



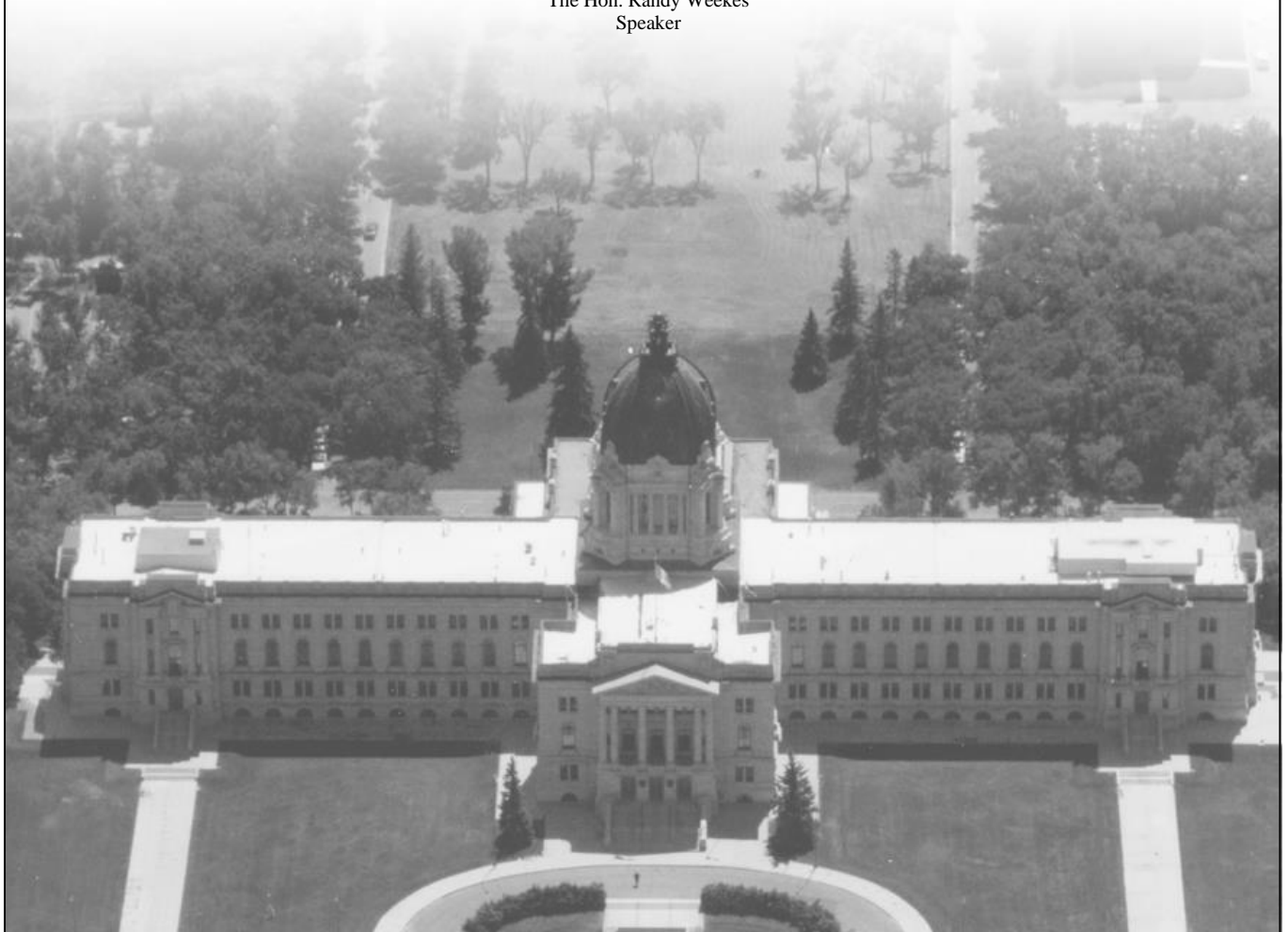
FOURTH SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

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)
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Burki, Noor — Regina Coronation Park (NDP)	McLeod, Hon. Tim — Moose Jaw North (SP)
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Cheveldayoff, Ken — Saskatoon Willowgrove (SP)	Merriman, Hon. Paul — Saskatoon Silverspring-Sutherland (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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[The Assembly met at 10:00.]

[Prayers]

The Speaker: — I'd like to inform the Assembly that Miranda Gudereit, one of our Procedural Clerks, is participating in a professional development program with the Table Officers and will be periodically at the Table throughout the session. So please join me in welcoming Miranda to the Chamber.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask for leave for an extended introduction.

The Speaker: — The member has asked leave for an extended introduction. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the members, in the gallery, we have somebody in the Speaker's gallery, Jordan McPhail. I want to give a little bit of an introduction. He's a First Nation northern person. He comes from the community of La Ronge. He's had the strength to sit as an alderman for two terms. I am proud of this young man. He's dedicated. He cares about community. He cares about the North. He's very passionate. He's got himself a beautiful daughter, Lily Rose. Good to see you. Keep your dad organized. That's going to be important.

But he's here with Unifor doing some work. He works with one of the Crown corporations. He's definitely a very proud northerner. He's a proud family man. He has a lot to offer. And I'm very pleased to say he's supported me throughout my career as being an MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly]. He's always been very helpful, very supportive.

And you know, I'm very pleased to say that he's the candidate to represent the NDP [New Democratic Party] in the Cumberland constituency in the next provincial election. He's somebody that's very passionate, as I've said. He's very caring, and I think he'll represent the people if they decide to elect him. And I think the good people of Cumberland will do that, but that's up to them as all of those seeking re-election. But this young man has shown true leadership.

Again I just want to say, thank you for everything. You've supported me in my journey, and I wish you all the best in your journey. Serve the people well. Make sure you hear their issues, and I think again you'll do that. But I just want to welcome you and Lily Rose to your Assembly. And I ask all members to please join me and welcome him to his Assembly.

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

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Miigwech, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to join my colleague in welcoming Jordan and Lily Rose to their Assembly. It's always wonderful to see First Nation citizens in this province come to the legislature, which is sometimes not as inviting as we would like it to be. But it's always great to have First Nations people show up, and not because they're here to bring attention to the issues that they're facing, but just to be here as an observer, and also just to see how legislators operate in this House. And to have young people, especially First Nations people, get involved in the provincial political sphere is always so encouraging.

And to have a bright, talented young man like Jordan, who is a likeable young man, who is a dedicated family man, and is a young man from the North to come here, take the time to come to Regina and bring his daughter to this legislature, it's always wonderful to see that. So with that I ask all members to join me in welcoming Jordan and Lily Rose to their Assembly.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to all members of this Assembly, I'd like to join with both of the opposition members in welcoming Jordan McPhail and his daughter — Lily Rose, I think the name was — to their Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

Thank them for their service, for Jordan's service in his community of La Ronge. I understand he's been a two-term councillor there and is now going to run to sit on the floor, potentially — we might have a say in that, but potentially — to sit on the floor of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

And I once again would just say that we are very fortunate in this province and in this nation where we have a functioning democracy. And there is much debate that happens across the floor of this Assembly and other assemblies in our part . . . House of Commons in Ottawa. But we should be very thankful because the differences that we have are much smaller than the differences that we see in other areas of the world, Mr. Speaker. And we find our way to those decisions through words, not through the use of firearms, war, guns, things of that nature, Mr. Speaker.

I'd also just say that should you find your way to the floor of this Assembly, to Jordan, that he has a mentor in the current member from Cumberland, in particular some of the work that the current member from Cumberland has done when it comes to the conversation and action, I would say, around suicides, not only in northern Saskatchewan but across our province.

And I would say that that conversation of mental health, addictions — and all too often, Mr. Speaker, we're faced in our communities across this province and across this nation with suicides — that the current member from Cumberland has been a great advocate in that space.

And so I would just join with the current member of Cumberland in welcoming Jordan McPhail and his daughter Lily Rose to their Legislative Assembly.

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

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Briefly would like to enter in, join with the Premier and the members in welcoming Jordan and Lily Rose to their Legislative Assembly. As has been discussed, Jordan is an impressive, passionate young leader who wears many, many hats. Lily Rose is going to get a new role this summer or later this spring as a big sister.

An amazing, exciting career and year ahead of you, Jordan. And I want to say how much confidence we have in you, and can't wait to see what you continue to get up to as you lead with passion, with purpose in your community. And we very much do hope to see you very soon on the floor of this Assembly.

Invite all members to join with me in welcoming Jordan and Lily Rose to their Legislative Assembly.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

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

The undersigned residents of the province of Saskatchewan wish to bring to our attention the following: Saskatchewan people are struggling to keep up with the 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; and that the Sask Party government could follow other jurisdictions in Canada, such as Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, and Newfoundland, and provide immediate cost-of-living relief to Saskatchewan families by suspending the 15-cent-per-litre provincial gas tax.

Mr. Speaker, 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 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.

Mr. Speaker, the undersigned residents live in Regina. I do so submit.

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

Mr. Keisig: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We, the undersigned residents of the province of Saskatchewan, wish to bring to your attention the following: whereas the Trudeau Liberal-NDP 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 that tax out

of pocket at the pumps, grocery stores, and many more places.

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 Saskatoon. I do so submit. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to present a petition to this Legislative Assembly calling for the funding of in vitro fertilization treatments here in Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan is now one of two Canadian provinces that provide no support for fertility care, and what a shame it would be, Mr. Speaker, to find ourselves as the only. As all members of this Assembly will be familiar, this is something that impacts one in six people. And in presenting this petition every week, I've endeavoured to bring forward petitions from across this province because this is an issue that impacts people regardless of geography, regardless of status, regardless of circumstance, Mr. Speaker.

And I'd like to read a comment that was shared with me by someone from Yorkton. It reads, "her greatest," and I'll quote:

. . . greatest regret was that I could not afford IVF since the government considers it a social problem not a medical problem and the greatest pain was trying, still hoping I could do it naturally. Families should not have to live with that kind of disappointment.

Mr. Speaker, I'll read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Government of Saskatchewan immediately move to cover the financial burden of two rounds of IVF treatments for Saskatchewan people experiencing infertility.

The signatories of today's petition are from Tisdale. I do so present.

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

Mr. Clarke: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition calling on the Legislative Assembly to immediately address the doctor shortage in Rosthern and Duck Lake.

The undersigned residents would like to bring to our attention the following: that emergency services at the Rosthern Hospital continue to experience closures due to a shortage of doctors; that without emergency services the communities of Rosthern, Duck Lake, and the surrounding rurals are forced to travel to Saskatoon or Prince Albert for care; that the shortage of doctors is impacting local clinics and long-term care homes, with some unable to

provide the level of care that they have historically been able to provide; and that nearly 1,000 people in Duck Lake, Rosthern, and the surrounding area are without a doctor.

I'll 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 immediately recruit and retain doctors to provide adequate and accessible health care to Rosthern, Duck Lake, and the surrounding area.

Mr. Speaker, the signatories today reside in Rosthern. I do so present.

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

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise yet again today to present a petition calling for the improvement of labour laws in Saskatchewan. Now this petition I've introduced many times and has very important provisions in it, all of which are included in Bill No. 613, our private members' bill.

Today I want to specifically highlight one of them, and that's the anti-harassment provisions. Now this petition states that 71 per cent of workers, sadly, in Canada have experienced workplace violence and/or harassment. Mr. Speaker, that's far too many workers in this country. I've heard from many individuals, both men and women, who experienced harassment in their workplace, Mr. Speaker, founded instances of harassment, and because of workplace policies or NDAs [nondisclosure agreement], they're not able to speak out about their experiences. And the silencing of survivors is very, very damaging, Mr. Speaker.

[10:15]

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.

We hope this government takes this petition seriously, takes a good look at Bill 613, and considers passing that legislation expeditiously. Those who've signed this petition come from Radville, Weyburn, and Lampman. I do so present.

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

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan to fix the crisis in health care.

The undersigned residents of the province wish to bring to your

attention the following: that there were 951 health care closures across rural Saskatchewan between August 2019 and July 2023; that 407 of those closures were to Saskatchewan emergency rooms; that for the first time an emergency room in one of our major cities shut down due to staff shortages; that Saskatchewan has the longest wait times for knee and hip replacement surgeries; and that it is unacceptable that women in this province are being forced to travel out of province for routine breast cancer diagnostic care; and that Saskatchewan people deserve to have adequate and accessible health care where and when they need it.

I will 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 immediately address the short-staffing crisis in health care and work with health care workers on solutions to improve patient care.

This petition is signed by the residents and constituents of Moose Jaw Wakamow, who are currently without satisfactory representation. I do so present.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Community Organizations Hold Annual Wellness Day in North Central Regina

Ms. Conway: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm on my feet to report back on an incredible day that took place at the māmawēyatitān centre over Easter break. The Wellness Day is an annual community gathering to shine a light on the incredible work being done by dozens of agencies and community-based organizations across North Central and beyond, hosted by the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority], Four Directions community centre, the North Central Community Association, and others.

A huge thank you goes to Pat from the community association, Sam at Four Directions, and Jo at the māmawēyatitān centre, no doubt among many others deserving of our thanks.

A delicious soup and bannock lunch was prepared by Chili for Children. For all those looking for a worthy cause to support, Greg Stevenson is carrying on his mother's torch, and that organization is in need of our support given the rising cost of living. They do excellent work in our community.

Our constituency office join many agencies: Pine Lodge; AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan; YWCA; public library; Rooted Connections Regina, formerly Catholic services; Schizophrenia Society of Saskatchewan; Regina Early Learning Centre; ECIP [early childhood intervention program]; Diabetes Canada; REACH [Regina Education and Action on Child Hunger Inc.]; North Central foot care; Meadow Primary Health Centre; and Indigenous home care, among others.

Growing Young Movers was there to offer a chance for young people to get active in the nearby gym . . .

An Hon. Member: — Hear, hear.

Ms. Conway: — Hear, hear, indeed. Yoga was on. And perhaps what really stole the show was the chance for free haircuts offered by Tangles Hair & Beauty. The owner, Destinee, brought a team along with her to cut hair all day long for free, an incredible act of generosity from a local Indigenous-owned business located on Broadway Avenue. It's an honour to serve this community, Mr. Speaker. Each and every day they inspire me. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatchewan Rivers.

Crime Rates in Saskatchewan

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Speaker, it troubles me to inform this Assembly that all forms of crime continue to surge in our province. This epidemic began after the Premier took office. Under his watch, our communities have gotten less safe, lethal drugs have become more prevalent, and organized crime is thriving. The single greatest jump in violent crime recorded in the province was one year after the Premier took office. The violent crime rate has risen every single year since.

Earlier this year the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] major crimes unit reported it has seen a 50 per cent increase in homicides over the last five years — 50 per cent. Mr. Speaker, where is the war on crime from this government? It should be visible. Where are the press conferences by the Premier announcing arrests, gangs being busted, and drugs being seized? It should be visible.

It has been said a society only has as much crime as it tolerates. The Saskatchewan United Party has a zero-tolerance position for crime and will end the lawlessness and violence. We will re-prioritize police efforts to go after violent offenders, fund policing services so they have the resources they need, and bust drug gangs and organized crime.

If this government cannot deal with criminals, the Saskatchewan United Party will. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Recognizing the Work of RCMP Depot in Regina

Ms. Sarauer: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight RCMP Depot, located right here in Regina. This winter I had the opportunity to spend a day at Depot to learn more about their cadet training program and to celebrate that week's graduating troop, troop 12.

Depot has been a staple in Regina since 1885, currently employing about 500 to 600 people, while another 600 cadets are going through their 26-week police training program at any given time. The Depot trains new cadets with a focus on the RCMP's core values: acting with integrity, showing respect, demonstrating compassion, taking responsibility, and serving with excellence.

The facility is world-class and the curriculum is able to be

tweaked and modernized in real time to reflect the realities of policing and community. During my day at Depot, I had the opportunity to inspect the graduating members with the commanding officer during parade and speak to the troop and their loved ones at the graduation banquet.

I hope we can all agree that the RCMP Depot is a mainstay of Saskatchewan that we want to keep here for a very long time. Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in recognizing all the folks who keep Depot running and thank the RCMP for their invaluable service to this province each and every day.

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

Saskatoon Celebrates Nowruz, Persian New Year

Mr. Friesen: — On March 20th, it was another great day in Saskatoon, Mr. Speaker. This year unfortunately I was unable to attend, but the member from Melfort, the member from Martensville-Warman, and the Minister of Justice had the pleasure of enjoying Nowruz, also known as Persian New Year.

Last year I had the pleasure of joining the Persian community in celebrating Nowruz, which marks the beginning of spring and the first day of the Iranian calendar. This celebration has been going on for over 3,000 years in several countries, celebrated by millions of people. It's an amazing evening, spending quality time with family and friends, special dance performances, enjoying a special meal with traditional dishes, and experiencing the Persian culture.

Mr. Speaker, this may or may not be a surprise to my colleagues, but I made a number of new friends that evening, including being invited into homes for more amazing traditional food, great conversation, and community celebrations. One amazing thing I kept noticing, Mr. Speaker, was their ties — so special I had to order one for myself, and today I sport my handmade Persian tie.

Our province's motto, "from many peoples, strength" could not be more true than with this community and how they work with communities in the cities, start businesses, and really help our province thrive. I ask all members to help me celebrate Nowruz. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Health Human Resources Action Plan Showing Positive Results

Ms. A. Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's health human resource action plan continues to be one of the most ambitious plans in Canada to recruit, train, incentivize, and retain health care workers, and it's showing results.

As of April we have seen 232 new and enhanced full-time positions filled in rural and remote areas. More than 300 physicians are now working through the SIPP [Saskatchewan international physician practice assessment] program and 118 applicants have been approved for the rural physician incentive program, providing up to \$200,000 to ensure physicians stay in rural and remote communities. In the 2024 budget we are

investing over \$141 million into this plan to expand its scope.

Several new incentives are available to support recruitment and retention of specialists in high demand, including a relocation grant for anesthesia, as well as an annual incentive of \$200,000 over five years for regional service, and \$100,000 over five years for urban service, \$200,000 over five years for regional service for psychiatry, and \$200,000 over five years for breast interventional radiology in approved sites.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to a strong and growing economy, we're continuing to invest and innovate our health care system to ensure residents get the timely care they need. Thank you.

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

International Trade Offices Result in Significant Agri-Food Exports

Mr. Jenson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is really going to shatter the opposition's economic narrative. Our international trade offices are continuing to show their success. The value of our agri-food exports to Vietnam has tripled to \$46 million.

Just as an example, in 2022 export value of non-durum wheat to Vietnam had a value of \$3.7 million. In 2023 non-durum wheat exports were valued at \$40.6 million. Non-durum wheat was Saskatchewan's largest agri-food export in 2023, rising to a total of \$3.7 billion in worldwide exports. Other top exports to Vietnam include peas and purebred swine.

Mr. Speaker, our trade offices put in the work to make sure our producers have the right connections to ensure they get the best value for their products. Their work attracts Vietnamese stakeholders to attend events like Agribition, which allow our producers to show off their world-class products.

Mr. Speaker, we're very proud of the work being done by our international trade offices, but the opposition doesn't care. The member from Regina University described those working, these offices as "... cushy foreign patronage postings with little to show for the shrouded work."

Mr. Speaker, we know that if the NDP were ever back in power, they would crash our economy. This government will continue to build on our economy, support rural communities, and help provide opportunities for the people and producers of this province.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Melville-Saltcoats.

Opposition Position on Irrigation Project

Mr. Kaeding: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP leader believes that trust is built when you say the same thing in every room. Trouble with the NDP is they keep saying different things in different rooms, and sometimes, Mr. Speaker, they say nothing at all.

That's what happened last night when the NDP critic for Water Security was unable to voice a single word in support of the Lake

Diefenbaker irrigation project. When asked directly, the NDP critic's response was silence. The NDP member wouldn't even commit to working collaboratively to secure federal support for this generational project.

That NDP member was not afraid to speak up when she called the carbon tax necessary. The NDP member had no trouble finding her voice when she said that Agriculture is a fox guarding the henhouse when it comes to Water Security, and she certainly had no trouble speaking when she said, you will see the merits of why it's necessary to legalize the toxic drug supply here in Saskatchewan.

But when it comes to support for our producers, Mr. Speaker, not one single word. Will the NDP leader listen to local voices like SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] and support the Lake Diefenbaker project, or will she stay silent like her critic? We're about to find out.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Contract with Private Company for Provision of Surgeries

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, it's good to see the government continue to audition for the role of opposition over there.

Now every day this spring, Mr. Speaker, we've asked this tired and out-of-touch government to cut the gas tax to give Saskatchewan families a break. Yesterday we learned that a private company, a Sask Party donor, secured a \$6 million sole-source contract for private surgeries. This after former Sask Party cabinet minister Kevin Doherty was hired as their lobbyist.

Mr. Speaker, it makes you wonder. Is this what Saskatchewan people are going to have to do to get a break on the fuel tax? Do they have to hire Kevin Doherty as a lobbyist to get this Premier's attention?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, as you know, over the last number of years, and in particular since COVID, this government has been looking to utilize all of the tools and all of the methods that we have to reduce our surgical wait times, Mr. Speaker, surgical wait times that ballooned since the pandemic across the nation, and Saskatchewan has been no exception.

Through an ambitious HHR [health human resources] plan, most ambitious in Canada, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing those wait times come down in general about 23 per cent. Part of that plan is utilizing private surgeries, building on the success that we've had in delivering 160,000 publicly funded private surgeries across the province over the last number of years, Mr. Speaker.

Clearpoint surgical centres was one that we used to reduce some of that wait time, Mr. Speaker. Yes, they are represented by a former MLA, Mr. Speaker. Associated Radiologists is also a publicly funded, private deliverer that we use to the tune of, I believe, budgeted about \$22 million this past year, Mr. Speaker. And they are also represented by a former MLA in this House, former leader of the opposition Cam Broten.

[10:30]

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

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, they really want the job of opposition, and they'll get their chance. But right now Saskatchewan has the worst wait times for hip and knee replacement in the country, and that is the record of this tired and out-of-touch government. But instead of focusing on what matters to Saskatchewan people you see the Sask Party signing sole-source contracts with their friends and their donors.

How does the Premier justify these inside deals that benefit the Sask Party donors while Saskatchewan people are struggling just to pay their bills?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, there's a number of entities and individuals, Mr. Speaker, that are on the lobbyist registry discussing — and not only discussing — discussing solutions that they might have with the government. But I would suspect that they're also discussing some of those opportunities and solutions with the opposition as well, Mr. Speaker.

We are looking at innovative ways to reduce our surgical wait time that will include expanding the publicly funded, privately delivered surgeries, Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well if they don't want the answer, Mr. Speaker, they should not ask the question.

Mr. Speaker, if that includes for a finite number of surgeries, if they can be delivered in Calgary to lower our wait-lists, we're going to do that, Mr. Speaker. That includes engaging with Mr. Broten and Associated Radiologists and providing \$22 million of publicly funded money, Mr. Speaker, to deliver those private surgeries on behalf of Saskatchewan people.

So my question is this: 161,000 publicly funded, privately delivered surgeries have been offered to and received by Saskatchewan residents, many of them by Associated Radiologists, some of them now by Clearpoint surgical centre, Mr. Speaker. Is it the view of the opposition that they would remove all of those 160,000 surgeries in the province?

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

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, they're so eager to ask the questions. You'll get your chance. Don't worry.

But yesterday we saw the Minister of Health state in this Assembly that there was no sole-source contract for surgeries. He said there was an RFP [request for proposal] and everything was above board; the NDP is just grasping at straws, Mr. Speaker. Then that minister went out into the rotunda, and what did he say out there? He said he got it all wrong, that there was a sole-source deal with a Sask Party donor.

What does the Premier think about this mix-up? Shouldn't Saskatchewan people be able to expect their ministers to get it right the first time?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — We are getting it right, Mr. Speaker. We're reducing the surgical wait time in the province by 23 per cent. We're doing that, Mr. Speaker, by utilizing all of the opportunities that we have to offer surgeries to Saskatchewan people. That means publicly funded, privately delivered surgeries within the province. Publicly funded, privately delivered surgeries outside of the province, much like the government, the NDP government in British Columbia is doing, but they're sending them out of country, Mr. Speaker.

We're sending them to a neighbouring province in a much smaller number, Mr. Speaker. And we are investing . . . And we're investing and investing heavily in our publicly funded surgeries with the most ambitious health human resource plan in the nation, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, there are lobbyists that are lobbying government and opposition in that publicly funded, private surgical area, Mr. Speaker. But also on the lobbyist registry are entities like CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees] and SUN [Saskatchewan Union of Nurses]. And those that are working strictly in the publicly funded, publicly delivered health care scope, Mr. Speaker, some of which are going to be working in the urgent care centre on north Albert Street here as well as we drastically expand the services available to Saskatchewan people.

So what we're seeing today is more services, Mr. Speaker, in the publicly funded, publicly delivered; more surgeries and diagnostics in the publicly funded, privately delivered, Mr. Speaker, and we're seeing more people work in our health care system across the board.

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

Ms. Beck: — There might be a little more to correct in that answer, Mr. Speaker. But Saskatchewan people expect their leaders to be honest and forthright. They expect the Premier to hold his ministers responsible.

Is the Premier okay with the fact that the Health minister came into the Assembly yesterday and said one thing and then said something completely different in the rotunda? What does that say about this Premier's leadership?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — What this Premier's leadership and, I would say, more astutely the Health ministers' leadership that we've had over the course of the last number of years, Mr. Speaker, means this: that in the public sphere of offering health care services to Saskatchewan people, we have today offered — as I've said many times on the floor of this Assembly — offered 1,097 Canadian nursing graduates jobs in the Saskatchewan Health Authority. Mr. Speaker, we are up 831 nurses across the province today.

So the question across the floor often is what is the net increase this year in nursing, Mr. Speaker? It's up 831 since 2018, Mr. Speaker, which seems to be a number they like to look at. We're up 2,165. That's an 18 per cent increase in people working in the nursing, nurses working in our community in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to nurse practitioners since 2018, we're up 35 per cent. Those are real facts, Mr. Speaker. Those are coming from the College of Registered Nurses, Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No, they weren't coming from Cam Broten. He's with Associated Radiologists, Mr. Speaker. They're coming from the College of Registered Nurses. Up over the last five, six years, Mr. Speaker, 18 per cent in our nursing complement across this province, up 35 per cent with our nurse practitioners.

Again, Mr. Speaker, in addition to how we are reducing our surgical wait times, it's these Health ministers and the previous Health ministers that are utilizing every opportunity they have, even innovative opportunities to serve Saskatchewan residents better.

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

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people deserve so much better than this tired and out-of-touch government. Let's recap. We see a minister coming into this Assembly making statements that are completely inconsistent with the facts, all in an effort to defend the indefensible — a soul-source sweetheart deal with a private surgery company that donates to the Sask Party and has a former Sask Party cabinet minister as a lobbyist.

How can the Premier be satisfied with the fact that his Health minister came into this Assembly and said one thing, and said something completely different out in the rotunda?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, most certainly this Health minister, both these Health ministers and previous Health ministers continue to look for every opportunity that we have to serve the people of Saskatchewan better, as does all of those that are, Mr. Speaker, that are in leadership spaces at the SHA and all of those across the province working within our Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, they are looking at things that, quite frankly, the NDP won't look at, is publicly funded, privately delivered surgeries and diagnostics, Mr. Speaker. By this very metric is the NDP saying that those 161,000 surgeries that have been offered to Saskatchewan people don't matter? Are all of those publicly funded, private diagnostics, Mr. Speaker, some offered by Associated Radiologists — that again, Mr. Speaker, has on their staff Mr. Cam Broten, who was the leader of the opposition for the NDP — should we be removing them from the procurement opportunities to offer services to the people of Saskatchewan? I think not, Mr. Speaker, most certainly.

Mr. Speaker, what these Health ministers are going to continue to do is continue to take action when it comes to recruiting people into our publicly funded, publicly delivered health care system. And we have over 1,000 nurses, Mr. Speaker, that have been recruited into that system just over the course of the last year.

What these Health ministers are going to continue to do is to look at new and innovative ways to deliver health care, to reduce our surgical wait time, which is down 23 per cent, Mr. Speaker, to staff . . . innovative ways to deliver health care, on the mental health care side as well, like our urgent care centres. They've been doing that and they're going to continue to do that.

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

Ms. Conway: — Mr. Speaker, the Premier can huff and puff. He can throw out some numbers on surgeries. Worst in the nation for hip and knee surgery wait-lists before this sole-source contract; worst in the nation after this sole-source contract, Mr. Speaker. This tired and out-of-touch government signed a sole-source deal with a Sask Party donor to provide hip and knee surgeries out of a private clinic in Calgary.

When we asked the Minister of Health about this yesterday, he got rather defensive, personal attacks. He attacked our credibility, but he ended up shredding his own. Does the Minister of Health think it's acceptable to come into this Assembly and say things that are completely inconsistent with the facts?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in the media I corrected that the short-term contract for hip and knee surgeries was not RFP'd, Mr. Speaker.

A bit of history. In early May of 2022 the Ministry of Health reached out to a number of private surgical companies across Western Canada and Ontario. This was something that other provinces were doing as well, Mr. Speaker, to look at other solutions to help address their backlog of surgeries. Mr. Speaker, there was only one provider, Clearpoint in Calgary, that was able to provide the short-term, overnight stays for hip and knee replacements, Mr. Speaker.

Now further to that, Mr. Speaker, in January of 2023, and this is important, ministry officials from the Ministry of Health consulted with the SaskBuilds and Procurement chief procurement officer. And Mr. Speaker, the chief procurement officer did advise that this initiative would fall under an exemption from procurement trade agreements due to the nature of service requested, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Conway: — Mr. Speaker, he made a few phone calls. He made a few phone calls. Mr. Speaker, Sask Party members have no respect for these institutions any more. Whether it's slouching in their chairs, muttering blah blah blah when we're talking about health care closures, or making statements that are completely inconsistent with the facts, they show day in, day out that it's time for a change in this province, and that this Sask Party government, this tired and out-of-touch government has got to go.

The Minister of Health signed a sweetheart deal, a sole-source contract with a Sask Party donor, and when pressed for answers made statements that are demonstrably incompatible with the facts. If he can't keep his facts straight about his friends and donors, what else is he getting wrong on this file?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of things that are wrong, the Minister of Health does not sign

contracts. The Minister of Health, we don't do that. The ministry officials in the Ministry of Health would engage with organizations like this, but it's not through the minister. It's not myself sits down and negotiates contracts. So the member opposite is incorrect in that statement, Mr. Speaker. And that's why she sits in opposition and will continue to sit in opposition for a long, long time, Mr. Speaker.

This government is pursuing all options to improve access for joint replacement surgeries for people in this province, as the Premier detailed. The Ministry of Health, in this particular instance, reached an agreement with a chartered surgical facility to accommodate up to 250 publicly funded joint replacement surgeries for eligible Saskatchewan patients, Mr. Speaker.

As the Premier talked about, we have made record investments into publicly funded surgeries in this province — \$670 million in the new budget, an increase over the previous year's budget. And we're also utilizing other initiatives as well, such as this one, in order to provide even more people with the surgeries they need, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Conway: — Mr. Speaker, these guys love to take credit for everything, but apparently they're responsible for nothing.

Mr. Speaker, in the rotunda yesterday, the Minister of Health seemed to imply that he had no choice but to sole-source this contract to a Sask Party donor with a former Sask Party Finance minister for a lobbyist. News flash to the minister — he had a choice. Instead of handing a \$6 million contract to a company that donates generously to his party, he could have put that money into building up the public system here at home and get more scans for more Saskatchewan people, building capacity here.

Why does the Sask Party always find a way to help their friends and donors get ahead and leave Saskatchewan people holding the bag?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite once again not paying attention, not listening to the answers, not listening to the budget, and not recognizing that there continues to be significant investments into health care in this province, Mr. Speaker. And we've talked about the investments and the additional funding going in towards building surgery capacity, more funding for more scans. There's additional funding in this year's budget, Mr. Speaker, to build capacity and conduct more MRIs [magnetic resonance imaging] in this province, more CT [computerized tomography] scans in this province, Mr. Speaker.

But in addition to that, we know that we have to get people the surgeries they need, which is why this is one of the reasons that we are looking at all of our options that we have within our province and also for, in this case, patients who've been waiting for 24 months as a result of the backlog that built up during the pandemic which happened right across this country, Mr. Speaker. And for the patients that have been waiting for these hip and knee surgeries, this is important work. This is their lives that are

important to them and surgeries that needed to be completed.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would say, as the Premier pointed out, there were 161,000 surgeries that have been provided by privately delivered but publicly funded options in this province, and these are important to get done, Mr. Speaker.

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

[10:45]

Ms. Conway: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, these patients are waiting a long time. In fact they're waiting longer than anywhere else in Canada. And that's why the official opposition expects results.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister said that Kevin Doherty, the former Sask Party Finance minister, had never met with him on this project. He said, I quote from *Hansard*, “. . . that Mr. Doherty did not lobby on this, was not involved in this particular RFP.”

We know now there is no RFP, and the Health minister was wrong. There are multiple entries of Kevin Doherty lobbying on surgical policies with this minister when this deal was being made. To the Health minister: did Mr. Doherty lobby on this sole-source deal that saw his client get paid \$6 million by the taxpayers of Saskatchewan or not?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I meet with many people, and I've talked about that in this Chamber before. I meet with many people. I meet with groups. I meet with organizations. I meet with municipal leaders. I meet with health care foundations. I meet with front-line health care providers, Mr. Speaker. I meet with patients, such as I did yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

And there are a number of groups, and the Premier talked about this a little bit, but there are a number of groups that are registered with the Registrar of Lobbyists to meet with us, to meet with the opposition, Mr. Speaker, such as the Saskatchewan Medical Association, such as the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, the Canadian Red Cross, the Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Diabetes Association. These are all groups that I have also met with as well, Mr. Speaker.

And they meet with us to talk about health care in Saskatchewan, to talk about some of the challenges that we are facing, but also to look at creative ideas, and look for solutions to the challenges that we face to continue to build health care in this province so the people of Saskatchewan can have the best possible health care, Mr. Speaker.

The members opposite, they want us to consult. They want us to engage with people on one hand, but on the other hand, they say we shouldn't be doing that, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to do what's right for the people of this province.

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

Ms. Conway: — Mr. Speaker, Brad Wall promised that the Sask

Party would be the most open and accountable government in Saskatchewan history. They're not what they used to be, Mr. Speaker. They don't even try anymore.

Let's look at the facts. There is entry after entry after entry in the lobbyists registry of Kevin Doherty lobbying that government on behalf of their Sask Party donor to "work with the Ministry of Health to assist in the surgical backlog." This is a great deal for the Sask Party. This is a great deal for their donors. But it's a terrible deal for the people of Saskatchewan — worst in the nation results — who are left to wait longer and longer, often in pain, and then they're left to pick up the tab.

Who should Saskatchewan believe on this matter, Mr. Speaker — the Minister of Health or Kevin Doherty's own filings with the lobbyists registry?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would hope that the member opposite is prepared to make those allegations outside the Chamber, and I would encourage her to do so, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this government has made significant progress in reducing the surgical backlog in Saskatchewan by utilizing a number of initiatives, including utilizing private surgical providers. As of December 2023, Mr. Speaker, this past December, there were 27,000 patients waiting for surgery in Saskatchewan, over 8,100 less patients than in November of 2021, or a decrease of 23 per cent.

Members opposite, they want us to shut down our publicly funded, privately delivered services that would deny immediate relief to people right across this province who need knee surgeries, who need hip surgeries.

Mr. Speaker, 161,000 residents that, since this program started a number of years ago, 161,000 residents of Saskatchewan have benefited from this program. And they're grateful for the ability to get these surgeries done. Mr. Speaker, 161,000 patients that the NDP would deny service to.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatchewan Rivers.

Crime Reduction Measures

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to put the crime rate into perspective for this government. The per capita vehicle theft rate in Prince Albert is four times higher than Toronto — four times — yet this government continually fails to act. Where is the will? Why isn't the Premier declaring war on crime? Or should we do what they're doing in Ontario and tell residents that they should leave their car keys outside for the thieves?

Can the government state what are they actually doing to tackle crime today, not just some line item in a budget? Their families, their neighbours, their communities are all affected by this. We don't need more speeding cameras that rack up fines on law-abiding citizens, Mr. Speaker. We need leadership that has the will to end the lawlessness and violence. I'm asking the government, what are they doing to end the crime epidemic?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I'm very proud of what our law enforcement is doing — our municipal, our First Nation, and of course our RCMP law enforcement — with our crime reduction teams, Mr. Speaker, across Saskatchewan. A newly implemented marshals service that's going to be up and running next year, Mr. Speaker, which I know the opposition is against. Mr. Speaker, I can't understand for the life of me why they would want to have less police officers in Saskatchewan. We have a new deal with the . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I can wait, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the marshals service that we've been able to implement to be able to help reduce crime — not just in rural Saskatchewan, in northern Saskatchewan — and assist our municipalities in making sure that they have the proper resources to be able to work against the people that are committing crimes in this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatchewan Rivers.

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm not interested in some line item on a budget. What are they doing? Their own law enforcement are at citizens-on-patrol meetings begging for help. A minister from this government attended a citizens-on-patrol meeting and told his residents he had no solutions for them. He said he wasn't going to go back to Regina and ask for more money until the public put together a plan for him. He told them they knew how to contact him because his phone number was on the radio.

Is this the kind of leadership this government is proud of? Is this the kind of leadership that will solve the crime problem?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And directly to the question, what we're doing is we're investing \$228 million to the RCMP in the provincial police service agreement, Mr. Speaker. That's the investment that we're doing. On top of that, Mr. Speaker, we're also investing again in our marshals service, which I know the opposition and that member specifically does not support, even though it would benefit specifically into her community.

Mr. Speaker, we're very proud. I just attended this morning the RPS [Regina Police Service] luncheon for long service, and I'm attending this afternoon to be able to thank those police officers, to thank those front-line officers who are out there making sure that our communities are safe.

Mr. Speaker, this is something that is critically important to our communities, something that the Premier has identified to myself and to this cabinet that we should be able to make sure that our communities are safe. That means our municipalities, our northern communities, our agricultural areas, Mr. Speaker.

This government will continue to invest within law enforcement and will continue to work with front-line providers to make sure that those services are properly funded. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Ms. Carr: — Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Please state your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Ms. Carr: — Mr. Speaker, during question period the member from Regina Lakeview and the Leader of the Opposition said, people expect their leaders to be honest and forthright. And what she was saying indirectly was that the Premier was not being honest. I believe you have clearly ruled on this, and I would ask that the Leader of the Opposition withdraw and apologize.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

Ms. Sarauer: — Mr. Speaker, I will again state what the Leader of the Opposition said, as had been repeated by the Government Deputy House Leader: Saskatchewan people expect their leaders to be honest and forthright. Period — that was all she said. That should not be a controversial statement, but apparently government finds that offensive. Mr. Speaker, I'd ask that you find that that point of order is not well taken.

The Speaker: — I'll take it under advisement.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Mr. Speaker, I wish to order question no. 6.

The Speaker: — The question was ordered.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

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

Cost of Living and Affordability Measures

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What a pleasure it is to be on my feet today for this beautiful Thursday tradition that is the 75-minute debate. Now, Mr. Speaker, at the end of my remarks I will be moving a motion calling on the government to urgently act to provide relief to families struggling with the high cost of living. And, Mr. Speaker, the reason that this motion and these statements come before this Assembly time and time again is because this is the number one issue identified by Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker.

It is an outrage that this year's budget did not contain one thin dime of affordability measures. We hear the government day after day stand up and, you know, try and point to the status quo as somehow adequate, when more than 6 out of 10 people in Saskatchewan say that they're having trouble making ends meet, that they can't afford the life that they work so hard for.

It's an outrage that food and fuel costs continue to skyrocket and

this government sits on its hands and does nothing. Maintaining the status quo is fine. Well, Mr. Speaker, people in this province know that if the government is saying status quo, then they've got to go.

Since this Premier was elected, Saskatchewan people are paying 30 per cent more for groceries, 27 per cent more for housing, and 21 per cent more on gas. And day after day in this Assembly you will see this team and this Leader of the Opposition stand up and call for this government to act on something they could do to impact affordability tomorrow: scrap the gas tax. Save families in Saskatchewan 15 cents a litre at the pumps, starting tomorrow.

Now, Mr. Speaker, these members opposite, they don't like to look at things like provinces, like, you know, NDP Manitoba have done. But they can also look to the west and look at what UCP [United Conservative Party] Alberta has done. They've scrapped the gas tax, Mr. Speaker. Doug Ford in Ontario, what has he done? He thought gee, people in Ontario really need some relief. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if it's good enough for Doug Ford, it's good enough for Danielle Smith, you would think that the people of Saskatchewan — who drive to get to work, who drive to get their kids to sports, who drive to get to the grocery store — you'd think these people could perhaps use a measure of affordability relief. You'd think these people could use a government that cared about affordability and that cared to act on one simple thing. But no, Mr. Speaker.

The opposition has been calling for this for honestly I think years. Years ago was the first time we called on the government to act, and still nothing, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And again this number one issue for Saskatchewan people just points to how tired and out of touch this government has truly begun because, Mr. Speaker, they have lots of other priorities, Mr. Speaker, and you know, they're proud of their record. They've got this new language they're testing that, you know, you can't trust these guys, something-something crashed the economy.

Well spoiler alert, folks. This conservative government has nearly \$1 billion in interest payments. And those payments that this government has rung up are what families, what seniors are paying through new taxes, through PST [provincial sales tax] expansion, utility rate increases.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member from Kindersley is chirping from his seat saying, you guys want to cut the gas tax. Yeah, we do. Quit wasting money. If you were a conservative government sitting there heckling . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — This is not a conservative government. This is a Sask Party government, so please use the Sask Party.

Ms. A. Young: — Right you are, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is not a conservative government. This Sask Party government is so . . . The member from Kindersley is so eager to get on the record that he does not want to scrap the gas tax.

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

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Point of order, Mr. Speaker. One of

the bedrock principles around here is you are not to comment on Speakers' rulings. There was no more direct example of that than what that member just did. She needs to withdraw and apologize.

[11:00]

The Deputy Speaker: — Yes, the member from Regina University, you do know that you are not supposed to say that, so I would ask you to withdraw and apologize.

Ms. A. Young: — I will withdraw and apologize, Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . It's a privilege being tall and statuesque, Mr. Speaker.

So let's move on. This member from Kindersley is eager to get his opposition to removing the gas tax on the record. Well here's a spoiler alert, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If you quit your scandal, your waste and mismanagement, you would have lots of money to provide Saskatchewan people the affordability relief that you believe. And if this is a government that actually believes that dollars are better vested with them than in the pockets of hard-working Saskatchewan people, well I look forward to what Saskatchewan people have to say about that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let's take one more tour through their most recent budget. This is a budget, while not offering one thin dime of affordability relief, does . . . Well I was going to say it's balanced on, but of course it's not balanced, because this is a government that has never met a budget they can balance. Well actually I think they maybe did it twice, so let's give credit where credit is due, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Oh, once. I've been corrected.

This is a budget that is funded with increases on personal income tax, PST, and ironically — and I've noted this before and will continue to do so because it delights me — with a \$448 million back to their coffers from the OBPS [output-based performance standards] which is their own carbon tax.

Now the member from Kindersley was concerned about this the last time I mentioned it. And I hope he's gone and investigated what exactly the OBPS is in that intervening time, because 6 out of 10 people, 6 out of 10 people in Saskatchewan are desperately worried about their finances. One in five Saskatchewan people — one in five, 20 per cent of people in this province — report having gone hungry since 2021. That is not a measure of success, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have the highest rates of child poverty. We have the highest rates of things like infant mortality, like maternal mortality. These are not markers of success and distinction. And this is a government that has demonstrated yet again that they just don't care about affordability. And they are not listening to, again, these 6 out of 10 Saskatchewan people who say that they are desperately worried about paying their bills.

And this is a government that is not content with keeping money in the pockets of hard-working Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker, because if you're a person in Saskatchewan who works for a living, you know that this is a government that is coasting on the largest tax increase in Saskatchewan history.

Let's take a quick visit to budgets past. They expanded the PST

to restaurant meals, to insurance, to children's clothes, to takeout food at the grocery store that hard-working families might rely on, your vehicle registration, Rider tickets.

Mr. Speaker, if you buy a used car, which people who work for a living often do in this province, not only are you paying PST once, you're paying that PST into perpetuity. And you're not only paying that PST on the price you paid. You're paying it on the book value, so you can't even turn around and sell your car to your kids without paying this government thousands of dollars potentially in PST. This is a government whose PST revenue has grown by over \$2 billion, since that Premier took office. In 2024, this past year, let's talk about their record. PST tax revenues have increased 17 per cent — 17 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And we don't have to look far. I've canvassed this before. What did they do after their last election victory? They turned around. They increased education property taxes. SaskPower rates are up under this government. In fact our electrical prices under this government have increased 114 per cent. And, Mr. Speaker, again nothing for affordability.

But what do they have money for? They have money for a marshals service, which has cost how much so far? \$17 million, Mr. Speaker, and not one single boot, not even half a pair of boots on the ground here in Saskatchewan. They spent \$11 million in money to settle a lawsuit related to another donor in Wascana Park, \$240 million and counting on AIMS [administrative information management system], hundreds of thousands on billboards.

I mean, Mr. Speaker, if this is how that tired and out-of-touch government is choosing to spend public money instead of on affordability relief, I would ask those members to seriously have some in-depth conversations in your caucus meetings. Go out there; talk to your neighbours. You ask them what they think about that, Mr. Speaker.

We heard again today a little bit of . . . I think I'll use the word, "fragility" around some of their international travel, Mr. Speaker. And again, the best people positioned to be out there — industry, innovators, producers — those are the people who know their trade, who know their profession, who know their expertise, who know their markets. And yes, we should be helping them, Mr. Speaker. But this is a government who is so comfortable spending public money.

They spent, we're still not sure, but clearly well over a million dollars on their trip to Dubai. A week in Dubai, the most expensive foreign trip in Saskatchewan's history. And you know what it cost Danielle Smith next door in Alberta? It cost just over \$150,000. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, members opposite, you know, they think I don't know math, but I'd say that's close to a tenth of what this government spent on a week in Dubai. And wow, they really don't like that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Under this Premier, that government's economic growth record has averaged just slightly more than half a per cent a year.

And they want to look out. They want to talk about their GDP [gross domestic product] numbers going forward, because of course they don't actually want to talk about their record. And that's great. They want to talk about their capital investment, and I imagine that's because this year's number is lower than it was

in 2014, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This is a government that has had negative economic growth in three of the last six years. And why does that matter, Mr. Speaker? That matters because that represents the potential, the future of the people of this province. This is a government that in their own budget documents is projecting per capita GDP growth to decline. You have per capita GDP growth going down. You have life expectancy going down. And this is a record that you're proud of.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister for CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan] is claiming it's all COVID. Well, news flash. We're still the worst in the country. We are the worst in the country, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . And now he's changing tactics, and I appreciate that he's, you know, quick on his feet. But, you know, they like this quote from Deloitte looking at their GDP forecast for next year of 1.4 per cent. And yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's growth.

You know what 1 per cent of that 1.4 represents? One per cent of that is represented by the excellent investment that is being made at the Jansen mine. One per cent of that GDP growth is that project, which is excellent, which is exceptional. That additional 0.4 per cent is everything else in the province, Mr. Speaker. And as much as these members might try, I don't think they can claim responsibility for Saskatchewan's natural resources, Mr. Speaker.

And it is this side of the Assembly that has a proud history of defending Saskatchewan's resource sector, of growing our industries, of developing them in the first place, Mr. Speaker, of developing all of those regimes that so benefit the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

But instead we have a government that is afraid to run on their own record, which is one of economic failure, economic mismanagement, and no affordability relief, Mr. Speaker. With the economic record of the members opposite, worst job creation record, second-slowest wage growth in the province.

Like our immigrant retention rate. They want to talk about population growth — 42 out of every 100 people who moved to this province leave. That immigration retention rate has dropped 20 per cent under this Premier.

And an even worse statistic, Mr. Speaker. Looking here in Regina in my home community, last year we had 6,300 newcomers come to Regina. That's excellent — 6,300 immigrants, refugees come to Regina. Twenty per cent of those people are using the food bank, Mr. Speaker. And this is a government that clearly does not care about affordability.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm happy to move my motion and begin this debate:

That the Assembly calls upon the government to urgently act to provide relief to families struggling with the high cost of living.

I so move.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Regina University

has moved:

That the Assembly calls upon the government to urgently act to provide relief to families struggling with the high cost of living.

Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member from Saskatoon Riversdale.

Mr. Friesen: — Well that's quite the starting speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I've got to just think about what the Minister of Health said the other day. And you know, it would be really interesting to see if the NDP opposition could ever, ever, even once have something positive to say about the growth and about the great things happening in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, yesterday I had the really great honour of seeing almost 200 new Canadians become citizens. And I'll tell you, the excitement about coming to this province, building their lives and their futures for their family and their children in this province is nothing short of amazing. The smiles on their faces.

And I don't know where the NDP gets their numbers from, but they cherry-pick the stats left, right, and centre, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And they seem to be running out of questions. And it's not surprising they can't . . . They write down one question in question period, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they can't seem to pivot. They seem to roll with the same question over and over again, even after they get the answers. Why, Mr. Deputy Speaker? They don't like them because the answers are good news in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this motion is about removing the gas tax. And I really find this interesting because the members of the opposition keep talking about a temporary relief measure. One thing we have done since we had the honour of forming government, very shortly after, is start annual affordability measures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not a six-month relief — not a six-month relief with no idea of how they're going to pay for it. They have no clue. They have no suggestions of how to pay for this nearly \$500 million.

What did they do back in their day, Mr. Deputy Speaker? They took it out of the roads. They didn't fix the roads, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We were expected to fix our own roads. Is that what they plan to do again, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Take it out of the gas tax, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We take that gas tax that we collect and it does not go into the General Revenue Fund. It goes directly into our roads and highways, with over 1000 kilometres highways being done every year, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I think the member from Arm River had talked about how many highways we have in this province, more than anywhere per capita. But I think it wrapped around the world, wasn't it?

An Hon. Member: — Halfway.

Mr. Friesen: — Halfway around the world. We fixed enough highways to wrap halfway around the world. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we don't even have enough money in that road tax that we take to fix those highways, which means we have to top that up. When the NDP were in government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they didn't even use all the money they collected.

So I find it really interesting that they keep going on this point, but I guess it's kind of a one-hit wonder over there. And we're not really terribly surprised. They do have, you know, they have kind of a cheesy calendar over there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the math really just doesn't add up. It doesn't add up.

[11:15]

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, speaking of gas tax relief, how many families that are struggling, low-income families, even have a car? There's lots of families that don't even have a car, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And if you do have a car though, what has this government done? In the time that I've been elected, we've provided, on average, \$480 to those people in rebates directly from SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance], Mr. Deputy Speaker. I don't know why we keep forgetting about this. Because apparently that doesn't matter. There's nothing that this government does for affordability, is what the opposition keeps saying.

But I see things a lot different. The members on this side of the House, and I would argue my constituents as well and the majority of the province, sees it a lot differently, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What about the \$500 affordability cheque that went out to people? I didn't hear people complaining about that, and yet the opposition did. Because what? It wasn't sufficient. And yet they proposed what? I think it was \$150, \$145 tax credit. And we did 500, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You know, I'm getting a little tired. I'm getting a little tired of how out of touch the NDP opposition is.

I touched on this briefly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but you know, the Minister of Finance, the Premier's spoken to this many times, and I don't believe it can be spoken of enough: the over 2 billion in tax affordability measures each and every year. Do we really want short-term affordability measures? You know what? Sometimes they're necessary, and we've delivered on that with almost \$1,000 with the SGI rebate and the affordability cheques, but more importantly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, bringing over 112,000 people off the tax roll. And that is incredible, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because that's actually doing things for these families that really need it.

And they like to keep going to Manitoba so let's go to Manitoba. Premier's mentioned this a few times. A family of four, provincial income tax, starts paying at 38,000 per year. In Saskatchewan a family of four pays no provincial income tax on the first \$59,000, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So do we want to compare Manitoba to Saskatchewan?

Let's keep doing it, and let's compare BC [British Columbia] as well. We have the second-lowest utility rate bundle in the country, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And this has directly . . . if we want to go province to province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is over 500 less than British Columbia, who arguably, their cost of living is I'm sure close to two times. My daughter lives in Vancouver and I know what they pay there, and it's certainly not even close to what we have here, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We are so affordable here. That's why Regina is the number one city . . . I think it's the lowest, most affordable city in the country, and I think Saskatoon is right next to it at second.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we want to talk Quebec, over 1,300 less than a family in Quebec. Want to go next door to Alberta? Over 4,500 less than a family in Alberta; 3,600 in Ontario; 4,000 in Nova Scotia; 2,900 in New Brunswick. This is pretty easy stuff, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are delivering on affordability measures in this province day in and day out, not just a temporary six-month relief with no idea where the money's coming to pay for it.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, something that gets left out, and I'm really sad that it does, is our SEI [Saskatchewan employment incentive] program, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And this is just over \$17 million. And I did a little deeper delve into the Saskatchewan employment incentive and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this speaks directly to people in households that need a little handout. And that is what we are about on this side of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They keep quoting Brad Wall. Brad Wall told me when I was door knocking, 2014, '15, '16, this is what we are trying to do. We are trying to provide a handout for the people of the province that need it the most.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can't even speak to the depth of this Saskatchewan employment incentive program. For example, if you are employed and you're making between 500 and 2,200 a month and you have three children, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you can receive up to \$600 additional money. And as you begin to make more money, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that only decreases by 30 cents on the dollar. Are we talking about actually helping the people that need it the most, Mr. Deputy Speaker? This is addressing that, and I'm so proud of this investment. So I don't know where, or what budget they're reading, but there is a lot in this budget to help people with affordability measures.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we can talk about the carbon tax. We talk about that often. Their members on that side can't decide if they support it or don't support it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But we've seen a direct impact in this province, dropping the inflation rate directly in this province, giving people an average of \$400 back per year, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Can you imagine if we took that carbon tax off of the businesses who are creating our products and moving them to market? Mr. Deputy Speaker, we did the math on how many times the carbon tax is on a loaf of bread. It's over a dozen times, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by the time a loaf of bread is sitting on that shelf. You want to talk about affordability measures? Get a hold of your leader over there, Jagmeet Singh, and get rid of that carbon tax.

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

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Miigwech, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's an honour to enter into the 75-minute debate to support my colleague's motion from Regina University. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan citizens in this province are struggling with high cost of living while this government's backbenchers gleefully holler, day after day in their members' statements, "It's a great day in Saskatchewan."

Mr. Speaker, while it may be a great day for these members opposite, every day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, citizens outside of this marble castle and everywhere across this province are struggling to make ends meet. These folks are having, they're having to

make difficult decisions. Many citizens do not have the luxury of choosing to take a winter holiday or using their fifth wheel for a holiday like the Minister of Finance does.

For the minister to have no qualms in taking an \$8,000 luncheon to North Battleford on public dime demonstrates how out of touch this Sask Party government has become. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the rotunda she also said she would do it again. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this shows how much she has actually lost the pulse of the Saskatchewan communities in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, many, many folks are having to choose between putting food on the table, having a roof over their head if they have one, and keeping up with their utility bills that keep increasing, or paying for prescriptions that would keep them or their family happy.

This tired and out-of-touch government boasts about the growing economy and claims that the province is the most affordable place to live. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, no matter how the Sask Party government wants to spin this, there are others saying that the government's affordability formula applies to only certain families. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this affordability formula they use, say . . . It only applies to those who are already able to get by. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it does not capture what actual people might be living.

According to the head of economics department, Joel Bruneau at the University of Saskatchewan says, "Even if a family or individual does fit the criteria, they may have costs cutting into their household budget that the province didn't account for." He further adds, "By essentially arguing that we're affordable for everybody, I think we gloss over that there are a lot of people that are struggling."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my own constituency of Saskatoon Centre, I see long lineups at the food bank, and many of these folks have two or three jobs. I see folks pushing carts down the street with all their belongings with no place to rest. Not only do we have a record number of people using the food bank in this province, we have the highest child poverty rates in this country. And we have more citizens without a roof over their heads. This is appalling, considering how often this Sask Party government states in their members' statements that our Sask Party government is building a stronger Saskatchewan and investing in communities.

Back in January, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after a big snow storm, it was very cold and the wind was blowing. I saw a man huddled under a cardboard trying to stay warm and out of the wind. I pulled over, got my winter bomber out of the back and took it over to him to put on, and asked him if I could take him to a shelter or somewhere warm. That man was so grateful for me stopping — because many people weren't — and offering my help. He declined my offer to take him to a warm place, but he was so grateful. And when I got in my vehicle I said a prayer to the Creator to watch over this man during this very cold night.

Those are things that happen. I see many, many citizens in my constituency without a home. Many thoughts and feelings arose in me. And one thought I had was, with a province as rich as ours, why on earth would we allow this to happen? Mr. Deputy Speaker, every person deserves a roof over their head. In

Saskatoon there are many people, including women and their children, who experience ongoing and repeated periods of homelessness while we sit on unoccupied social housing units in the province.

In CUISR's [Community-University Institute for Social Research] 2022 report, 50 per cent that experience homelessness are male, 20 per cent are children and youth, 40 per cent are adult, and 90.1 per cent are Indigenous. That is very sad in a province that is as prosperous as we are. People living on low income can only access only a small part of the available housing market, with limited options, often in areas that experience poverty, crimes, and drugs. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this tired and out-of-touch government has been de-investing in social housing units to the point that many are uninhabitable and many still remain vacant.

I remember in Saskatoon when social housing units were always so immaculate and kept up. Now I'm hearing many stories from single mothers with little ones having to stay in mouse-infested homes or, even worse, having to live in mould-infested homes. And some of these social housing units, the children are not able to play in their backyards because the fences are falling and there's no dollars for the organizations to fix them.

Now let's talk about the food costs in this province. People are not able to buy fresh fruits and vegetables, let alone put food on the table. With the rising cost of food, it is making many in this province struggle. University students, who are already struggling with tuition fees and finding affordable housing, go hungry and must go to student services to see how they could be helped.

My heart broke when I heard of one of my friends, who already had a part-time job, a full course load, a family to support, and tuition fees that had to be paid. And that person had to go to student services, asking for help to eat.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the North, a 24-pack of bottled water costs more than \$53 in Fond-du-Lac. Those small bagged salad kits cost \$14. A bag of oranges costs \$14. A club pack of Ritz crackers costs \$26. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know what the irony of all of that is? Alcohol in the North is the same price as it is here in the South. So it's cheaper to have alcohol, yet food prices are skyrocketing.

[11:30]

And additionally, traditional hunting is getting more difficult due to fuel costs. For one to go on a hunting trip in the North costs \$2,000. Thankfully some nations, depending on available funding, will organize community hunts. For one community hunt in Fond-du-Lac, it would cost close to \$200,000 if they are aiming to get a caribou for each house.

Now let's compare plane rides. Fond-du-Lac is a fly-in community. A flight from Fond-du-Lac to Saskatoon costs \$900 one way. That's one person. A trip to North Battleford from Regina is a four-hour drive. You can drive to North Battleford from here. That luncheon the Minister of Finance took cost the taxpayers in this province \$8,000.

So when you look at all the affordability, high cost of living,

people in this province are suffering, and this government continues to ignore them. Miigwech.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Lumsden-Morse.

Mr. B. McLeod: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is indeed an honour to be able to stand today and speak to the issue of affordability, something that, as a farmer myself and speaking on behalf of farmers across the province, affordability is a huge challenge in the industry that we're involved with. I know a great deal about not having enough and not knowing where the next bill is going to be paid and digging deep and finding the resources to really be there for the next season. One thing I've learned in my time in farming is you don't farm for one year. One year is not going to get you where you need to be. It's a lifetime occupation, and it's one that I'm proud to be involved in.

I also want to talk a little bit about just a recent event, the Real Estate Association of Saskatchewan and the reception that they had in this . . . just down the hallway here a little ways. And they talked about the fact of Saskatchewan having one of the lowest housing costs in Canada. Amazing, actually. And thanks to so many people involved with making that happen — construction workers, all levels of government in terms of permitting — recent stats of how . . . building permits through the roof. That's awesome. Those are great, great things.

And just a bit of a personal comment here in regards to the fact that there are a lot of people involved in selling real estate as well, not the least of which is my own mother-in-law. And I think, and I'm going to research this topic just a little bit more, but I believe she may be if not the oldest but very close to the oldest active real estate agent in our province at 90 years of age. Ninety years of age. And I think she'd be okay with me saying her age. She's a very spry 90-year-old. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, yes, she's very active, and yes, she does hit the tax rolls on account of what she's doing in selling real estate. Impressive. Impressive.

So when we talk affordability, it's always important to compare apples to apples. You can never take one stat in isolation, and I know the member from Riversdale also talked about this. It's easy to cherry-pick single elements that tell your story, but what's needed is a very holistic look at the entire picture. Comparisons are very helpful, and so we'll attempt to provide a balanced look at affordability in Saskatchewan.

Now our official opposition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, likes to use Manitoba as an example. So let's explore that a little deeper, using stats derived from the same source — that would be Stats Canada.

Saskatchewan has a population of 1,225,493 at January 1st, 2024. That is a lot of people that have moved to this province in a very short period of time. Rapid growth. That's an increase of 30,624 year over year, or 2.6 per cent.

Similar growth in Manitoba, who has a larger population base to start with, a population of 1.465 million, and over a one-year time period shows a growth of 2.94 per cent, a growth of 41,844. So we're similar in size. Similar in size, slightly larger in Manitoba. So let's look at some of the comparisons in terms of affordability.

In Manitoba a family of four pays provincial income tax on the first . . . when they get to \$38,050. That's the seventh lowest tax-free threshold in Canada. Seventh lowest. In Saskatchewan, 59,475. That's \$21,425 more than Manitoba, and the highest — let me say this again — the highest tax-free threshold in Canada.

An Hon. Member: — Indexed every year.

Mr. B. McLeod: — Next point on my list. Indexed every year. Thank you for the member from Cannington. He's here to help, and that's awesome.

So a family of four pays \$2,078 more provincial income tax than Saskatchewan. Now just recently a provincial budget passed in Manitoba as well as here. \$71 million in education property tax increase in Manitoba. How much was the property tax increase here? Nothing. Nothing. Zero.

Fitness tax credit, \$54 per child in Manitoba; 150 here, introduced by our government as a cost-saving affordability. No children's drug plan in Manitoba. We have a drug plan in Saskatchewan introduced by the Sask Party. No first-time homeowner, homebuyer tax credit in Manitoba; \$1,050 first-time homebuyer tax credit here in Saskatchewan.

What's the PST number in Manitoba? Seven per cent. Six per cent here. What about utilities? Seven per cent on utilities. Can you imagine 7 per cent PST on utilities? And in Saskatchewan, no carbon tax on home heating, saving \$400 per family. No carbon tax. Payroll tax in Manitoba, 2.15; no payroll tax here. And Manitoba has a capital investment dollar figure of 9.06 billion in 2024. What's the number here? 19.57 billion.

So we talk about a net debt-to-GDP ratio, and that's a really important, important conversation because it gives you the sense of how much the cost is to run your government if you're running into debt all the time. In Manitoba, 38.5 per cent — among the highest in the country. Net debt-to-GDP ratio in Saskatchewan, 14 per cent.

I'm going to talk a little more about that. It's the second lowest in the country, second only to Alberta, and as the member from . . . what's your . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Moosomin, I always forget Moosomin. It's still too high, we need to get it lower.

And on top of all that, Manitoba receives \$4 billion in equalization payments, and yet members opposite think that we should do like Manitoba and take the gas tax off. So a six-month gas tax would cost us \$253 million, more than half of the capital budget for highways. So we're supposed to go back to filling our own potholes, I guess is the answer. And make community — what was that? Community growth . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Bonding. Bonding community building exercise. I don't think so, Mr. Speaker.

So let's talk about the net debt as a percentage of GDP because I've got to watch the time here as well. So I already said Saskatchewan, 14 per cent; Manitoba at 38.5; Ontario at 39.2 per cent. What does that actually mean? So for Saskatchewan, when you talk about that, it leaves us with a source of revenue that needs to go to pay debt. And in Saskatchewan 4.2 per cent of our revenue, so 95.8 cents of every dollar is what we get to spend.

The other goes to debt repayment. Ontario, 93.3 cents is what they get to spend. And in Manitoba 10 cents of every dollar goes to pay on their interest costs.

And we've paid down 2.5 billion in operation debt. That's saving us \$97.5 million annually, allowing us to invest in projects, programs, and capital projects. And what kind of things? Already mentioned by my partner here, Saskatchewan employment incentive, a wonderful opportunity to be able to say affordability is important in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker . . .

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

Mr. Burki: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to be stepping up in debate for 75 minutes on the topic of affordability. I think on both sides of the House we agree that this is the issue of the people, whatever they are having and facing in their homes. I will be not going to one way or other, but I will go right straight to the people that I've been talk, chat, and sit and stand with them every day.

I've been a driver educator for 15 years and been teaching in my constituency in four high schools. And I was working with a lot of associations, a lot of churches and mosques very closely. In the by-election I went to thousands of doors, and thanks to the people of my constituency that I was not a stranger for them. I was a teacher for their children, for their siblings, which they were very open and welcoming at the doorstep. If I'm looking to my calculations, about 80 to 90 per cent of the issues that we got on the doorstep was affordability.

Regina Coronation Park is the area where we have average working class families living, and they were living and are living paycheque to paycheque. We were having issues with COVID. The price of everything went up, and people were still struggling and are still struggling as well.

As a constituent, as a member, the true facts that we can get over here to this Chamber is to knock on the door, talk to the people. Right after this winter session, the fall session, I went about to 75 per cent of my constituents. I did door knocking, even the temperature sometimes was minus 40. When the people looked at me at minus 40 and I was knocking at the door, they don't know what you're doing. You're a crazy person.

I should be crazy, because I have to get the facts and figures from the people's doorstep — what they are looking for, what they're expecting from us, from this side and from that side of the House, what they're expecting. We say democracy is of the government, for the government, and by the government. I understand of and by, but for the people. Democracy is the government for people, by the people, for the people, for what we are giving back to the people.

[11:45]

Being a driver educator, numerous times I have picked the students in first period where they told me that they haven't done their breakfast. Numerous times the students came to me when I asked them, you didn't get the learner licence? And they told me, Mr. Burki, might be able to not get it. I said, what's wrong? They said, my parents can't afford \$25 to pay for my learner licence.

That learner licence is the future of our children. When they graduated, they can work. Without driving, they will be not getting a job. Very rare chances.

Whatever I think for my children, I should have to think for each and every child in this province. So we make sure that affordability is one of the biggest reasons. It was in the by-election, and it is still right now.

Right after the by-election, the Premier's response to the media was that we heard the message of the people loud and clear. But I feel we didn't get anything back from the people. We didn't get back to the government to those people that they were expecting. Further than that, the government stayed with the pronoun policy, which was not the demand of the people.

I've been a driver educator, and I don't know how the situation's going worse in schools. One student, that was enough back and forth, she was in grade 11. Their family moved due to some circumstances. They went to Ontario. They went to Cambridge, Ontario. She was sitting in math class and she told the teacher that whatever math you are teaching, I don't understand what you are teaching. And the teacher asked where you came from and she said, I came from Saskatchewan. Then she told me that she told her to go back into grade 9 in her school. So children matter. All crowded classroom sizes.

Psychologists. I've personally been waiting for psychologist for six months. And last week when I went to the psychologist's office and I talked to them they said, we have appointment over here. My daughter was with me. And they told me, oh, we called you. We cancelled that appointment. I said, which number did you call? They told me, we called you on your landline. And I said at least we were waiting for six months, you should have to send us a letter.

But I'm not blaming them. They are the front-line workers. They are doing the best job. I appreciate them. But I gave my personal cell phone number, I said you can call me on this number, and which number you will be calling so I should know I can book an appointment. A lot of people are waiting for psychologists.

Mental health issues is a genuine issue in school. Overcrowded classroom size, that is a genuine issue of the school. We make sure we have to equip our children with the best knowledge we can, but unfortunately we didn't go to that direction.

My colleague from Regina Walsh Acres, he went from A to Z, all the curriculum. I've been teaching almost four school divisions, and I was working very close with the administration in the school division as well. If there was any issue with some child to change my name or call me by this name, the principal was telling me. And I have no problem to call a person with this name or not. It was not an issue.

But anyway we were being distracted from main issue of affordability that should be on the top of the list.

So, Mr. Speaker, people are looking for a second job. And I know on one doorstep I went and talked to one young person, a single mother. She bought a house. She did a Bachelor in health sciences. She's working a very good position in health care. But she was telling me, "I can't afford to pay my mortgage and my

“I can't do that.” So she looked for a second job, and she told me where she is working. She's working at a hotel as a receptionist with minimum wage. How we can defend people when they're struggling like that?”

I appreciate the member from opposite from Lumsden-Morse, which he brought it to here that the real estate market is very good. We are, at the minimum, purchasing or buying sales over here in real estate. That's a fact. In Ontario the real estate is skyrocketing, in BC the same. In Alberta the same as well. We are in good shape to attract people from all provinces. People can afford to buy a house over here for \$400,000, where they can't even afford in other provinces, where we have such a good . . . [inaudible] . . . to attract people to our beautiful province over here. The only thing that we need, to make sure we can provide them affordability at their doorstep.

At the doorstep I talked to some people, and they were saying that they are doing already two jobs but that's not enough to support their families. They are looking for a third job. They can't put their kids in extracurricular activities. So if the people are not having the basic needs, definitely they will be going where they can support their child's education with less stress. One of the constituents, she told me that before COVID she was . . .

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

Mr. Jenson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to provide some insight into the opposition's motion regarding affordability in our province. Mr. Deputy Speaker, affordability challenges are not something that is unique to this province. Inflation is also affecting our entire country and many jurisdictions around the world. It doesn't matter if it's groceries, other retail goods or services or farm inputs or business supplies — the cost of everything has gone up. The question is why. It's no secret that the ever-increasing carbon tax is to blame.

The NDP-supported Liberal carbon tax, there's not one single tangible good in our economy that isn't subject to the carbon tax, either directly or indirectly. This is what has driven up the price of everything. Each and every domestically produced or imported consumer good that moves through a supply chain is touched by the carbon tax. From the time that product is grown or manufactured to the warehouse stage and all the way through the retail system until the final point of purchase, that item is subject to the carbon tax cost adjustments multiple times.

But while we're feeling the effects of nationwide inflation, our government in past budgets and again in this year's budget, provides over \$2 billion in affordability measures for the residents of our province, to which my colleagues from Saskatoon Riversdale and Lumsden-Morse have already detailed in great length.

Our government's removal of the carbon tax from natural gas and electrical home heating has resulted in our inflation rate dropping from 2.7 per cent to 1.9 per cent in February. Now remove the carbon tax from everything in our country — fuel, electricity, transportation, agricultural production, manufacturing — and there's not a doubt in anyone's mind that the cost of living for

everyone will greatly improve with just that one single measure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's interesting that the opposition uses the word “urgently” in their motion, that the government urgently act to provide relief from the high cost of living. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just outlined the fastest and most efficient way to reduce inflation and restore affordability and the purchasing power of not only our friends and neighbours here in Saskatchewan, but also for everyone right across this great country.

The Opposition Leader apparently tried calling her federal boss, Jagmeet Singh, but all it seems she could do was leave a message. So if the phone call didn't work, and the carbon tax is the primary driver of inflation and affordability challenges, why doesn't the Opposition Leader head down Regina Avenue, catch a flight to Ottawa and personally meet with and tell Jagmeet to stop supporting Trudeau and get rid of the carbon tax?

It's an urgent matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So if she won't commit to doing that, then it speaks volumes about her party's actual support of Jagmeet Singh and Justin Trudeau. They're all hat and no cattle, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They talk a big game over there, but when the chips are down, the Trudeau-Singh coalition are the ones calling the shots for those members over there. They're the same old NDP. They talk down our economy and they have a terrible disdain for our oil and gas and mining industries. And in their world, no one should invest in the economy unless it's their idea and it's taxpayers' money.

History shows that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That opposition party stops at nothing to keep private investors out of our province and blow hundreds of millions of dollars of our taxpayers' dollars on bad investments and even worse investments. It's in their DNA as a party, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

When the NDP governed, think back to all the dot-coms they invested in and lost everything. There was tapped into. And then there was the \$15 million loss on Persona. And who could forget the \$43 million lost on Navigata? How about another 10 million on Craig Wireless or the network services of Chicago deal where they lost another \$16 million? And if that wasn't enough failure, they came back for more — 35 million more lost in the potato industry at SPUDCO [Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company].

But the investment party continued with investments in Guyana and the infamous Channel Lake losses. The NDP even went for the blackout and failed at that by losing taxpayers' money on the mega bingo project. Between losing hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars on these and other failed investments, coupled with the previous nationalizations of potash and oil, it's no wonder that anyone with private capital to invest steered clear of this province when the NDP were in power.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the opposition has started quoting our former premier Brad Wall, using the phrase, “The best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour.” And Mr. Wall couldn't have been more right when it comes to the NDP. Nothing has changed over there. They're all over the map. It's a complete mess just like it was in the years that they were in government. There may be new faces, but it's the same failed logic and ideology.

They want the gas tax cut just like they've done in Manitoba. We've heard all about it. Apparently to this opposition, we should be copying NDP Manitoba. Not a chance. Not a chance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In their budget release just over a week ago, Manitoba's debt-to-GDP ratio will climb to thirty-eight and a half per cent. Here in Saskatchewan we remain one of the best in the country, one of the lowest at 13.3.

It's interesting to note the billion-dollar increase in equalization money from the federal government to Manitoba, but that province is still projecting a deficit of almost \$800 million, all the while, while cutting capital roads budgets by 8 per cent, cancelling nine school projects, and axing 660 daycare spaces, on top of cutting funding to police, courts, crime prevention, and victim services.

If these types of cuts sound familiar, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are, because we lived through the NDP cuts when they were in power here. 176 schools were closed. Highway construction and maintenance were essentially non-existent. Everybody remembers the orange markers every hundred yards or so on every highway. And the NDP were telling people of this province to go fix your own roads; it'll be a worthwhile community project.

And then there was the decline in population which one NDP member said at the time was great. It's great that we're having people leave because with fewer people it leaves more for the rest of us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our collection of annual affordability measures is substantial. Whether it's reducing personal income tax and taking 112,000 residents off the tax rolls, or providing the second-lowest cost utility bundle in the country, our province is leading the way in affordability.

And there's others outside this province who are in agreement on affordability. Angela Serednicki of Zoocasa wrote on March 11, and I quote:

And when we talk about affordability, Regina truly shines. It's housing market offers some of the most budget-friendly options nationwide, with prices a staggering 57 per cent below the national benchmark.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my time is running short here, so I think it's . . . Just like my height. I think it's really important to emphasize this. When you add up the \$2 billion of affordability measures that we have in this province, whether that was through the SGI rebates of \$385 per vehicle; or the \$500 affordability cheques that were sent out; or the active families benefit of \$150 per child or 200 for a child who is disabled; or the graduate retention program tax credit, which that opposition is opposed to; or the first-time homebuyers tax credit; or the Saskatchewan employment incentive; or the seniors' drug plan; or the children's drug plan; or the seniors' income plan that has quadrupled since 2007.

The list is so long; I wish I could list them all. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you add up all this, all these affordability measures can only be paid for through the strength of a growing and vibrant economy, an economy that is projected to continue to be one of the strongest economies, if not the strongest, in the nation. That is something that cannot be discounted. It is very

real, and it's vital that it's protected, nurtured, and promoted.

There's one thing that Saskatchewan residents cannot afford, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that's the NDP. We know what their ideology is. We know they'll attack our economy. They'll crash our economy by chasing job creators and businesses out of the province, like they did before. They'll put up barriers to outside investment and they'll raise taxes, all the while shrugging their shoulders and wondering why is everyone leaving.

[12:00]

We in Saskatchewan can't afford that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our strong economy is what supports all of this province's targeted . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — The 65-minute period has expired. The 10-minute period, question-and-answer period will begin. I recognize the member from Arm River.

Mr. Skoropad: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The NDP concerns about affordability appear to start and stop with their party's fundraising emails.

Interestingly those members across the way have been sending out emails promising that they will make life more affordable. But only if you give them some of your money. I believe the quote from the Leader of the Opposition was asking, and I quote, "Help us strengthen our fight so we can make life more affordable for you and your family. Chip in \$150 by September 30th to support the fight."

To the member from Regina Coronation Park, do you believe it's fair to continue to ask money from the same Saskatchewan people that you feel have no extra money to give?

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

Mr. Burki: — Thank you. Thank you, member opposite for his question. I take it very happily, that question. If there's any criticism that should be happening, that's what we are sitting over here. But our fundraising is not from corporate and we are not doing the same thing, okay. So that should be very clear.

Our objective, if we can come into the government, I will say we will have to put the things on priority. The only . . . [inaudible] . . . we have over here, it is not something that the government is not doing, but the government is oversighting and not prioritizing those things. And we are not getting any fundraising from the corporate companies. Thank you.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In his remarks, the member from Riversdale said a number of fascinating things that I look forward to reviewing. But one of them was he talked about this new employment incentive program. And I believe — don't want to misquote him — but I believe he said a single mother with three children earning between 500 and \$2,000 a month could qualify for a maximum of \$600 a month.

So taking his numbers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, does the member from Riversdale really think a single mother with three children can afford to pay rent, bills, transportation, groceries for \$1,100 a month?

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

Mr. Friesen: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And you know, it's an interesting question she asked. Would they rather us not do this program? This program is amazing. And as the income increases, they are actually only deducted 30 cents per dollar. So this is a program that allows people to grow in their employment income while still getting this employment incentive benefit. So I believe this is a great program, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I'm happy to support this program.

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

Ms. Lambert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The opposition continues to run down our economy, denies the existence of jobs being created, and refuses to see what measures exist to support Saskatchewan's economy and its residents. In fact members of the opposition have consistently claimed that there are no new supports for affordability in this budget. But they are wrong. So we're just talking about the Saskatchewan employment incentive program.

To the member from Saskatoon Centre: do you believe that the Saskatchewan employment incentive program introduced this year, that provides young families with relief, does nothing to help with affordability?

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

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you for the question, a very good question. I guess my response to that is that since this Premier formed government, the people in this province are paying 30 per cent more on groceries, 20 per cent more on housing, and 20 more per cent on fuel.

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

Mr. Burki: — My question for member Riversdale is that, when we think that our real estate is really ideal for us in our province, that people from west, from east, they can come over here and they can afford it. I've been living in constituency and I've been living in a lot of communities. People are leaving.

At one point we were having, our ethnic community, we would have about 75 families. But yesterday we had a big Eid celebration of the same community. We invited all of them. We just left over . . . up to 17 families.

My question is, if we are such an ideal, why people are leaving our province?

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

Mr. Friesen: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I think I know where the question is going here, but I didn't really hear the end of it. But why are people moving to our province, is maybe what I heard. But that it's the most affordable place to live, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we have a housing first-time tax buyer's credit. Our housing here is the most affordable in the country. First and second, Regina and Saskatoon.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do admire the communities that move to our province from all over the world, and they do such a great job in supporting themselves and supporting their friends and families. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm proud to live in a province that is the most affordable in so many ways in this country.

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

Mr. D. Harrison: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It seems that everybody is able to handle reality except for the opposition. Just the other day — and the Leader of the Opposition was there — we heard from the realtors association CEO [chief executive officer] that Saskatchewan continues to be the most affordable province in Canada. With one of the highest thresholds for paying income tax and over \$2 billion in affordability measures in every budget, it's no surprise.

To the member from Saskatoon Centre: do you agree with the realtors association CEO in saying that Saskatchewan is the most affordable province?

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

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — What we know is that 50 per cent of Saskatchewan families are struggling to put food on the table for their families. That's what we know.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the member from Saskatoon Riversdale, we had a lot of discussion about provincial finances, and so — recognizing the Speaker's caution — does the member from Saskatoon Riversdale think it's acceptable that Sask Party and Conservative governments are responsible for 95 per cent of the debt in Saskatchewan's history?

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

Mr. Friesen: — Well thank you for that question. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we hadn't been under the NDP government for 16 years, we wouldn't had so much infrastructure to rebuild.

We are committed to building our infrastructure in our province and our schools and our hospitals and with our communities. And none of this can be done, none of this can be done without a strong and growing economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Keisig: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd like to read a quote from the Opposition Leader into the record:

I think we have one hell of a story to tell in this province about quality of life, about the opportunity that's here. We need to be telling that story. In an affordability crisis, we have some of the best rates as a province, the most affordable housing in the country.

To the member from Regina University: do you agree with your leader, and do you support her?

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

Ms. A. Young: — Well thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and thank you to the member for such a thoughtful question. I'm glad he was courageous enough to stare the Leader of the Opposition in the eyes while he asked it.

Absolutely I support my leader. But you know what I don't support? This government hiking power rates 114 per cent during this term.

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

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Miigwech, Mr. Speaker. To the member from Saskatoon Riversdale: you have many inherent and treaty rights holders in your constituency. What do you tell those inherent and treaty rights holders who rely on wild game for sustenance when it is costing them more to do their traditional hunting due to the high cost of fuel?

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

Mr. Friesen: — Carbon tax, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 1 — Regulation of Legal Firearms Possession

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by Mr. Bradshaw.]

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

Mr. Keisig: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's always happy to be on my feet and speak to the motion put forward by yourself and seconded by the member from Melville-Saltcoats.

Before I get into too much, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a second and just recognize a former constituent sitting in the west gallery, Fritz Wyssen. It's critical for a democracy to have an informed and knowledgeable electorate to keep a functioning democracy happening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so thank Mr. Wyssen for his due diligence on performing that duty here today.

Speaking about the motion that yourself brought forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you did an excellent job. And I want to use the time allotted to me today and speak a little bit more on a historical perspective on the issue. The Hudson's Bay Company had the sole contract to conduct trade from 1670 to 1870 in Rupert's Land, and that area encompassed large parts of present-day Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. One of the number one traded goods, Mr. Deputy Speaker, between the Hudson's Bay Company and local First Nations was firearms.

Indigenous people were very quick to adopt this new technology, and firearms became prized possessions throughout their culture. If you ever have a second, go to the Assiniboine Gallery in this building, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and take a look at the portrait of Chief Big Bear. He purposely had his portrait done with his axe and his rifle. These are important tools used by both First Nations people and all of the Hudson's Bay employees of the day.

Now moving forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our pioneer ancestors who settled this land came here with little possessions, and they worked very hard to tame a challenging and very unforgiving landscape. These people were farmers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they came with very few livestock. They were ambitious and hard-working, but the vast majority of the settlers were very financially challenged. These were very poor people, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As they worked hard to grow their herds of cattle, it was almost unheard of for people to butcher their own livestock that they were raising for sale. So they used wildlife and used firearms to harvest that wildlife to provide sustenance for themselves and their families. It became a very family affair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that family affair continues to this day.

The other day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there were guests in the Chamber and I was introducing them. And there was Retired Brigadier General Cliff Walker, and I thanked him for his service. And at the end of my introduction, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I made a statement, "up the Johns." And I know many in this House know exactly what that means, but there's a lot of people watching on television today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I want to just educate them.

In 1939 Nazi Germany invaded Poland, and Britain declared war on Germany. Canada, being part of the Commonwealth, immediately went on a war of footing. The Regina Rifles regiment, a militia unit, was called into service. Volunteers arrived from all across the province to serve their country. The regiment had very little funds, equipment, or gear but they trained vigorously as best they could in local farmers' fields till being sent overseas to England to continue training and wait for further assignment.

The other military units looked down on them as being a bunch of Farmer Johns, a very derogatory term that the unit took upon itself to turn it around and use it as a battle cry. Hence the term, "up the Johns."

[12:15]

Their first foray into battle, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was June 6th, 1944 on a beach in Normandy. D-Day was the largest armada ever assembled in the history of mankind and it was to begin the

liberation of Europe from Nazi domination. They had the distinction that day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the largest armada — this is the most, the largest military force — ever assembled in the history of mankind. And they had the distinction that day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of advancing the furthest inland of any unit. And they also resisted a very savage counteract from Nazi forces that day. That deserves some applause. That was the largest.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, ask yourself, why were these men so successful? I mean there could be a myriad of reasons, but one reason I am very sure of is the fact that virtually all of these men knew how to handle a rifle long before they ever volunteered for military service and were proficient hunters at home.

It's important to note as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 40 men from Peepeekisis First Nation also served in that unit during World War II. The bronze statue that was viewed the other day at the west side of the Legislative Building, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is tentatively going to be going out to Peepeekisis First Nation. They're having a ceremony there on the 21st of April as well.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, all of this historical data I'm presenting is just trying to educate people on how important firearms are to our heritage. These are lived stories that resonate with families throughout the province. There is a current Liberal-NDP coalition government that has absolutely no understanding, appreciation, or empathy towards law-abiding firearm owners. They have absolutely no clue on how challenging it is to get a licence, a possession and acquisition licence.

And the member from Melville-Saltcoats did such a good job in his speech on informing the House on how demanding that training truly is. We have a very good system already in place. It's worked well for years until this Liberal-NDP coalition government thought it would be politically expedient to demonize law-abiding firearm owners.

This government on this side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has taken many steps, and one of the first steps we have to protect the rights of law-abiding firearms owners is beginning with appointing our own Chief Firearms Officer, Robert Freberg. There are over 125,000 firearm owners across the province of Saskatchewan. That's 10 per cent of the population, and we will always diligently work to protect your right to own your firearm.

I also want to talk about our Attorney General of Saskatchewan. She's applying to intervenor status on the legal challenges to the federal government's ban on the assault-style firearms. And that entire statement — assault-style firearms — I can't stand that statement. If you're going to ban something, you have to have a definition, and they have never given a clerical definition of what an assault-style firearm is.

It really just shows, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the level of true incompetence in the coalition government. And these bans are purely political in nature, partisan in nature, and this case will be heard before the Federal Court of Appeal shortly. This government is focused and always standing up for Saskatchewan and we will never back down.

You know, the members opposite, we just had a . . .

[Applause]

Mr. Keisig: — Thank you. The members opposite, we just had a debate on affordability and wasteful spending, and they always talk about that. And I just want to talk about some NDP wasteful spending.

The federal Liberals' coalition government promised that their gun buy-back scheme would only cost \$400 million and would remove many dangerous firearms, so-called, off the streets. Latest data in an article in the *National Post* published April 9th shows that they've spent over \$42 million — fully supported by the NDP — and they have not removed one firearm yet at all.

An access to information request from the *National Post* shows costs ballooning to over \$2 billion. This has been an absolutely colossal waste of money, has not helped one person other than some government lackeys in a make-work project. It does nothing for safety, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It does nothing for people's security, and it does absolutely nothing to remove firearms from criminal hands.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the whole issue boils down to something I think is a very simple concept — trust. Why does the federal government not trust what is statistically one of the most law-abiding segments of society? Why does the Liberal-NDP coalition not trust over 10 per cent of Saskatchewan people? And why is the NDP supporting this misuse of taxpayer dollars in — their own words — a cost-of-living crisis?

Let me be very clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There are stringent laws in firearm ownership, and this is a very good thing. But what the federal Liberal-NDP coalition government proposes does nothing for Saskatchewan people, and that's why I am asking all members of this House to support this motion:

That this Assembly calls upon the Government of Canada to devolve all relevant parts of the *Firearms Act* to the province of Saskatchewan in order to allow it to administer and regulate legal firearms possession.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I adjourn debate.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker: — It has been moved by the Government House Leader that this Assembly do now adjourn. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Carried. This Assembly stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:22.]

GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN

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Premier
President of the Executive Council
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

Hon. Lori Carr
Minister of Highways

Hon. Jeremy Cockrill
Minister of Education

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