

## **Report from the Legislature**

### **June 18, 2020**

On June 15<sup>th</sup>, Saskatchewan became the first province in Canada to table a budget that recognizes the impact of COVID-19. This is an historic time around the world, complete with new challenges due to the pandemic. Saskatchewan people, however, have faced this pandemic together. We are re-opening our province together, and we will rebuild and recover our economy together.

While 87 per cent of Saskatchewan businesses were able to stay open during the pandemic, our province is not immune to the financial hit that came along with COVID-19. This year's budget has dedicated over a billion dollars in spending directly related to the pandemic. As a result, we are currently sitting in a deficit position, but it is important to acknowledge that this is not a structural deficit; this is a pandemic deficit.

In fact, prior to the arrival of COVID-19, Saskatchewan was on track for balanced budgets both this year and last. As our province begins to re-open and our economy recovers, we will get back to a balance without having to cut programs and services.

### **Budget Highlights**

Budget 2020-21 invests in health, education, social services, family, and communities. The Ministry of Health budget is \$5.8 billion, which is an increase of 4.6 per cent from 2019-2020. This is the highest investment into health ever made that will ensure our health care system has the resources it needs to serve Saskatchewan people.

Our budget also dedicates \$435 million to mental health and addictions services, which makes up 7.5 per cent of the overall Health budget to fund critical initiatives including the development of an innovative crystal methamphetamine treatment program in Estevan. Funding will also be available for the development of a mental health program for Emergency Medical Service workers in the province.

Also included in this budget is \$2.6 billion for the Ministry of Education, which is an increase of \$123.3 million to support Prekindergarten to grade 12 classrooms, early learning and childcare, libraries and literacy.

\$8.5 million has been allocated to begin the planning and design for new joint-use schools, replacement schools and renovation projects. As our province continues to grow, we must continue to expand capacity to welcome and accommodate new students.

Community-based organizations, including childcare centres, will receive an increase of \$2.4 million from the 2019-20 Budget. This includes an increase of \$350,000 in provincial funding for specialized Prekindergarten programming to support preschool-aged children with intensive needs.

Our government has made a \$715 million commitment to safety and economic stimulus in the Ministry of Highway's budget. Safety will always be our number one priority for our roads but we must also consider the economic opportunity that our communities will need. This stimulus funding will improve our highway system by adding in passing lanes, road improvements and investment into municipal transport infrastructure.

As our government moves into the remaining weeks of this sitting, we will continue to be transparent and available to our constituents. Recovering from this global pandemic will take time but we have proven before that we are a resilient province. I applaud everyone in their efforts as we continue to re-open our province.

This week we announced a date for phase 4.1 of the Re-Open Saskatchewan Plan. This will include the re-opening child and youth day camps, outdoor pools and spray parks as well as outdoor sports. Our children have sacrificed a lot through this so we are very happy that our health officials believe kids can safely get back to these activities. I ask that we all continue to do our part. Please continue to physically distance, wash your hands, and self-isolate if you are feeling any symptoms of COVID-19.

Finally, I want to highlight one of the legislative changes that we will be working on. The Trudeau government has continued to change gun ownership rules by stealth over the past several weeks and would also like to give municipalities the option to ban handguns. Your Saskatchewan government believes we need clear rules, not a patchwork of regulations across the country, especially regulations that do not actually address crime and instead needlessly target legal gun owners. Therefore, we are amending *The Miscellaneous Municipal Statutes Amendment Act* to clarify that banning firearms does not fall under municipal jurisdiction. We have received support from many municipal leaders across the province on making this clarification and I thank them for their support. We will keep working to focus on criminals instead of further restricting legitimate firearm owners.