



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, March 22, 2018

Day 9

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Fourth Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP),
Alberta Party Opposition House Leader
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawthorn (NDP)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
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Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (NDP)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (AP)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (UCP),
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)
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Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
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Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Conklin
Vacant, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 25 Alberta Party: 3 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, March 22, 2018

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

Let each of us reflect or pray and take the time to understand and prioritize our duties in order that we can properly fulfill the requests of our constituents and indeed all Albertans who count on our dedication, our service. Let us listen. Let us try to understand before being understood.

Please be seated.

Privilege

Misleading the House

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, as I indicated yesterday in the House, I intend to rule on the purported question of privilege raised by the Official Opposition House Leader on Tuesday, March 20, 2018.

With respect to the formalities of the purported question of privilege my office received notice from the Official Opposition House Leader on March 20, 2018, at 11:12 a.m. of his intention to raise a question of privilege under Standing Order 15. The member has satisfied the requirement in Standing Order 15(2) for notice to be given to the Speaker at least two hours before the opening of the sitting. The notice did not, however, contain many specifics, and in the future I would respectfully request members to include more details of their question of privilege in the written notice. By doing so, we might well be more efficient in the utilization of this Assembly's valuable time. I would note that the debate on this matter occurred on March 20 and 21, and the arguments can be found on pages 259-261 and pages 293-294 of *Alberta Hansard* for those dates respectively.

As to the facts of the matter before us today, the Official Opposition's purported question of privilege has to do with an alleged deliberately misleading statement that the Minister of Environment and Parks made on March 19, 2018, in the Assembly. Specifically, in a question period exchange the Official Opposition House Leader asked whether the Minister of Environment and Parks will "come and talk to the people of Rocky Mountain House and Sundre about the future of the Bighorn." The Minister of Environment and Parks responded to the question that "I met with the mayor of Rocky Mountain House a couple of weeks ago and discussed the economic development and tourism opportunities that are available through the regional advisory council's advice." This exchange can be found on page 197 of the March 19, 2018, edition of *Alberta Hansard*.

Hon. members, this is not the first time during the 29th Legislature that a purported question of privilege concerning an allegation of deliberately misleading the Assembly has been raised. I ruled on a similar matter on December 12, 2016. As members may recall, a question of privilege raising these types of allegations is a very serious matter. Such a question purports that a member has made a statement to deliberately mislead the Assembly and, as such, is treated as a possible contempt of the Assembly.

One authority treating these matters as possible contempts is *Erskine May's Treatise on The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 24th edition, as discussed on page 254. Another is the third edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* on page 85.

The second aspect to note regarding purported contempts of this nature is that there is a test for deliberately misleading the Assembly. This three-part test was referenced on Tuesday in the Official Opposition House Leader's arguments which are available on page 260 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

The test was devised by the former Clerk of the New Zealand House of Assembly, David McGee. An explanation of it can be found in the third edition of his book, *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*, on pages 653 to 654. Quoting McGee, there are three elements to be established when it is alleged that a member is in contempt by reason of a statement that the member has made: the statement must in fact have been misleading, it must be established that the member making this statement knew at the time that the statement was made that it was incorrect, and in making it, the member must have intended to mislead the House.

Hon. members, as I noted in my ruling of December 12, 2016, which may be found on pages 2508 to 2509 in *Alberta Hansard*, I would like to point out that the three-part test is very difficult to meet. In his arguments on Tuesday the Official Opposition House Leader stated that the Minister of Environment and Parks did not, as she had stated, meet with the mayor of Rocky Mountain House. Instead, he alleged that the minister encountered the mayor in passing in a hospitality suite in Edmonton. He further claimed that this did not constitute a formal meeting, and as such the remarks of the minister "showed contempt for this Assembly because she chose to answer a question by referring to a meeting that did not take place, thereby misleading this Assembly." These comments can be found on page 260 of the March 20 edition of *Alberta Hansard*.

The Government House Leader in his submissions noted that he was advised that the Minister of Environment and Parks met with the mayor of Rocky Mountain House for about 10 minutes at an event coinciding with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change conference in Edmonton. He further claimed that there is no dispute as to whether a discussion between the two individuals took place. Rather, there is a difference of opinion as to whether or not this encounter between the minister and the mayor was indeed a meeting. He argued that: "There may be legitimate differences of opinion as to whether this meeting or nonmeeting was sufficient consultation on the matter being discussed. Those are legitimate differences of opinion, but they do not constitute a contempt of the House." You may find those arguments and the various authorities and precedents that the Government House Leader referenced on pages 293 and 294 of yesterday's *Alberta Hansard*.

Considering the facts of this situation and applying the McGee test to the matter at hand, it would be very difficult to conclude that the minister's statement about a meeting was in fact deliberately misleading. The minister claimed that she met with the mayor of Rocky Mountain House while the Official Opposition House Leader stated that although the minister and the mayor did encounter each other, they did not in fact have a meeting regarding economic development as the minister indicated in her response.

9:10

This situation is similar to the one facing Speaker Kowalski on November 24, 2003. In that instance Speaker Kowalski concluded that the then Minister of Infrastructure's response left "considerable room for subjective interpretation and ambiguity." Speaker Kowalski relied upon a reference that is now found on page 516 of the third edition *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in . . . response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue. As such, these matters are more a

question of debate and do not constitute a breach of the rules or of privilege.

Members may find Speaker Kowalski's ruling on pages 1803 and 1804 of *Alberta Hansard* for November 24, 2003.

Paragraph 494 on page 151 of *Beauchesne* holds that "it has been formerly ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted."

Hon. members, the matter before the Assembly today also involves a disagreement among members as to the facts. The question of what an interaction must be in order to qualify as a meeting is subjective. It's not a matter for the Speaker to adjudicate. Accordingly, because this is simply a disagreement as to the facts, I find there is no prima facie question of privilege, and this concludes the matter.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2 Growth and Diversification Act

[Adjourned debate March 21: Mr. Gotfried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Good morning, hon. members.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 2, Growth and Diversification Act. Here we go again. We have come full circle on AITC, the Alberta investor tax credit, and CITC, capital investment tax credit. Now we also have an interactive digital media tax credit, IDMTC. Too many acronyms.

This new tax credit would provide a 25 per cent tax credit on eligible salaries and wages with an additional credit being available for companies who hire employees from underrepresented groups. Wow. Maybe my East Indian friends living in Silicon Valley, who are facing H-1B visa issues in the U.S.A., might move to Alberta, Madam Speaker. I wish so. Currently there are roughly 50 interactive digital media studios in Alberta, with approximately 500 full-time employees. These employees earn over \$70,000 per year on average, and the industry contributes roughly \$80 million to Alberta's annual GDP.

Madam Speaker, I do question the wisdom of targeting this sector. If Alberta is lagging behind B.C. and Quebec in terms of developing our digital media sectors because we have not previously had a tax credit, how are we going to catch up if we implement a similar program and are already so far behind? Overall on tax credits other provinces such as B.C., Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia have found success with some version of a small-business venture capital tax credit. Tax credits can be good stimulus, too, if they are not too onerous on the red tape. According to the government the CITC has already stimulated more than \$1 billion in capital projects for manufacturing, processing, and tourism infrastructure.

With respect to the AITC it remains a first-come, first-served funding pool. As of March 16, 2018, there was still \$1.397 million approximately in unallocated money, roughly 5 per cent of the total initial amount, Madam Speaker. We know that AITC was supposed to be \$90 million over two years and that it was later changed to

three years and that now it offers a 20 per cent tax credit to investors. According to the minister last year at estimates:

For the AITC as of March 31 of 2017 there were 126 eligible business corporations, two venture capital corporations. By sector 87 per cent were research, development, and commercialization of proprietary technology and products and processes.

I would like to get a formal update on those numbers one year later.

The Minister of Economic Development and Trade further went on to say last year:

I do need to say that we don't release the names of the companies that are receiving these funds. They're not posted.

That's on page EF-666, Alberta's Economic Future, April 10, 2017, in *Hansard*, Madam Speaker.

But just one month ago, on February 21, 2018, the same minister put out a press release.

Tax Credits Spurs Growth in Northern Alberta.

Alberta's north will see new jobs and business expansion with support from the Capital Investment Tax Credit (CITC) . . .

Seven Generations Energy, a liquids-rich natural gas developer, received conditional approval of a \$5-million tax credit to build a natural gas processing facility in the Montney Kakwa River area. The project will create about 150 construction jobs and dozens of direct permanent jobs once operational.

The minister went back on his words here, Madam Speaker. He said before that he cannot release the names, but then he did a campaign-style announcement on the same subject which he said is supposed to be confidential. The minister went back on his word here, and he ran a press release announcing who got the tax credit. He went on in the press release – I want to quote this.

New projects include building a cannabis manufacturing and processing facility, a skydiving facility, a craft brewery and tap room, a biofuel facility and a glass factory. Expansion projects include upgrades at a precision machining shop, a trailer manufacturer, a metal manufacturing plant and pulp mills.

In small communities people know who these businesses are, Madam Speaker. The minister was not going to reveal who got the money, but now he has. He wouldn't tell me or the public a year ago, but now he is telling everyone. So Albertans suspect that the NDP minister is picking winners and losers. Why not give industry the opportunity to come before the Legislature themselves and tell us why this wonderful Bill 2 and the AITC and CITC are so important to them?

9:20

In that light, Madam Speaker, I would like to move an amendment. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 2, Growth and Diversification Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 2, Growth and Diversification Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

I have the requisite copies, that I'm passing on to the page. I'll wait for you to call me to speak again.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. If you could just wait until I have a copy of the amendment.

Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as RA1. Please continue.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The reason I am moving this amendment is that in parliaments around the world bills get referred to committees all the time. I should know that because when I went to the Mother of Parliaments in London, U.K., that's what I learned about.

If the grants are so important to the recipients, we should let them come here and tell us why the programs the ministry is expanding are essential to grow the economy and the future of Alberta. Coming to the committee will allow the members to ask important questions of the department on the bill, questions like: why wasn't recommendation 7.4 of the Energy Diversification Advisory Committee included in Bill 2? That particular recommendation, 7.4, reads, "Seek the permanent extension of the existing accelerated capital cost allowance for manufacturers such as the petrochemical industry to provide certainty to those interested in investing in the downstream."

Madam Speaker, as you know, the United States is going to eat our lunch on this particular business. The Trump budget cut allows an accelerated capital cost allowance, and some say it is more powerful than a corporate tax cut. So there is merit in referring this to the standing committee.

Not very long ago in this House, actually this week, the Member for Lethbridge-East spoke. I'm just looking at the *Hansard* from March 19. The member said:

Clearly, there is a good case to be made that we need to take a closer look at changing the standing orders to allow for further committee-initiated reviews. I would note that there is a standing committee of the Legislature, that being the Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing Committee, whose mandate is expressly to review proposed standing orders. I believe that that committee is the appropriate venue for the discussion of this proposal to take place.

For that reason, I have an amendment that I would like to put forward.

That's how that particular Motion 501 was referred to a standing committee, Madam Speaker. If that argument was true two days ago, it's still true now, today, and tomorrow.

This particular bill that we are talking about, Bill 2 – there was a lot of talk in the throne speech. If this government truly believes that it's an important bill, we have to actually strengthen the bill. That's why I moved this amendment.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to the debate on this amendment, and I also look forward to the discussion in the committee.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? Oh, 29(2)(a) first. Sorry.

Now is there anybody wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak, of course, against this amendment. You know, it's important that the government get on with the agenda of managing the affairs of the province, and, of course, sending this bill to committee would certainly interfere with that.

You know, it's interesting that the member opposite for Calgary-Foothills implies that sending this bill to committee will in fact enhance the work of this Legislature. But it's interesting that when his leader, his current leader, was a cabinet minister in Ottawa, he and the Harper government, of course, wrote a 200-page manual on how to use committees to obstruct the work of the House of Commons. I don't know if the members opposite, of course, have a similar document available to them now. I would anticipate that many of them probably wouldn't have the attention span to read a 200-page document.

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Madam Speaker. I'm sorry to have to call this.

The Acting Speaker: Point of order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Point of Order

Language Creating Disorder

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Madam Speaker, under 23(h), (i), and (j). I appreciate that the hon. minister considers himself a comedian, but the fact is that insulting the intelligence of other members of the House, I think, really falls directly under words that would disrupt the order in the House, "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member," and I think it pretty much qualifies as "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I would respectfully ask you to insist that the minister withdraw those remarks.

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Yes, Madam Speaker. I've been feeling a little feisty this week, and I realize that I perhaps got a little too excited in my previous comments. I withdraw and apologize to the members opposite. However . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, thank you. Just a reminder. Today's a great day; it's budget day. So if we could just keep the tone of the House down and have a respectful debate, that would be appreciated. Please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: Madam Speaker, my point stands, though, that the work of diversifying the economy of Alberta is urgent. You know, later this afternoon we're going to hear the Minister of Finance deliver the budget speech. We're all eagerly anticipating that. In that speech I'm certain that the Minister of Finance will probably talk about the importance of building an economic recovery that will last, an economic recovery that serves the needs of working people.

We've been through the worst economic downturn in a generation, and we know that things are starting to look up. We've created 90,000 new jobs, and every economic indicator that can go up is up, Madam Speaker. But we also know that there's more work to do, that not everybody in Alberta is feeling the positive effects of this economic recovery. That's what this bill is intended to do. That's why I think it's not wise to refer this bill to committee, because there are thousands and thousands of people out there in Alberta who are still not feeling the effects of the economic recovery. It's important that the government get on with building a recovery that will last, that brings up everybody, all regular Albertans. We cannot afford to spend time in committee deliberating whether or not the proposals brought forward here will be good for the people of Alberta because we know that it'll be good for the people of Alberta. The people of Alberta can't wait for this Legislature to continue its deliberations. The people of Alberta want this government to take action, and that's what we're doing by bringing forward this bill. So I encourage all of our members to vote down this amendment to refer this bill to committee.

I want to go on, Madam Speaker, if I can for a moment, to just outline some of the points of this bill that require this Legislature to deal with this urgently so we can get on with building an economic recovery that's built to last.

9:30

One of the first things that the member opposite noted is that we provide supports for a digital media tax credit similar to Quebec. Quebec, of course, has a burgeoning video game industry. Now, Madam Speaker, this may come as a surprise to you. I know that I don't look like the kind of person who would play video games, but

I do. I have been an enthusiastic player of video games ever since the age of four or five, and I know that the Member for Edmonton-Decore is also an eager video game player.

A number of the video games, of course, that I've enjoyed over the previous few years have been built right here in Edmonton by a studio that many are familiar with called BioWare. BioWare, of course, has created a number of video games that have been tremendously popular and tremendously fun to play. I have spent many hours playing *Dragon Age: Origins*, which was a tremendous video game. I spent many, many, many hours playing the *Mass Effect* trilogy, Madam Speaker, and I just want to put it on record that I thought the ending of *Mass Effect 3* was just fine.

Madam Speaker, just to go a little bit deeper into the catalogue of BioWare games, people who have been playing video games for a while will remember, of course, that BioWare also created the *Knights of the Old Republic* series of video games, which were a classic and probably the best *Star Wars* video games that have ever been made. No *Star Wars* game since has really come close to capturing the essence of the *Star Wars* universe quite like the *Knights of the Old Republic* video games. But my personal favourite BioWare game was one that didn't receive a lot of commercial success. It was a video game called *Jade Empire*. It was created for the Xbox, and it was really BioWare's take on a kung fu movie.

I see, Madam Speaker, that you are eagerly anticipating me to speak to the amendment. Trust me; I will get there. Let me just say that *Jade Empire*, of course, came out in 2004, I believe. It's been 14 years. I'm still eagerly anticipating a sequel. Maybe this digital media tax credit will spur the people of BioWare on to create that sequel. I can only hope because that was, of course, by far my favourite BioWare video game, and I've been waiting for the sequel for a number of years.

But the digital media tax credit is not the only piece of this legislation that must be passed urgently so that we can continue to build an economic recovery that is built to last. You know, this act includes a number of proposed changes that directly impact the postsecondary system in our province in a very exciting and positive way. This legislation includes supports for 3,000 new tech spaces in Alberta's postsecondary system that will increase educational access for learners across our province. Our goal is to spread the 3,000 new spaces to a number of institutions from across the province, meaning that this program will support accessibility and educational growth in urban and rural areas.

Madam Speaker, it's our intent to fund 200 of these spaces during the upcoming 2018-2019 academic year if this bill passes the Legislature. That's one of the reasons that I urge our members to vote down this amendment to send it to committee, because time is of the essence. We need to do the work of identifying the 200 spaces that will be created for the upcoming 2018-2019 academic year. Of course, we know that committees don't work quickly enough to get this work done so that these spaces will be in place for the 2018-2019 academic year.

In addition to those 200 spaces for the next academic year, an additional 550 spaces will be made available in the 2019-2020 school year, with 750 spaces being added each of the following three years, meaning that by 2022-23 all 3,000 new tech spaces will be available to students in Alberta. This bolsters our existing strong programming in the tech sector currently being offered by our province's postsecondary institutions.

When the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and I made this announcement at NAIT, Erin Wilson, a recent graduate of the NAIT instrumentation technology program, who is currently at NAIT training for the mechatronic skills competition, said: I

believe it's very important for students to have access to a diverse range of programs to build and update their skills; this program will create more opportunities for students like me to train and grow and hopefully improve the economy.

We've also heard from industries across the province, and we know that access to a highly skilled talent pool is one of the determining factors that high tech firms consider before making investment decisions. Zachary Fritze, the CEO of Promethean Labs, said at this same announcement: new technology brings global opportunities closer together, and they affect every sector of our economy; Promethean Labs uses satellite imagery to help agricultural companies be more efficient; here from our head offices in Edmonton we bring our technology to the world; we need to support students locally to help prepare for the incredible job opportunities in tech in Alberta, right here; that will help us ensure that our province continues to be a global leader today and tomorrow.

Madam Speaker, we also made a similar announcement in Calgary, and at that announcement Mary Moran, the CEO of Calgary Economic Development corporation, said: this proposed expansion of tech spaces at postsecondary institutions is fantastic; I'm very impressed on how quickly the government moved on this. I want to emphasize that. She said: I'm very impressed on how quickly the government moved on this.

Of course, this referral amendment that the Member for Calgary-Foothills has made would severely disappoint Ms Moran and the Calgary Economic Development corporation and prove that perhaps government isn't as nimble as the people of Alberta would like it to be. I don't understand why the Member for Calgary-Foothills insists on bogging down the work of the Legislature by sending everything to committee.

But anyway, Ms Moran went on to say: Calgary Economic Development corporation was very vocal about the gap that Alberta has in the tech talent post-Amazon; we want to help them in conjunction with postsecondaries, and they've done a great job of responding; this is needed both short- and long-term; they're taking long-term vision in how they can adjust the economy; we are really behind the eight ball in high tech; in terms of software engineers we're behind the rest of the country; we have to get caught up because we are a centre for industries, whether it's energy, transportation or logistics or agriculture, and we don't have the talent to support the digitization of these industries; Alberta's assets in terms of ensuring that tech graduates stay here are our quality of life, our high cost of living, Rocky Mountain playground; safe communities are a big lure for people that want to work here.

I'm sure that she meant to say "our low cost of living," Madam Speaker. Vancouver and Toronto are having difficulty retaining people because housing is too expensive, commutes are tough, housing is tough.

We're committed to technology and digitization of our sectors and showing talent that this is a destination. This won't happen overnight, but it will happen. That will happen, Madam Speaker, unless this Legislature decides to send this to committee and delay the passage of this bill and make Albertans continue to wait for tech talent that we could have right now instead of dithering about this in committee. The Growth and Diversification Act will take unprecedented steps to increase our existing talent pool so that our province can support local start-ups and established tech giants. We know that additional spaces are needed to keep pace with the demands of the new economic reality, and we know that our postsecondary graduates are highly skilled and coveted by businesses across North America. So this bill would be a win for students, a win for industry, and a win for our provincial economic future.

9:40

To ensure that our graduates are entering the workforce as quickly as possible, the initial 200 spaces may potentially be supplemented by the delivery of a number of short-term skill development opportunities. Potential areas in which short-term skill training may occur include 3-D modelling, new media design, predictive analytics, and industrial network cybersecurity. If implemented, these skill development programs could help Albertans, particularly those with existing credentials, to acquire tech-related skills to aid in the transition to permanent employment.

Additional programs could be developed in areas such as information and communication technologies, clean and renewable technology, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing. In addition to increasing access to tech programming, we will also be adding supports to ensure that education remains affordable. New scholarships will be created by this legislation to encourage students to join the high-tech workforce that will sustain our province's economy now and in the future.

Together with the advice of our government partners, including Indigenous Relations, Status of Women, Community and Social Services, we will work to ensure that underrepresented groups, including women, have access to exciting, future-focused career training. A portion of these new scholarships will be focused on women interested in entering tech-related training programs. As with the 3,000 additional spaces, the scholarships will be rolled out over a five-year period.

Madam Speaker, again, providing these urgent and desperately needed financial supports for our students just highlights the urgent nature of this bill and reinforces the fact that we shouldn't vote to send this to committee, that we should deal with this legislation right here today in the Legislature.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?
The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. The minister's speech was interesting. Time is of the essence, he said. Time is of the essence to ensure various things. More particularly, the message I heard loud and clear from the minister was: future creations of video games coming right out of here in Edmonton so that he can play them. That's loud and clear the message.

But I really heard, Madam Speaker, and what I'd like, probably, some further clarification on is his comment: time is of the essence. There's no time to study this. There's no time to bring in witnesses and ask what they think or give suggestions on perhaps how to strengthen this piece of legislation.

But time is not of the essence for this minister and his government when it comes to firefighter leave. Time is not of the essence when it comes to supporting a motion to do more than one thing in committee, which he also touched on, saying that committees already have lots of stuff on the go. It's interesting, Madam Speaker, that this government doesn't support being expedient in any other area other than things on their own agenda, and it's disturbing that they don't appreciate that there are constituents in constituencies other than their own that would like to have a say, that would like to have an impact on the legislation that will be imposed on them by this government. This government continually barrels through with their ideological agenda without consultation.

They consistently get in trouble from the public over these matters, like Bill 6. With Bill 6 having been one of the first pieces of legislation that really got them into trouble in regard to consultation, you would think that this government would have learned a lesson, Madam Speaker. That's clearly not what's

happened on bills 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, prorogued back one, two, three, four and so on and so forth. That's clearly what's happening here with Bill 2, the Growth and Diversification Act, that is meant to in essence encourage other sectors to invest and participate in the Alberta economy, probably because one of our major industries has been so poorly damaged by this NDP government's policies.

I commend efforts to diversify, Madam Speaker. That's not what this is about. This is about the Minister of Advanced Education specifically citing that time is of the essence. He refused to support an amendment to refer this bill to committee for future study but, on the other hand, won't support a motion to actually make committees more expedient. It's, like, I think, to the average person not going to make sense. It doesn't make sense.

Furthermore, they're not interested in being expedient in assisting firefighters in our province, especially the volunteer ones, guys that put their lives in their own hands to help out their communities very cheaply.

Madam Speaker, time is of the essence. Time is of the essence to remove this government. Time is of the essence to bring back investment to Alberta without government handouts. Time is of the essence to refer this bill to committee and have it properly studied. I want to hear from the NDP's friends as to how much this bill is needed. Who's going to benefit and why from this piece of legislation? What is the impact on Alberta families of this piece of legislation? That's what I want to hear.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and speak in favour of this referral motion. I rise to speak to my colleague's referral motion on Bill 2, the Growth and Diversification Act. This bill is yet another example of the classic NDP world view and misguided economic philosophies that we've seen for many years now. This government and their ideological allies believe that every problem arising in economics and society can be solved with the meddling hands of government.

Madam Speaker, I can tell you that I support growth and I support diversification, but I'm not sure that this bill will effectively promote either. For the almost three years that we've seen this government in action, what we've seen is the exact opposite of what this bill claims to promote. What does promote growth? I would argue that it's lower taxes, less regulation, and a government which doesn't treat wealth-creating private enterprise like the enemy. How about diversification? I would posit that diversification will only come when innovators and entrepreneurs have access to capital.

It is well apparent that much of what this government has done, in fact, has sent both domestic and international investors fleeing for other jurisdictions. In fact, Madam Speaker, \$36 billion in the first two years has fled this province according to the Conference Board of Canada. With Alberta business reeling from the destructive policies of the NDP, what have they decided to do? Grace us with yet another government program to try and reverse some of the damage that they have caused. Are you friend or foe to Albertans if you first create the problem then seek to remedy it?

Madam Speaker, I would encourage the government, if they truly want growth and diversification, to reverse their antigrowth and antidiversification policies: scrap the carbon tax, for one; reverse their 20 per cent increase in corporate tax; and remove the shackles of regulation that they have placed on free enterprise in this province. Albertans have already suffered the consequences of NDP legislation that was not completely thought through.

Let's support this referral amendment and let the committee process try and make some improvements and get our professionals and people who understand these industries into a room to talk about what the best practices are. A fulsome vetting process would be the second-best approach. The best approach would be an economic impact study, which never seems to get done by this government.

9:50

Madam Speaker, I would also point out that this isn't the NDP's first shot at this. In 2016 they passed the Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act, and while that legislation may have its merits, it certainly hasn't performed the economic miracles that the NDP might have expected it to.

A large part of this bill rests on support for industry through tax credits. Tax credits can incent economic activity, but I would question whether they will come anywhere close to making up for the disincentives created by the NDP's other policies. Boutique tax credits have rarely ever been shown to outperform across-the-board tax reductions. I would also question the wisdom of the sector-specific credits that this bill extols. When we start handing out favours to specific people in specific industries, we start picking winners and losers. Just look to the east, to Quebec, to see what has happened with Bombardier for many, many years.

Madam Speaker, if you want diversification, you should let the market decide which areas to diversify in, not the government. Market has the best ability to be able to identify what is a growth industry and what isn't. We have a huge industry, we have a huge economy, especially in first-world countries, and Alberta certainly fits that model. These market forces are so difficult to predict that even people who have studied it for years have a difficult time in doing that and getting it right. If you want to use tax credits, then let's have them available to all sectors, not those that the front bench opposite us happens to grace with their favour on any particular day.

Foreseeing the potential problems with these types of tax credits doesn't require a crystal ball; it only requires time and thought. Let's take the time to consult and weigh this legislation a little more before proceeding. We can do that by referring it to committee now.

We also need to look back at the way tax credit programs have performed in Alberta in the past. Were the objectives of the past legislation met? Did the relief get to those who needed it the most? What kind of returns did we see? Before we utilize the power of government, we should see if these industries can attract private capital and succeed on their own. There was a day not too long ago in this province when the Alberta advantage gave our companies a leg up against those in other jurisdictions. I hope, along with Albertans, that this government hasn't completely removed that unique support.

Some other points that I'd like to point out, Madam Speaker, are that the AITC is a first-come, first-served funding pool. As of March 16, 2018, there was still almost \$1.4 million of unallocated money left in there, roughly 5 per cent of the total amount. Because the budget has not been released, the total funding being committed to the IDMTC has not been reported, so we need to give this time to be able to actually find out from that budget what that report will say. If Alberta is lagging behind B.C. and Quebec in terms of developing our capital media sectors because we have not previously had a tax credit, how are we going to catch up if we implement a similar program and are already so far behind?

One thing that we found that this government has a lot of support for is these superclusters. The federal government is also in support of these superclusters. What they've realized is that there are certain areas that have their natural advantages over other areas. Like, for instance, in my riding Taber has actually been granted one of the

superclusters' funding for that area to be able to do a beta test for a supercluster. Anyways, we have a lot of high-heat units down in that area, and it's a natural fit for being able to have this supercluster down there. The problem, Madam Speaker, is that if you were to try to apply that to, say, Fort McMurray, they don't have the heat units up there, obviously, and it just wouldn't work. What we've seen is that certain areas have their natural advantages, so it makes sense for those areas to start growing and diversifying in those areas.

However, for us to say "Quebec is doing it" or "B.C. is doing it" is not really a fulsome way of looking at the whole picture of this because it doesn't really indicate whether or not we have the natural ability to be able to compete with Quebec or B.C. Just because other provinces offer these incentives doesn't mean that we have to. Alberta has a history of success in taking our own approach to the economy.

I think that rather than saying that we don't like that approach – and I've heard the members opposite say that we've messed up for 44 years. I would have to say that a lot of them have moved to this province because of the opportunities that they were given, and for them to say that is completely disingenuous, Madam Speaker. I hope that just because something is being done in another jurisdiction doesn't mean that we have to follow suit and do it here. We might be behind the eight ball on that. That doesn't mean that we have to keep on doing it.

I think that Albertans are a little concerned about how disingenuous the NDP sound when they only send opposition motions and bills to committee and refuse to do their own.

I think it was a little telling when I heard the Minister of Advanced Education just minutes ago say, Madam Speaker, and I quote: we know this bill will be good for all Albertans. Now, the question that I have. I don't know what crystal ball the Minister of Advanced Education has, but we constantly ask: have you done an economic impact study? What we are constantly told is: no, we have not.

I had an opportunity to speak to the Minister of Labour a couple of times, talk about this exact issue. One of the things that she said to me that also I found very interesting was: we have not done an economic impact study, but we will assess as we go. Those were her words. The problem is, Madam Speaker, that the value of an economic impact study is that it provides us with an opportunity to be able to figure out: what are the pros and what are the cons of any piece of legislation that is brought forward that will be binding on Albertans and binding on our wealth creators and entrepreneurs in this province? You know, unfortunately, I don't understand why this government has not implemented that very important tool, an economic impact study. They have refused to do that.

Because of that, some of the things that I've heard people around Alberta say in describing this government are: a government of unintended consequences. Look, I'm not trying to be rude. I'm just telling you what I've heard people say, and this is not an attempt on my part to be glib in any way. But I think we need to take a look at what people are saying, especially if you're in the government right now. You need to say: "Okay. Well, why are they saying that? Why are they saying that this is a government of unintended consequences?"

I think the reason why is because when you have a policy come forward – when I talked to the Minister of Labour about this issue of minimum wage and she was set, dead set, on making sure we get to \$15 minimum wage, I asked her. I said: have you done an economic impact study? She said: no; we're going to assess as we go. I gave her the studies, Madam Speaker, about other jurisdictions that have actually increased minimum wage quickly, and the studies are pretty clear that for every 10 per cent you increase the minimum

wage, you actually increase unemployment anywhere between 4 to 8 per cent amongst young people. The studies are actually – look, these are not studies where people just say: you know, this is what I think is going to happen. This is actually looking back on what they've done.

So how do we know whether or not it's a good policy or a bad policy? Well, we can now look back and take a look at what's happened. We are now sitting at 13.1 per cent unemployment rate amongst young people in this province. At what point are we going to be in a situation where this government says, "Enough is enough; we need to stop punishing our young people"? The reason why I point this out is because right now we're speaking, Madam Speaker, about taking this legislation, sending it to committee, properly vetting it, and hoping to be able to get the proper iteration that would be good for all Albertans.

10:00

Now, when the minister, I believe with good intentions, said that he believes – no, he didn't say that he believes. He said: we know this bill will be good for all Albertans. I believe he thinks that. I believe that he actually believes that. The problem is that he doesn't know, and unless he actually did and their government actually did an economic impact study, Madam Speaker, I don't know how they would know. Even an economic impact study will only give you the best direction going forward. I have to say that I am deeply concerned – deeply concerned – that this government refuses to do economic impact studies. They refuse to consult in a proper, fulsome way with the people who are in the industries, that have been there for 10, 20, 30, 40 years in these industries, that know best, rather than actually saying that they know best.

There's a level of arrogance when people say, "We know best," rather than saying: "We need to ask the people of Alberta. We need to ask the people in these industries. We need to ask the people who are in the trenches." Once we do that, we can get a great discussion. We can have a great opportunity to be able to figure out, really, what will be best for Albertans.

I have no doubt that, you know, if the NDP were graded by intentions, they would get A's. I don't have any doubt that they have the best of intentions. But, Madam Speaker, this government is not being graded on their intentions; they're being graded on the outcomes. They're being graded on how well they do for Albertans. To tell you the truth, the evidence is not looking so good for them at this point.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I really appreciate my colleague reasoning very reasonably with the government benches here to support this motion. I really appreciate that. He has very, very, very valid points about the big picture, so he's not just looking at this bill, but he also said how we can actually help Albertans to get back to work. He said that he did some work with the Labour minister and gave them input on the impact of minimum wage policy and other labour policy amendments. I really appreciate that.

Now, I would like to ask him to also talk about the hesitancy on the side of the NDP here, why they can't support this referral motion and how they can justify the referral of Bill 201. If you can share your thoughts on that, I would appreciate it.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate my colleague for the question. I think it's a very important question because it strikes at the heart of the issue here, and that is that, unfortunately, we've seen for almost three years now with this government a propensity to believe that they are right when it comes to reshaping Alberta. You know, we've heard it many times where they believe that there has been a real travesty that's happened in Alberta for the last 44 years and that it's their responsibility to set things straight. Now, I appreciate that they may think that and believe that. I would even be willing to accept it if the outcomes showed it. So far, though, all we've seen in the last three years is a fleeing from this province of foreign investment.

Remember, Madam Speaker, that when they talk about how, you know, we did so bad or so wrong in this province during the '90s, there was a 10-year period, actually, during the '90s – I think it started around '93 – where there was more foreign investment that came into Alberta than Ontario and Quebec combined. Because of that what happened was the trickle-down effect. That foreign investment that came in: we had small businesses that were able to start because of that. We had more jobs, obviously, because of that. We had almost the size of Lethbridge moving into this province every year. That kind of growth is a good thing. And you know what? To tell you the truth, this has been a great blessing to me and my family and something that I'm very grateful for. We used to call that the Alberta advantage.

Madam Speaker, I have to say that their approach to reshaping Alberta and saying that Alberta had it wrong for the last 44 years: I don't see the evidence to show that. I see instead people from all over Canada and all over the world coming here because of the many opportunities that Alberta provided for them. To change that and to say, "We know a better approach," I'd like to know: what is the evidence? Where is the example in other jurisdictions that you're pulling that from? If it's, you know, coming from Bernie Sanders's ideas, I don't think that's going to work because he hasn't proved it can work.

Wherever they are bringing their ideas from, I think that they need to bring forward the evidence. If it's corporate welfare, we've tried that in this province. It cost us \$2.4 billion in the past, Albertans' taxpayer dollars going down the drain. That's money we had to pay back. It was difficult for us to do that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Yes, I do rise to speak to the referral amendment. I'm going to speak against referring this particular bill because while I don't think it's perfect, I think that it's important that we get on with it and ensure that we don't send the wrong signal to investors who would seek to create jobs in our province, who would seek to make investments in our province. I think that even the government would acknowledge it's been a very difficult time when it comes to attracting investment capital in this province. I think they bear some pretty clear responsibility for creating uncertainty, for putting roadblocks in the way of investment, for all the changes big and small that have driven capital out of Alberta. Those are true things that have happened. At the same time, I think that, broadly speaking, the provisions that are contained within Bill 2 are to be lauded, and I think that the investor tax credit, in particular, is one that deserves an opportunity to go ahead and to continue to evolve as this bill does.

Again, we in the Alberta Party caucus do have some concerns, which we will raise through the course of debate. We may bring

some amendments once we find ourselves in committee. But as it stands now, I think we would rather see this bill move forward and move into the committee phase, and we can have a more detailed discussion on specific clauses and aspects of the bill at that time.

I think what the minister had talked about is worth noting. When you have feedback from organizations like Calgary Economic Development that are in support of these sorts of initiatives, when you have Amazon not choosing Alberta primarily because we did not have enough tech talent in this province, I think it's a wake-up call. I think it's sobering. I think we all feel very strongly about what our province has to offer in terms of quality of life, in terms of cost of living, and in terms of the talented people who we have in this province.

Unfortunately, the talented people that we have are not the right sort of talent. We have a lot of engineers, and I hope that we continue to have a lot of engineers. I think we need to grow that number and improve our focus on the STEM areas. This bill has provisions that, I think, if done properly, will help us get there.

10:10

I do have concerns about the timeliness of some of these things, in particular the 3,000 new technical training spaces. If we're to play this forward, what I see from the bill is that of the 3,000 seats we'll have 200 new ones in the first year, 550 in year '19-20, and then 750 new seats over the next three years. Now, I realize we can't just flick a switch, create new seats, and have 3,000 software engineers roaming the streets of Edmonton, Calgary, and rural Alberta within a couple of years. However, I do question the timing, and I do think that there should be a sense of urgency here, especially because this is not creating new seats in new programs in every case; it's simply adding seats to existing programs in many cases.

I think there is a real opportunity and, frankly, a missed opportunity here for the minister and for the government to move more quickly to create new seats in the shorter term. Of course, once you've created that training spot, the students still need to complete the training. They then need to get working, and they need to gain some experience. I think that when Amazon is talking about hiring 50,000 software engineers and related professionals – and we're far short in terms of our numbers – realistically, this plan would have us not get there for another decade. I think that when we're talking about referring it to committee and slowing things down, as the UCP would do, frankly, we need to go the other way. I think we need to move more quickly, and we need to find our way to creating the right sorts of skill sets and doing that in very short order, Madam Speaker.

As we talk specifically about the CITC and the AITC, the capital investment tax credit and the Alberta investor tax credit, what I'd like to see from the minister – perhaps we can hear it through debate at some point – is some report on what we learned from evaluating the first iteration of this, not just pure numbers in terms of how many dollars have gone out the door but which jobs have been created, what kind of return have those companies generated, what sorts of companies have in fact produced jobs as a result of these tax credits. Now, I recognize that it's a year and that except in rare circumstances we're not going to see massive returns in short order, but I would think that that would be something that the ministry is doing. I imagine it is something they're doing; if they're not, they certainly should be. But that's something I think they should be bringing before the Legislature.

On the interactive digital media tax credit, again, it's something that I think is interesting if Alberta wants to be in this sector. One of the questions I have is about the definition under section 1(d) of

an interactive digital media product. What I'm curious about is whether that definition of an interactive digital media product,

(iii) is capable of presenting information in at least 2 of the following forms:

- (A) text;
- (B) sound;
- (C) images,

includes services. Are we only talking about software products, or are we talking about services, things like Facebook or Netflix? Would this help nascent companies, which could turn into the next Facebook or Netflix? Would it help those sorts of companies? Again, those are questions that I hope to see answers to as we move forward, and I hope we'll move quickly as we go forward here.

Just another, I guess perhaps, point on the unmanned aerial systems. While I absolutely support and I think there is some real potential and some already very interesting things happening in southern Alberta with unmanned aerial systems research, much of what we are challenged by is actually not provincial jurisdiction but federal transportation jurisdiction, federal regulatory jurisdiction. What I'm actually curious about is: what problem does this bill solve that we currently have? What hindrance exists that this legislation would seek to remove? Again, I'm quite curious to hear from the minister. Do we even need this section, or is it something symbolic so that the government can trumpet the fact that they purportedly are doing something when, in fact, it may not even be necessary? We've seen some of that, you may be surprised to hear, in my opinion, here with Bill 1 as well.

Finally, as we talk about the scholarship piece, which falls under the technical training provisions, again, I'm a big, big supporter of that. What I'm surprised to see, though, is actually what's not there. There seems to be a lack of an explicit focus on women and underrepresented people in STEM programs. It's not embedded in that aspect of the legislation where we have the diversity and inclusion enhancement program, which is included in the investor tax credit and the digital media tax credit. That is something, again, that I would like to hear from the government, whether they envision including diversity provisions within the scholarship because, frankly, that's a great challenge. There is, I will say, a tremendously, deeply unfortunate and, in my view, unacceptable lack of diversity in particular within the STEM disciplines.

I'll even tell you a story. My 13-soon-to-be-14-year-old daughter was offered an opportunity to do some mentorship work, women in STEM. She actually said to my wife, who is so accomplished that she has more letters after her name than she has in her name, quite a remarkable professional woman in STEM herself: "But, Mom, there are so few women in science and math. Should I even bother going down this path?" It hit me – right? – because, boy, my daughter does take after my wife. She's very good in school, very focused, and she enjoys the STEM disciplines. That was a very sobering moment. There is such a lack of diversity. She's interested in computer programming. She's decided that she's going to teach herself Python over spring break. I'm just going to stand here and talk about my daughter. That's actually kind of fun. That's something I'm awfully proud of. She would be deeply embarrassed that I'm doing this right now, but *Hansard* is forever, so too bad, sweetie. I'm very proud of both of my girls.

As we look at expanding scholarship opportunities, I think it's very, very important that we have explicit support for women, for indigenous peoples, for minorities of all kinds, for people of lower income, for people who don't ordinarily take advantage of or participate in this, not from lack of ability but from lack of opportunity. So I think that would be something that I'd love to hear from the minister, from the government as to whether or not that has been contemplated here. If it hasn't been, I can assure you that

I'll bring forward some amendments during committee to make sure that it is

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a), the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise, of course, under 29(2)(a) to offer some comments on the previous speaker's remarks. Certainly, first of all, let me commend the Member for Calgary-Elbow for stating that he would vote against this. I appreciate very much the fact that he recognizes how important it is that we get on with the work of diversifying the economy and building a recovery that's built to last and built to work for regular Albertans and that he recognizes the importance of this legislation in accomplishing just that. He did pose some questions that I'd like to hopefully answer in my remarks, particularly around the allocation of the tech spaces.

One of the things that I didn't get the opportunity to speak to in my remarks because of the time limits is the fact that the bill will create a talent advisory committee. We will strike a panel of experts who are working in postsecondary education, in high-technology industries to provide the best advice to the government on how to allocate these programs so that by 2022-23 we will have wisely allocated the 3,000 tech spaces that we're proposing to create, so that we achieve the maximum benefit from supporting the development of high-tech industries in this province and support people who want to go back to school or go to school in the first place, I suppose, and be trained to work in this high-tech sector. I hope the creation of this talent advisory committee will of course allay some of the member's concerns about how the government will be allocating these spaces.

With respect to the creation of the scholarships, of course, as I noted in my remarks, Madam Speaker, as you'll well remember, some of the money that we are setting aside for scholarships will in fact be targeted to underrepresented groups such as women. Our government believes strongly in gender equality, of course, which is demonstrated by the fact that we have near gender equality in our caucus, a remarkable achievement in the history of Alberta electoral democracy. You know, we continue to support gender equality through a number of initiatives, and we will continue to do that work with setting aside some financial aid for women who want to pursue education and work in the STEM sectors.

10:20

You know, what I would note, what I did find interesting in the comments, which should be concerning to the people of Alberta, Madam Speaker, is that, of course, the member is supportive of the government's initiatives to create 3,000 tech spaces and scholarships that support people who want to pursue this kind of education, particularly people from backgrounds who are underrepresented in the tech spaces, but I had a quick review of the Alberta Party shadow budget, and it's interesting that the members opposite put not one additional dollar in the Advanced Education line – not one – which is remarkable. Isn't it remarkable that somebody who says that he would support the creation of 3,000 new tech spaces, who says that he would support the creation of scholarships to help people from underrepresented demographics to pursue education and work in the tech sector – that as soon as he's asked whether or not that support extends to actually spending money on creating those things, the answer is no. It's remarkable.

I'm curious to know how the member thinks that he can support the creation of 3,000 new tech spaces and \$7 million worth of scholarships if he's not going to put any money into it. You know,

I know that postsecondary institutions do the good work of educating people, but they don't do it for free, Madam Speaker. Students who want to pursue this kind of education need financial aid to pursue this kind of education, and we need the money in the budget to do this.

Of course, we've announced through Bill 2 that we will put money in the budget, and I would encourage the member opposite to actually put his money where his mouth is and develop a shadow budget that shows financially his support for these positions.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Speaker's Ruling

Question-and-Comment Period

The Acting Speaker: I just want to remind all members of the House, before we move on, around 29(2)(a). It is comments and questions, but as you all know from past rulings, typically you leave time for the person to be able to respond to the questions. So I would just encourage all of you as you are speaking under 29(2)(a) that if you are asking and commenting towards the speaker, you stay relevant to what they have spoken about and as well give them time to respond to whatever it is that you are commenting on.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Debate Continued

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to speak to Bill 2, Growth and Diversification Act, which I believe should be referred to committee to be looked at further to possibly conduct an economic study and look at the repercussions of this bill. I think we all agree on both sides of the House that the economy is not doing very well and that this Growth and Diversification Act is an attempt by the government to stimulate the economy and get Albertans working again. I do believe that this government's heart is in the right place and that they want to see Albertans succeed, and while they may be trying to accomplish that through bills and regulations and through using corrective measures, much more work needs to be done. There's a huge concern across the province regarding employment, and while these measures may be good ones, we also know that many Albertans have given up looking for work while some others, who may have been fortunate enough to have found a job, are working for less money than they've previously earned.

This bill does not seek to address the current and future labour shortages in the tech sector, one that is near and dear to my heart. I worked in the IT industry for well over 30 years. I was afforded a comfortable living because of the industry. I got a chance to advance my education, I worked in other countries, and it provided me the opportunity to travel and, moreover, to build a business and build shareholder value for my investors and, of course, to create employment for several Albertans.

Part of the bill seeks to increase job activity in digital media production. While I'm all for investing in the future of the province, there has to be a balance created first. Creating sector-specific tax credits is all fine and dandy, but when there are other policies that have been implemented to hurt businesses in Alberta, we have to wonder why those policies aren't being looked at first. While this bill shows the government's goodwill, the truth of the matter is that we need to work towards getting back the Alberta advantage. However, as the government looks at implementing Bill 2, how will it help when increased labour costs, followed by the carbon tax and other recent labour policy decisions, have had a detrimental impact on our already economically weakened economy?

The UCP is very concerned about the job loss in Alberta that's been caused by this NDP's policies. We're worried about the future of our children and our grandchildren. We're worried about how these policies will affect young Albertans. But without rescinding other hurtful ideological policies, implanting a tax credit will only offer somewhat of a Band-Aid solution, perhaps only temporarily. If the economy isn't nursed back to health with care, the consequences of this bill, potentially the only purpose, could distort the market or encourage tax credit subsidy dependence. Unfortunately, while I can see the government's intent to make things better and give them credit for trying, these tax credits will not be able to offset the damaging fiscal regulatory tax policies that government has already introduced. These policies, as I mentioned before, undermine competitiveness in the attractiveness of investment capital.

In November 2016 the NDP introduced Bill 30, Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act, which they passed that December, and it came into effect in January of 2017. Two tax credits were brought in, the Alberta investor tax credit and the capital investment tax credit. The Alberta investor tax credit has a budget of \$90 million over three years and offers a 30 per cent tax credit to investors who provide venture capital to Alberta companies with fewer than 100 employees in specific areas such as IT, clean technology, interactive digital media, game productions, postproduction visual effects, and digital animation sectors. Bill 2 will essentially be an addition to this tax credit by providing an additional 5 per cent to investors who meet certain inclusivity and diversity requirements.

However, on the government website it states that almost \$1.4 million is still available this year even though the fiscal year ends in just a few weeks. This says one of two things, that the government's anticipated uptake on this credit was too narrow or too sector specific or that the credit was not effectively or efficiently distributed to investors. Either way, something needs to be adjusted to improve success.

I'm not quite sure if the government is bringing in Bill 2 to try and fix or alleviate some of those problems, but it would sure be nice to see an economic analysis done or some statistics on how well the program actually worked. Since they've not already released those details, I'm sure that it will not achieve what they expected.

The capital investment tax credit has a budget of \$70 million over two years and offers a 10 per cent nonrefundable tax credit of up to \$5 million. This was for businesses who make an eligible capital investment of \$1 million or more. These companies must be involved in manufacturing, processing, or tourism infrastructure. The government claims that this tax credit stimulated more than \$1 billion in capital projects throughout Alberta.

Bill 2 creates the digital media tax credit, and even though it is clear that the credit will provide 25 per cent on eligible salaries and wages and an additional credit being applied for companies who hire employees from underrepresented groups, we still will not know what the government's funding commitment will be until the budget details are released here this afternoon.

This bill was created to initiate and address current and projected labour shortages for computer and information technology professionals – software designers, programmers, and developers – and will add 3,000 new tech spaces in postsecondary institutions over the next five years. While that may be a positive step, my question is: is this really enough? When I say that, I don't mean financially. I mean that with all the other hurtful ideological policies that this government has also put in place, will this bill and others be enough to bring back the Alberta advantage? Further study of these things really needs to be undertaken.

Madam Speaker, Albertans do not know the answer to that question. They want the disastrous government policies repealed. They really need jobs today, not 10 years in the future. We need to do more than just what this bill offers. In the last three years we've known that the current NDP policies have not helped Alberta. While they may be trying to accomplish that through bills and regulations and through using corrective measures, on which more work needs to be done, there is a huge concern across the province regarding employment. While these measures may be good ones, we also know that many Albertans need employment today. Our caucus will do the very best to make sure that happens in short order.

10:30

Now, just as a bit of an aside, I listened to the minister talk about his expertise in video game playing, or what I call alternate reality. This is the real world. These are real dollars. These are real people. Albertans know there are consequences in a real world. My colleagues and I, with all sincerity, see the government's intent to correct the economy, but what we need is not to rush through legislation just to make a correction but to take a good look at Alberta's economic problems as a whole. I therefore believe that this bill should be referred to committee to do the good work for Albertans. Our caucus is committed to do their best to make sure that that happens in quick order.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this morning. I've been listening intently to the debate. It has been riveting, to say the least, and it's a pleasure to be able to speak to the referral this morning.

You know, we've heard a number of interesting things, particularly from the Minister of Advanced Education, around anything from our attention span to the importance of utilizing the processes that are available to members of the Assembly to be informed about decisions that the Assembly makes. Now, I understand he made some allegations about those processes being a slowing down or a clogging up of the Assembly, but nothing could be further from the truth with respect to Bill 2 and the desire to have the appropriate information for members on this side of the Assembly. Just because a bill goes to committee doesn't mean it needs to go there forever.

Now, I know that the government has a habit of sending off pieces of legislation that they don't like, particularly from private members. They go to committee forever, and they wind up dying there. Sometimes they get brought back to life because the government has made a poor political choice, so they reincarnate a piece of legislation, and then they send it back to committee to kill it again. But that's not how it has to work. I know that the government has used committee to make it work like that, but the committee process can be utilized to make legislation as strong as possible.

Now, we saw just two days ago the government send a motion to committee because it needed more study. This particular motion would have had very little in the way of costs to the taxpayer. It would have perhaps increased the number of times that a committee would meet in a year, but it may not have, in fact, in that the groups that would like to come to the committee

could have potentially tagged onto other meetings, and there may have been a zero impact.

What I can tell you is that there is no way that there would be millions and millions and millions of dollars associated with the cost of that motion. The government decided: we need more study; we need more study of this motion. My sense is, Madam Speaker, that the reason why they wanted more study is because the Official Opposition proposed the idea and it was a politically expedient way for them to deal with that particular motion so as not to have to vote against the use of committees.

Here before us today we have a referral motion that is looking to refer a piece of legislation to committee. That committee would be able to meet expediently and before the end of this session quite likely make a recommendation back to the House and would be able to accomplish all of the glorious goals that the minister of postsecondary claims that Bill 2 is going to deliver on.

Now, with respect to content of Bill 2 I might just add that there are a number of very, very positive things in this particular bill. I would say that while I have not fully decided if, in fact, I support the legislation or if I will be voting against the legislation, what I am certain of is that I would like to be able to get a much better understanding of how Bill 2 will be applied and hear from stakeholders and experts, both on the pro and con sides of this particular issue, so that we as a Chamber would be able to make the best available decision in front of us.

As I said, it's quite possible that I will be supporting Bill 2, but I have yet to make my mind up. Unfortunately, in the current context what we have is the minister of postsecondary telling us that everything is awesome and that everything is good when you're part of the government. But we don't have the opportunity to hear from others with respect to: what exactly will this bill do, and how will it be applied?

Now, if there's one thing I can assure you of, Madam Speaker, it's that I don't want to be a part of the minister of postsecondary's team. I will acknowledge that from time to time I might support an idea that he would propose, but on balance that happens less often than more often. It is possible that with respect to Bill 2 we will be happy to support it, but I wouldn't say that we're there yet.

One of the reasons why we're not there and I'm not there is this government's track record on the economy. We all know that Bill 2 has some lofty goals with respect to diversifying the economy, but we also all know that this government has a terrible, terrible track record on managing the economy. If you speak to CFIB, they will tell you that 92 per cent of business owners are not confident that the Alberta government is committed to improving the business climate.

I can tell you this. When I speak to the outstanding constituents of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and business owners in that region, one of their significant concerns is around the way this government has handled the economy. Any time that the government proposes legislation like we see before us today, I think that we should all have pause.

You know, Bill 2 has a number of concerns around it with respect to the scope and: have we struck the right balance? I'm not saying that we haven't, but I'm also not a hundred per cent convinced that we have. This particular tax credit and the scope to which it reaches could use some further discussion to make sure that we have in fact done that.

One thing that I do know when I have spoken with industry, particularly with respect to Bill 1 – and I understand that we're debating Bill 2 here – and reached out to some industry folks: their first and foremost goal is to have an economic environment, a regulatory environment, and a government that understands that the best way for the government to diversify the economy, to strengthen

the economy is to create the environment for those that do the job creating to do what they do best.

What we've seen is the government create a disaster in the economy and now, trying to put tax credits and other pieces back together, to be, like: "Hey, look, everybody. Everything is okay, and we're actually putting this back together." Yet we are here in many respects because of their lack of fundamentals on the economy.

10:40

The government, in this case for Bill 1 and Bill 2, is ultimately going to be engaged in the process of picking winners and losers, and they're going to be picking and playing favourites with different sectors of the economy. Some will benefit, and others will not. Any time that we have the government doing that, it poses significant risk to the taxpayer. It poses significant risk to the way that our economy can recover, and it poses risk with respect to the actual costs to the taxpayer.

Now, I also want to be clear that I think it's important that our technology sector is growing. I think it's important that many areas of our economy are growing. But are government incentives the best way to do that? That ultimately is the question that we need to be asking ourselves. Making our province more appealing for investment for our tech sector is great, but is incentivizing them or offering tax credits the best way that we can make the environment for our tech sector grow? Is it the best path to do that?

You know, there was a time not that long ago when Alberta was thriving, when Alberta was the envy of the world to invest in. At that time Alberta had the highest median wage in the country. People from across Canada and literally around the world flocked to Alberta for the quality of life, that was unparalleled. The question I have for you, Madam Speaker, is: did they come here for government programs, or did they come here because of the opportunity that existed because of a growing economy?

I think that if you asked the vast majority of those Albertans, it was not because the government was incentivizing business or the economy, but it was because our economy was growing, and opportunity was on the increase. We had a business climate that encouraged investment of private dollars from all around the world, and Alberta was a solid place to invest, a safe bet for return on investment. Now we have a government that is needing to incentivize when what we really need is a government that's going to provide a structure for that activity to flourish again.

That's, again, why the referral is so important. We need to have the facts around: is this the best path forward or not? I know that some of my other colleagues have highlighted the fact that this particular tax credit was not fully utilized on its first go-around. Now, I'll be the first to acknowledge that the vast majority of the tax credit certainly has been utilized, but there is approximately \$1.4 million that's still available. Committee would be a great place for us to be able to discuss whether or not the government has the scope correct, whether or not the amounts are correct instead of just listening to the Minister of Advanced Education saying that everything is A-okay, to actually find out if the costs that Alberta taxpayers are going to incur because of this credit are in fact going to do exactly what they claim.

Since the NDP has come to power, they have horribly mismanaged the economy. Alberta business owners and investors – you know, it comes as no surprise to folks on this side of the House and should come as no surprise to them as well that the vast majority of the constituents in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that I speak to feel attacked by the government, particularly with respect to the way that they have imposed the carbon tax; increased income tax, personal tax, corporate tax; increased the

regulatory burden; increased, too, a number of challenges in the labour market with respect to major, significant changes in how businesses interact with that piece of legislation and the costs that have been incurred.

At one point in time we had the opposite of that. I know that the good people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills really feel like this government is imposing death by a thousand cuts. Perhaps each single item in isolation is not the end of the world, but when you pile up that big, big pile of damage that has been imposed by the NDP, the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills are feeling that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would also like to thank my hon. colleague from Olds-Didsbury . . .

An Hon. Member: Three Hills.

Mr. Panda: Three Hills?

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. Don't forget Three Hills.

Mr. Panda: Yeah. The second-best riding after Calgary-Foothills.

I really thank him for standing up to speak in support of my referral amendment, and I want him to continue sharing his thoughts with us on the big picture and on the economic impacts of this government's risky ideological policies. It seems that his constituents are feeling the same way as Calgary-Foothills residents, so I would ask my hon. colleague to talk about the rise in unemployment and debt and deficit and so on.

Mr. Cooper: Why, thank you to my colleague from Calgary-Foothills. I was so engaged in the previous remarks that I actually had some more to add, so I'm glad that you've offered me the opportunity.

You know, I think, as I speak to constituents in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and, in fact, around the province that not only have so many of them been directly hurt and their businesses impacted – the government has created an inhospitable investment environment so that investors and business owners are almost feeling a little bit bitten, if you will, by this government – but while they show some sense that they can see now the government recognizing that they've made a mess of it and that they're trying to do something in the form of Bill 1 and Bill 2, et cetera, it's almost like they're concerned to stick their hand back through the fence, afraid that the government is going to lash out at them again. They're apprehensive about this government having control of a \$52 billion economy. We've continued to see this concern that the folks on the front lines have with respect to the direction that the economy is going.

You know, it's almost like this, Madam Speaker. The government is trying to undo a lot of the damage that they have created in the economy and the investment climate. I would suggest that perhaps this legislation wouldn't be necessary if the government hadn't done its best to get us in such a bad spot in the first place. While the resilience of Albertans remains strong and while I believe that the best years for our economy are ahead of us, it's not because of that government and some of the projects that they are trying to implement. It's because of the mom-and-pop shops, small-business owners that have tightened their belt, that have done their very best through a very difficult time, in spite of the government, to make sure that when the investment climate is right again, they will be there to support the families.

10:50

They will continue to be the job creators that they have been, and the entrepreneurial spirit of Alberta will remain in spite of the fact that the government has done its very best to destroy the playing field. And now we've heard the minister talk about trying to level the playing field. It's a playing field that they tilted in the wrong direction and are now just trying to get back to level. What Albertans are hoping for is a government that puts the playing field back in their favour, not in the favour of a select few but in the favour of creating an investment climate and an economic framework that puts Albertans first.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 2, the Growth and Diversification Act, which indeed carries a lot of important principles. Nobody can disagree with the kinds of efforts that this represents.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I just want to clarify that you know we're on the referral amendment, not the bill itself.

Dr. Swann: Yes. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Just clarifying. Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Sorry. I meant the referral amendment. I would like to speak to that after making some preliminary comments about what we have seen so far, which suggests that, once again, we're going to provide subsidies to business rather than look at alternative methods of stimulating the economy. In other words, we're still picking winners and losers in this province.

There are other ways to stimulate. Frankly, a lot of my colleagues and constituents are concerned that further distortion in the market doesn't promote more investment in Alberta. It creates the sense that there is a lack of competition, that there is a lack of equity in terms of companies' abilities to compete on a level playing field. That's the bottom line.

Efforts are there, but the question is: what's the impact? It's more and more of a concern the more money we see going out the door and the higher the debt load is getting to be in this province.

Just to summarize, there are three different paths of this bill. Schedule 1, which is the lion's share of the bill, proposes to enact the interactive digital media tax credit to create new media activity, with a 25 per cent refundable tax credit on eligible salary and wages as well as an additional 5 per cent credit if they hire employees from underrepresented groups.

Schedule 2 proposes to amend the Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act to include a diversity and inclusion component whereby investors that are eligible to receive the Alberta investor tax credit are also eligible to receive an additional 5 per cent credit in the same way. Currently the AITC offers a 30 per cent tax credit to Alberta investors who provide venture capital to small Alberta businesses substantially engaged in tourism, research, development of interactive digital media, postproduction visual effects, and digital animation.

Schedule 3 proposes to amend the Promoting Job Creation and Diversification Act by inserting certain instructions for the Minister of Advanced Education relative to technology education. It indicates, for example, that the minister shall

- (a) take steps to increase the number of seats in new and existing technology-related post-secondary programs by 3000 over the next 5 years,

- (b) consult with interested parties, including industry, post-secondary . . . Alberta Innovates and organized labour to develop . . . a strategy to allocate those 3000 seats, and
- (c) take steps to establish new scholarships or awards to support learning.

Well, this is all very good on the surface of it, but the concern, again, that we have is that this is, arguably, omnibus legislation that cobbles together various proposals and initiatives from at least two different ministries, some of which are required to be given force by legislation but others that are clearly not, all brought together under the rubric of economic diversification.

Again, around business subsidies, this appears now to be the second one aimed at the digital media industry after the Alberta investor tax credit. For a government that claims to support diversification, there's not a whole lot of diversification in the way these business subsidies are handed out. Certainly, some industries are getting more favourable treatment than others, and this is a concern.

The bill also establishes or adds a 5 per cent diversity and inclusion incentive to certain tax credit programs. An intriguing idea, to be sure, and I hope it leads to positive change. We all want to see more diversity in our industry. Tiny as this is, it may have some impact, and I give credit for that effort. Again, though, the initiative strikes me as being more about promoting diversity and inclusion than diversification of the economy, especially when one understands that businesses are looking for certainty, clarity, equal opportunity, and a level playing field.

The January 2018 report from the University of Calgary School of Public Policy noted that Alberta has the dubious distinction of having the least transparent public reporting when it comes to business subsidies. Another area that this government needs to improve on is more transparency about where the subsidies are going and what the impacts of those subsidies are.

Lastly, if we're going to be looking at these issues, schedule 3 reads more like a mandate letter from one of Alberta's late Conservative Premiers to his ministers and seems totally out of place. If creating tech training spaces is a government priority, which it should be, why do we need to use legislation to instruct the minister to, quote, take steps towards creating spaces for establishing scholarships? This is already in motion. It's Bill 1, the Energy Diversification Act, which is currently before the Legislature, again, using showpiece legislation to compel a minister to do something that's already being done.

When previous governments increased spaces for postsecondary students, this has typically been given effect by announcing an increase in provincial funding as part of the budget. While the government has already signalled that 200 new tech spots are set to be filled in the next year, this will happen as a result of the budget and not Bill 2. Bill 2 could actually be defeated, and these tech training spaces, of course, would go ahead. It's hard not to view this bill as little more than a pre-election promotional message masquerading as legislation, something that we are seeing much more frequently now from this government, treating legislation as another media platform to disseminate information on its initiatives.

There are not a lot of concrete issues that Bill 2 actually does in regard to technology training in postsecondary programs, although to listen to the March 14 news conference, you'd think the bill was quite prescriptive and quite expansive. For example, Albertans were told that Bill 2 will establish a talent advisory council on technology to advise government on the creation or expansion of specific programs. It's also suggested that Bill 2 extends the Alberta investor tax credit and the capital investment tax credit. It's also suggested that Bill 2 specifically includes a scholarship program worth \$7 million over five years. Lastly, Albertans were told that

Bill 2 specifically includes \$43 million over five years to fund 3,000 new tech training spaces.

Other than pledging to fund 3,000 new tech training spaces over five years, none of these proposals or dollar figures are what we will be debating in this House. While the government may in fact be planning to do all these things at some point, they aren't actually being given effect by Bill 2. It's a bit disappointing that the government is portraying it in this way.

I also find it a bit rich that the NDP is now trying to make political hay out of extending the Alberta investor tax credit and the capital investment tax credit when, in the case of the former, which was announced back in spring 2016, program changes and application processing delays have seen the rollout move at a snail's pace. I'd suggest that what's being referred to as a program extension may in fact be a failure to launch, with unallocated funds simply being pushed further down the road for more political gain. I suspect there may have been similar challenges with getting the capital investment tax credit off the ground. I actually wrote to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade about these delays, but I don't believe I've received a reply.

Lastly, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade has tried to suggest that the trade missions to Silicon Valley are behind Albertans' bid to produce more graduates for the tech sector. Let's be honest. Calgary's failed bid to entice Amazon to build its second headquarters in Calgary and concrete actions being taken by jurisdictions such as Ontario and B.C. were the wake-up call. Amazon reportedly told Calgary officials that it didn't make the 20-city short list because of a significant gap in the local tech talent pool. It's encouraging that the government is at least taking steps to remedy this, but we'll have to wait and see how this all plays out.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Could I adjourn debate?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, you move to adjourn debate?

Dr. Swann: I move to adjourn debate. Thanks.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

11:00 **Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Ms Sweet moved, seconded by Mr. Malkinson, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, LL.D, the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 21: Mr. Mason]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just want to stand up, of course, and make a few comments in regard to the Speech from the Throne. I certainly believe it was appropriate, you know, on International Women's Day that we recognize the wonderful opportunities and people that have come forward to

really bring gender parity to the forefront. One of those who was in this Chamber whom I did not see recognized – however, certainly, I possibly could be mistaken, and if so, I'm sure it was an oversight on the government's part – was Senator Betty Unger. She was in the Chamber; she was on the floor.

For those that do not know, she lives here in Edmonton. She is a Senator. She was the first woman in Canadian history to be elected as a Senate nominee and appointed to the Senate by the Prime Minister. I certainly had an opportunity to speak to her after the event, and you know, we had a very wonderful and engaging conversation. She's currently dealing with marijuana legislation in the Senate in Ottawa, and hopefully I was able to assist her by providing some insight from my experience as a former law enforcement officer. Of course, she has experience as a registered nurse, and obviously there is, you know, certainly a positive relationship typically between law enforcement and nurses.

Madam Speaker, you know, the Speech from the Throne has a section called Protecting Albertans from Crime. I just want to note that it states: "Today in Alberta, especially in rural areas, people are concerned for the safety of their homes, their property, and the well-being of those they love. That must change." Well, I could not agree more with that statement. However, the frustration is: why did the NDP wait so long to even acknowledge that this crisis is occurring in rural Alberta? You know, this is a crisis that has been identified at least on this side of the House, an issue that we've tried to raise for quite some time. In November the UCP took serious measures, hosting busloads of people from all over rural Alberta to this House. The galleries were full of concerned residents, and every member acted as their voice inside this Chamber.

You know, we brought forward that motion for an emergency debate, and sadly, to the shock of the residents who were here, that debate was voted down. It made me think, to put this really in perspective for folks to understand, of one fellow that was a victim of crime who was interviewed by a media outlet. We're not talking about victims of crime as it pertains to thefts or property damage. In some of these cases we're talking about serious, violent home invasions where individuals inside their residence, law-abiding citizens, are being victimized to the point where they are receiving grievous bodily harm and sometimes situations where those scars, although external, leave an internal scar as well.

You know, I can tell you that this is a crime epidemic that really is no different than the fentanyl crisis and requires a co-ordinated response that involves a multitude of different agencies to come together and recognize that all levels of the justice system, whether it be the judiciary, whether it be our Crown, whether it be our law enforcement community, have to work together in order to solve this problem.

Now, let's take a look. The minister, of course, recently made an announcement regarding some funding for some officers, 39 officers, boots on the ground, as she put it. Sadly, by her own admission, there's no indication of when or even if those RCMP will be able to come out into the communities, when they will be coming from Depot. I think people need to understand that a request for police officers, especially from the RCMP, is a process. This is not something that is very easy. You don't just make a request, and there are 39 officers sitting in Depot in Regina waiting to be dispersed and ready to go to Alberta. There's an application process. This application process is time consuming. Again, an individual just doesn't show up at an RCMP station and request a form to get hired and then are hired within two weeks. Sometimes that process can take anywhere from six months to a year before that person is even accepted as an applicant. It's a rigorous, rigorous process with checks and balances, with investigations on who those individuals are. Polygraph tests: that's another thing.

Throughout Canada if they can get enough people to form a class, then those individuals go to Depot. Well, that's another six months, Madam Speaker, six months worth of training. Hopefully, some of those individuals have completed it. The goal, of course, is to successfully get them all passed, but that's not always the case. Let's just take, for instance, that it is the case that all of them pass. Then there's a process in place in Ottawa as to where those individuals will be then dispersed throughout Canada.

Sadly, the RCMP are facing a significant shortfall, Madam Speaker – we're talking 20 to 30 per cent – to reach their minimum staffing levels. Now we're talking about: okay, let's say that we get a handful of those officers. Well, those officers, once they reach the detachments, will take another six months at minimum before they are possibly ready to go out on their own. They're going to have to be trained with a senior officer. I can tell you from experience that for a police officer to really, truly feel comfortable riding on their own and being able to handle any and all calls that come their way can take as much as five years. Wow.

When we add the time from the initial application, assuming everything goes well, all the way through to them reaching the detachments, possibly in Alberta, hopefully in Alberta, we're talking about two or two and a half years. Some of my sources within the RCMP have indicated that that could be even longer, and that's concerning. That's deeply concerning.

11:10

You know, we talk about the police officers, and we talk about the tactics. Well, let's talk a little bit about these officers, who are going to be pillaged, from what I can tell, from other detachments that are already feeling the shortfall within their communities. One of the tactics that was mentioned was bait car and tracking. Madam Speaker, that's a tactic; it's not a solution. When I was in the Calgary Police Service, we did bait cars. I can tell you from experience that there was limited success, sometimes no success, quite frankly. Certainly, to sound off as though this is a solution to the problem, I think, is really giving people what I would call false hope.

Another piece of information that the minister had indicated was the sharing of information with Alberta Sheriffs and fish and wildlife and commercial vehicle enforcement. My question, when I heard that, was: is that not done now? Are they not communicating right now? I can tell you that in order to have any successful operation, you must be able to communicate.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The funding: the minister mentioned \$8 million for the 39 new officers. Well, \$8 million on top of \$500 billion: the math on that, Madam Speaker, is 1.6 per cent. That's a drop in the bucket when dealing with a crisis of this magnitude. You know, that reminds me of 2004, when I was a law enforcement officer, a young constable, and I was on what is now known as the Red Mile. It's actually world famously known as the Red Mile. I remember being one of a team of six officers and a sergeant, so there were seven of us. The Flames were doing, obviously, very well at that time, and we had heard that there was going to be a mass exodus out of the Saddledome, that they were going to come down 17th Avenue, which is in Calgary, which is now, again, as I mentioned, known as the Red Mile. I remember the six of us on the street and our sergeant saying to us: keep them all on the sidewalks. Twenty-thousand people, six police officers. Keep them all on the sidewalks: unreasonable, completely unreasonable. That's why I'm talking to the 1.6 per cent of \$500 billion. It's just not enough.

We learned from that though. We learned to prepare. We put processes in place, and we put the necessary resources in place.

Then when 2006 occurred and the Flames were doing well again, we were prepared to have the thousands and thousands and thousands of people hit the streets, and we had the necessary resources in place because the issue was identified to us and we formulated a plan, a successful plan, a plan that has been recognized not only in Alberta but throughout Canada on how to properly prepare for events. That's something that the Calgary Police Service is very proud of. They did that with the G8, another major incident that had no issues whatsoever because of the proper preparation.

Going back to this, when the government was aware that rural crime was starting to become an issue, there needed to be proper communication, there needed to be proper planning, and they needed to get the necessary resources in place working with all of the law enforcement communities throughout this province in order to execute a plan, not some smoke-and-mirrors plan where there's false hope given to residents that these 39 police officers are going to be magically showing up in their communities. That's, quite frankly, Madam Speaker, just not reasonable. This is a very negligible amount, and I really do hope that these detachments have an opportunity to at least, at the minimum, get their minimum staffing requirements.

Do you know that when rural crime was first identified, Madam Speaker, the minister was telling rural municipalities that they have the ability to get money and get more police officers themselves? Yes, they can, but as I already indicated to you, they're not even meeting the minimum staffing requirements. Even if a municipality did find the money and they were able to give it to the RCMP, the likelihood of them getting an officer was slim to none, as I already explained to you what the process is. In fact, some of my sources . . .

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-West was actually just about to give us some more insights, which I think are valuable in this case because I'm not sure how many other members of the Chamber actually have the inside experience and knowledge about what happens with the police services. So I would like him to complete what I thought was winding up to be an important point, please.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Hays. What I wanted to continue to say – and, you know, I really hope that my sources are incorrect on this, but I sadly believe that they're not. We're talking about a period of seven, seven and a half years if a municipality decides to give the RCMP some extra money in hopes of getting a police officer. We're talking about that long a period of time.

Quite frankly, that's why – that's why – we need to start looking in Alberta at other alternative means in a co-ordinated effort. Although the RCMP have rolled out a number of tactics in order to deal with this, what I did not hear from them is the relationship that they would be having with their other law enforcement community members; as an example, Edmonton Police Service, Calgary Police Service, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, our sheriffs department. I haven't really heard anybody even talk about the sheriffs department. There are many things that this minister can do, quite frankly, with the stroke of a pen in order to ensure that we properly and more effectively use our sheriffs within this province, that I have not heard anybody mention.

Now, I will say this. It is also vitally important to ensure that those individuals are up to a certain training standard. I mean, I will give you an example, Madam Speaker. Although I have the great honour to be in this House representing the wonderful people of Calgary-West, I am a fully trained police officer and can, if I had the opportunity, choose to go back and perform the duties as a police officer at any time. I can tell you that, you know, many of our sheriffs are retired from other jurisdictions. They are fully qualified and capable of performing the duties of a police officer. Those individuals need to be identified and recognized, and they certainly can have the opportunities to further assist in working with other law enforcement officers in order to help in a crisis which is currently facing the people of this province.

You know, I just want to say as well that this is an epidemic that has grown and, I would say, kind of raged on, that is putting our rural communities in a situation now where they are starting to have diminishment in what I call the public trust. The public trust, I can tell you, is really what law enforcement has in order to have an effective and efficient police service.

11:20

Let me give you an example, Madam Speaker. When I was a constable in the Calgary Police Service, I can tell you that there were many complaints that would come that, in my opinion as a young rookie, seemed rather, let's say, nebulous. Then as I evolved and I grew and I learned and certainly had the fortune to become a supervisor in the Calgary Police Service, as a sergeant I realized that what the Calgary Police Service had was public trust. They had a 96 to 97 per cent approval rating, and that was because the people of that city knew that if there was a problem, they could call the police, that they will attend, and that they would deal with the issue in a timely and efficient manner.

That is the issue that we're seeing in rural Alberta right now, the diminishment of public trust. I believe, from the people that I have spoken to in rural Alberta, there is massive concern that when they call the police . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, and good morning, Madam Speaker. I'm thrilled to stand here and reply to the Speech from the Throne. As I open up, I would be remiss to not, like many other members here, reflect on the fact that we did this on International Women's Day. So I would like to open up by recognizing some amazing women in my constituency.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The St. Mary's University women's basketball team, a team that in its first year, in 2013, had only won one game, a team who, despite a couple of seasons of heartbreaking losses in the final game of the tournament, went on to win the ACAC women's basketball tournament, crowning St. Mary's with its first-ever provincial championship: I always admire watching these women play and sharing this with my kids. I think that here in Alberta we could do more to support collegial sports since in many instances the pace and intensity outmatch that of professional play.

Now, many people throw around the term "David versus Goliath," but I prefer the little engine that could, because this team, despite everything, being one of the most underfunded universities, not having its own gym, kept chugging along and never gave up. When push came to shove, they dominated the matches they played. Having spoken with some of the parents who were there at some of the games – I ran into them at the

Calgary International Airport just last weekend – they said that the team played phenomenally in the nationals. They didn't bring home the big championship, but it was setting them up for more consecutive years of success.

This really does parallel well with the work that St. Mary's does in collaboration with its indigenous community. Their First Nations, Métis, Inuit initiatives focus on relationship-building first and allow their program to meet the needs of First Nations students. This led to the hosting of the truth and reconciliation synopsis on campus and has really led to a lot of other postsecondary institutions coming to them and seeking advice from St. Mary's, being a leader in this field.

Now, their work with First Nations complements our government's commitment to our First Nations. We continue to maintain meaningful dialogue to work with our First Nations through our diversification of our economy. As mentioned in the throne speech, through constructive and practical dialogue we will continue with our nations through a renewable energy program, curriculum review, and improvements to our child intervention system. In the past year I've been humbled, similar to yourself, Madam Speaker, to be involved in the child intervention review. The dialogue we had with stakeholders taught me a tremendous amount, and it showed the urgency to do things better and work towards ending the cycle of trauma.

During the throne speech event we saw a lot of Alberta's historical context. I'm sure someone at home could have played a drinking game around the number of times in this House that we mentioned Peter Lougheed, so allow me to mention him a few more times and encourage people at home to drink a bit more Alberta craft beer.

Our expansion of the petrochemicals diversification program has helped many people in Calgary-Shaw get back to work. The Fluor office in Sundance recently was contracted to engineer some of the projects during the first round of the project. Their contributions have helped us diversify our economy and leverage our natural resources. As we develop our resources, we need to recognize global and world trends. Right now there is a need for sustainable oil products, that Alberta can provide, but we need to look to the future. I can tell you, as the Member for Calgary-Currie mentioned his cars earlier in the response to the throne speech, that my Mazda5 does burn a lot less fuel than my parents' K-car did. So investing in processing and value-add will allow long-term jobs for the people of Alberta and allow us to continue developing our alternative resources.

I want to reflect on another vision that Lougheed had for Calgary-Shaw, which was Fish Creek park and the development of Fish Creek park, which since its creation has seen, unfortunately, quite a bit of neglect from the previous government over the last quarter of a century. Our government is now reinvesting in the infrastructure deficit that was left behind, by restoring structures, improving pathway networks, tackling invasive weeds. While there is more to do, our government has committed to this park. We will continue to do it with the tremendous support that we receive from the Friends of Fish Creek, who do a tremendous amount to advocate for that area.

Now, the Friends of Fish Creek have provided us with a tremendous amount of support in the area by providing educational programming that benefits the people of my area in south Calgary. Many of the programs also promote self-awareness, an awareness of nature and culture. The Friends have been very helpful during developments in my constituency, which we saw a couple of years ago during a contentious natural gas pipeline that ATCO was developing. One of the feedbacks that they provided to the project managers during this construction allowed us to find ways to

replant natural grassland species and actually renew the park. As we move towards the southwest ring road development and its interjection with Fish Creek park, the Friends of Fish Creek are going to be a valuable resource as we look to renew the land and regrow that area.

Madam Speaker, right now in Alberta I see two visions. I see one that is the UCP's vision, which we can see reflected in the province of Saskatchewan, which has failed to create growth in their economy. Now, you don't have to take my word for this. We can look at RBC's report, which I can table later today. In March it can be seen that Alberta led the country in job-creation growth in all the oil-producing jurisdictions while at the same time Saskatchewan saw a 2 per cent decrease in its economy. Manufacturing and retail sales are up here in Alberta while Saskatchewan declines or stays flat, all this while we're bending the curve on spending, charting a path to balance, freezing many government departments' hiring and spending.

To add a few more numbers to this equation, Alberta saw a 10 per cent increase in wholesale trade while Saskatchewan saw a decline of 3 per cent. While the opposition may speak praise of this government, that is running a deficit while it has gone ahead and raised the PST, cut public services people depended on, and is layered in scandal, we will stand up here as this government for Alberta jobs and the services that people rely on.

Now, at least every week, Madam Speaker, I find myself at Cardel Rec centre, which is in my riding. I'm either there attending meetings, attending events, or simply just taking my kids to the library. Sometimes when I'm there, I set up a table, and I just talk with people and constituents. While I'm here, I've heard from a lot of people about how the economy is shifting and how we're starting to see people getting back to work. While I recognize that we're not out of the woods just yet, things are improving.

Now, one of the times when I was at Cardel Rec, I was actually talking to someone while I was grabbing a coffee at the coffee stand. He said that it feels like, for the first time, the government of Alberta has his back. He is a 31-year-old service worker who's earning minimum wage. You know, I get it. It's easy when you're in this dome or when you're in an ivory tower to not recognize what it is like to try to get by with so little, but you know what? We're a government with so much diversity, who really engages with their constituents.

You know what? I'm reminded of this every time I door-knock in communities like Shawnessy or Midnapore and I hear from people at the door who say that this is the first time they've heard from a politician when it's not an election year. I'm sure I can see a lot of head-nodding from my colleagues on the government bench here, so I think they all hear it, too. We're here to get our feedback, we're here to hear from Albertans, and we're not here just to pander for votes.

Now, one thing that you cannot miss when you're at Cardel Rec centre, Madam Speaker, is how full the high school there is. Both high schools in my riding, Bishop O'Byrne and Centennial, do so much with such limited space, and I do have to thank the teachers for what they do to maintain it and keep it going. The fact of the matter is that our government is listening to Albertans, and we're following through on our plans to build new schools, which is why I'm excited that next year we'll be opening up a new school in Legacy, which will directly have an impact on students in my riding and the entire south end of Calgary. In fact, we have over a dozen projects in south Calgary alone, projects like roof replacements and new schools throughout my area. Now, the difference between us and what we've seen in the past is that we don't just announce it; we actually get it done.

11:30

I've heard commentary about maintaining a sense of decorum in this House, and I'm hopeful that this type of respect can be found. I want to make comments about some criticism that I received from the former Member for Calgary-Lougheed about me mentioning pro wrestling in this House last spring. You know, now that I have the forum to go deeper into the context, I will use that opportunity because I was quite disappointed about the criticisms that were made. The reason why is because last May at the Backlash pay-per-view – oh, and by the way, happy Rusev Day for those watching at home – we saw Jinder Mahal win the WWE title. This was the first time that a Calgarian had done so since Bret the Hitman Hart. I was excited to see this not only as a wrestling fan, which I am – I'll admit I am – but also as a person who grew up in northeast Calgary.

You see, Mahal, whose parents are of Indian descent and who is Sikh, became the first world champion in the WWE of this descent. Early in his career he trained with many greats in the Calgary area, including the late Bad News Allen and Gerry Morrow. He cut his teeth in Stampede Wrestling and the Prairie Wrestling Alliance before he entered his stint in the WWE. After being released, he worked hard to achieve a remarkable physique, which led to his eventual and inevitable win.

Since his win the thing that's been really amazing and something I'm really proud of him for is that he's used this platform to inform people and dispel myths about the Sikh culture. You know what? To be honest, I'll call it as it is. The wrestling fan base are not ones that have the means to necessarily inform themselves about the Sikh culture, so sometimes biases do develop. He's really used this to relate to fans through podcasts or interviews and just talk about the culture and history, which I found remarkable.

You know what? I do have to say that if there's anything I'm going to be known for, it's that speech that I made during that time because it garnered nearly 40,000 views on YouTube and was reported by news outlets in four different countries, including Mexico, Great Britain, and even on CBS Sports. It was quite funny because I got directly messaged by a lot of fans in the Calgary area and from abroad who actually said: you know, it's really neat because someone from this government is just like me and gets what I'm talking about.

You know what? I'm proud of the pro wrestling history. It's something that has existed in the Calgary area for almost 70 years, and it's a shame that sometimes people ridicule it because there was a time when there were only two things that people could tell you about Calgary. Those were that we hosted the Olympics and that's where Bret the Hitman Hart is from.

In the last year we've also seen another Calgarian, Natalya Neidhart, who comes from that family, win the women's championship as well, which led to a lot more equality in women's wrestling and the removal of a lot of the biases that used to exist there.

Now, I really want to also take this opportunity to reflect on how my riding is going to change in the 2019 election. It will gain communities like Silverado, Legacy, Chaparral, and Walden. To all those residents in the area: I want to reiterate that your NDP government has your back. We have maintained the MSI program, that the city of Calgary leveraged for projects like the 162nd interchange. We are opening up dozens of schools to make sure that your kids can go to school near their homes. In the meantime, while you wait for those schools, we're removing the busing fees that you have to pay because there is no school in your area. We're also taking a lot of feedback into a lot of mitigation around projects, including the construction of the ring road, and we've learned a lot from the past as that develops. I would like to also use this

opportunity to thank my colleague from Calgary-Bow, who has been advocating for this immensely as well.

To the residents of south Calgary: we're working to build jobs, diversify the economy, and we're going to do this while maintaining the lowest tax rate in Canada, without giving handouts to the richest 1 per cent, as proposed by the opposition through their flat tax.

Now, I also want to use this opportunity because today I received an e-mail from the Calgary Highlanders, who recently had their Highland Ball. I recognize this because Her Honour is a strong supporter of the Calgary Highlanders and our military history here in Calgary. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, who is the liaison for the province of Alberta to the Canadian military, for coming down and attending. It was a very successful event. They drew a lot of attendance; a lot of people went and supported them. I really enjoyed the parallels because as the grandson of a Calgary Highlander it was remarkable to see this legacy continuing, this part of our history that we continue to maintain and to encourage. It's just remarkable to have an opportunity to share that history in this House as well.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'm proud of the work our government has accomplished and the work that we continue to move towards doing.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to serve on the delegation to the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region with the Member for Calgary-Shaw. I know he's been doing a lot of work lately with regard to working for our economy here in Alberta in terms of the NAFTA file. I was just wondering if he could perhaps expand on a little bit of the work that we've been doing through the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region to ensure that Alberta, you know, still has access to export markets.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. I first want to take this opportunity to really recognize the hard work that the Member for Calgary-East is doing on this file. You know, there's a lot of stuff that we do to advocate for our province and our economic growth that may not see the light of cameras. We may not be necessarily waving the flag to the public, but we're doing the work. She's been doing a tremendous amount of work to get our products to market, to advocate for pipeline development and getting our resources to market. I want to thank her for her hard diligence on this because she's been holding a firm line and holding the entire organization accountable.

The one thing that has been great to see is that through some of our leadership that we have been doing, that I've been doing as the vice-president of the organization and the member has been doing with the delegation, we've been trying to work with all the partners from the five U.S. states as well as the Canadian provinces to have a united front on NAFTA and to really talk about how as a region we all actually benefit from this. Exports and imports are moving constantly across the border, and before product is even in its finished state, it has potentially moved across the border a few times. So there is a lot at risk if we were to eliminate what is currently in place. We do recognize as an organization that any policy does deserve to be renewed and that the IT sector wasn't as big as it was when we originally signed on to NAFTA. From this

forum last November we were able to get the entire organization to agree as a united front to encourage Washington to take a stance that recognizes the interdependencies that the entire region has.

Then when the steel and aluminum tariffs were being proposed and we didn't know where we would land with the tariff policy, we urgently reached out to the organization. We got the president, who is Senator Arnie Roblan from Oregon, and myself to issue a letter to President Trump recommending and encouraging him to exempt Canada from the tariffs on steel and aluminium. I was really excited that two days after we issued that letter to Washington, they did exempt our country from the steel and aluminum tariffs.

You know, it's really the commitment that a lot of our government members make to advocate for resource development and advocate for well-paid jobs. It's what New Democrats do. At the end of the day, we're going to continue to support our resources, we're going to continue to advocate for the jobs that are here, and we're going to continue to work collaboratively with trade partners from across the world and continue to maintain all the good relationships that we have because it's how we're going to continue to benefit. I think that some of this hard work that we started doing is why, as I alluded to before, we're leading in a lot of our manufacturing sectors, we're leading in our exports, our agricultural sector continues to grow tremendously. We continue to leverage new technology and new products that are available to us.

11:40

You know, I'm really proud whenever I go and hear about new, exciting things like pulses and how we're leveraging some of the new technology around refining canola and how we're able to start exporting a lot more of our beef to Asian markets. They're things that, you know, I never necessarily thought I would dabble in. Even looking at my previous life, which was as a grandson of a Slovakian who settled on a farm in Innisfail, it's neat to see that this continues to be an area that we develop immensely and see it really drive our provincial economic growth.

With that being said, there are a lot of exciting things that continue to happen. We continue to work hard to diversify our economy and create more jobs. We recognize that we're not out of the woods just yet and that we have to do this in a very calculated, systematic way that will ensure that a recession like this never happens again here in Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and speak in response to the Speech from the Throne. It's my greatest honour and privilege to represent the residents of Calgary-Foothills, the hard-working people of Calgary-Foothills. What I hear from the residents of my constituency is that the throne speech covered some very important points, but it also was silent on other important, long-term goals of this province and the direction we are going to take. I'll speak to that in my speech.

Before I start, I would like to pay homage to the great NDP luminary and former federal NDP leader, the late David Lewis. David Lewis was born in present-day Belarus and grew up during the Bolshevik Revolution and during the Russian Civil War and the Polish-Soviet War. David's son Stephen Lewis rose in prominence as the leader of the NDP Official Opposition in Ontario. Stephen Lewis's son is Avi Lewis. You might have seen him on the CBC or Al Jazeera. Avi is married to journalist and author Naomi Klein.

Canada's NDP royal family is known for being signatories to the infamous Leap Manifesto. Tzeporah Berman is a signatory; so is

David Suzuki. But I don't want to talk about the document or the signatories. I want to talk about David Lewis and the gift he gave us: free market, Reagan- and Rogernomics, titles that we continue to use today. At a speech in Pictou county, Nova Scotia, in August 1972 he criticized the government of Nova Scotia for giving grants and loans to Michelin Tire and Scott paper, Madam Speaker. David Lewis called those businesses corporate welfare bums. The name has stuck ever since.

When governments go handing out grants, loans, loan guarantees, equity positions to subsidize business and industry, it's the practice of handing out corporate welfare. David Lewis would be ashamed of today's Alberta NDP, Madam Speaker. This is no longer the NDP of David Lewis. While David Lewis would be ashamed, Tommy Douglas would be very proud because he wanted all the multinationals to be kicked out of Canada. This provincial NDP is very successful in doing so. Look at Shell, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, Total. All those multinationals left Alberta because of the economic policies of this government.

The previous speaker, my friend from Calgary-Shaw, talked about the importance of having good relations with neighbours, and then he went on to attack the Saskatchewan government. I don't know how we are going to, you know, maintain good relations and get the results we are looking for while at the same time attacking a neighbour who is our trusted friend in fighting for pipelines and market access. I don't get that. If he wants to comment on that, he should look at the recent polls. Scott Moe is still the most popular Premier in this country, and you can contrast that to our Premier. I'll leave it there, Madam Speaker.

This throne speech is riddled with allusions to corporate welfare. Corporate welfare is one of the factors affecting how we can balance the budget. It is ironic that this NDP government is factoring in the Trans Mountain expansion project to balance their budget. After railing against pipelines in opposition, the NDP have come to realize that pipelines create wealth. The previous speaker also mentioned how he and his colleagues are working on market access. I really thank them for doing that. I appreciate that. Although they are late to the game, it's the right thing to do, and Albertans appreciate that. These pipelines move the product that give us the royalties to help pay for health and education, teachers and nurses, and even the NDP buses to rural Alberta, where the market has failed.

The NDP Deputy Premier talked about how we are exporting 99 per cent of our oil production to our one-and-only customer south of the border, the U.S.A., and we get told by the NDP and the left-wing academics that the carbon tax won't affect our competitiveness. Really? We're only shipping to one customer south of the border, and we are talking about competitiveness here. Down in the United States of America they rejected the Paris climate agreement. The U.S.A. doesn't care about our carbon tax. They're our only customer. They don't care about our carbon tax. And here we go; we have a carbon tax. [interjection] Yeah. I'm coming to that. We'll talk about other countries, but in the meantime our only customer, who is receiving 99 per cent of our product as per the Deputy Premier, doesn't have a carbon tax, so us imposing a carbon tax is not helping industry here.

Then we needed the pipeline to ship the product to China and India, but China, Russia, and India don't have carbon taxes either. The U.S.A. now has an accelerated capital cost element, and some say that it is more powerful than a corporate tax cut.

Madam Speaker, as you know, I immigrated to Canada from India to fulfill my economic dream because Canada is an energy superpower. But upon arrival I realized that the NDP and their fellow travellers just want to leave \$11 trillion worth of natural resources in the ground instead of improving life for themselves.

Talk to Jagmeet Singh. He'll tell you. Your own leader will tell you that he wants to leave the resource in the ground. Your own colleagues in B.C. even, whether it's the Premier of B.C. or the mayor of Vancouver or the mayor of Burnaby, or the NDP in Manitoba: talk to them and see if you can convince them to support these pipelines.

11:50

I was so amazed when I heard that Canada was the energy superpower, so I came here to realize my economic dreams, but once I landed here, my dreams were shattered after watching all these NDP fellow travellers blockading the pipelines every single day, to the extent that they are now even harming the security people in B.C. The police were hurt by these radical environmental activists. That is so sad, Madam Speaker. Something is fundamentally wrong with this in our country if we cannot get our resources to tidewater for global export. It's a lack of common sense. That's what I call a lack of common sense.

A multimillion-dollar effort known as the Tar Sands Campaign has literally stifled our pipelines. The goal is to landlock Russian and Canadian oil so that it cannot reach overseas markets for higher prices. It was launched in 2008 by the Rockefeller brothers and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. It has nothing to do with climate change or saving the environment. The campaign uses those environmentalists as stooges to accomplish the goal of ensuring that cheap oil moves south. That's what's happening, Madam Speaker. We are subsidizing. We are shipping our oil at a \$30 discount, and the U.S. is exporting their oil at market price.

The Tar Sands Campaign through the Tides Foundation has made at least 400 payments worth \$36 million to more than a hundred organizations in Canada, the U.S., and Europe. This is a very serious problem, Madam Speaker, and the throne speech didn't mention a word about it. None of the front-benchers in this House talked about that. By sullyng our product through an information war with selective and sometimes blatantly false facts, shaking investor confidence, the industry is curtailed by the big American interests. That's what we are doing unknowingly. I don't think my NDP friends realize that what they're doing is actually helping the U.S.A.; it's not helping Canada. By blockading pipelines, they are actually helping the U.S.A.

False facts like the Alberta oil sands impact an area of the size of England or Florida – that is false. The truth is that the oil sands impact less than 1 per cent of the boreal forest. That is the truth, and it was not mentioned in the throne speech, Madam Speaker. The success of the campaign hinges on its ability to get air and media. The folks up in the press gallery: when the eco radicals pull a stunt, they don't report it. It's a cry for attention to keep cheap oil moving to the U.S.A. Alberta and Canada are subsidizing America. Who ever thought Uncle Sam would be a corporate welfare bum?

In Ottawa the wise old Senators support new pipelines. They get it, but we don't get it here. We moved an amendment to the government motion to support this government, to strengthen the motion by asking them to use 92(10)(c). This government rejected that whereas on Tuesday, March 20, the Senate of Canada unanimously adopted a motion introduced by Conservative Senator

Richard Neufeld urging the Prime Minister to bring the full weight and power of his office to ensure that the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain expansion project gets completed on schedule. With its adoption, Conservatives, Liberals, independents, and nonaffiliated Senators have united their voices in asking that the Prime Minister and the government ensure that the expansion is completed on time and that this commitment be conveyed to the governments of British Columbia and Alberta in a manner that leaves no doubt as to the federal government's determination to see the project become fully operational within the present timeline. That was the release from Senator Neufeld's office, Madam Speaker.

Even if and when Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain expansion gets built, we still need an additional million barrels of pipeline space per day based on CAPP's forecast, Madam Speaker. CAPP says that we are short 1 and a half million barrels. I'm optimistic that when Trans Mountain gets built, we'll still be short another million barrels of pipeline capacity. That was not addressed in the throne speech. The throne speech did not address that, and there was some news yesterday that . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was riveted by the hon. member's comments and would like to hear the remainder of it if he would be willing to.

The Acting Speaker: Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yesterday there were some news articles about celebrating this Trans Mountain pipeline. When the first barrel of oil is flowing in that expansion project, we will all celebrate together with the Premier, but we have some more work to do on that project. The throne speech is silent on any firm action. If the pipeline is delayed and if we have economic difficulties, how do we still balance the budget? It doesn't talk about that.

Now, already the Finance minister is finding an excuse for not balancing the budget. He can blame it on the B.C. NDP and the NDP mayor of Vancouver and the NDP mayor of Burnaby and the federal NDP leader for not being able to balance the budget, which is not good.

In this throne speech we did get a handful of programs espousing development and a plan B for pipelines, but some of them come out to being nothing but corporate welfare, Madam Speaker. That's why I talked about the Lewis family and former NDP leader. This corporate welfarism is the right idea, but those are the wrong tools to be used now.

Madam Speaker, thank you for the time to . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the Assembly will now stand adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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