They need results. And this tired and out-of-touch government, by the numbers, is failing to deliver those results and failing badly.

People in BC [British Columbia] are waiting half as long for hip and knee replacements. Why does the minister think it's okay for people in BC to have better access to health care than people here at home?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, he might want to be cautious about referring to BC because when it comes to breast cancer care, the province of BC, New Democrat BC, is sending patients out of province. As a matter of fact, they're also sending patients, when it comes to breast care, to Washington state, Mr. Speaker, for their care. That's what the province of BC is doing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let's remember as well, we as a government are working to provide all sorts of options for patients in this province, reducing the surgical wait times, investing in surgeries here in Saskatchewan, and providing patients with the opportunity to . . . as a result of contracting some surgeries through private clinics in Calgary. That is another option. And we have people across this province that are accepting those offers when it comes to surgeries and the opportunity to get hip replacements in other provinces, Mr. Speaker.

Again we're going to continue to invest in making sure that we have record investments into surgical wait times, Mr. Speaker. And again I don't know what the NDP's plan is. We wait. We still haven't seen it, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Conway: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the former minister of Health announced his big fix to our worst-in-the-nation knee and hip replacement wait times, a plan to send 20 patients a month out of province to a private clinic in Calgary. This is what we see over and over from this Sask Party government. They drive our public health care system into the ground, then sign a private deal with a Sask Party donor to fix the mess they've created. Meanwhile wait times keep going up and up.

Why does the Sask Party always find a way to help their friends and donors get ahead while Saskatchewan people wait longer and longer?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is one of several options that we have presented to patients as we work to reduce the surgical wait times. I'm going to read a quote, Mr. Speaker, from an individual who wrote in to the office in February, who says, and I quote:

I want to share with you that last month I had the opportunity to go to Calgary for hip replacement surgery as part of the provincial initiative to address the long wait-list. It has been a game changer for me as my condition was deteriorating quickly, and on the wait-list it would've meant another year until surgery. I'm confident if that had been my path, I would've ended up on sick leave, unable to work while waiting for surgery.

Instead I'm recovering quickly and expect to be back to work soon. I'm almost pain free, starting to be active again, and regaining strength.

Mr. Speaker, again we are making significant investments, record investments into our surgical program here in Saskatchewan but also exploring all options to give patients access to surgeries they need while we continue to cut that wait-list down.

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

Ms. Conway: — Mr. Speaker, facts are facts and this private Calgary-based company has donated more than \$14,000 to the Sask Party since 2016. What did they get in exchange? A \$6 million deal for private hip and knee replacements; a 2 million sweetheart deal to provide basic mammogram services at 10 times the cost to Saskatchewan taxpayers. That's what they got, Mr. Speaker.

The only people who are benefiting from the Sask Party's privatization schemes are Sask Party donors. Saskatchewan people are left waiting longer and longer. Why won't the Sask Party fix our public health care system and get people the care they need now?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know the members opposite, we know they can't stand anything that's outside-of-the-box thinking. They can't stand to look at anything

that might be involved with privately operated but publicly funded health care, Mr. Speaker. And there are people that are benefiting.

I'll continue with the quote from the individual who wrote in to our office who said, furthermore:

I want you to know this initiative has made a significant impact on my life and I am grateful I had the opportunity to go to Calgary. I hope you're able to continue this strategy as it is helping people get their health and get their lives back. I work in health and I know there are many challenges in providing care and think it's important that you hear about a success story.

Mr. Speaker, that's from a health care worker here in Saskatchewan who's in support of this initiative to give people the option to get surgeries next door.

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

Ms. Conway: — Mr. Speaker, this is the Sask Party's MO [modus operandi]. Step one, neglect the public service and run it into the ground. Step two, wait for the public to get frustrated with the service. Step three, privatize the service to their friends. Step four, rake in the donations while their friends and insiders get rich. That's the Sask Party's privatization playbook and it's not working.

When will the Sask Party realize that Saskatchewan people are the ones paying the price for their health care privatization schemes?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here's the opposition's playbook. Number one, give up on Saskatchewan. Drive people out of this province. Reduce the population. Number two, close hospitals. Close 52 rural hospitals across this province. Fire doctors. Fire nurses. Shut down training programs, for example, for registered psychiatric nurses. Heaven forbid we would have some of those being trained in our province, Mr. Speaker. That's their plan.

Here's what the playbook of this government is. Continue to have faith in the people of this province, to make record investments into health care, \$7.6 billion in this year's budget into health care, \$670 million alone into the surgical program, an increase of three and a half million dollars into surgeries in this year's budget to meet the increasing demand, Mr. Speaker.

This is a growing province, one that we are proud of, one that the people of this province are proud of. It'd be nice for once if the NDP were actually proud of Saskatchewan.

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

School Nutrition Program

Mr. Love: — Mr. Speaker, under this tired and out-of-touch government, we have the highest rates of childhood poverty in

the country. Fifty-seven per cent of families struggle to pay for groceries. Parents need some help when it comes to making sure every kid has access to safe and healthy food.

The federal government has announced a plan for a national school lunch program. Will the Sask Party get a deal with the feds to help parents and kids get access to healthy food?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We spoke about this issue for a little bit of time at estimates yesterday evening in this Chamber, and I reminded that member in particular that the province already funds a child nutrition program here in the province to the tune of about \$2.7 million a year, a slight increase again. Mr. Speaker, over 5.3 million meals were provided to students in our education system around the province.

But, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to working with the federal government, there's examples where us as a provincial government have worked with the federal government when it's in the best interests of Saskatchewan. We will review the federal government's recent announcement, ensure that it's best for Saskatchewan kids, it's best for Saskatchewan schools and families, Mr. Speaker, before we enter into any agreement with the federal government. Thank you.

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

Mr. Love: — Mr. Speaker, the fact is that there is a serious need to help families in our province today with access to healthy food. We lead the country in child poverty, and 57 per cent of families are struggling to put food on the table. But you wouldn't know that from listening to this tired and out-of-touch government.

Will the minister work with the feds and get a deal for Saskatchewan? Yes or no?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As per usual from this federal government, an announcement comes out with zero information. This is something that the federal government has talked about off and on over the last several years, but an announcement comes out in recent days and weeks with no information and no guidance for provinces, and no consultation with provinces either, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, we want to work with the school divisions around the province to ensure that students are supported. As I said, Mr. Speaker, we will work with the federal government to understand the information around this announcement. If it's in the best interests of Saskatchewan kids and families, absolutely we will enter an agreement that makes sense for Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Love: — Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely important to stand up to the federal government when they're on the wrong track. But it's also important to get a deal done when it's in the best interests

of Saskatchewan people. Federal funding for a school lunch program would go a long way to reducing child poverty and helping families with the cost of living, and it's something Saskatchewan school boards are also asking for.

Why won't that Sask Party work with the feds, get a deal done on a universal school nutrition program?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Mr. Speaker, let's just review what that member opposite and the NDP are asking us to do as government. They're asking us to enter an agreement when we have no information from the federal government. There's no understanding of what the announcement even is, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated before, there's examples where our provincial government has worked with the federal government collaboratively in the best interests of Saskatchewan people. Once we can see what is on paper and ensure that it's in the best interests of Saskatchewan people, we'll do the same here with the child nutrition program. Thank you.

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

Mr. Love: — Mr. Speaker, this government leads a province with the highest rates of childhood poverty in the country, among the highest rates of children using the food bank in the entire country. So a solution is before this minister and yes, it's coming from the federal government.

Will he pick up the phone today and call the federal minister to get details so we can get a deal done, so Saskatchewan children can get the nutritious food that they need and deserve at school in Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Mr. Speaker, this announcement from the federal government is in a federal budget that hasn't even been announced yet. When that budget is released and we can receive more information, we'll absolutely enter into discussions. Thank you.

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

Overdose Deaths and Treatment for Addictions

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Miigwech, Mr. Speaker. Every day this year a family has lost a loved one to overdose — 113 people lost to this crisis since January 1st of this year. Overdose impacts everyone in this province; however it disproportionately impacts Indigenous people and our communities. Seventy-five per cent of overdose deaths this year have been an Indigenous person, Mr. Speaker, when Indigenous people only make up 17 per cent of the population.

[14:30]

This is an area where Indigenous people are being failed by this government. When will this minister take ownership of this

wrong and implement an evidence-based plan that would save Indigenous lives?

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

Hon. Mr. T. McLeod: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously every loss of life due to an overdose is a tragedy. That doesn't matter what community they come from, Mr. Speaker, or what age they are. Every loss of life is a tragedy and this government takes that very seriously.

And that's why we are actively working to expand capacity of our treatment facilities across the province, making it easier for individuals to access those treatment facilities, and wrapping supports around them through recovery-oriented systems of care. Those facilities, the 500 spaces that we are quickly expanding to, are appearing in every corner of our province, including Poundmaker's Lodge, which is located in North Battleford, Mr. Speaker.

And I would like to thank the member for her support of that facility, Mr. Speaker, when she said to CTV News, and I quote:

This treatment centre is from an Indigenous perspective. And as a 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.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 160 — *The Immigration Services Act*

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

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I am pleased to rise today on Bill 160 for second reading of *The Immigration Services Act*. And at the conclusion of my remarks, I will be moving that motion.

As announced in our budget, Saskatchewan is developing new immigration legislation to align foreign worker protection and further strengthen the integrity of the immigration system. Responsibility for *The Foreign Worker Recruitment and Immigration Services Act* has been transferred from the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety to the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training.

The Immigration Services Act will fortify a strong and effective immigration system that will create a positive experience for newcomers and lead to better outcomes for both them and the province, will enhance the existing immigration framework by increasing investigative authorities and enforcement measures to tackle immigration fraud. It also seeks to continue to guard against exploitation and improve oversight of foreign worker recruiters, immigration consultants, and employers that are

recruiting internationally. In addition the ministry is further enhancing its ability to provide a full suite of settlement services from pre-arrival to longer term retention.

This legislation also encourages collaboration between immigration and enforcement agencies, fostering a more integrated and effective approach to combat immigration fraud and labour exploitation. Saskatchewan needs to increase scrutiny and enforcement of those who would abuse the immigration system with strong measures to ensure public trust is maintained and to protect foreign workers.

The ministry aims to establish the most robust program integrity framework in the entire country to protect foreign workers and newcomers, including the highest potential fines for violations. Those who comply with the legislation will be minimally impacted and benefit from a fair and level playing field as the rules discourage unfair practices. Those who are non-compliant and attempting to exploit Saskatchewan's immigration system will be held to account for their actions.

Not all jurisdictions in Canada have provincial legislation for immigration and protection of foreign workers. With this new Act, Saskatchewan's immigration system is poised to set a new standard in the country. In addition the new Act will enable the government to provide additional services to newcomers immigrating to and settling in Saskatchewan, starting before they've even arrived in the province. The objective of these services will be to help them prepare to settle in their communities and to ensure they remain long term in the province. Services beyond employability, such as community integration, will assist newcomers in having a thriving cultural, social, and economic life here in Saskatchewan.

This Act will support the competitiveness of Saskatchewan by ensuring the province is the leading jurisdiction in Canada with the most robust immigration system at the provincial level, will support the growth plan goals of growing our population to 1.4 million in adding 100,000 new jobs by 2030. Immigration plays a vital role in supporting Saskatchewan's growing economy and labour demands. The Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program drives immigration to Saskatchewan, accounting for three-quarters of Saskatchewan's newcomers. In 2023 the SINP [Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program] issued 7,350 nominations, and that includes 100 unused nominations from other provinces that were reallocated to Saskatchewan.

Employer use of the SINP has also increased significantly, growing from 3,500 employers using the program in 2022 to over 5,000 in 2023. Saskatchewan is already an attractive destination for newcomers, and this Act will enable us to become the top destination and the fairest one for foreign workers and newcomers to Canada. Our immigration programming will continue to build on current success, help meet employer demand, and contribute to the growth of Saskatchewan's population and economy.

With that, I am pleased to now move second reading of *The Immigration Services Act*.

The Speaker: — It has been moved that Bill No. 160 be now read a second time. Is the Assembly ready for the question? I

recognize the member from Regina University.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to be on my feet and enter some initial comments, having heard the minister here on Bill 160. Of course immigration is essential. It's critical to the strength and to the future of our province.

And I think anyone paying attention has heard concerns, certainly from communities out there, from employers, from people seeking to enter the labour market, newcomers to Saskatchewan, around these concerns with exploitation challenges with human trafficking for a variety of reasons but of course explicitly for economic and labour-based purposes. Fortifying a strong and effective immigration system will of course lead to better outcomes for newcomers, stronger communities, and a stronger economy.

Having heard a little bit about the bill from the minister's comments around investment of powers for those investigating fraud, bad actors here at home and internationally, as well as providing supports for newcomers as they come here, that last piece in particular I think is salient when we look at the five-year retention rate for Saskatchewan which has dropped 20 per cent under this government. And now 42 of every 100 newcomers to Saskatchewan leave within five years, which is a shame, Mr. Speaker, and something that the government should be turning its attention to and something that could be rectified and should be rectified.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention in these comments I think the simple step of returning the family class, something that has long been called for and would be a real simple way to expedite increasing our retention back up to where it should be. But I know my colleague, the critic, is going to do thorough and extensive outreach on this important piece of legislation. We look forward to hearing from stakeholders, hearing feedback, learning more, and listening to all the brilliant comments no doubt my colleagues will put on the record.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to conclude my remarks and move to adjourn debate on Bill 160.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 156

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Harpauer that **Bill No. 156 — *The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2024*** be now read a second time.]

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

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be on my feet entering into debate on Bill No. 156, *The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2024*. This is a piece of legislation that is expanding the licensure for the selling of tobacco to include retail, wholesale, resale, and anyone else wanting to sell tobacco. It will prohibit retailers from acquiring for sale from a wholesaler without a licence, which is a surprising fact that that wasn't previously the case here in Saskatchewan, but certainly good to see the loop being closed on that process.

The bill also will provide provisions for anyone selling tobacco without a licence to have their stock seized. That will also include if a licence is expired or if they have more than the prescribed amount. It will apply to both marked and unmarked products and does not hold the ministry liable for any damages during seizure.

One interesting change in the legislation is the renaming of enforcement officers to revenue investigators, allegedly to sort of remove any type of confusion with I suppose enforcement in other areas of legislation, which I personally find a little bit surprising given that, you know, when you look at sort of the reason for why we have legislation around restricting the sale of tobacco, it's rooted in addressing a substance which has significant health effects. And I just wanted to sort of mention some of those now.

Tobacco use is a known or probable cause of more than 40 debilitating, often fatal diseases of the lungs, heart, and other organs. It also increases the risk of dying from common illnesses such as pneumonia and reduces life expectancy by 10 years. So there is certainly a very high cost impact.

I'm sure the members opposite would agree that, you know, the burden on society from tobacco use is one that is significant. And so while, you know, welcome these changes to more adequately regulate this controlled substance, that it also be doing it in a spirit that acknowledges the very serious, detrimental health effects associated with it, not unlike other illicit substances.

We've talked a lot and had many questions in the legislature around death from toxic and illicit substances and the lack of a harm-reduction approach. So I as always find it very curious to see such a disconnect in terms of the approach that's been taken by this government in terms of how it's regulating substances and ensuring the safety of all citizens in this province.

I want to say that I'm also concerned of course that, you know, lots of tobacco products are directly marketed to the youth, and they are a particularly vulnerable population. And certainly I know that our critic will have many questions about these amendments, including how this will be addressing discouraging tobacco use amongst youth.

So with that I will move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 156.

The Speaker: — The member has moved to adjourn debate.

Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Bill No. 157

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Harpauer that **Bill No. 157 — *The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2024*** be now read a second time.]

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

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to be on my feet again on Bill No. 157, *The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2024*. This was something that of course did not come as a surprise. We knew from the budget that the small business tax rate would be maintained at 1 per cent for another year. And it's my understanding that it is now intended that after we have the general election, that this amount will be raised up a year from now.

Certainly we see that businesses have been struggling mightily since the pandemic and continue to do so in this long tail as we come out. We've had nearly 1,000 small businesses close in the last six years, 230 closures alone in the last year. So we know that businesses are continuing to struggle. We know that they are a very significant employer and contributor to the economy, that they continue to be challenged by issues of supply chain and other things.

[14:45]

Now I'm also a very proud representative for the constituency of Saskatoon Nutana, where we have a very vibrant business district along the Broadway area. And you know, it's of utmost concern and priority for me that we see those businesses in our community thrive and be supported. They are significant employers. They contribute to the vibrancy of our community. They're supportive in the many festivals and activities that happen throughout the year — Winterruption, the folk festival, the list goes on and on. And it's important that we continue to support these businesses.

It is disappointing however that we didn't see similar kinds of relief provided in the budget to support working families who continue to struggle with, you know, a high PST rate that was increased by this Sask Party government and then continued to expand it onto other goods and services, everything from used cars and groceries, restaurant meals, kids' clothing, the list goes on and on. We've been calling repeatedly for gas tax relief for a six-month period. That has gone unheard, unmet by this government.

And so it's been disappointing to see that, you know, while we continue to have families living below the poverty line, unable to provide meals, you know, mortgage arrears highest in the country, so on and so forth, those are issues that are real and hurting Saskatchewan families. We would like to have seen more relief. We do however appreciate this component in terms of tax relief.

I know that our critic will have much more to say as they have a look at this bill. And with that I will move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 157.

The Speaker: — The member has moved to adjourn debate. Is it

the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Bill No. 158

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. J. Harrison that **Bill No. 158 — *The Saskatchewan Commercial Innovation Incentive (Patent Box) Amendment Act, 2024*** be now read a second time.]

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

Mr. Teed: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be on my feet today to enter into adjourned debate following a very important speech about small businesses from my colleague from Saskatoon Nutana. Thank her for those words on the record.

Mr. Speaker, today I'm entering into debate on Bill No. 158, the Saskatchewan commercial innovation incentive Act, called the patent box amendment Act. Mr. Speaker, I was doing some research into this Act here. The Saskatchewan commercial innovation incentive, a.k.a. [also known as] the patent box program, is an incentive that encourages small and medium-sized businesses to commercialize new products in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, as I was reviewing through the minister's remarks — thank you to the minister for the remarks — on this legislation, I learned that as a credit or some kind of tax credit that they offer to small- and medium-sized businesses that this tax credit actually has no cost to the government. Unfortunately though, it seems like this is a long process for small- and medium-sized businesses to qualify, a complex program for them to access.

And maybe this is why, you know, we look at this credit. It's in theory a great credit. We want to see more businesses set up, small- and medium-sized business. We want to see them enter into a patent processes. But you know, when you look at this process, a complex, long process through the NRC [National Research Council], and maybe that's why but you know, to our knowledge no small- and medium-sized business has ever taken advantage of this credit. So good idea in theory.

You know, Mr. Speaker, for those watching from home, you know, as a legislator I'm into my year and a half on the job and it's interesting. You look at some bills that are, you know, 40 to 50 pages long, and then you have a bill here that fits on half an eight-and-a-half by 11 page, you know, that essentially is extending a tax credit for one more year. You know, as the budget comes forward we see those pieces of legislation that can extend different offerings in the budget.

You know, I would be remiss to say, Mr. Speaker, that I'm on my feet today hoping that I would be speaking to pieces of legislation coming from the budget that might address the needs of regular Saskatchewan people. And not to say that small- and medium-sized enterprises don't need this specific attention but I wish, Mr. Speaker, that I was on my feet today debating legislation coming from a '24-25 budget that would address the main, the most pressing issues facing Saskatchewan people. And,

Mr. Speaker, I'm referring to the generational cost-of-living crisis that we are seeing right here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, again the '24-25 budget has come and gone and not a single new policy or spending line will go towards offering relief for families struggling under the cost-of-living crisis, families who are unable to afford groceries, Mr. Speaker, in a province where over 50 per cent of people polled feel more financially insecure than one year ago. Mr. Speaker, this is a loss for this Sask Party but, Mr. Speaker, I guess that might be a win for us. If they will not address the issues that are important to Saskatchewan people, then we will continue to address the issues that matter to Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, there's some concerns we have. You know, a complicated tax credit, window dressing for a government that wants to look like it's friendly to those small- and medium-sized enterprises that are closing their doors in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, this year alone, 230 small businesses have closed under this Premier's watch. That's in this year alone. We're April 9, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to be here on December 29th in this province looking at a number far higher of small- and medium-sized enterprise businesses that have shut their doors in Saskatchewan or have moved to greener pastures where governments address the needs of their citizens.

We look next door to Alberta; we look next door to Manitoba; we look to Ontario, where they have extended the gas tax relief. That is relief that will directly impact small- and medium-sized enterprises every single day, whether it's through their direct operation, or through the supply chains that they rely so heavily on.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday we met with Sask Trucking, a fantastic group of individuals who are looking for a government who is going to sit down at the table and listen to their concerns, Mr. Speaker. So I was so pleased to be in that room with my colleagues listening to those concerns, taking note of what they are bringing forward.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going long on Bill No. 158 here, so I will digress here by saying that I know we have amazing talent in this province. We have amazing small- and medium-sized businesses operating in this province. They want a government that's going to listen to them, is going to make changes, make policies that make it easier to do business, not more difficult.

So I will absolutely be voting in favour of extending this tax credit, hopefully because by next year we'll have a new government in Saskatchewan that will be able, that will be willing to sit down with small and medium-sized businesses and maybe make this tax credit work for them, find other tax credits that might keep more businesses open in this province, keep the doors open, and keep the lights on, a government that will listen, Mr. Speaker.

So on that note I know our critic will have more to say on this, more questions to ask of the minister in committee. At this time then I will adjourn debate on Bill No. 158, *The Saskatchewan Commercial Innovation Incentive (Patent Box) Amendment Act, 2024*.

The Speaker: — The member has moved to adjourn debate. Is it

the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Bill No. 159

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Harpauer that **Bill No. 159 — *The Revenue and Financial Services Amendment Act, 2024*** be now read a second time.]

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

Mr. Teed: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm hopping back up on my feet to jump into another bill, Bill No. 159, *The Revenue and Financial Services Amendment Act, 2024*. I think I thoroughly canvassed some of the desires that our opposition had when we saw or we heard some more of these budget bills were being presented. You know, again I wish I was on my feet speaking to bills that would be helping Saskatchewan families.

Now, Mr. Speaker, not to say that these aren't important amendments. We have a bill put forward that has quite, quite a few amendments, a lot of information here to digest, a lot of information that I know our critic will be diving into, speaking to stakeholders on, and asking really important questions in the committee process.

So, Mr. Speaker, at this time I will be adjourning debate knowing that they will be doing that work, and I will adjourn debate on Bill No. 159, *The Revenue and Financial Services Amendment Act*.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — In order to facilitate the work of committee both this afternoon and into this evening, I would move that this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader has moved to adjourn the House. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried. This House now stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 14:56.]

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