



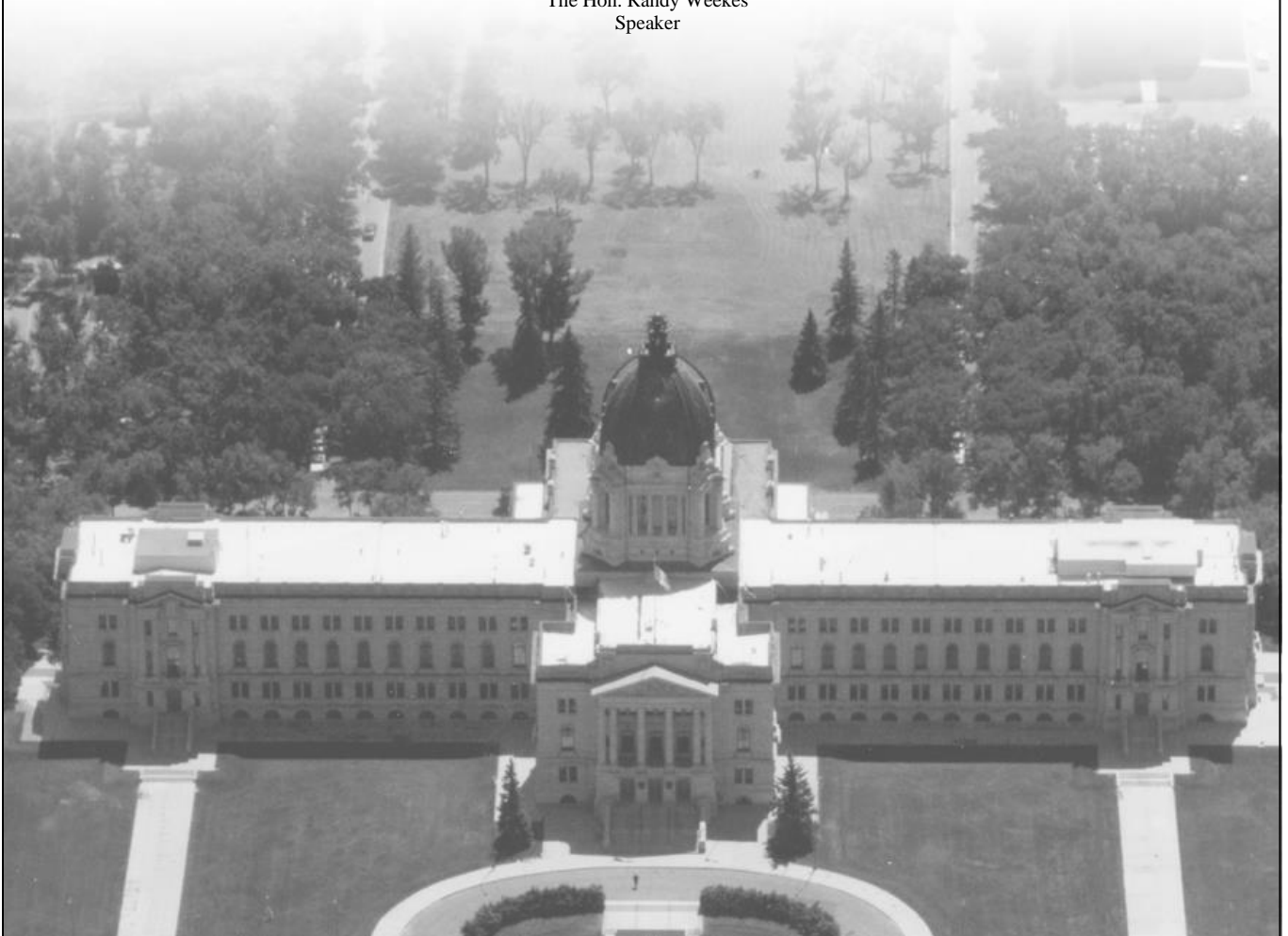
FOURTH SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
AND
PROCEEDINGS**

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



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
4th Session — 29th Legislature

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

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

| | |
|---|---|
| Beck, Carla — Regina Lakeview (NDP) | Lemaigre, Jim — Athabasca (SP) |
| Bonk, Steven — Moosomin (SP) | Love, Matt — Saskatoon Eastview (NDP) |
| Bowes, Jennifer — Saskatoon University (NDP) | Makowsky, Hon. Gene — Regina Gardiner Park (SP) |
| Bradshaw, Fred — Carrot River Valley (SP) | Marit, Hon. David — Wood River (SP) |
| Buckingham, David — Saskatoon Westview (SP) | McLeod, Blaine — Lumsden-Morse (SP) |
| Burki, Noor — Regina Coronation Park (NDP) | McLeod, Hon. Tim — Moose Jaw North (SP) |
| Carr, Hon. Lori — Estevan (SP) | McMorris, Hon. Don — Indian Head-Milestone (SP) |
| Cheveldayoff, Ken — Saskatoon Willowgrove (SP) | Merriman, Hon. Paul — Saskatoon Silverspring-Sutherland (SP) |
| Clarke, Jared — Regina Walsh Acres (NDP) | Moe, Hon. Scott — Rosthern-Shellbrook (SP) |
| Cockrill, Hon. Jeremy — The Battlefords (SP) | Morgan, Hon. Don — Saskatoon Southeast (SP) |
| Conway, Meara — Regina Elphinstone-Centre (NDP) | Mowat, Vicki — Saskatoon Fairview (NDP) |
| 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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Legislative Assembly are available
within hours after each sitting.

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

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[The Assembly met at 10:00.]

[Prayers]

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — I would like to table the annual report from the Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, pursuant to subsection 38(1) of *The Ombudsman Act, 2012* and section 23(1) of the public interest disclosure commissioner Act. The Ombudsman has submitted the annual reports for the year 2023.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — Joining us today in my gallery is Sharon Pratchler, Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner. Seated with her from her team are Kathy Willerth, Ziad Alhousseini, Ryan Kennedy. These individuals are responsible for dealing with the 3,660 requests for assistance the Ombudsman received last year and helped with the preparation of the annual report to the legislature. Please join me in welcoming them to the Legislative Assembly.

I recognize the member from Kelvington-Wadena.

Mr. Nerlien: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce a couple of guests in the west gallery. First is my dear wife who is my wife next month of — and I'd like the member from Saskatoon to note this — 47 years next month.

And seated beside her is my daughter Angela Wright. Angela is an InSite field project manager for Clean Harbors. She works at a Suncor site in the hazardous waste management field, a Suncor site north of Edmonton, and we're extremely proud of the work that she does. And I'd like all of my colleagues to welcome them to their Legislative Assembly.

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

Mr. Kaeding: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you and all members of the Assembly, seated in your gallery, I would like to welcome to his Assembly, number 68 from the Saskatchewan Roughriders, Noah Zerr. We grow them big in Langenburg. His mom, Patti, is a school principal in Churchbridge. His dad, Rob, is a U of S [University of Saskatchewan] Huskie football alumni and farms with his brother in Langenburg.

Noah graduated at the Yorkton Regional High School and was a proud Yorkton Raider. Noah is a U of S Huskie who played 41 games with the Huskies from 2016 to 2021. Noah was drafted 12th overall and started his career with the BC [British Columbia] Lions, but we are very happy to have Noah back in Saskatchewan where he is proudly wearing the green and white.

Noah and I will be visiting with his favourite Rider, the Minister of Social Services, after question period. I'd like all members to

welcome Noah Zerr to his Legislative Assembly.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour to join with the member from Melville-Saltcoats, Mr. Speaker, to welcome Noah Zerr to his Assembly, Mr. Speaker. Welcome back to Saskatchewan. Wonderful to have him on the Riders here this year.

There might be a little snow out there today, Mr. Speaker, but Rider camp is just around the corner, and we're looking forward to a really great season ahead of us. We wish him well. We wish our new coach, Corey Mace, and the whole team well, Mr. Speaker, and you know, we'll all be in Mosaic Stadium soon enough cheering for the green and white.

And, Noah, thank you very much for your leadership in this province. We wish you all the best this season.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Miigwech, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present the following petition. The folks who signed this petition wish to bring to your attention that Saskatchewan needs legislation to ensure provincial duty-to-consult is fulfilled and is carried out with the honour of the Crown. And the Sask Party government voted against duty-to-consult legislation, and also they continue to move forward with duty-to-consult processes without fulfilling constitutional obligations set through the many court cases.

I'll read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on the Government of Saskatchewan to enshrine duty-to-consult into law by enacting the meaningful duty-to-consult legislation.

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

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

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

So:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly 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.

The below undersigned are residents of Martensville and Saskatoon. I so present.

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

Mr. Teed: — Mr. Speaker, I'm on my feet to present our petition to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan calling on the government to repeal Bill 137. And I will ask the Minister of Justice to listen up, if she thinks I will ever be quiet while her government runs roughshod over queer and trans rights.

The undersigned residents would like to bring to your attention the following: that Bill 137 unfairly targets queer and trans youth; that queer and trans youth are at higher risk of self-harm and suicide when their identities are not affirmed and represent the most vulnerable youth in our schools; that Bill 137 forces teachers to non-consensually out vulnerable queer and trans youth to their parents if they request to go by a name and pronoun that suits their gender identity, and in doing so is in direct contravention of *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the human rights of the child as it pertains to the human rights of children.

Mr. Speaker, I will 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 immediately repeal Bill 137 and authentically engage with educators, parents, students, and subject matter experts to develop and implement 2SLGBTQIA+ affirming policies at all levels of our government and province, and implement evidence-based sexual health education for all students.

The undersigned reside in Regina. I do so present.

The Speaker: — I just want to caution the member from Saskatoon Meewasin about the content of your petition. These shouldn't be a debatable item, and a bit of a personal shot there is not welcome.

Next petition. I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The undersigned residents of the province of Saskatchewan wish to bring to your attention the following: Saskatchewan people are struggling to keep up with the increased cost of food, shelter, and basic necessities, as wages have not kept up with the rate of inflation; that according to an October 2023 Angus Reid poll, more than one-third of people in Saskatchewan are struggling with the cost of living; that the Saskatchewan Party government could not provide immediate cost-of-living relief by suspending the

15-cent-a-litre provincial gas tax; the Saskatchewan NDP and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation among others have been calling for immediate gas relief; that the other jurisdictions such as Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, and Newfoundland have suspended or reduced their provincial fuel tax to make life more affordable for the residents of their province.

We, the undersigned, read in the prayer as follows: respectfully request the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan to call on the Government of Saskatchewan to suspend collection of the provincial fuel tax from gasoline and diesel to provide tax relief, provide relief to the residents.

The signatories of this petition reside in Muskoday, Saskatchewan. I do so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order, a petition concerning the immediate suspension of the carbon tax across the nation of Canada and acknowledgement of its impact on affordability and inflation, presented on April 17th, 2024, has been reviewed and pursuant to rule 16(7) is found to be irregular and therefore cannot be read and received.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Saskatoon Business Gives Back to the Community

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prairie Proud is another local-owned business that calls the Broadway business district in my constituency of Saskatoon Nutana home. Entrepreneur Cole Thorpe founded Prairie Proud in April 2014, starting the business in a spare bedroom of his apartment. The business has evolved over the years to include a website, pop-up shops, collaborations with other businesses, and the business's storefront is now located on Broadway Avenue. Cole continues to design all of Prairie Proud's products, and Prairie Proud was founded on the cornerstones of passion, community, and quality.

And the business proudly believes in giving back to the community. Prairie Proud supports causes across Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, with money from each item they sell donated directly towards various organizations in prairie communities, including residential school survivors, STARS [Shock Trauma Air Rescue Service], Ronald McDonald House, City Hospital Foundation, and the Children's Hospital Foundation, just to name a few. Donations have totalled over \$100,000 into these and many other prairie organizations.

Prairie Proud proves that prairie people, a sense of community, and coming together for the betterment of all sets the prairies apart. I am so happy to recognize Prairie Proud, their business philosophy, and their contributions to the communities across Saskatchewan and beyond.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cut Knife-Turtleford.

Museum Volunteers Restore Heritage Vehicles

Mr. Domotor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Manitou Pioneers Museum in Neilburg has started something called shop night every Wednesday. Chris Makey, a foreman for the RM [Rural Municipality] of Buffalo, and who also chairs the museum's machinery committee, came up with the idea.

Mr. Speaker, what is shop night, you might ask. It's a group of volunteers that have met every Wednesday night since November of 2022 to help restore old donated tractors and trucks to get them ready for display at the museum. There's a high interest, Mr. Speaker, from the volunteers to restore vintage vehicles. Shop night is said to be a great evening of camaraderie and a sense of accomplishment to see antique tractors and vehicles resume to running condition once again.

All of this great work takes place inside a new museum wing called building C that has been a work-in-progress since 2017. The goal is to display the restored vehicles in the building. The volunteer group ranges anywhere from five to eight guys each Wednesday evening, Mr. Speaker. Shop night has motivated people to take an active interest in the museum once again.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members of this Assembly join me in congratulating Chris Makey and all of the Wednesday shop night volunteers for their active interest in their local museum and preserving the heritage of Saskatchewan. Thank you.

[10:15]

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

Bird Count Volunteers Contribute to Science

Mr. Clarke: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today during National Volunteer Week to recognize the volunteers in Saskatchewan who participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count from February 16th to 19th of this year.

In Canada, Mr. Speaker, the Great Backyard Bird Count is organized by Birds Canada, the National Audubon Society, and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and it calls on people around the world to go out looking for birds and then submit their observations into eBird, a global bird database. These data are then used by scientists to study many aspects about bird biology.

Across the globe over those four days in February, 7,883 species of birds were observed. And here in Saskatchewan over 100 participants tallied 75 different species. Species highlights included two northern pygmy-owls seen near Cold Lake by Dan Zazelenchuk, a varied thrush and fox sparrow seen near Estevan by Kathy Hedegard, and a gray-crowned rosy-finch seen near Southend by Laura Messett and Nolan Hoggarth. Sharlane Toole found the most species in the province with 36. Nick Saunders came in second with 34 species.

Now whether you are a highly skilled birdwatcher, Mr. Speaker, or just beginning to notice birds, the bird count encourages people to just get outside and enjoy nature while contributing to science. I ask all members of this Legislative Assembly to join me in congratulating the many Saskatchewan people who

participated in the Great Canadian Backyard Bird Count. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Wood River.

Remembering Bob Switzer

Hon. Mr. Marit: — It is with heavy heart that I rise today, Mr. Speaker. On February 13th, I was shocked to hear of the passing of my dear friend, Bob Switzer.

Bob and his wife, Gail, were involved in the community, and they operated Sandy Bar Ranch in Aneroid, Saskatchewan. Bob was a dedicated promoter of black Angus cattle and an advocate for the cattle industry in Saskatchewan, across Canada, and around the world. He was a distinguished black Angus breed champion, a judge, a promoter, a mentor, and an industry leader.

Bob organized the first black Angus feeder calf sale in southern Saskatchewan back in the 1970s, working to create a market for buyers and sellers across Canada. He served the livestock industry in leadership positions with the Canadian Angus Association, the Saskatchewan Angus Association, Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association, and the Red Coat Cattle Feeders association. Bob was also inducted into the Canadian Ag Hall of Fame in 2016.

Bob leaves behind the only thing a producer would dream of — a heartfelt legacy and respect amongst the industry, a beautiful family, and a lot of damn nice black Angus cattle. I send my heartfelt condolences to Bob's four children, Beau, Kyle, Jane, and Bailey, and his wife, Gail, and the rest of Bob's family. A celebration of life will be held at the ranch this Saturday at their annual bull and heifer sale. Rest in peace, Bob.

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

Honouring Volunteers During National Volunteer Week

Ms. Lambert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, each April we take time to recognize the incredible contributions that volunteers across Saskatchewan make to our quality of life. This year's National Volunteer Week theme is Every Moment Matters, and this year's theme highlights the importance of every volunteer and each contribution they make in our communities and in our lives.

Mr. Speaker, these are hard-working, selfless, and humble individuals. In the sport, culture, and recreation world we know them as coaches, instructors, leaders, board members, event planners, teachers, officials, caretakers, and so much more. But perhaps most of all, we know them as our friends and our neighbours.

Mr. Speaker, more than 330,000 Saskatchewan residents volunteer in their communities. That is almost one in three people who live here. We have the highest rate of volunteerism in the nation, and we are known far and wide for our volunteer ethic. Whether it is for large-scale events like the Scotties Tournament of Hearts or local sports games, bake sales, and dance competitions, the dedication and enthusiasm of Saskatchewan volunteers never wavers.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage everyone to celebrate National Volunteer Week by taking a moment to stop and thank those people who put in the hours to make our lives and our communities better. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Moosomin.

New Visual Arts Centre in Moosomin Is a Haven for Artistic Expression

Mr. Bonk: — Moosomin is abuzz with the vibrant pulse of its flourishing arts community celebrating their recent inauguration of a brand new visual arts centre. Nestled within the walls of the venerable St. Alban's Anglican Church, this establishment promises to be the creative nucleus for Moosomin and surrounding areas. Local artisans, fuelled by passion and dedication, have meticulously crafted a haven for artistic expression.

The centre offers an extensive array of classes spanning diverse interests, from traditional mediums like painting and pottery to cutting-edge pursuits such as digital arts and photography. Catering to all demographics, after-school programs support young enthusiasts, while evening and weekend sessions beckon adults of varying skill levels.

The inception of this undertaking was made possible through a three-year lease supported by a generous \$45,000 start-up grant from the town of Moosomin. Continuous fundraising endeavours spanning a year have supplemented this funding with the community rallying behind the cause. Donations, both monetary and in the form of art supplies, have poured in from businesses and individuals alike.

Looking ahead, the visual arts centre aspires to be a bastion to local talent envisioning a dedicated gallery space to showcase the works of gifted artists. The realization of this vision owes much to the tireless efforts of individuals like Krista Crellin, Terry Grant, Jacqui Beckett, and the Moosomin and District Arts Council, whose unwavering commitment has transformed dreams into reality. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Kelvington-Wadena.

New Rare Earth Processing Facility Attracts Investment

Mr. Nerlien: — Mr. Speaker, on Monday the Saskatchewan Research Council signed a five-year agreement with the Hung Thinh Group from Vietnam to import 3000 tonnes of rare earth carbonate per year for five years beginning in June 2025. This carbonate will allow SRC's [Saskatchewan Research Council] new rare earth processing facility to produce up to 400 tonnes of rare earth metals in 2025. These rare earth metals are essential for modern technology, including cell phones, electric vehicles, and robotics.

This new SRC facility is North America's first fully integrated commercial demonstration rare earth processing facility. Agreements like this are made possible by Saskatchewan's strong trade ties with Vietnam, a country whose agri-food exports from our province saw a 227 per cent increase this past year. This agreement is a direct outcome of Saskatchewan's international

engagement with Vietnam, supported by our trade and investment office which opened in 2022.

During the province's 2022 mission to Vietnam the Minister of Trade and Export Development and officials met directly with HTG [Hung Thinh Group], showcasing opportunities for collaboration with Saskatchewan.

We are proud of the work done by both SRC and our international trade offices. The investments they attract to this province are vital to delivering more jobs and opportunities for our residents. Thank you.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Cost of Living and Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, this Sask Party government is out of touch and has lost the plot. Fifty-seven per cent of Saskatchewan people are struggling just to put food on the table, food that's been made more expensive by Sask Party tax hikes and life that's been made more expensive on front after front by Sask Party tax hikes.

How does this Premier defend his record of hiking costs and failing to deliver any fuel tax relief when families in Saskatchewan are breaking the bank just to fill the tank and struggling to put food on the table?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you. You know, day after day I've read into record where we have made affordability measures in this budget that affect seniors, individuals, families, students, etc., and they're in the budget and listed each and every day. Thankfully the CPI [consumer price index] is now about half the national average here in Saskatchewan.

But let's be real and let's acknowledge that the largest driver of making everything more expensive is the carbon tax. And interesting, in Ottawa the Canadian Labour Congress is meeting to plot strategy for the next federal election to get the Trudeau-Singh government re-elected. Both Justin Trudeau and Jagmeet Singh are addressing the meeting. So I'm kind of curious. Is the Leader of the Opposition planning on attending any of these meetings, meetings to help Trudeau and Singh get re-elected?

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

Contract Nurses and Health Care Staffing

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, I can be certain that the Leader of the Opposition in any room and in any place will be clear with our opposition to the federal carbon tax, just as she'll be clear with her opposition and our opposition to the biggest tax hike in Saskatchewan's history, and a government that's made things worse with more costs and more hikes.

You know the ways that tired and out-of-touch government has

made life more affordable, they're short, Mr. Speaker. But the way they've wasted dollars, hard-earned public dollars, well that list is long. Just look at contract nursing agencies.

We know the cost of a private contract nurse is through the roof higher than a nurse. We learned at committee that they spent \$59 million on private contract nurses last year. The Sask Party says they have no idea how much they're going to spend this year, but SUN [Saskatchewan Union of Nurses] says they're going to spend over \$70 million.

How does the Sask Party justify spending \$59 million on private contract nurses from out of province, dollars that could've gone so much further by hiring and retaining nurses here in Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan along with other provinces and territories in Canada and other health systems across the world are experiencing shortages when it comes to health care professionals and that includes nurses. This has led to an increased need for contracted staff resources, which we are doing here in Saskatchewan, as I said, as do other provinces. These contracted health staff do help to reduce service disruptions while recruitment is under way.

Mr. Speaker, you've heard us talk in this Chamber about the number of investments that have been made into recruiting and training and hiring more nurses into Saskatchewan. In the past 12 or so months over 1,000 more nurses working in this province, either trained in Saskatchewan or other Canadian provinces, Mr. Speaker.

As we continue to fill the vacancies that we have when it comes to nursing, we'll be phasing away from and phasing out the use of contract nurses as we build the health care system here in Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Clarke: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this tired and out-of-touch government's overreliance on contract nurses is proof that their human health resource plan isn't working. If it was, they wouldn't have needed to spend \$59 million on contract nurses last year.

Now it's not just the Saskatchewan NDP who are raising concerns with the reliance on contract nurses. Forty-nine emergency room nurses from St. Paul's Hospital wrote to the minister this week detailing how the overreliance on contract nurses is eroding morale and making staffing issues worse.

What does the Minister of Health say to those nurses who are fed up with his failures?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been meeting with and having conversations with the nurses from St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon, as I have with other health care workers around this province. A couple weeks ago, Mr. Speaker,

I was in Kindersley, as the member for Kindersley talked about in member statements the other day, to announce a new practical nursing program in that community through the regional college, which will help build capacity in rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, the health human resources action plan of this government that was released in September of 2022 is providing and creating real results, results that are being seen in our communities across this province. Mr. Speaker, hundreds of health care positions have been successfully hired, including 97 positions in the city of North Battleford, 70 of which are nurses; in Prince Albert, 69 positions, of which 44 of those are nurses; 47 positions in the city of Moose Jaw, 25 of which are nurses; 30 positions in Yorkton, 11 of which are nurses. I can go on and on, but this is the result of this health human resources action plan.

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

Mr. Clarke: — Mr. Speaker, clearly those meetings aren't going well if those nurses are now sending a letter to the minister this week. I'll read what the nurses said to that minister: "We can find ways to attract agency nurses and keep them coming back. Why can we not find ways to retain our own nurses?"

It's a great question, Mr. Speaker. What's the Minister of Health's answer?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of meetings, some of the work that's been done as a result of the meetings that I have had with the nurses in Saskatoon — and the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] has had by the way as well — have resulted in the capacity pressure action plan, both in Saskatoon and Regina. We still have some challenges there that we need to address, but that work is happening and there are significant dollars being implemented, invested into those action plans, Mr. Speaker.

Over 19,000 nurses call Saskatchewan home, Mr. Speaker, and that is a growing number. It's an increase of over 6,400 nurses since 2007. As I said earlier, over 1,000 graduate nurses have started practising in Saskatchewan since December of 2022.

[10:30]

That work is going to continue to happen, Mr. Speaker, as we continue to create more training seats, hire more nurses, fill those vacancies, restore the temporary service disruptions that we have, and build this health care system in our province.

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

Mr. Clarke: — Mr. Speaker, it's clear from the letter that contract nursing has gone from a fill-in-the-gaps opportunity in the health system to becoming a baked-in, integral part of this tired and out-of-touch government's staffing plan. Nurses in the hospital who do want to pick up extra shifts are told that they can't because the SHA has to give the shift to the contract nurses first. It's in the letter, Mr. Speaker.

The Sask Party spent \$59 million on contract nurses last year. SUN says it's going to be 70 million this year. That's almost \$300,000 per nurse. How much more will the bill be this year?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said previously, the SHA will phase out the use of contract nurses as they find and hire permanent full-time nurses in these positions and fill other temporary vacancies that may exist in the health care system, Mr. Speaker.

The health human resources action plan has well over \$100 million invested in it in this year's budget to continue to recruit, train, incentivize, and retain health care workers in high-priority designations across this province, Mr. Speaker. That includes nurses. And I've talked previously about the investments in nurse training seats, in the hiring of more nurses across this province — over 19,000 nurses of all designations calling Saskatchewan home — an announcement in this year's budget to further implement and further utilize nurse practitioners in this province to help build our primary care teams.

That is some of the work that is going to be expanded upon throughout this province, Mr. Speaker, and continuing to fill those vacancies so that we can build the best possible health care system that we can here in Saskatchewan.

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

Support for Education and Meeting with Parent

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Job action with the teachers has gone on for months, and earlier this week we had a mom, grieving the loss of her child, who had come to the legislature to have her voice heard. She was here to talk about the impacts that this government's cuts have had on classrooms.

Parents, teachers, students deserve so much better than they're getting from this tired and out-of-touch government. So a simple question to the Minister of Education: does he think he's good at his job?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the news came out last night that we've come to a tentative agreement between the GTBC [government-trustee bargaining committee] and the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation] leadership. This is good news. This is good news for the families and students and teachers really around the province, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we have predictability going forward.

Mr. Speaker, I have risen in this House numerous times to talk about the additional investments that our government has made into education to support students all around the province: nearly a 9 per cent increase in school operating funding for next school year; a multi-year funding agreement to ensure that classroom supports funding is at a floor over the next four years. I think about several of the pilot projects that we have going on, whether

it's the specialized support classroom or the teacher innovation support fund.

Mr. Speaker, these are investments that this government has made in order to support the students and families in our province. We're going to continue doing that work. I'm excited to do that work as minister each and every single day.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The question was about whether the minister is good at his job, whether or not he is suited for the job of being Minister of Education, and it is increasingly clear he is not.

Mr. Speaker, we're joined again today by Taya Thomas. Reminder to members opposite, Taya is a constituent of mine and her oldest daughter, Mayelle, had special needs and she passed away late last year.

After question period on Wednesday the minister met with Taya, and when STF job action came up, he asked her — and this is a direct quote from Taya — “What do they want me to do, give up my first-born child?” When Taya asked the minister to check himself, pointed out how offensive and hurtful that was to her, a mother who had just lost her first-born child, he failed to apologize. Does he not understand how hurtful those . . .

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome back Taya Thomas to her Legislative Assembly. I did have the opportunity to meet with Thomas earlier in the week. You know, in that meeting, I used an expression that was a poor choice of words on my part, Mr. Speaker. I did apologize to Ms. Thomas in the meeting for my choice of words.

Mr. Speaker, I have colleagues on this side of this House who have lost children. That is incredibly difficult for a parent to go through, something no parent should have to go through in this province. I did apologize to Ms. Thomas. It was a poor choice of words on my part and again I apologize for that.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's good to hear that apology today. Despite what he said in this Chamber, that apology did not come to Taya, but I'm glad it came today. Now it's hard to believe that somebody who could be so careless with those words in the presence of a grieving mom who just wants what's best for her kids, for all kids in Saskatchewan. She deserves an apology for that, and I'm glad she got one here today.

But she also deserves an apology for what the minister said in this House. During question period he encouraged her to be more engaged with the school division, Mr. Speaker. Taya's a great mom. She's engaged with the school division. She was engaged every single day that Mayelle was there. And she was so unsettled by his words, Mr. Speaker, you know what she did? She went back to her daughter's classroom teachers to see if there was more she could have done, if she could have been more engaged.

That is the impact this minister's careless words had on Taya. The very last thing that she deserved was a lecture from this Education minister.

Is this what people should come to expect when they come to their legislature to advocate? That they'll be blamed and shamed by an increasingly out of touch and . . .

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, I had the opportunity to meet with Ms. Thomas earlier this week, you know, and was moved by her family's story. I never said in this House that Ms. Thomas was a bad mother. But I do believe, across the province, it is important for all parents to be engaged in the lives of their children when it comes to education. That's what I've been consistent in saying as long as I've been minister, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, it is evident to me that after meeting with Ms. Thomas, she is very engaged with the education of her children. And I thank Ms. Thomas for being engaged and encourage all parents to be so. Thank you.

The Speaker: — Before we move on, I'd like to say to the member from Regina University, you made two or three personal remarks to the Minister of Education. You should know you're not allowed to do that. Please stand, withdraw, and apologize.

Ms. A. Young: — Withdraw and apologize.

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

Provision of Surgical Procedures and Contract with Private Company

Ms. Conway: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are so many unanswered questions still about the \$6 million sweetheart surgery deal this tired and out-of-touch government signed with their Sask Party donor.

The Minister of Health first said that he had never been lobbied by former Finance minister Kevin Doherty on the file. Then he said that he couldn't remember what file he was lobbied on but thought it might, well probably, well almost certainly hadn't been about this.

Mr. Doherty's lobbyist filings only show three health-related clients: an ambulance company, a seniors care company, and the private surgery company that the Sask Party gave the \$6 million sweetheart deal to. I hope this jogs the minister's memory. Did he meet with Kevin Doherty on the surgical backlog? Yes or no?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did not meet with this particular lobbyist group on the issue of surgeries. But while we're speaking of surgeries, this government is proud to have made another record investment into our surgical program this year, \$670 million for surgeries in Saskatchewan, a \$3.5 million increase over last year's budget, an increase of roughly \$148 million from where the surgical program was in

2007, Mr. Speaker.

We are targeting this year completing 100,000 surgeries for patients in this province, making sure that we're reducing the surgical wait-list and getting people the surgeries that they need as quickly as possible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Conway: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Doherty's lobbyist filings speak to meetings on the surgical backlog with the Minister of Health and they only show three health-related clients, again, an ambulance company, a seniors care company, and the private surgery company that the Sask Party gave this \$6 million contract to, the same one that donated over \$14,000 to that Sask Party.

So again is the Health minister absolutely sure that he didn't meet with Kevin Doherty on the surgical backlog? Yes or no?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I explained earlier this week how the lobbyist registry works. For the member opposite, just because a lobbyist firm may be listed on there does not mean they've necessarily met with those MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] and discussed those particular issues. That is what they are registered to lobby about, but whether that happens or not is a determination between the lobbyist and that MLA and, Mr. Speaker, I did not.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that again the government has set very ambitious surgical targets, a number . . . you know, 100,000 surgeries we're going to be attempting to complete in this new fiscal year, building upon record numbers of surgeries in the previous fiscal year and even the year before that.

We are going to continue to make those investments to make sure that people in this province get the surgeries that they need when they need them and build capacity thanks to the great work of our surgical teams right across this province, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Conway: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the Health minister says he didn't meet with Mr. Doherty on this file. Did the Premier or the previous Health minister meet with Mr. Doherty on this file?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we make continued investments into surgeries in this province through publicly funded and publicly provided surgical providers but also private surgical providers as well.

And I know that the members opposite often want to ask about what sort of investments are being done here in Saskatchewan, so I'll go through some of those, Mr. Speaker. A fifth operating theatre opened in Prince Albert in January of 2023, allowing for increased procedure volumes as part of the health human

resources action plan. The SHA also increased perioperative training seats, as well as implemented an accelerated operating room nurse training program, so that we can get more operating room nurses trained on a quicker basis to get them supporting our surgical teams in this province, Mr. Speaker.

We continue to make record investments into our surgical program so that people can get the surgeries that they need when they need them, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

Government's Fiscal Management and Irrigation Project

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Speaker, at our Sask United town halls being held all across the province, people are telling us they have lost confidence in this government. They are getting no relief on taxes. Their health care wait times are some of the longest in the country. Crime is out of control. And they can't afford groceries for their family.

Yet they have a government that is recklessly spending tax dollars on nearly every project. Take for example the Lake Diefenbaker irrigation project, where this government is planning to spend 44,000 per acre. In Prince Albert they're spending \$13 million for every new hospital bed. Mr. Speaker, the Regina bypass worked out to be over \$40 million per kilometre. Is this fiscal responsibility? How can the government explain this? Will any member opposite actually stand up and defend these ridiculous rates?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Marit: — The member opposite did mention the Diefenbaker project, Mr. Speaker, and I'll speak to that. This is a project that we announced at the SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] convention that we are going to move forward on the first phase of 90,000 acres of irrigation on Lake Diefenbaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Lake Diefenbaker was created in 1967 and the purpose of having 500,000 acres of irrigation from the reservoir. Currently only 29 per cent of that is being utilized, about 145,000 acres.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about Lake Diefenbaker and the size of the Lake Diefenbaker reservoir itself. Mr. Speaker, that reservoir can take one metre of water and supply water for 300,000 people for 18 years. That's the kind of water that can be utilized out of there. The irrigation on Lake Diefenbaker, the Lake Diefenbaker project takes about 2.7 per cent. I've got lots more . . .

[10:45]

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

Emergency Hotel Stays Paid by Social Services

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Speaker, the best decision of my political career was leaving that government with answers like that. I've seen their mismanagement first-hand. Now their troubles are

piling up at an alarming rate.

Mr. Speaker, take for example the situation at the Sunrise hotel, a business that went from receiving virtually no government contracts for temporary housing to hundreds of thousands of dollars in contracts after the owner became a member of this government.

Where is the accountability and transparency? Why are the member's hotels still under contract receiving outrageous amounts of public funds? Why can't we open the books and show the public what went on?

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

Hon. Mr. Makowsky: — Mr. Speaker, I've been very transparent in giving information to the opposition as requested on several occasions. But in terms of my involvement, Mr. Speaker, wasn't involved. I said that before.

And, Mr. Speaker, on Monday, April 15th, 2024 on page 642 of *Hansard*, the deputy minister of Social Services, Kimberly Kratzig, said and I quote, "I think it's really important to note that at no . . . [time] in any of our use of hotels has the Minister of Social Services ever directed placement of an individual in any hotel."

We have a new policy for procurement of hotels in process right now, Mr. Speaker, from my direction. Looking forward to having more competition and more availability if needed for vulnerable clients. We've been able to make significant investments in our provincial approach to homelessness as we go forward.

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

Crime Rates and Policing Services

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan people are tired of empty words and no action. Those who created the problem cannot be the ones to fix it. Over half of small businesses in Saskatchewan are now telling us they fear for the safety of their employees and their customers. Residents and small business owners are saying it's futile to even report crimes because nothing is ever done.

How can they brag and boast about their growth when businesses and offices are closing in major cities due to the unprecedented crime levels? With so much damage already done, why did it take so long for them to act?

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

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And this government is very proud of its record in dealing with the issues that citizens of Saskatchewan are facing, crime in the communities. That's why we've increased our funding to our First Nation policing, our municipal policing, the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police].

We have a new agreement with the RCMP actually to fund positions. This is a first in Canada. And as Assistant

Commissioner Rhonda Blackmore said, this is a game changer for her. She can now go to the federal government and be able to ask to fill those vacant positions. Our money is on the table, Mr. Speaker, and we're very proud of our relationship that we have with all of our law enforcement. And we thank them for doing that challenging work on a daily basis.

For that member over there, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask if she's in support of the marshals service, if she's in support of the funding because she certainly doesn't show it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy.

Standing Committee on the Economy

Ms. C. Young: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the Standing Committee on the Economy to report that it has considered certain estimates and to present its seventh report, which includes the 2024-25 estimates and 2023-24 supplementary estimates no. 2. I move:

That the seventh report of the Standing Committee on the Economy be now concurred in.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Chair:

That the seventh report of the Standing Committee on the Economy be now concurred in.

Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Mr. Speaker, I wish to order questions 7 through 9.

The Speaker: — Questions have been ordered.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Melfort.

Cost of Living, Affordability, and Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. Goudy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege this

morning to be able to enter into a conversation about affordability.

And you know, for the last 27 years being married with my wife and raising six children, it's been a challenge, you know. Your parents teach you a lot of good things by example, and then you, you know, you jump right into that thinking you're going to do as well as they did. There's a lot of hurdles, Mr. Speaker, to raising six children.

But I do want to say that the Saskatchewan Party government, since I've lived in Saskatchewan, has been the government that has set a lot of good policies, done a lot of good things that have helped me and my family afford life, to enjoy our time together so far in this province.

And you know, as I was preparing this response, I looked back 50 years ago in Saskatchewan, the same issue was facing Saskatchewan. It's funny and on behalf of the NDP, I will read some of a motion that they put forward 50 years ago in this same Chamber, and yet it was concerning affordability.

And so as I looked at their motion and our motion, I was able to see a little bit of difference on how we think and how we perceive and, you know, what we believe. And it's funny the prime minister back then was a Trudeau as well. And the province wanted to commend themselves for taking good steps to reduce the harmful effects of inflation, and the NDP did that. And we're going to do that same thing now, believing that our policies and our ways of governing are good policies that will lead to good ends.

And you know, we're in an agricultural province where what you sow is what you reap and, you know, I think it's very important to see that in choosing a government — what are their policies and what are their plans.

So as I was reading from the past there, it says they urged the federal government. So they challenged the federal government at that time “. . . to take the appropriate steps to control the cost of living by such measures as . . .” and they go on and talk about increasing production and, you know, government intervention in wealth creation and production.

It's interesting, I looked at our guiding principles of the Sask Party and then I read the guiding principles of the NDP and, you know, it was fairly surprising to me to see the . . . Again I had read it before into the minutes but, “The name of the organization shall be the Saskatchewan New Democratic Party, hereinafter referred to as ‘the Party.’”

And you know, I lived in Albania for three years and it was interesting. The government, the party, it was a bit . . . “The Party shall constitute a section of the New Democratic Party of Canada.” So very clear that the provincial NDP and the federal NDP are one of the same.

The purpose of the Party shall be to promote through political action and other appropriate means the establishment of a co-operative commonwealth in which the principle regulating production and exchange will be the supplying of human needs and not the making of profits.

And so that's one side's perspective. And they were lobbying the federal government to intervene back then. And one of the things that they were intervening about was, Mr. Speaker, in the *Leader-Post* in December 13th, 1973 a headline said, and I quote, "The high grocery bills to continue." So they were worried about, you know, costs of living and all the rest back then.

But interesting enough what they were attacking was private industry and saying we need to deal with private industry because that is what is causing our costs of living to increase. And so here, just a quote, it says:

Dominion [like when they're going after the increased cost], Safeway, Dominion Stores, O.K. Economy [anybody remember the old O.K. Economy from when we were kids?], and Loblaws and their multinational corporation and associates, these companies make a profit in the manufacturing of food.

And I just thought, that is just so strange to hear. You know, where I come from, we love it when people make profits manufacturing things. And then it said, "They make a profit on the transportation of food." And I again was thinking, good for them. You know, we are making profits.

Where I come from a good friend of mine just sold his company. That guy made profits. And yet at the same time when I moved back to Melfort, I kept hearing about this guy's name, this guy's name, this guy's name. Everybody seemed to have a good job, a solid, good-paying, stable job manufacturing things and making profits.

And then it went on to say, "And they make a profit on the buildings they rent. They make a profit on the operation." All of those things, when industry makes profit it creates wealth for all of us to enjoy. And so you know, it's just interesting to see two different perspectives on wealth creation.

One of the things that we all, I'm sure, hear as we go through the province and talk about education is we need to add . . . What is the number one addition, that sort of the catch, that we hear from parents and community members? What needs to be added into education? Financial literacy, and we all know it. Financial literacy. And you know what's important about financial literacy, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that you need to understand where does wealth come from.

And I mentioned Albania — not to say that, you know, Albania and the NDP Party are, you know, connected in any way — but I just want to say that when I arrived at that country, it was a very difficult place to live, and there was a lot of trouble for families. You know, if you were a parent of six children, it's a very difficult country to have been living in under the party's leadership.

They all worked together, you know. They had water distribution. I had . . . I shouldn't say. But my stomach wasn't working very well for 11 months because I was drinking water that the party had provided for the community. And those pipes under the ground had rusted, and so the sewer pipes and the water pipes had rusted and were blending. And me, the 19-year-old kid, wasn't very smart, and I thought, boy, why do I still have diarrhea 11 months later? I should have probably put two and two

together; I shouldn't be drinking this water.

And yet that's what came from government driving the profits and the . . . They couldn't afford to replace the water and sewer pipes in their communities. They turned the water on for an hour in the morning and an hour at night, because the more they turned it on, the more it leaked into the ground.

So, Mr. Speaker, our party on this side of the House stands for something, and our guiding principle no. 1 is economic growth and job creation through private industry, not government as the economic driver for our province — smaller, less intrusive, more efficient government.

You know, when I looked at the end of our discussion, the motion that's being put forward today, it says that we denounce the federal NDP-Trudeau coalition government for their support of policies that have led to drastic increase in crime, the prices of homes, groceries, and more, while continuing to burden taxpayers with an unfair carbon tax.

And I still love the quote from the member from Weyburn-big money . . . Big Muddy. Big money . . . Weyburn-Big Muddy. They do have a lot of private industry providing money for our economy in Weyburn as well.

Our prime minister has built an inflation escalator called the carbon tax, and we will suffer for it as long as we put . . . until we put an end to that job-killing, soul-sucking, unconstitutional, and inflationary carbon tax.

[11:00]

So you know, we have seen two perspectives, one blaming inflation on private industry making profits. And yet I think on this side of the House we are very concerned about a government who has got involved in areas that they don't understand, and they have thought that they could put a carbon tax on all things.

And it's funny, but every one of these areas — Safeway, Dominion, and O.K., all these different industries making money — these companies make a profit on the manufacture of food while we pay taxes and carbon tax on the manufacture of food. They make a profit on the transportation of food. Well my goodness, someone is taxing the transportation of food in a way that has never been taxed before. When our farmers are drying their grain, when our farmers are . . . whatever our farmers are doing to create food . . .

Very interesting. One of the things that the NDP had said that they need to develop policies and programs to increase food production and to ensure stability in the agricultural sector. Well that was my world when I was a young man, Mr. Speaker. And it was not the government who stepped in and said, hey, we need zero-till technology; we need chem-fallow. Because we as an industry, private industry has created the opportunity for Saskatchewan farmers to grow more grain than ever was imagined possible. And we have exported that technology around the world, not because the Canadian government could step in with the NDP and say, we will fix things. It was so interesting. It was a little bit of stomach turning, and I'm just kind of . . .

I was reading through the budget, the federal budget yesterday.

And you know, something I've had a little bit to do with was building homes. And they are going to . . . No worries for my part of the world. I'll be able to tell St. Brieux and Annaheim and all the rest, do not worry about the housing crisis; the federal government has it under control, and they are going to fix the housing crisis. And one of the words that they used was so funny. It says, we're going to turbocharge it. I thought, how are we going to turbocharge it? They're generally putting . . . And that's going to reduce prices.

So I just was shocked on so many levels. I don't have time. I only have a few minutes left. But if you have a chance, for a little bit of comedy, read through the budget and some of the words. You'll need a new term thesaurus though, because you'll have to understand new words that have come out there. I jotted some of them down. It was, my goodness, "shrinkflation" they were talking about, and they were going to tackle it though, and "de-qualification."

It was funny to read through. Like not that they're . . . Not just like in the past. The NDP is concerned about, and I totally agree with that. They are concerned about the cost of living. And we appreciate the fact that you're concerned about the cost of living, as we are.

And yet it boils down to where does money come from so that we can have an economy that isn't going to crash down the road. We need to be sowing seeds. And we have chosen to put our trust not in ourselves, not in the federal government, but in the hard-working citizens of this country and of this province. And we would love to see those people making profits so that they can employ their neighbours and they can employ their friends.

You know, one of our other guiding principles is that we have a strong social safety net in Saskatchewan to support those who are truly in need. And that's what we absolutely want to be able to have, is a strong economy so that we can provide for those who are truly in need. And yet it also goes on to say, while promoting self-sufficiency in the lives of all citizens.

And so that is a great thing that I see. You know, you tell a person, hey, why don't you go out and make some profits and you'll be able to provide for you and your family, and then you'll be able to, you know, maybe even hire your neighbour. And at the end of the day, we do tax, because we do need to build that infrastructure that they can build upon. And so we have schools and hospitals. You know, one of the problems that we're facing in some of our communities is not the lack of funding, but the lack of labour.

And you know, so as we go through all of these things, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I think what it boils down to is sowing seeds for the future of our children, not lumping, as it is being done, the \$50 billion of interest payments that our children . . . we're putting it on the credit card. And we talk about financial literacy. That is bad, bad, bad debt. And that came out from this coalition.

I was going to say something about — probably good I didn't — but about the codependent relationship of a narcissist and an enabler maybe down in Ottawa. But probably good I didn't have the chance to talk much about that. But you know, when you get to a place where there's a codependent relationship that is

promoting the kind of ideological bent that is spending the future of our children's money and saying that we're doing it for them, that to me is child abuse.

I'll read the motion:

That this Assembly supports the Government of Saskatchewan's programs and policies that have led Saskatchewan to be one of the most affordable places to live in Canada, with over \$2 billion in affordable measures included in every budget; and

That the Assembly denounces the federal NDP-Trudeau coalition government for their support for the policies that have led to a drastic increase in crime, the price of homes, groceries, and more while continuing to burden taxpayers with an unfair carbon tax.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Melfort has moved:

That this Assembly supports the Government of Saskatchewan's programs and policies that have led Saskatchewan to be one of the most affordable places to live in Canada, with over \$2 billion in affordability measures included in every budget; and further,

That the Assembly denounces the federal NDP-Trudeau coalition government for their support for policies that have led to a drastic increase in crime, the price of homes, groceries, and more while continuing to burden taxpayers with an unfair carbon tax.

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

Mr. Teed: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be on my feet. You know, there's a lot in that 15-minute start to this debate to go over. But my favourite part of it all was hearing the parable where Jesus talked about the importance of trickle-down economics. What I really didn't want to hear about though is Sask Party shrinkage, Mr. Speaker.

Well you know, this is a very timely debate. We are entering into a 75-minute debate motion similar to last Thursday on the cost of living. So I will thank the members opposite the opportunity to continue to beat their failing record on the cost of living.

Mr. Speaker, as much as the members opposite are loath to admit it, we are living through a generational cost-of-living crisis. One only has to knock a couple doors to find families who are struggling to pay the bills, struggling to buy groceries, struggling to pay rising utility rates, facing skyrocketing rent increases.

One only has to look at the polling, Mr. Speaker. For years we've been seeing this in Saskatchewan. The number one issue facing people is cost-of-living pressures. People are concerned. Number two, our health care system. But you don't have to take my word for it. I encourage all members to get out there, knock the doors in your constituency. Listen to the people on the doorsteps. Hear what they are dealing with, Mr. Speaker. People are struggling and they need support.

Mr. Speaker, the cost-of-living crisis is hitting some of the most vulnerable members of our communities, people who are living around the poverty lines, seniors living on fixed incomes, and folks living with disabilities. These are the folks who are experiencing the cost-of-living crisis the hardest in our province.

In fact one of the largest volumes of casework that I have coming into my office are folks who are living on SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability], who are failing to meet their basic necessities because rent continues to skyrocket, their groceries continue to skyrocket. Mr. Speaker, our office tries to assist in these processes where the government starts to claw back those SAID rates, but it's truly horrifying in some cases to see that people so vulnerable are being hit so hard by this crisis with so little done by the government.

Mr. Speaker, for those living around the poverty line, the expansion of the PST [provincial sales tax] has hit them the hardest, a regressive tax that I'll talk about later but one that directly impacts individuals whose budgets are the tightest.

Mr. Speaker, people are looking to their government for action on this file. Surely then you would think that with such clear and pressing issues facing the people of Saskatchewan, that we would see action on behalf of this government; we would see thoughtful policies addressing the pressing situation; that we would have seen new ideas, new policies, and new dollars allocated to addressing the number one issue facing Saskatchewan people.

No, Mr. Speaker, instead we see a tired and out-of-touch government release a provincial budget so out of touch with the needs of the people of this province, what is happening in this province, a provincial budget with absolutely no new dollars allocated to the crushing cost-of-living crisis. No new policy announcements. No new initiatives to help Saskatchewan families.

Mr. Speaker, budget 2024-25 missed the mark on the most crushing issue of our time. In essence they are saying to the people of Saskatchewan, "we know best." They continue to resort to tired and out-of-touch talking points. When questioned and pressed on the lack of cost-of-living supports in their budget, they say, "don't worry about cost of living. Turn to page 75 of the budget. We are actually the most affordable place to live."

Our Finance minister, who doesn't bat an eye at an \$8,000 flight for lunch, is telling the people of Saskatchewan, who can't afford their groceries, "just eat cake instead." They continue to point to some of these nebulous budget dollars saying, "don't worry; you live in the most affordable place. You don't need any additional cost-of-living relief."

These tired talking points are cold comfort, Mr. Speaker, to the families struggling in Saskatchewan, cold comfort for families who are turning to the food bank in record levels, cold comfort to a province that leads the nation in mortgage arrears, and cold comfort to the children who are heading to the food bank — the highest rates in the country.

Mr. Speaker, nowhere is it more clear how tired and out of touch this government has become than in their complete lack of action on the cost-of-living crisis. The fact is that instead of taking action to make your life more affordable, instead of taking action

to alleviate the financial pressures facing Saskatchewan families, they've cooked up all sorts of issues, all sorts of fights that they can pick, and have completely lost the plot.

Instead of addressing cost of living, they are spending who knows how much money fighting queer and trans kids in our courts. They've promised to take this all the way to the Supreme Court. Last time we saw this, \$500 million on court cases, Mr. Speaker. That's how much money this government has spent on superfluous court cases.

They are spending your money on a marshals service that won't even be active until 2026, if we're lucky, instead of investing in our local police forces who are asking for those supports.

Instead of addressing the cost-of-living crisis, they're spending your hard-earned tax dollars on a Saskatchewan revenue agency so that they can squeeze every last single penny out of beleaguered small businesses in our province.

Mr. Speaker, this tired and out-of-touch government shows time and time again that instead of listening to the concerns of Saskatchewanians buckling under the cost-of-living crush, they would rather listen to their own party donors, their own lackeys. They are taking advice in smaller and smaller rooms, and their arrogance is showing. It's so clear that this tired and out-of-touch government is not working for you and it is not working for your family.

Mr. Speaker, worse yet, apart from a completely haywire priority list, this tired and out-of-touch government has consistently made your life more expensive. Throughout their time in office they have overseen the largest expansion of the PST tax base in history. The PST, the most regressive tax instrument in the government's tool box that consistently hits the lowest income folks, folks on SAID and SIS [Saskatchewan income support], individuals making the lowest minimum wage in the country, older adults living on fixed incomes.

Mr. Speaker, it's hard to remember what used to be exempt from the PST in Saskatchewan. Let's look at the list. Construction labour and new home builds — a gut punch on an industry and a gut punch during a generational housing crisis in our country, where we have a housing shortage and rent is skyrocketing. This tax should be scrapped. Used cars. Every single time you buy a used car the government is putting their hand out to collect. Kid's clothing. I remember as a kid my mom would say to the cashiers, "under 14," because it mattered to our family to save those tax dollars to maintain that household budget.

[11:15]

And more recently we saw 32 new tax and fee hikes, all on culture and entertainment. A tax that's killing an industry in Saskatchewan that gives back so, so much. I've spoken about that before. Mr. Speaker, that includes theatre tickets, your Rider tickets, concert tickets. Mr. Speaker, we're the only province in Western Canada that slaps PST on concert tickets. So every time those concert acts roll through from Manitoba to Alberta, they look at the profitability and if it doesn't work, they skip us — losses of economic impact every single time.

Mr. Speaker, they've tripled the take on the PST while they have

been in office. Through these expansions, the average Saskatchewan family now pays upwards of \$2,400 per year. They are attempting to balance the budget, balance their financial missteps all on the backs of Saskatchewan families. It's unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. They've consistently made the lives of Saskatchewan people more expensive with their record take on the PST. Mr. Speaker, I can promise you here and all members and all the people of Saskatchewan that we're ready to clean up that mess.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I will say that I cannot support this tired and out-of-touch government's complete inaction on the cost-of-living file. Mr. Speaker, if this government will not take action on the issues that are mattering most to Saskatchewan families, we are ready to take up that challenge. And we've been crystal clear on this, Mr. Speaker, crystal clear in every single room we are in. We would scrap those 32 new tax and fee hikes. We'd scrap the PST on those used cars and new home construction, and revitalize this industry here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan New Democrats have cleaned up the messes of conservative governments in the past, and we are sure as heck ready to do it again. Mr. Speaker, it's time to elect a government that's really going to work for the interests of Saskatchewan people. It's time to elect a Saskatchewan New Democratic government. And with that, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to sit down on this 75-minute debate today.

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

Ms. Lambert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to join this debate and second the motion brought forward by the member from Melfort. Across the country, people are dealing with the issues that we face here in Saskatchewan, namely affordability and inflation. The Bank of Canada explains that when economies reopened after the COVID-19 pandemic, globally we faced a spike in commodity prices, a surge in demand for goods, and impaired supply chains.

Here in Canada we deal with another reason for higher costs — the federal carbon tax. As the carbon tax goes up, companies increase the costs of their goods and services to keep pace. It has caused an increase in the cost of food production and the cost of shipping that food, so our grocery bills go up. We pay more for fuel sources burned for energy, such as gasoline at the pumps, natural gas, propane, diesel, and electricity to light our homes and power our appliances, particularly after the staggering increase of 23 per cent in the federal carbon tax on April 1st.

The federal carbon tax has driven up the cost of all sectors in our export-based provincial economy — agriculture, energy, forestry, manufacturing, and mining. As the top exporting province in the nation, that exports 70 per cent of what we produce, it has increased not only our production costs, but as a landlocked province, also our cost to ship our products via train or truck. And that impacts our competitiveness. For these reasons and more, we do not support the federal NDP-Trudeau coalition that keeps that federal carbon tax policy and other damaging policies in place.

We have not sat on our hands, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as it pertains to that damaging carbon tax. We took matters into our own hands

and removed the carbon tax on residential home heating on January 1st of this year to mirror the removal of the carbon tax on home heating oil in Atlantic Canada. Not only does that save SaskEnergy customers an average of \$400 this year, estimated, our rate of inflation is being impacted favourably.

The consumer price index measures changes in goods and services over time. Inflation is indicated by a growth of CPI, which helps assess changes to the cost of living. In March the consumer price index in Saskatchewan increased by only 1.5 per cent year over year. This is the second-lowest increase in Canada, and well below the national average of 2.9 per cent.

There are so many measures that we have taken in this government to address affordability and cost of living — over \$2 billion in affordability measures included in every budget. I'd like to highlight just a few.

In 2022 our government issued \$500 affordability cheques to residents of the province to address rising costs due to inflation. Folks could decide for themselves how to best use the cheques to address their own personal situations. In our 2024-25 budget there are no tax increases and no new taxes. Now that's helping keep life affordable for Saskatchewan people.

This government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has implemented policies that foster economic growth. We have maintained strong financial management at the same time. That is how we are able to build and protect this province. That growing economy has allowed us to pay down 2.5 billion — that's right, billion — dollars, and that reduces our interest costs by 97.5 million each and every year. That's 97.5 million that we can use to invest into services such as health care, education, and capital projects.

I learned at an early age that it was important to pay down debt. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we hear the term “net debt-to-GDP [gross domestic product] ratio” often in this Assembly. That's because it is used to evaluate the health of our provincial finances. Gross domestic product is a monetary measure of the market value of all the final goods and services produced within a certain specific time period. GDP is a measure of the economic output that predicts the province's ability to generate current and future revenue. Simply put, the net debt-to-GDP ratio demonstrates our province's ability to pay down debt.

The province's net debt is forecasted to be 14 per cent of GDP in March of next year. Saskatchewan has the second-lowest net debt-to-GDP ratio among the provinces. Why is this important? Because investors look for stability and certainty when considering jurisdictions to invest in and see it as a good sign when net debt-to-GDP is low.

Secondly, this ratio is an important factor when it comes to credit rating agencies. The better the credit rating, the lower the interest rate that you pay to borrow money. Our credit rating is the second best in the country. Compare that to Manitoba next door. Their credit rating is seventh in Canada and their net debt-to-GDP ratio is 38.5 per cent.

Contrast our net debt-to-GDP with the previous NDP government in 2006. Their ratio was 28.2 per cent — double what it is today. Many important factors affect our quality of life here: the cost-of-living factors such as the level of taxation, the

cost of utilities, the cost of auto insurance, and the cost for housing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, residents might not be aware that SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] customers benefit from the lowest average personal auto insurance rates in the country, with the most comprehensive injury coverage, I might add. SGI has sent out two rounds of rebate cheques to vehicle owners in the last three years. That's a return of \$375 million to the people of this province.

A reliable way to compare the affordability of living in different parts of Canada is to calculate the combined cost of provincial taxes, utilities, and housing. Our Minister of Finance has undertaken that intercity comparison for 2024 using Regina and costs in other major cities across the country. The result: Regina was the most affordable jurisdiction for a family of four.

When it comes to rent, average rent in our two biggest cities, Saskatoon and Regina, is the lowest in the nation. As of March 2024 it is \$619 lower than the national average and \$1,000 below the top 10 average. We have the first-time tax credit to assist with home affordability. This offers a provincial non-refundable income tax credit of up to \$1,050 to eligible taxpayers on qualified homes.

Saskatchewan's total utility bundle costs for the last fiscal year were the second lowest among the provinces. I'd like to compare what an average Saskatchewan family pays on their total utility bundle to other provinces: 2,900 less than a family in New Brunswick; 3,600 less than a family in Ontario; 4,500 less than a family in Alberta. We pay significantly less than almost all families across the country.

I joined the Premier last year in Saskatoon to talk about the active families benefit that was introduced by this government. This benefit is an annual, refundable tax benefit introduced to help Saskatchewan families with the cost of their children's participation in sports, cultural, and recreational activities. Eligible families of a child 18 years of age or younger can receive a fully refundable tax benefit up to \$150 per child or \$200 for a child with a disability.

We have the children's drug plan, also introduced by this government. The program allows families to pay \$25 per prescription for drugs for children 14 years of age or younger.

I would be remiss if I didn't talk about affordability measures that affect seniors. Under the seniors' drug plan, eligible seniors 65 years of age and older pay \$25 for their prescription drugs. The senior citizens' ambulance assistance program offers full coverage for interfacility transfers, and the cost of ground ambulances have been lowered from \$275 to 135 per trip. The Ministry of Health covers 96 per cent of the cost of home care and 100 per cent of the cost of home care nursing services allowing seniors to remain in their homes. The seniors' income plan offers up to \$360 per month, and it has quadrupled since 2007.

One of the many measures this government has undertaken in tax reduction is the cuts in education property taxes, cuts that have saved Saskatchewan residents approximately \$100 million per year. Since 2008-2009 this government has reduced the

education property tax burden by approximately \$3 billion. Now I must mention that under the NDP Saskatchewan residents paid the highest EPT [education property tax] in the nation.

Did you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we are the only province to offer the graduate retention program, again introduced by this government? It has benefited over 81,000 graduates and since 2009 has saved graduates over \$739 million. My three daughters have appreciated that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am proud to say that Saskatchewan remains one of the most affordable places in Canada to live, work, and raise a family. How fortunate we are to call this place home. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to enter into debate here this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, to enter into discussion on the motion, Mr. Speaker. What's been unfortunate I think is much of the rhetoric that we've heard from government opposite, again denying the challenges that people are facing by way of affordability, Mr. Speaker. And certainly as the official opposition in this province, as Saskatchewan New Democrats, we've been clear with our concerns where the federal government has made choices that aren't in the interests of Saskatchewan people. And we will continue to stand up and to make that case, I believe so, more effectively than what we've seen opposite, Mr. Speaker. Because we see the results there.

You know, we'll stand up of course against the federal carbon tax that just doesn't make any sense for Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and we'll make that case. But I think Saskatchewan people expect their government, their elected government, to understand the reality and the pressures that they're facing.

And this current tired lot couldn't be more out-of-touch on this front, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to cost of living. And of course worse than doing nothing, Mr. Speaker, in face of a once-in-a-generation affordability challenge facing families, this is a government that's made things worse, Mr. Speaker. Worse than doing nothing, they've made things worse, Mr. Speaker.

Pretty much unlike anywhere else in Canada, where all other provinces have acted to extend various types of relief in cost of living to families in face of these pressures, Mr. Speaker, not only has this government failed to make the case effectively that the carbon tax doesn't make sense for Saskatchewan, but they've failed to understand the pressures and hardship that families are facing. And instead have actually piled on with additional costs, Mr. Speaker — worse than doing nothing. They've added new taxes on front after front after front. They've added new costs, Mr. Speaker, and Saskatchewan people know those costs very well, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, this was the government that mismanaged the finances and project after project through so much scandal and mismanagement and waste, Mr. Speaker. And now they're sticking Saskatchewan people with the bill, Mr. Speaker.

[11:30]

The biggest tax hike in Saskatchewan's history, Mr. Speaker, brought to you by that Sask Party government, Mr. Speaker. They've stuck the PST on everything from children's clothes to insurance to construction, Mr. Speaker. Making housing more expensive for everyone, Mr. Speaker, whether you're building out a rental unit, whether you're building out a house or whether you're replacing your toilet or fixing your shingles, Mr. Speaker, or maintaining your home. This is a government that's made all of that more expensive and of course have driven jobs away from Saskatchewan with this attack on our competitiveness, Mr. Speaker — a gut punch to growth.

We've seen this government impose that tax on everything from even some grocery foods and restaurant meals, on local businesses across Saskatchewan, and on used cars, Mr. Speaker, where they're taxing the sale of that used car many times over, Mr. Speaker, and sticking again those working so darn hard, Mr. Speaker, just to put food on their table that might be looking to make sure they've got a vehicle that's going to get them from point A to point B, to get them to work, Mr. Speaker, to get their kids to activities, to get them to training, Mr. Speaker. They're putting the bill there as well.

And as we've been identifying, this is a government that has failed to do what other provinces have extending relief. One of those options would have been to suspend the fuel tax as we've been calling for, Mr. Speaker. Of course that Premier and that government deny the reality that people are facing, the cost-of-living pressures, but they continue to impose not only those new taxes but their 15-cent-a-litre tax on gas and diesel across Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, again hitting those that are working so hard across this province.

They haven't done anything to roll back the PST that they've put on people. And now if you look at the impacts of that PST, this is a government that has tripled the amount of the PST that they're taking out of the pockets and bank accounts of hard-working Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker, at a time where we see that 60 per cent, 57 per cent of Saskatchewan people are saying that they're finding it difficult or very difficult just to put food on the table, Mr. Speaker. This government is out of touch. Worse than, you know, doing nothing, they've made it worse, Mr. Speaker, and lacking a level of . . . I don't know, decency as a government. Instead of listening and working to understand the hardship, they actually work to deny the reality that people know with the hardship.

You'll hear day after day, you know, cabinet ministers or the Premier getting up trying to tell people that, oh, you've got it wrong; life is affordable, Mr. Speaker. Well you know what, Mr. Speaker? I'll trust Saskatchewan households and Saskatchewan people any day of the week over this tired and out-of-touch Sask Party government when it comes to knowing the pressures, the real pressures and the real hardship on their household finances, Mr. Speaker.

You know, my buddy, the member from Melfort was up today and he, you know, talked about a few different things. He was talking about shrinkage and a few other things, Mr. Speaker. And certainly with respect to the economy and an economic contraction and stagnation and lack of growth, his government does have a miserable record on this front, Mr. Speaker, and it really has failed to present the economic opportunity that

communities across Saskatchewan, corner to corner to corner to corner, need and deserve, as well as those jobs, Mr. Speaker, that will pay the bills and that families can count on. So he's, you know, with respect to his economic entry around, you know, contraction, shrinkage, stagnation, his record of his government is very poor, Mr. Speaker.

He was talking as well about some of the views on multinationals, Mr. Speaker, and on profits. And of course we want to see local businesses and businesses across Saskatchewan, we want to see them doing well, Mr. Speaker. And that means they need to be profitable, Mr. Speaker. So there's no question on this front, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it's this government that seems to misunderstand the importance of making sure local businesses in Saskatchewan are profitable and have futures and are able to grow employment and create those opportunities.

But when it comes to some of the other anticompetitive forces in the supply chains, Mr. Speaker, you know, I would really challenge my pal from Melfort to lean in a little harder for the interests of Saskatchewan. When we're talking about folks like the duopoly that is the out-of-province meat packers, Mr. Speaker, you know, there is a role for him and his government to lean in and challenge those anticompetitive behaviours from those out-of-province meat packers, Mr. Speaker, who shortchange producers, livestock producers, beef producers across Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, who short them on the fair dollar they deserve, Mr. Speaker, and who have the consequence through their anticompetitive behaviours as well of driving up the cost of meat, driving up the cost of food, and sticking consumers with an unfair bill, Mr. Speaker.

And anyone that rolls into a meat counter these days, Mr. Speaker, will understand this. They know how hard it is to, you know, fill that grocery cart in a way that meets the needs of their family, Mr. Speaker, but that doesn't break the bank as well. And this is a government . . . Every government should be willing to lean in to anticompetitive duopolies like the meat packers, Mr. Speaker, and address those anticompetitive behaviours.

You know, the other reason that that's of interest for Saskatchewan — fairness for producers, better price, better options for consumers — we could also really grow a strong meat processing industry across Saskatchewan. Local jobs across this province, Mr. Speaker. More choice for producers. More choice for consumers.

You know, it's that same approach, tired approach, kid gloves, Mr. Speaker, when we see . . . addressing things like the rail companies, Mr. Speaker. Again a duopoly, Mr. Speaker, where the Government of Saskatchewan should always be serving the people of Saskatchewan, the producers of Saskatchewan, the exporters of Saskatchewan. And you know, the kid-glove approach described by the member from Melfort just doesn't cut it, Mr. Speaker, in making the improvements that people deserve on fronts like this.

Mr. Speaker, we have a government here in Saskatchewan that struggles to walk and chew gum at the same time. We should have no trouble effectively making the case against the federal carbon tax at the same time as making life more affordable here in Saskatchewan. This government has failed on both fronts. They've failed to address that carbon tax, Mr. Speaker, and

they've only stuck Saskatchewan people with more costs. They've stuck them unfortunately with an economy that's way more stagnant than it should be, Mr. Speaker, failing to present the opportunity and the good jobs, and certainly failed to ensure the affordability that people deserve, Mr. Speaker.

And again, this is a government that chooses to try to spin the reality that households and people and producers know all too well, all across our fine province, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Arm River.

Mr. Skoropad: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am so eager, chomping at the bit, to get involved in this debate here today. This is something we've talked about lots on the floor, but I just want to begin with how much I love this province. I love Saskatchewan. This is the most amazing place on the planet to live, and it is certainly one of the most affordable places to live in Canada. And the people of this province deserve an affordable life, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that's why more than \$2 billion in affordability measures are included in each and every budget that you see presented by this government.

And this was described . . . I won't spend too much time talking about that in particular. It was described so well by my colleague, the member from Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood. But I would think that there would be a lot of agreement on the affordability measures that we present year in and year out for this province to support. I would think that members opposite would see a lot of value in those affordability measures. And you know, if not though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I certainly would be interested in hearing specifically which one or ones of those affordability measures they would like to axe, which ones they'd like to cut or turf. I would truly be interested in knowing specifically.

But I do understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why the opposition is confused by our strategy to make life more affordable in this province. I understand that the opposition is looking for a quick one-off measure to address affordability while actually not addressing affordability at all.

You know in farming, in farming there is a difference, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There's a difference between a rain and a shower. They are interested in providing a quick, isolated shower, whereas we, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are interested in providing a widespread, general rain for the people of this province. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you see that in the more than \$2 billion in affordability measures each and every year.

You know, I do need to note. I need to note something: the role the economy plays in this whole thing. The opposition criticizes us for the work that we do to grow and strengthen our economy, and they often say we talk far too much about the economy. They actually go so far as to say, that's all you guys care about; you're just all about the economy, not people at all. But I'll say this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's through the economy that we are able to care for people of this province, and that's how we are able to address affordability year in and year out.

The opposition though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is caught up in the ideology of affordability. It's the ideology of affordability and virtue-signalling, and they forgot something. They forgot

something very important. How do you pay for it? The strength of our economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is exactly how we pay for it, and that's how things work.

Now I'd like to just . . . I typically use trees as analogies. I just love using trees as analogies. My colleagues give me a hard time about this, but I'm going to give just one more. And we'll call this lesson, lessons from a tree, part three.

And so our economy, the economy of this province, could certainly be compared to a fruit tree. The stronger we can make it, the more we'll provide to the people who depend on it. And success, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is directly related to how we feed, how we nurture it, how we protect it from those entities that would otherwise do it harm. You know, we don't believe, as members opposite may, that you just plant it, leave it, and hope it grows. You know, at the end of the day the well-being of that tree, that economic tree, certainly, certainly affects the well-being of the people who depend on it in this province.

And I would suggest this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As we've seen in the past, if the NDP opposition ever had the chance — Lord help us — to govern again, they would surely ignore the economic tree of this province, leaving it to wither. And I do fear. And I do fear, if given the chance, the opposition would even go so far as to chop that thing right down to the ground. They would have that thing crash to the ground, and further than that, they would probably then just sit on the log and then hold their hand out and wait for the federal government to come by and to give them an apple because they have not one to eat.

Speaking of apples, Mr. Deputy Speaker, grocery shopping is certainly not one of my most favourite activities. I'll say that. It starts with the picking of the cart. I always select the wrong one. It usually has a twisted wheel, and I really hate the ones that pull to the left too far. But I will say it carries right on into the fruit and vegetable department, and that department where my wife and I, we have different strategies. She's not that fussy when it comes to picking the fruit and vegetables. I'm very fussy when it comes to that. She'll hand me a basket of strawberries. I'll look it at it and go, oh no, I mean come on; pick a better one.

So a little bit of frustration, but the frustration goes on as I walk along and I see some of the prices. The frustration increases, and then the frustration even increases a whole lot more when I consider those families struggling to buy that apple, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those families who in some cases say "no" more than they do "yes" to their children's questions of, can we get that? And you know, it actually takes my frustration to another level. It probably takes it into the anger range when I consider that it doesn't need to be this way, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

If you would just for a moment indulge me, a little carbon tax 101. The premise of the carbon tax by design is to make life more unaffordable. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's premised on taking your money and then forcing your decisions. The concept is, hit them in the pocketbook and they will make different choices.

Well what's maybe overlooked in this plan and by all those proponents of this plan is that, what if other choices just simply aren't an option? What if the pocketbook can't take many more hits? And what if every good or product that relied on fossil fuels

to get itself to market, well what if they had to bear a cumulative, a compounding carbon tax? Well then if that is the case, you'd have exactly what we're seeing right here with the inflation in this province and across the country.

The only thing surprising about the impact of the carbon tax is that proponents of the carbon tax are surprised by the negative impacts. We predicted and warned that this very thing, this very situation right from the beginning, right from the beginning when our Premier, then the minister of Environment, walked out of a meeting where the carbon tax was being rammed down the throats of all the provinces. Since day one we sit against the carbon tax, and in the beginning we stood alone. And we stood alone for the people of this province.

[11:45]

And now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is where the conversation is just going to get just a tad bit awkward. You see, our stance has always been crystal clear on the carbon tax. We stand against that. And while it's very heartwarming to see members opposite try to position themselves on the right side of history, documented history would say otherwise.

While this government fought to extinguish the newly ignited carbon tax campfire, like a bunch of children playing with a pack of matches were members opposite, some of whom sat silently on the side watching it all take place, some of whom scoffed and mocked our efforts to extinguish that flame right in the beginning, and some, more disturbingly, openly fanned the flame and supported it.

Now that the carbon tax, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a raging inferno of inflation, they are running hard from their paths, and they are running hard from the fire that they helped create because their fear is to get politically scorched. And while some of those members will get away with only getting singed maybe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's the people of this province and the people of this country that are the ones that are going to experience the burns.

But the thing that makes me most angry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that this tax, created by the Liberal government and supported by the NDP, hurts our most vulnerable the most. It punishes those who can't afford the alternatives and those that can't bear the weight of inflation.

And that is why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're committed to providing affordability measures in this province each and every year to support all the people in the province and why we denounce the federal NDP-Trudeau government and their supporters for making life more difficult for the people across this country. Thank you.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What an interesting stump speech from the members opposite. And now we heard an awful lot about fruit in that speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I thought the members opposite were opposed to fruits. Anyways I'll go on.

So affordability, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, it's great to be able to talk about this so often. And I was thrilled to see this as a 75-minute debate topic come up because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know how much I love a 75-minute debate.

And you know, I was inclined to go back through *Hansard* and look at what we talked about the last time we had the chance, member from Saskatoon Meewasin and I, to talk about the carbon tax, to talk about affordability, and it bears reading. May 4th, 2023, almost a year ago today, and you know, Mr. Speaker, it's like I could just stand up here and read this right back into the record and it would be true today.

We are opposed to the carbon tax. We've been crystal clear on that, Mr. Speaker. And what we are in favour of is a government that recognizes the obvious, a government that recognizes — whether it's the federal Liberals in Ottawa or the government here at home — recognizes that affordability is the number one concern. And both of them are making it harder for regular people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in reviewing *Hansard* from last year, I saw a couple stats that jumped out. Fifty-two per cent of people have desperate economic insecurity. Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that number has crept up in this year, and now it's kissing 60 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another statistic. Last year I referenced in my comments that here in Regina, in my home city, 5 per cent of the people who live here in our provincial capital, 1 in 20 people rely on the food bank to feed themselves and their family. But, Mr. Speaker, we have seen that statistic climb up. In Saskatchewan under this government one in five people has gone hungry in the past five years. Shame, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This is a government who is telling people that everything's fine. The status quo is fine. Be thankful for our budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's enough. I'm not sure what they're trying to sell, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because are they telling people that everything's fine, you are wrong, and the reason you can't pay your bills, the reason you are struggling to afford food is your fault? I don't know, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But let's talk about a few things that are in the control of this tired and out-of-touch government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I have the privilege to serve as our SaskPower critic. I'll admit it's probably my favourite file in opposition, Mr. Speaker. And this is a government who has control of a Crown corporation, who has the ability to impact affordability. And what have they done with SaskPower, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but they have raised utility bills during a generational cost-of-living crisis not one, not two, but three times, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And in preparing for this I remembered something. They got another sneaky half a per cent rate increase in just this January. And I'll quote from the SaskPower spokesperson: "We've managed to keep the increase somewhat lower for this year, and that has to do with how we're operating our system." But another half a per cent increase, Mr. Speaker, from SaskPower just this past January.

And it's easy to just, like . . . I've got a real chaos desk set-up here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I've got like five binders. I've got newspaper articles printed out because there are so many

examples of the waste and mismanagement that has occurred under this government.

Let's go back to Bill Boyd, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We'll start a little further back, and let's remember that this is a government who proposed to build a penthouse on top of SaskPower. The best use of Saskatchewan taxpayer dollars was building a penthouse, a penthouse upgrade it was called, with a living wall. Now, Mr. Speaker, we know this government isn't as green as they purport to be, but a living wall built in SaskPower headquarters with taxpayer dollars?

We have a carbon capture project, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one that I worked on, one that I was proud to work on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but that under this government's watch went hundreds of millions of dollars over budget. Again not the best use of taxpayer dollars, Mr. Speaker.

Let's just revisit some of the upgrades: \$282,000 for a rooftop patio including outdoor heaters; \$72,000 for stone floors; that \$65,000 living wall; a \$200,000 kitchen; \$173,000 metal-clad penthouse; \$60,000 exclusively for executive updates; \$20,000 for two electric car charging stations — I guess that probably went by the wayside; and \$100,000 for a rainwater tank. What a penthouse, Mr. Speaker, and I would say a very questionable use of taxpayer dollars.

Another extravagant expense. Let's not forget the vanity project that these members have tried to bury. That wasn't Bill Boyd, but was the former minister. They tried to rebrand all of the Crowns, Mr. Deputy Speaker, an expensive vanity project. Like every lineman should have to go out and have the taxpayer pay for a new, you know, fire-retardant set of overalls in order to carry this government's brand. Another sterling proposal in terms of using taxpayer dollars, Mr. Speaker. But they're happy, happy to keep wasting taxpayer dollars left, right, and centre when it comes to our Crowns.

Last year SaskPower was in a historic position of loss, \$172 million, Mr. Speaker, the worst in the corporation's history. And what do we see this year? We still see dividends being taken from the Crown. Again during a generational cost-of-living crisis under this government they are proposing to raise people's power bills by at least two and a half per cent every year in perpetuity, Mr. Speaker.

And where does this come from? This comes from SaskPower's own documentation, their own supply planning overview, Mr. Speaker. In every single scenario they have presented in the plans put forward by this government, there is at least a two and a half to three per cent SaskPower rate increase every year until 2050, Mr. Speaker. These are not just the words of the opposition critic. This is in SaskPower's own documentation, Mr. Speaker.

And now of course we haven't seen this rate hike actualized this year. It's election year, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to guess we're not going to see it next year either. But the year after the election, should this tired and out-of-touch government still tragically be in power, are the people of Saskatchewan to expect a seven and a half to nine per cent increase in one single year on their power bills? Well, Mr. Speaker, it's right here in black and white. And this is a Crown corporation that should be providing affordability relief to people in a generational cost-of-living crisis.

But again, I'm going to read from SaskPower's own words:

In general, SaskPower rates are below the Canadian thermal average for high-load customers. However because of our extensive distribution grid and relatively sparse population, SaskPower has relatively higher distribution costs per ratepayer than most utilities, which negatively affects our competitiveness at the lower levels of electricity consumption.

Mr. Speaker, again from SaskPower's own rate application, 2022-2023. Again in black and white under this government a Crown utility that is not as affordable as it could be, a Crown utility that is not competitive with other utilities when it comes to affordability, let alone for residential customers, and whose industrial rates are crippling the potential for economic growth here in the province, Mr. Speaker.

Now I'm almost out of time, and I've spent most of it focused on SaskPower, but it is clear this is a government that is tired, that is out of touch, that is so incapable of seeing the obvious reality that people in this province are living. They just prefer to read their own talking points, convince themselves that everything is fine and it's the people who are wrong. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the member from Churchill-Wildwood. Good person, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that her government has stuck people with more costs, more taxes during a once-in-a-generation cost-of-living challenge. Of course we all oppose the federal carbon tax. Her government, her cabinet, has failed to protect people from that carbon tax.

But why does the member from Churchill-Wildwood support the choices of her government to stick Saskatchewan people with more taxes during this time, not relief, and not providing them an exemption, a break on the gas tax?

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

Ms. Lambert: — Well I thank the member opposite for the question. He referenced the federal carbon tax, and I'd like to point out that under that carbon tax, the Liberals, federal Liberals — and the NDP are in thick with those federal Liberals — have missed every single one of their environmental targets. And the independent parliamentary budget officer confirmed what many Canadians already know. You pay more in the carbon tax than you get rebated back.

So each and every day in this House, we introduce a petition, read it into the record, and I will quote:

Whereas the Trudeau Liberal-NDP coalition carbon tax is one of the main causes of affordability issues and inflation in the nation of Canada; and that the federal Liberal-NDP government was politically motivated in issuing a carve-out for home heating oil . . .

And we go on to say in the end, “We call upon the Government of Canada to immediately suspend the carbon tax across the nation of Canada . . .”

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

Mr. Jensen: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We know that in Saskatchewan we continue to have the most . . . We’re the most affordable province in the nation in which to live, raise a family, and start a career. But the NDP refuse to accept that as fact and continue to claim our government does nothing for affordability.

But just yesterday at SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association], and with the member from Regina University listening, the assistant commissioner and commanding officer of Saskatchewan RCMP here in Regina said, and I quote, “We have an amazing cost of living.” And she continued on that our province’s affordability is resulting in more RCMP officers from other provinces choosing to serve in Saskatchewan for recruitment.

Yes or no: does the member from Saskatoon Meewasin agree with the commanding officer of the Saskatchewan RCMP?

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

Mr. Teed: — Mr. Speaker, \$17 million on marshals that will not see boots on the ground until 2026, all the while RCMP and municipal police forces are asking for supports, supports that already have boots on the ground that could be addressing crime in this province. The leaders of the RCMP in Saskatchewan and those municipal police forces have been crystal clear on their need for additional funds.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As members have heard time and time again in this House, we are all united in our opposition to the carbon tax. Or are we? A question to the member from Churchill-Wildwood: does she think it is good news for Saskatchewan people that there is \$488 million of carbon tax, of Sask Party OBPS [output-based performance standards] carbon tax, in her government’s budget?

[12:00]

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

Ms. Lambert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I thank the member opposite again for her question. I’d like to refer to an article that came out I believe just today in the *Moose Jaw Express*, written by Ron Walter. And we’re talking about affordability. I just spoke about it in my remarks today, and I quote:

Living expenses of Regina residents rate among the lowest of 10 major cities across Canada, according to Saskatchewan budget data.

The data tables do intercity comparisons of taxes, household utility and housing costs in 10 cities . . . [from] three income levels.

So those 10 cities are Vancouver; Calgary; Regina; Winnipeg; Toronto; Montreal; Saint John, New Brunswick; Halifax; St. John’s, Newfoundland; and Charlottetown.

For a family earning \$75,000, Saskatchewan taxes, household utility and housing costs are lowest of the 10 cities . . . [Yes, lowest.] For a family earning 125,000 costs of tax, utilities, and housing are the lowest of the cities at 34,528.

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

Mr. B. McLeod: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Continuing on that theme of the lowest, the opposition has consistently pointed to Manitoba as a beacon of affordability. Here’s the facts. In NDP Manitoba, families pay 7 per cent PST on utilities. Saskatchewan families pay zero on utilities. Manitoban families also pay carbon tax on home heating. Saskatchewan families pay no carbon tax on home heating.

Saskatchewan families pay no income tax on their first 59,000 in income, and Manitoba families pay provincial income tax at 38,000. That’s a difference, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of \$21,000 at 12.75 per cent. That’s \$2,700 that Saskatchewan families keep in their pockets.

To the member from Saskatoon Meewasin, which province does more for families?

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

Mr. Teed: — Mr. Speaker, it’s fairly rich from this government who has overseen the largest expansion of the PST in this province’s history. I don’t even remember what isn’t exempt anymore — kids clothes, new home construction, used cars, concert tickets, Rider tickets. Mr. Speaker, this government is making the lives of Saskatchewan people more inexpensive absolutely every single day and has doubled the take on the PST. They have no ground to stand on.

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

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question’s going to go to the member from Saskatoon Wildwood. We’ve seen a lot of talk about inflation in this House, and we’ve seen just recently, from the member from Lumsden-Morse, a lot of talk about Manitoba.

So, Mr. Speaker, if this is a government who’s so fixated on a low inflationary rate, what does the member from Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood think about the fact that next door in Manitoba the government is boasting the lowest inflation rate, the only in the nation just behind 1 per cent after having cut their gas tax, same as Alberta to the west?

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from

Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood.

Ms. Lambert: — Well thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm pretty busy getting up and down here this morning, and I appreciate the opportunity.

So we talked about intercity comparisons, and that's a fair way to actually look at some facts. And you mentioned Manitoba. So when I look at that I talked about credit rating in my remarks, we are the second best in the country; Manitoba, seventh in the country. When we talk about PST, we're at 6 per cent; they're at 7 per cent. When we talk about the first-time homebuyers tax credit, which offers families here, qualified families, \$1,050; they have no homebuyers tax credit in Manitoba. We have the highest tax-free threshold in the nation, where Manitoba has the seventh-lowest tax-free threshold in the nation.

I could go on and on and on. We have no . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Kelvington-Wadena.

Mr. Nerlien: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I just had a note here that the member from Saskatoon Meewasin said not that long ago that our Crown corporations are providing "some of the most affordable rates in the country." Obviously his seatmate would disagree with him, as his seatmate took time to criticize the leadership of SaskPower today in terms of their management of the organization.

And I'm wondering in terms of sort of the current practice of drive-by smears, the member from Saskatoon Meewasin expanded the smear campaign to include the Saskatchewan Party government, which would be referring to 269,996 people of Saskatchewan who support our government. Does the member from Saskatoon Meewasin actually believe that they're all wrong? Thank you.

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

Mr. Teed: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm having a hard time determining where the question is, but all I can say is, this is the exact same government that tried to sell off those Crowns to private buyers, Mr. Speaker, and has hiked rates, hiked rates, made life more expensive at every step.

The Deputy Speaker: — The 75-minute debate period has expired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

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

Motion No. 4 — Legislation Regarding Transparency and Accountability

Ms. Conway: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be on my feet, and at the end of my comments I will be moving a motion around the need for transparency and accountability from this Sask Party government.

There's not a day that goes by, Mr. Speaker, where the people of Saskatchewan are not reminded of this government's shocking lack of transparency and accountability. And nowhere is this more clear than in the four categories that I intend on touching on today. That is our lobbying legislation, electoral financing laws, conflict of interest, and as well as our broken freedom of information system.

And I can tell you right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Saskatchewan NDP takes these matters seriously. We believe at our very core that the people of Saskatchewan deserve an open and transparent government. They deserve a government that is not influenced by big money or out-of-province interests, where elections are fair and open, and where conflicts of interest simply do not exist. We are light years behind many jurisdictions on these issues, Mr. Speaker.

This week was an absolute master class in our insufficient rules around lobbying. We have a lobbyist registrar that has eight or nine entries that speak to Clearpoint Health Network's lobbyist Kevin Doherty meeting with ministers — the Minister of Health, the Premier, the Minister of Finance — around the surgical backlog. Eight or nine entries.

We then have a Minister of Health who has stood up and said those meetings simply didn't exist. Although I will note that in question period today, he was very clear that he did not meet with Mr. Doherty on this \$6 million sweetheart deal with this Calgary company on knee and hip surgeries, of which we are last for wait times in the nation. But when I asked him a very clear question about whether the Premier or the previous Health minister met with Mr. Doherty on this, he could not provide a straight answer.

But, Mr. Speaker, we are committed on this side to closing the loopholes in the lobbying registrar legislation. The people of Saskatchewan should note that before having to register at all, a company can lobby this government for 39 hours and that there will be no record of that anywhere. We will get rid of that 40-hour threshold so that the people of Saskatchewan know which lobbyists are meeting with their politicians, are trying to persuade their politicians, and that it is absolutely open and available to the people of Saskatchewan.

In fact the Saskatchewan NDP has brought changes to this legislation which have consistently been voted down by that Sask Party government, the least open and transparent government in Saskatchewan history. You have my commitment. This is the quote unquote no-plan NDP, Saskatchewan NDP. You have a commitment from me that the Saskatchewan NDP commits to being upfront about all meetings that occur, who's present, and the topic of that meeting.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the electoral financing laws, Saskatchewan under this government has earned the unsavoury reputation of being the wild west for electoral financing. The wild west. We have no caps on out-of-province, out-of-country donations and they flow in to that Sask Party government, Mr. Speaker, to that Sask Party. One in five donations to this Sask Party come from out-of-province interest groups. So do not, do not be fooled by the name, the Saskatchewan Party. Mr. Speaker, a fifth of their donations are coming from out of province.

You have a commitment — yes, it's unacceptable — you have a

commitment from the Saskatchewan NDP right here and right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that not only would we cap union and corporate donations, something when the Health minister was asked about in a scrum . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, not cap them, scrap them. He was asked about this, the Minister of Health was asked about this in a scrum this week, what he thought about scrapping union and corporate donations. He said, I'm not going to answer that. Well I wouldn't want to answer that either if I was a member of that Sask Party caucus, Mr. Speaker.

But the truth is that this is necessary. And this is a commitment that this Saskatchewan NDP has made. We have introduced legislation to this effect before, and it has been absolutely voted down consistently by this Sask Party government, the least open and transparent government in Saskatchewan history.

We would also cap individual donations, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We would put a cap on that because we don't think that it's only the wealthy, the ones that can give the most, that should be influencing politics, Mr. Deputy Speaker. No, it's not that they should have no say; there should be a cap. There should be a cap, Mr. Speaker.

We believe that it is unacceptable that money from outside of Saskatchewan, interests from outside of Saskatchewan are influencing and shaping the priorities of this government. And that's what we see day in, day out. Women having to go to Calgary companies for mammograms at 10 times the cost. Individuals living in pain who are waiting too long for the surgeries they need now going to Calgary to a private company, Mr. Speaker.

These policies have impacts, and we see day in, day out that this is increasingly a Sask Party government that works for Alberta companies. It's growth that works for Alberta companies. That's for sure, Mr. Speaker.

I want to talk about this Sask Party government's record on conflicts of interest. We need only look at the recent Sunrise scandal, the Thriftlodge motel, recent appointments to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, Mr. Speaker. That was a really stinky one, Mr. Speaker, after members of this commission deigned to speak out for vulnerable kids whose rights were being run roughshod by this government.

This government doesn't like it when institutions like that do their job. They don't like it when someone speaks truth to power, Mr. Speaker. And so what did we see? We saw the appointment of the Justice minister's constituency president. My God, Mr. Speaker. Like you'd think they'd be a little less obvious about it. Jeez.

Mr. Speaker, particularly concerning around the conflict of interest rules currently, and something that the Saskatchewan NDP has committed to addressing, is the lack of transparency around numbered companies and holding companies. Saskatchewan people deserve to know in an open and transparent way what assets Saskatchewan government members hold, and currently that is not the case, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I will also speak briefly to again the Sunrise and Thriftlodge motels. You know there's been a lot of questions about this, this \$1,300 spent on these hotels before the member from Regina

Northeast — who has a financial interest, benefits financially from these two motels — was elected. After he was elected we see that number jump to almost three-quarters of a million dollars.

[12:15]

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Social Services wants us to accept that this was just a coincidence. But you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? When I asked him in committee earlier this week . . . Well best-case scenario, best-case scenario we see that the Thriftlodge motel was charging rates 100 per cent more than market rates — double, double what I can pay for a room at the Thriftlodge motel on Booking.com tonight. I just looked up the rates. They're still \$80 a night.

Their average rate — this is their information, not mine — their average rate that the Ministry of Social Services paid, \$165 a night, the most inflated rates in the province. So excuse us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we're not going to accept the explanation that the member from Regina Northeast was just doing us all a favour, that he's just an advocate for the most vulnerable. We don't accept that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We don't accept that hotels charging Evelyn Harper \$200 a night — again, double the market rate — are the good guys, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We don't accept it.

But in the very best explanation, this was allowed to happen because of a lack of checks and balances at the Ministry of Social Services. Very best-case scenario, okay, Mr. Deputy Speaker? And in committee earlier this week I asked the Minister of Social Services and his officials whether they were going to start reporting these kinds of expenditures out differently. Nope, status quo. They've got this pilot project on how to procure hotels, but it's status quo, opening up to this kind of nonsense to continue happening, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is not okay.

Moving to Saskatchewan's broken freedom of information system, Mr. Speaker. This is one I have a kind of a song in my heart about. Since this Premier took office, freedom of information fee estimates have jumped from \$130,000 in 2018-2019 to \$2.4 million in '22-23. 130,000 in 2018-2019, 2.4 million in 2022-2023. It's right there in black and white. Again, the least open and transparent government in Saskatchewan history.

And you know what happens, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when people make requests for information and they get these exorbitant estimates? It has a chilling effect. People can't afford to access that information. I can tell you that my office alone, in doggedly going after these Sunrise and Thriftlodge motel numbers, I was asked to pay thousands of dollars in FOI [freedom of information] fees. And it came out of my constituency budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

That's not okay. An elected official, a critic in this area, is forced to spend the budget that is there to serve the public, serve the community that I represent, has to go to these exorbitant freedom of information requests, ones that should be made available so that democracy can run its course, so that critics can hold this government accountable as the system is designed to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have a water critic, the member from Saskatoon Nutana, who tried to FOI the water drainage policy, the effectiveness of that policy. And she was hit with a \$100,000 estimate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is not okay and this is not status quo. 130,000 total in 2019. One request to scrutinize the effectiveness of Saskatchewan's water drainage policy, and she's hit with an FOI for close to that total amount from the 2018-2019 year.

And it's all part of a shift that is happening under this new Premier, under this new configuration of the Sask Party government, the least open and transparent government that . . . The Minister of Corrections is chirping from his seat about rules, but this is increasingly a government who don't think the rules apply, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it is sad to see. This limits the opposition's ability to hold this government to account.

I know, I know they don't like it. They don't like it when we ask tough questions. They don't like it when we hold them accountable. They attack us for making it personal, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's not personal. We are doing our job. We are doing our job and we will continue to do our job. From my lips to your ears, we will continue to ask these hard questions. I know it triggers them, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know it triggers them.

Not only does it hamper our ability to hold them accountable; it kneecaps the media. It kneecaps the media, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It hampers our media. The members opposite, I guess they think there's a big conspiracy thing, a big conspiracy theory out there that it's our media, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It hampers the public's ability to scrutinize this Sask Party government's decisions.

And one of the issues with the freedom of information system is their ability to keep delaying, keep kicking it down the road, when a lot of the information we're seeking or the media is seeking or members of the public are seeking, this is time-sensitive information. So there are levers that they can pull under the freedom of information legislation that allows them to just delay, delay, delay, delay, delay. And they do.

And they have yet to enact the recommendations of the Privacy Commissioner that he has made. He has made several that they have not accepted. You know, one of the areas . . . I've been researching this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, quite a lot. I've been reading some of the work done by Tom Cardoso and Robyn Doolittle. These are two journalists on a national level that look into freedom of information systems across Canada. They're very critical of the current Canadian freedom of information system.

They've also written at length about Saskatchewan's freedom of information system. And I would invite the viewing public, if they want to look more into how Saskatchewan measures up — or fails to — in comparison to the rest of Canada, check out their article "Public bodies in Saskatchewan ignore the Information Commissioner's decisions to release records because they can." That's the headline, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We need a system where the Privacy Commissioner can compel the production of documents, can compel it. There's no excuse for the fact that we don't have that mechanism. Now they have not chosen to introduce that into legislation because it doesn't benefit them. They don't want more accountability. They don't want scrutiny. And it begs the question, why not? Mr. Deputy

Speaker, why not?

Our freedom of information legislation is 30 years old. It needs to be updated. The Saskatchewan NDP were pioneers when we introduced some of the first freedom of information legislation, and it was very progressive at the time. We are no longer a leader in this. Like so many other things, we are no longer a leader.

And I want to be very clear, the only thing wrong with Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is its government. We have been leaders and we can be leaders again. And I challenge this Sask Party government to take up the mantle, to have a look at this legislation, bring it into the 21st century, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, what will this quote unquote no-plan NDP do? We commit, we commit to putting all of the recommendations of the Privacy Commissioner into law. We make that commitment today, and we've made it before. We commit to taking those seriously and we commit to passing them into law. Though we would go further, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we would ensure that Saskatchewan has the most progressive freedom of information system in the entire country. That is our commitment, Mr. Speaker.

A little-known fact about what has happened since the 2020 election. This government has introduced legislation in the Ministry of Social Services that takes the access to information regime in that area — an area involving extremely sensitive documents, often to do with residential school survivors, often to do with survivors of extreme trauma at the hands of government — and they've taken that Ministry of Social Services area and just carved it out of the entire freedom of information system, which is already lacking to begin with, and ensured that there are no checks and balances.

This is something that a lot of people don't know has happened under this Minister of Social Services and under this Sask Party government since the 2020 election. They have actually made it harder to access Ministry of Social Services documents. Often those have to do with residential schools, Sixties Scoop, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So if I need to put too fine a point on it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that the rest of Canada is moving in one direction — which is to open those records up, face our colonial legacy, make amends — and Saskatchewan, ground zero for much of that colonial project, is moving in the opposite direction, moving in the opposite direction. It's unacceptable, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And of all these areas, these are things that I care deeply about. These are things that my colleagues care deeply about. But that is perhaps the thing that I find most reprehensible about how this government has approached transparency and openness, is the changes they've made to the Ministry of Social Services information and access to that information. It is unacceptable, particularly when so much is at stake. I'm not just talking historically.

You know, I learned this week our numbers in terms of children who die in care go up, they go up every year. Year after year they go up. And unfortunately this year they've gone up again. This is the kind of information — information about loved ones — that

people will be seeking out when they make access requests around these types of records. And instead of making those records more available, they are moving in the opposite direction, in the wrong direction, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In the face of a Sask Party government that is failing so badly on these fronts, there is not a day that passes when questions are raised as to their ethics, as to their openness, as to their transparency. And we saw that, you know, earlier this week, this idea that the rules don't apply. We saw that earlier this week. It was reported on widely, including nationally, these hundreds of texts sent to the Speaker, pressuring him to make certain decisions . . . They don't want me to talk about this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, like they don't want me to talk about so many things. The least open and transparent government in Saskatchewan's history.

The Sask NDP condemns this Sask Party's record on transparency and accountability. And we will bring a comprehensive plan. We will bring that to the people of Saskatchewan in this upcoming election. You have as that a guarantee. And with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are committed to building a government that works for people, that is open for people, that is responsive to the people of Saskatchewan — not Calgary companies, not out-of-country companies, but Saskatchewan people.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see we're a minute shy of 12:30, so I move:

That the Assembly calls upon the government to pass legislation to improve accountability and transparency in Saskatchewan with regards to lobbying, electoral finance, conflict of interest, and freedom of information.

I do so move.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre has moved:

That this Assembly calls on the government to pass legislation to improve accountability and transparency in Saskatchewan with regards to lobbying, electoral finance, conflict of interest, and freedom of information.

[12:30]

Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member from Regina University.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to enter in after a remarkable speech by the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre. And I'd like to maybe just make one last comment on this matter, Mr. Speaker.

You know, the thing about transparency is it's completely fine if you've got nothing to hide, Mr. Speaker. And I believe the members opposite have nothing to hide, so they should not be afraid of actually being the most transparent government in Canada, Mr. Speaker.

But what we see is a lack of respect for this institution, a lack of respect for transparency, a lack of respect for accountability.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's be clear. Members opposite like to talk. They like to talk about costs and what's the plan. Well I've got great news for the members opposite. This is a no-cost opportunity for them to not just save taxpayer money but to save taxpayers money.

This will save the people of Saskatchewan from having to pay outrageous, elevated fees to this government, Mr. Speaker. This will save taxpayers money through that purifying lens of sunlight when it comes to accountability on spending, on taxpayer dollars, on making sure that they're all spent in the most accountable, straightforward method.

So, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how this is anything but win-win for the people of Saskatchewan, win-win for the members opposite who certainly have nothing to hide. No cost, plenty of opportunity, absolutely the right thing to do. And it'll be free.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Regina University has moved to adjourn debate. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Hon. Ms. Carr: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We move that this House do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker: — The Deputy House Leader has moved that this House do now adjourn. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:33.]

GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN

CABINET MINISTERS

Hon. Scott Moe
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
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Power Corporation
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Telecommunications
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Water Corporation
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority

Hon. Bronwyn Eyre
Minister of Justice and Attorney General

Hon. Joe Hargrave
Minister of SaskBuilds and Procurement
Minister Responsible for the
Global Transportation Hub Authority

Hon. Donna Harpauer
Deputy Premier
Minister of Finance

Hon. Jeremy Harrison
Minister of Trade and Export Development
Minister of Immigration and Career Training
Minister Responsible for Innovation
Minister Responsible for Tourism Saskatchewan

Hon. Everett Hindley
Minister of Health

Hon. Gene Makowsky
Minister of Social Services

Hon. David Marit
Minister of Agriculture
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Water Security Agency

Hon. Tim McLeod
Minister of Mental Health and Addictions,
Seniors and Rural and Remote Health

Hon. Don McMorris
Minister of Government Relations
Minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety
Minister Responsible for
First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs
Minister Responsible for the
Provincial Capital Commission
Minister Responsible for the
Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board

Hon. Paul Merriman
Minister of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety
Minister Responsible for the Firearms Secretariat

Hon. Jim Reiter
Minister of Energy and Resources

Hon. Laura Ross
Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport
Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Minister Responsible for
Lotteries and Gaming Saskatchewan Corporation

Hon. Christine Tell
Minister of Environment

Hon. Gordon Wyant
Minister of Advanced Education