



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, May 9, 2018

Day 27

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Fourth Session

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

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, May 9, 2018

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

As we begin our work for the day, let us acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 territory, traditional lands for a wide diversity of indigenous people. We're all treaty people, and as such we have a responsibility to work collaboratively and respectfully with our indigenous partners.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 14

An Act to Empower Utility Consumers

[Debate adjourned May 2: Mr. Orr speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 14, An Act to Empower Utility Consumers. The Utilities Consumer Advocate was established by the former government approximately 15 years ago, by the government of Premier Klein. I believe that it has provided great service to Albertans, and I am pleased to see the way it has evolved over the years to assist more and more utility consumers. Its focus so far, as per legislation, has been on electricity and natural gas. Education, advocacy, and mediation are its areas of expertise, and it does a good job.

I support the government's plan to include water under its purview in this proposed legislation. In fact, we were pleasantly surprised to see the government do this for we have not seen the government display much concern about average Albertans in the first three years of this government's mandate. The government, despite repeatedly telling us that they're making life better for Albertans, has brought forward many policies that do not help make life better for Alberta families, yet that is what they are continually telling us. We only have to look as far as the carbon tax to see the trials this government is putting Albertans through. They blindsided Albertans with the tax in the first place and then increased it this past January by 50 per cent. You can understand why we are not convinced when the government is suddenly showing much concern about Alberta's water bills.

That said, I do support the UCA expanding to include free mediation services for water billing disputes. As we all know, mediation should always be the starting point when there's a dispute about anything. It lowers the temperature, thereby reducing stress. It saves time and money. Expanding the UCA's mandate to include this utility is clearly a good move and completely consistent with the existing services. I like the idea of offering Albertans a one-stop shop for utilities, and anything that makes it easier for citizens to receive assistance, especially at an early stage, is positive.

I do note that the department is not planning to expand personnel to perform these extra mediation services that will come with

handling water billing concerns. That seems a little naive, but I guess we'll see how that works out.

I'm also curious as to how the UCA will work with municipalities on billing issues that require mediation. We hear some unfortunate stories about spikes in water bills if there's a leak in a line or a toilet is left running. Right now some residents feel the need to go public with their plight to bring attention to it. Hopefully, having the ability to turn to the UCA will prove helpful to both parties involved in disputes of this kind or any other kind.

While it is good to see the government address this issue in a positive manner, I wish they displayed equal interest in addressing the financial burdens they are choosing to place on Alberta's families. They continue to pick and choose, acting on one thing like this bill, and ignore other areas where Albertans are really hurting such as the instability they are causing in our power system.

As an example, the NDP have displayed little concern for the communities trying to figure out how they'll survive the aftermath of the early phase-out of the coal-fired generating units. In her speech on Bill 14 in the House last week, the minister talked about Albertans feeling powerless when they have received massive water bills and had nowhere to turn. Well, what about the communities that feel powerless to stop the government's rushed phase-out of their coal-fired plants, plants that have been main employment generators in their communities, plants that had moved to clean-burning technologies? Madam Speaker, these communities are full of families that the government has shown almost no concern for. Their main industry is going to vanish, and so will jobs, and that means families are already leaving these communities for they see no future there anymore. A little bit of caring about these families would go a long way, but the government has never seemed concerned about the fate of rural Alberta.

A point I have yet to address in Bill 14 relates to the Utilities Consumer Advocate gaining the ability to report the track records of power and natural gas utilities companies. One of my colleagues described the change as turning the UCA into something akin to a Better Business Bureau for utilities. I believe this is quite apt. This addition to the act should allow Albertans to become more informed utility consumers. If the UCA is reporting on the performance of power and gas utility companies, then Albertans will likely pay more attention to the information available to them, which will also raise the profile of the UCA and the services it offers. That is a very positive move and something I applaud.

Now that I think about this point, Madam Speaker, perhaps the UCA's mandate should be extended to address the carbon tax on utility bills. I'm speaking specifically about natural gas. Maybe the UCA could act as a mediator when consumers have concerns about high heating bills due to the government's carbon tax on natural gas. Now, that would be providing a really good service for Albertans.

I'll leave this Assembly with that thought. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 14, An Act to Empower Utility Consumers. Being from Calgary, local residents would welcome this bill as Calgarians have been facing a fiasco of problems with their water bills. This bill appears to be an honourable bill. The NDP finally appears to be taking notice of the concerns of Albertans in regard to utility bills and not just Calgary's water bills. But after three years of serial increases to the cost of

living for Albertans by this very NDP government, at \$30 per tonne the carbon tax nearly doubles the cost of residential natural gas before other taxes and fees, so it's very important to have the outlet of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, to be able to call, complain, get help, and fix the problem with utility bills.

Not only has the natural gas jumped in price for consumers, but so has the electricity. Last month alone, the NDP spent \$9 million subsidizing electricity bills for consumers on the regulated rate option.

Mr. Gill: How much?

Mr. Panda: Nine million dollars just in one month.

Why? Because the price of electricity climbed above 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour, and that is the price cap that consumers get and the NDP subsidizes from a fund of \$74.3 million budgeted.

I'm sure the NDP's actions in subsidizing electricity prices have freed up some workers at the Utilities Consumer Advocate to take the water utility complaint calls that Bill 14 will now allow. Or have they? I'm hearing lots of people complain about the high price of electricity these days, Madam Speaker. In 2017 and '18 the Utilities Consumer Advocate took 22,790 calls and conducted 5,184 mediations on electricity and natural gas, and it is all the NDP government's fault.

9:10

For the first three years this government seemed determined to raise the cost of utilities for everyday Albertans. They hiked the job-killing carbon tax, and the early phase-out of our most efficient coal-fired generation: that coal-fired generation produced fly ash, which is used in the construction industry. Now the cement plants will have to use silica fume and metakaolin. But that's our NDP, always driving the costs up for consumers in the name of environmental do-goodism. The NDP even dared to close down brand new coal-fired generating stations – that's not common sense; it's crazy – then sent the minister on a road trip with the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour to visit the affected communities and bring hope when the workers are still at work trying to make the last dollar they could. It isn't right, Madam Speaker.

If the NDP are unwilling to address the cost of electricity and natural gas to ratepayers and taxpayers, it's a small comfort that they are willing to address concerns surrounding water bills. The UCA, the Utilities Consumer Advocate, is a good tool to provide consumers with the information and tools that they need to understand and manage their electricity, gas, and water bills. After all, it was a Conservative government who brought it in in the first place because the private sector was being unfair and not being accountable.

Bill 14 is going to allow the UCA to provide public reports on power and natural gas utilities. These reports will tell of the utilities' customer service performance. I know these reports will get used and generate news stories and make consumers shop and switch if they are being treated unfairly by utilities. However, there is inherent hypocrisy. The NDP are talking about public reporting on utilities while they simultaneously try to play down and hide the negative impacts of their policies on the utility costs for average Albertans. The NDP have raised electricity and gas prices and dared to tell customers and consumers to go complain to the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

Now, the NDP are not known for getting consultation right with Bill 6 and all other bills. We hope the NDP government engaged in meaningful consultation with municipalities on this bill, Bill 14, as this is an area primarily of municipal responsibility.

Bill 14 only solves water billing disputes, not water rate disputes as those rates are set by municipalities. It costs money for water lines, treatment plants, and environmental monitoring, and if you're using more water than your neighbour, you'll get billed more. That's why it is so important to stop any leaks as soon as they are found because you'll be charged for the water that leaked. I understand that over the last period of time, the UCA received 179 calls with respect to water bills. With Bill 14 giving them a mandate to handle water bills and a water billing dispute in the city of Calgary, I expect the calls to rise. Extending the free mediation services provided by the Utilities Consumer Advocate to water bills is the issue I can support, Madam Speaker, but what I can't support is the NDP government raising electricity and natural gas prices with their carbon tax, coal phase-out, and forced renewable electricity programs.

Madam Speaker, my colleague from Grande Prairie-Wapiti talked about extending the scope of the UCA to handle the complaints on the carbon tax. I think that that government is open to considering that. I encourage them to consider it because it's the most important concern on the minds of everyday Albertans. Their costs have gone up. The NDP tries to, you know, say in the House every day that they're making life better, but if they look in the mirror, they will know that they are making life even harder, miserable, unaffordable. If they really want to know that, they should extend the scope of the UCA to cover the complaints on the carbon tax as well.

With that, thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When we have an act that comes through the House, Bill 14, An Act to Empower Utility Consumers, I think that what's important to note here is that it's always good that there's a mechanism for people to be able to deal with monopolies, and that really is what a water commission is. You've got one line coming into your home. You have one supplier. Now, what happens here is that when there's a dispute with that supplier, we end up with a situation where they can just cut you off. Now, if this was something that wasn't a necessity of life, then that would be something that would be dealt with between the supplier and the consumer. In this case I see the wisdom in the government bringing forward a bill that says that we need to make sure there's a mechanism in place for us to be able to resolve these concerns before it gets to the point of cutting off that water.

Now, what I hear is that this is a good mechanism that deals with just the dispute between the two parties. What we have here is the fact that the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills has been very clear in saying that maybe, possibly, we need to also address the rates that they're using. This needs to be something that is maybe potentially an improvement going forward, and I think that's a reasonable improvement.

He also brought up the fact that carbon taxes are another thing that are a concern to a lot of Albertans. We heard that two-thirds of Albertans disagree with the carbon tax levy on their bill.

Mr. Gill: Tax.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. It really is a tax. This tax is levied on top of their bill, that Albertans are now responsible for.

What we need to do is ensure that the consumer has the ability to be able to discuss these things if a government implements an unfair burden on those consumers, and I do see the carbon tax as an unfair burden. It's disappointing to hear and see the fact that we have a mechanism to deal with water but that we do not have a mechanism

in here to deal with something where a government goes off the rails, like what my hon. colleague has been saying.

My question to the Member for Calgary-Foothills is: do you feel that this bill, while it's a start and we agree with it, could have been improved?

Mr. Panda: Absolutely. As legislators in Alberta our job is to critically evaluate every single bill that comes in front of us and see if it meets the expectation of the constituents that we represent. That's why I supported the point of view raised by the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti here. I do a lot of door-knocking in my riding, Calgary-Foothills, and sometimes I go into other areas, too, to talk to people. That's what they say. They say that our colleagues from the government side, the NDP MLAs, have good intentions, but they're not close to reality. Unless they go and consult Albertans on this very subject, they won't know. They think that just covering electricity and water will solve the problem and that Albertans don't have any other problems. They're all happy, in their mind, but they would realize how they feel about the carbon tax if they went and talked to their constituents.

That's why I think government should be open to an amendment to include the carbon tax also in the scope of this bill, and that's how we can serve our constituents better. I don't understand why they're hesitant to talk about this, because two-thirds of Albertans . . .

9:20

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Good morning, Madam Speaker, and thank you. This is an interesting bill, and thank you to the government for bringing this forward. It's interesting. You can read in the newspaper, you can read all sorts of interesting things about what it's like for the average person who's having these issues and trying to get help and trying to have somebody mediate through a lot of these issues.

As I understand it, the bill will expand the current mandate of the Utilities Consumer Advocate to mediate disputes for Albertans who have concerns about their water bills, sewage, and drainage as well as expand the UCA's ability to report on customer service performance, a company's history of consumer complaints, investigations and penalties. Madam Speaker, this is a great idea. It certainly pushes accountability. For anybody who is in this, to bring up the point of my hon. member over here that was talking about the fact that there is a monopoly on these things, there is absolutely a need to make sure that there's transparency and oversight. We all know how stressful this can be – right? – so to make sure that we're advocating on behalf of Albertans when something goes wrong, especially in these particular situations, is a really, really good idea.

As we know, the Utilities Consumer Advocate was actually established in 2003 to act as a mediator between Albertans with concerns regarding electricity and natural gas bills and companies that provide energy. Madam Speaker, I can honestly say that I'm sure everybody in this Chamber at some point in their life has gotten that bill, that one bill that was way higher than expected, way higher than they budgeted for, that causes unbelievable stress.

I remember when my husband and I bought our first house in Chestermere. We'd actually bought it from my parents. My parents had built this beautiful atrium off the back, extremely pretty but very, very inefficient and poorly built. It had plants. They put a banana tree in there and a jasmine tree and all sorts of wonderful things. However, the bills to heat it and to take care of it were well beyond the scope of what we were able to afford at that time. We had a particularly bad winter, and I remember my husband and I

getting that bill, and I almost fainted. Now, that wasn't the fault of anybody else other than us not realizing the amount of energy that it was going to take to run that particular greenhouse at that time. But being a young couple with young children at the time, unfortunately the bougainvillea and the jasmine and the banana tree met an early winter death because the power quickly went off in that wonderful little space until we were able to figure out what was going on in there.

I'm just sharing this story because I can share the stress with you, what that felt like, and what it took to be able to pay off that massive bill as well. I mean, you're looking at the bill. You know, you look at your bill, and you look at the number at the bottom of the page. I know, for us, our eyes bugged out. You start to run through your monthly expenses. You wonder: oh, my goodness, how are we possibly going to pay this?

Especially right now, Madam Speaker, we've got people in severe stress and distress. I can't imagine that there's a single person in this House that hasn't had discussions with folks about how hard it is right now. This is a good act in order to make sure that we're protecting people from at least some part of the stress or that at least they have somebody that they can talk to when that happens. I'm sure all of us can talk about a point in time when we didn't understand how that bill happened, and it's very, very difficult to get answers and very stressful and not always friendly on the other side of that phone call either.

You rack your brain and you desperately search for a reason for why your bill is so high. You know, did you turn the lights off? Did you have your heat turned up too high? Did you get a new appliance that is sucking more energy than you expected? Have your kids been playing with some button on your heating vents or the AC or whatever it is? Did you leave a window open? Or whatever the case may be. Sometimes you figure things out, but other times consumers are really, really left struggling and scrambling to figure out: why is the bill so much higher than you expected? You know, this is a very, very easy thing to relate to.

Now, obviously, there are many things that can lead to the discrepancies in the bills. When a consumer is faced with having to figure out which one of the multitude of factors might have caused the hike in the price, it's an incredibly, incredibly vulnerable feeling, Madam Speaker, when you're dealing with a large corporation. We know, at least in my office, that feeling of vulnerability. It's a feeling of helplessness, and you feel hopeless. Realistically, for the average Albertan, it's very complex to go through. It's very difficult to understand, especially with all the changes that are going on right now. We have a multitude of changes that are happening right now. Can you imagine, for the average Albertan, what it must be like looking at their bill right now to understand the energy market and the impacts of that on their bill and then to be able to fully advocate on behalf of themselves?

Having a Utilities Consumer Advocate I think will make a huge difference as someone, hopefully, that is in your corner so you don't feel like you're up against the odds with massive corporations. It's also another avenue when you're out of options. It's somebody that you can go and talk to.

Madam Speaker, there's one constituent in particular that comes to mind when I think about this advocate. We had gotten a call from a senior constituent in our riding who lives in a rural area and was away for a month. They're snowbirds – right? – so they fly out of the country for a little bit. When they returned, they had a \$3,000 power bill. That's when your eyes bug out of your head, at \$3,000. The family called the company, and they asked them to look at the bills for the last several years. When they looked at the average, it was about \$150 a month on average, and he explained to the

company that his bill was way off base. I mean, it was just astronomically expensive.

In fact, you know, he had his heat turned down to, like, 13 or 14 degrees the whole time he was gone, so it should have been less expensive than usual because he wasn't actually living in his house at the time. He was told by the company that they had no way of verifying the information and that there was nothing they could do. Can you imagine coming home to that bill? That would be horrible. Then, on top of that, for the power company, the ones that are supposed to have the expertise in doing this, not to be able to tell them what's going on – I can't begin to explain to you what it was like talking to this gentleman. I mean, his voice was cracking, and he didn't know how he was going to make this happen on his fixed income – I mean, it was obvious in his face: what was he going to do to pay this \$3,000 bill? – and he also was facing the horrible, horrible fact that his power could be turned off. And with absolutely no explanation.

He felt that he had no way to prove that he had not used that amount of power. It was basically, Madam Speaker, his word against that of a giant company, who hold all the power – no pun intended – literally. He absolutely felt completely helpless in all of this, completely unable to find answers. He was being blamed for this and hadn't even been there. The heat had been turned down. It just didn't make any sense. The legislation will help to protect Alberta consumers not only on concerns about their power and natural gas bills but also on the water bills, and that's good.

9:30

I wanted to talk for a moment, too, about what the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti and the Member for Calgary-Foothills said about how this should extend to the carbon tax as well. If you think about how many issues we've had with distribution of the carbon tax rebate – folks whose spouses have passed away who have had to return carbon tax rebate cheques and it going out to people who don't need it, that aren't on fixed incomes – like, there have been a lot of issues with that. I imagine it's very difficult to do something like that, to get that program up and running, so it might be a worthwhile umbrella to put the carbon tax under there, too, because it is very complicated and some people don't understand why they're having that clawed back. I mean, we have that issue with seniors, where 30 per cent of their carbon tax was being clawed back in order to help pay for utilities in the facility that they're living in.

These are all things where I think advocacy would be very, very useful for the folks of this province. You know, there are a lot of things going on that are making it difficult for people in this province, but as we all know, people love this province. They love being here. They're resilient. If they're given the opportunity to be able to be resilient and to be able to figure things out, they're going to do that. So the government might want to be able to extend this advocacy to that, too, especially given the number of issues that the government has had with the distribution of the carbon tax and especially because the rebates will not be increasing along with the amount of the carbon tax increases. Anyway, it's something to think about.

But this poor gentleman doesn't have much of a choice right now, Madam Speaker, and it's for these exact situations that the UCA is so important. We know that in recent years the number of complaints that the UCA has received regarding water bills has increased dramatically, but their hands have been tied since water bills didn't fall within their mandate. So thank you for putting that in there.

I've also heard from some of the members of this Assembly that constituents have seen their water bills increase, and this is

especially a problem as Albertans head into the summer season and the demands for water to water plants and grass and to fill recreational pools increase. But even aside from those kinds of things, there was a woman – it was in one of the newspapers, so I don't have it exactly. But I remember they were saying that she was charged \$2,700 for her water bill – \$2,700 – and had absolutely no way to be able to advocate on behalf of herself for this. There was another thing, where they were describing that she had to choose between I think it was, like, lessons or putting her daughter into dance classes.

Mr. Panda: Heat or eat.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. There's always that, too. Heat or eat.

But, I mean, she had to choose between paying her water bill and being able to do extracurricular activities with her daughter. I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but I think that this is solvable. I hope that this advocate is able to bring some sense of closure for these folks and that they have somebody who has their back with respect to these things. Adding water bills to the mandate of the UCA will give Alberta consumers some recourse for these inexplicably higher bills.

I think equally important, Madam Speaker, and what I actually really, really like about this bill is the increased reporting measures. I think it's one thing to have an advocate; it's a whole other thing to be following up with them and making sure that they're actually doing their job appropriately. I think that's excellent, and those reporting measures will really give us a sense and an idea of what's happening with the people who work within this monopoly, as the hon. member said, to make sure that they're being held accountable for their work and that they have great people on the ground that can help folks at this very, very stressful time in their life.

It's also important to note that the UCA has no formal enforcement powers. The one thing that they can do, which is very useful, is that they can go public, and they can report on the providers. Their ability to be able to report on these providers and either their ability to handle those situations or their inability to handle those situations is a hugely significant tool in itself. Sometimes public shaming is the only way that you can get things done, especially with these particular situations, when we have people that have these massive bills. I think that's incredibly important, and it will push those companies that are not putting the interests of their consumers first to actually start doing so.

I don't want to make it sound like these companies are always these terrible people – they're not – but there are situations where these things happen, where it's maybe a customer service issue or it's a contractual issue. I'm not sure. I mean, every one is significantly different.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Listening to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, you know, she has brought up some really good points. Specifically, I would have to say that whenever it comes to monopolies, we always need to be very cautious.

Now, as we've seen with this government – and we're seeing some municipalities follow suit – we're seeing a lot of creative taxes being added to bills and levies. This is something that I think – it doesn't just end with the carbon tax that we're seeing. We're seeing other things that are being put on the bill as a line item that more or less go into the general coffers of that utility commission or that municipality. You know, when I look at some of these line items, I ask myself: is that money doing what it was intended for or

what the people think it's for? It's easy to add a 1 per cent or 2 per cent levy or, in the case of the carbon tax, a tax. What we see here are breakdowns with incredible amounts of detail, but we have no idea whether there's actual accountability to see that money actually go to where it was intended.

We also see that it's done on these utilities that we have no choice but to buy. That's the problem here. When you've got a monopoly, you can tack on whatever you want. Some of them are very well intended, but in the end, we end up with things like the – a good example is when the city of Edmonton added a fee to its new builds, that accumulated large amounts of money. Then we found out that that money was meant for helping the process of new builds, and the problem here is that that money ended up becoming a massive slush fund for the city of Edmonton. Clearly, that was not the intent of that money. Clearly, the auditor of the city of Edmonton pointed this out. Now what happens is that we have an embarrassment for one of our largest cities, our capital city. This is an example of what happens when we have fees that are added and nobody is watching them.

When we've got a carbon tax – and this is a good example – we have a massive green slush fund that has been put together by this government, that is not being used as they had initially laid it out. There's no accountability mechanism when it comes to the things that are put on our bills. I do believe that it would be an improvement to this bill should the government decide to move this forward. I'm sure they will; they brought the bill forward. Again, the opposition agrees that this is a very important bill to move forward so that we've got the mechanism in place.

But the question here to the member is: do you feel that the carbon tax is the only one that we should be focusing on? Should it be all the potential levies that we've got on those bills, and if so, what mechanisms do you think we should put in to protect the consumer?

9:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I actually think it's a great idea any time that we can provide transparency. It might be complicated, but every time there's a line item that explains – because sometimes you have fees for service. Sometimes you have fees for a product. There are all sorts of fees, especially if there are utilities that are run through particular cities. Those will also have their fees running through their utility. There are all sorts of things. Presently we understand what that looks like. If it's not put onto these bills, we're not going to have any idea of what's happening. So the carbon tax would be a very, very good step in the right direction.

I think that to a large degree, to the point of the member, we don't actually understand what percentage that would be. So even if we understand that there's a carbon tax on that, we don't understand how that's being incorporated into that overall bill. By doing this and actually adding those pieces in, if you're a large company and you're providing water right now with very few incentives to actually do the right thing . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an honour, as always, to rise in this House and speak to a bill, in this case Bill 14, the utilities statutes amendment act, which would expand the Utilities Consumer Advocate's ability to deal with water complaints in particular and extend their education and free mediation services to disputes that involve water bills.

As we've heard in the debate previously, this has been an issue. Certainly, in the city of Calgary in particular it's been especially acute. It's been a challenge and an issue for certain of my constituents, so I certainly welcome the opportunity for those constituents to have another avenue of recourse should future issues like this arise.

The question I have is that this is a bill that seems to be designed to elicit a great headline for the government, but I'm curious what the actual outcome will be for consumers. Beyond the urban areas like my constituency it does, of course, include farms and small businesses as well and does continue to respect municipal jurisdiction. I'm pleased to see that the government has consulted with AUMA and RMA as well. The reporting of performance: I'm sure the House knows, but it's never a downside to say again how much I love data and how much evidence is, I think, the backbone of good decision-making, so I'm pleased to see that it will publicly report on that performance. I think that's, obviously, an important thing to incorporate into everything government does. It's especially true here.

What I'm fascinated by, though, Madam Speaker, is that there doesn't seem to be any need for new resources and there doesn't seem to necessarily be a plan here to actually promote these new services. The services will be made available by the UCA now to consumers who have complaints about water bills, with some pretty remarkably quick turnaround times by the looks of it. The mediation looks like two weeks to mediate the complaint, which is the same as existing.

It makes me wonder if the services that we have been paying for to date have been underutilized. Perhaps they have, or perhaps this organization has found some efficiencies that allow them to expand their capacity without additional cost. If that is the case, I give them great kudos for doing so, and I would say that it's a small but important example of what is possible when one sets one's mind to finding ways of doing more with the same resources and could be used as a tremendous example for the rest of government. I would really encourage the government side to find other areas within the government where this same basic model applies and more can be done.

You know, it is interesting that members have brought up some of the challenges that have been faced in Calgary. It didn't seem to be a huge focus for the government in their initial comments on the bill, but I can tell you that it has been a big, big issue in Calgary. So I think that the changes will, at the end of the day, be welcome. It's certainly not going to cost us any more, and it's going to allow consumers another avenue.

With that, I think we will be supporting this bill – I just wanted to put those brief comments on the record – and I will move to adjourn debate on this bill, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 1 Energy Diversification Act

[Adjourned debate March 21: Mr. Westhead]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, did you wish to continue in your time? No?

Do any other members wish to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 1. It's always a pleasure to rise in the

Assembly and speak to such important pieces of legislation that the government is so aptly bringing before the Assembly.

You know, one of the challenges that we see with this particular government is that they seem to be putting together such a lengthy track record of causing economic pain and terror and then needing to come to the Assembly to try to fix some of the problems that they've created. Any time government is engaging in this sort of governance, we wind up with government programs that often fail; we wind up with government programs that sometimes create more harm than good. I think of another Bill 1 that was brought before the Assembly. I can't remember the name off the top of my head, but something about: We're Going to Create the Most Jobs that the World Has Ever Seen Act, or the jobs plan bill, or the most amazing Bill 1 that the Alberta Legislative Assembly has ever seen, An Act to Create Jobs, Jobs, Jobs.

Madam Speaker, I think that you'll recall that it was basically a bill about nothing, trying to solve a problem that the government had created. In fact, it was used more as a political tool for the government to talk about jobs and how they were going to create all these jobs, and it really came down to the fact that it was a lengthy job description for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. I remember him standing in the House so triumphantly about how they were going to create all these jobs. The reality is that it created zero jobs. Well, maybe it created one job, and that was formalizing the job of the minister and giving him an actual job description.

We've seen this time and time again, where the government is responding to crises that they've created and then bringing forward legislation to try to correct some of the problems that they have started to make. In some respects that's exactly what we see with this Bill 1 as well. While, you know, I have spoken with a number of stakeholders and colleagues about this particular piece of legislation and while there are some good things in Bill 1, particularly in terms of its overall goal and that, we wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the government and their significant mismanagement of a wide variety of challenges that they've created.

While I've spoken with some stakeholders, and they have said that on balance they're not super opposed to this particular piece of legislation and that they, in fact, will be happy to apply to receive some benefit from this particular piece of legislation, what they would prefer even more than that is a strong and robust economy that didn't require government intervention or the overregulation that we see from this NDP government. And while they are going to quite likely engage in efforting to receive some of the revenue or the guarantees that come from Bill 1 because, at the end of the day, it has the ability to have a positive impact on their business and potentially – and I use this cautiously – have a positive impact on the industry, it also has the potential to be an absolute boondoggle as well.

9:50

While there is the potential that it will have a positive impact on the petrochemicals industry and in diversifying our energy industry and the economy as a whole, we've seen time and time and time again that where government efforts to intervene in the industry in the form of picking winners and losers, it is actually the taxpayer that loses. Now, I will provide some qualifying statements there because I understand that in Bill 1 there are more checks and balances than we've seen in the past with respect to trying to prevent those boondoggles in that some of the revenue doesn't actually get delivered until the project is – and these sorts of things make this piece of legislation appear to be better than some of the other times when the government has engaged in the economy.

But I think we can all agree – certainly, folks on this side of the House will agree with me – that government, generally speaking, has a terrible, terrible, terrible track record when it comes to intervening in the economy or providing subsidies or projects and oftentimes, Madam Speaker, under the guise of very noble ideals and ideas but delivered quite poorly. There are a lot of things that I believe could be done to help provide some additional assurances.

As well, I keep coming back time and time and time again to when I speak to the outstanding constituents of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that they talk about the destruction and the damage that the government has imposed upon Albertans and that they are the leading challenge to Alberta's economic future. I just keep coming back to that, that if it wasn't for the government, we wouldn't be in such a terrible position that needed to then be corrected.

As I look at Bill 1, on balance I see that there are just so many things that, first of all, have not been done that should be done to ensure that this piece of legislation is as good as it can be. But at the end of the day, it's difficult to support a piece of legislation that wouldn't be needed if the government didn't create the problem in the first place, and then it's difficult to support such a piece of legislation when you consider all of the other external factors and the financial position of the province and all sorts of other really good concerns and challenges that I hear from outstanding constituents in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills with respect to the way that the government continues to govern.

I don't know for sure, you know, and I see no reason why we shouldn't have sent this particular bill to committee. Industry has been speaking to the government with respect to diversifying the economy; therefore, it makes some good sense that we would allow industry to speak to the Legislative Assembly, to advise all of us. It would provide the opportunity for the opposition to ask industry in public. It's one thing, Madam Speaker, for me to call up stakeholders or for stakeholders to approach me privately in my own office or in the constituency office or here in Edmonton when they come to express either some concern or pleasure with legislation that is just like this, but it is entirely another thing – entirely another thing – to allow the sunlight of public presence to shine on those sorts of meetings.

I know that I've heard from some of my colleagues. The independent Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the former leader of the Alberta Liberal Party, recently brought up some of the concerns on the government meeting with certain types of lobbyists under the guise of secrecy. If there's one thing that folks on this side of the House know, it is that this government has all sorts of a track record now on doing business in secret. We look at the number of times that this government has been under investigation by the Privacy Commissioner, whether it's on shredding documents, not allowing access to visitor logs, whether it's operating in voice mode, whether it's political interference in the Premier's office in the absolute highest form, whether it's interference and political engagement in the FOIP process, in the PPA – they're under investigation for their interactions in the power purchase agreements – just four or five or six significant issues where they have been proving to Albertans that they act in secrecy.

I think just yesterday at the PAC meeting we heard some very troubling reports out of the Energy ministry's office on this very topic of the government essentially acting in secrecy. We've heard the Deputy Premier at times openly talk about how this government operates in voice mode. That's exactly why these sorts of pieces of legislation need to go to committee, so that it isn't on voice mode and it isn't just members of the opposition of the government calling up industry stakeholders and speaking to them about the legislation and whether or not it's right or wrong. I don't understand why the government continues their very poor track record on

consultation, their very poor track record on openness and transparency and continues to not allow these sorts of things to take place.

You know, Madam Speaker, there are a number of other areas with respect to this piece of legislation that I have significant reservations around. I know that my colleague the Member for Calgary-Foothills has risen in this place to talk about whether or not the government fully understands, and not necessarily specifically to Bill 1 but on a number of pieces of legislation. He's done a great job of holding this government to account with respect to: what are the actual impacts of Bill 1 going to be? This government likes to study everything under the sun except what the actual economic benefits or impacts of this legislation are.

A perfect example – and I've already alluded to it this morning – is that if the government had done an economic impact assessment on Bill 1, the bill that didn't create one job or do anything, they would have known in advance that they would have been embarrassed to introduce such a piece of legislation as they did. They could have saved themselves the heartache and the pain if they just had done an economic impact assessment on Bill 1 at that time. I believe that there have been zero actual economic impact assessments done with respect to the current Bill 1 we see before us, the Energy Diversification Act.

It's one thing to make yourself believe that your legislation is going to do what you hope it will do, and it is entirely another thing to go ahead and spend a brief amount of time to make sure that the results you hope to have happen will actually be the results that the legislation delivers. One of the ways – I'm not saying that it's the only way – that you can do that is to have an economic impact assessment. I just wonder if that was done. I'm certain that it hasn't been done, but from time to time I like to give the government the benefit of the doubt. I just wonder if, in fact, the government could save itself some hardship in the future by actually doing the important work that needs to be done now.

10:00

I was in the House just the other day when the Minister of Municipal Affairs rose in his place and talked about the impact that his father had had on his life. His father had taught him that if you're going to do something right, do it right the first time. I think that that is good advice that this government should heed. They have not done that on numerous occasions in just their short term in government, whether it's the elections financing act, that they've now brought back to the Assembly three, four times. I think this is the fifth time that we're going to see it, in the form of Bill 16, that I believe is currently on the Order Paper.

We've seen the government trying to do things that will diversify the economy.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. You know, I've been listening very intently to my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I have to say that whenever you have a lot of questions about process, secrecy within the decision-making part of the process, the question is: is this the appropriate place to be putting taxpayers' money? Now, I have to say that when you hear the member speak of the Energy Diversification Act, he has some reasonable concerns, and the reason is that as we move forward and we're dealing with billions of dollars, it needs to be transparent. It needs to be something where we can look back and actually quantify and qualify the results. If we put large amounts of money in something, did we end up with the result that we were hoping for?

The question here that the hon. member brings forward is: did the government do an economic impact study? It's clear that whenever we've had decisions go through this House, we have asked that question repeatedly, and the answer always comes to a cold silence on the other side. It's because what happens here is: do we actually have a government that just wants to go out and pick winners and losers? Do we have a government that is looking out for the best interests of the economy? Just because we're spending money doesn't mean that we're ending up with the results we're hoping for. That's an important point to bring up.

We look at our health care system as a good example. We continue to spend more than any other province on our health care, and we continue to see this government pouring more and more money into health care, but we see our wait times going up. Clearly, what we're doing isn't working for Albertans. We put money into the system. These hard-working men and women, who are doctors, nurses, technicians: they're working hard. So what is it that is preventing Albertans from getting these services? That is the question, yet the only answer we receive from this government is to put more money into it.

That doesn't seem to be a solution that is working for Albertans, and to be honest with you, it is reckless when it comes to the taxpayer because what happens is that we get into a cycle, a never-ending cycle of levying taxes and adding more and more money to the system and achieving fewer and fewer results from that money. Now, I can't remember the exact definition for insanity, but if I remember correctly, it's doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different result.

Now, what we're looking at here is the important question to the member: do you feel that an economic impact study is a necessity whenever you're dealing with large-scale credit projects like this one here being announced by the government?

Mr. Cooper: Thank you for your thoughtful question. You know, I think, as I highlighted, the government likes to study anything and everything except for things when it comes to the economy.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in the House this morning to speak to Bill 1, the Energy Diversification Act. I listened intently to my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills talk about some concerns and issues he may have.

The government's purpose behind this bill is to encourage investment in Alberta, specifically in the petrochemical industry. An important point to make and, I imagine, one of the reasons for the introduction of this legislation is the staggering amount of money that has been invested in other jurisdictions instead of Alberta in the same industry. We know now that most of this investment has been shifted to the United States' market, and part of the reason for this was the use of incentive programs and business-friendly tax policies in the United States that made them a very attractive place to invest. I'm not sure what the recent dollar amount is, but I'm thinking that billions of dollars have left this province in investment in this industry. Now, the bill does attempt to deal with some of this and some of the lack of competitiveness in Alberta.

I believe the government has good intentions behind this legislation. In fact, there are a few positives we can probably pull out of this bill. First off, the bill uses a mix of incentives to encourage the petrochemical industry to invest in long-term facilities, to grow here in Alberta. That sounds like a good plan. With investment drying up in Alberta, any incentive to get money

flowing again through Alberta's economy can be seen as a good thing. Now, this could and would put Albertans back to work and would increase our tax revenue.

It is important to state that part of the reason there has been a lack of investment in Alberta's petrochemical industry is because of this government's inability to encourage investment. This, coupled with attractive incentives from other jurisdictions such as the United States, has led to Alberta becoming an undesirable place to invest. If we're able to lure some of this investment back to Canada, I think that would be an extremely desirable goal.

Further, some of the initiatives that this bill proposes could have the potential to free up pipeline space for our resources. This could be done through partial upgrading, which would open up pipeline capacity. This would have added, to the benefit of enabling more refineries, the ability to access Alberta oil and thus expanded our market. Now, with this government's inability, with Ottawa, of course, to get pipelines such as Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain expansion built, any program that could increase pipeline capacity would be extremely beneficial to Albertans. And if more refineries are able to purchase our oil, that could also be beneficial to our economy, for our tax base, and to Albertans.

However, Madam Speaker, I have some concerns with Bill 1. Bill 1 allows for the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission to use any financial tools available, including loan guarantees and equity investments. I don't think that's a good deal for taxpayers. I think taxpayers get nervous when governments start to control these financial tools. What happens when a loan is defaulted on? What about if we invest in a company that goes bankrupt? Some of you might not remember, but NovAtel and the magnesium factory and a few other investments that governments in the past have invested in have not been beneficial for the taxpaying base here in Alberta. I'm not comfortable with giving Alberta public agencies too much power and too much financial ability.

10:10

Further to this, Bill 1 also gives power to the minister to create programs that support economic growth and energy diversification. This may include government grants or others, and I wouldn't trust the minister to have the power to create programs with taxpayers' dollars unilaterally. In other words, we, I believe, require a considerable amount of consultation and economic baseline adjustment to truly understand where those dollars should be invested.

We've seen how this government has used public dollars so far. I believe that we should not give them any more power to waste more money, chase good money after bad. We know that this bill would give the minister this power, but what programs would the minister create? We've yet to hear anything, nothing specific. How would this be rolled out? Again, no one is really sure how this will be rolled out. It's just too vague, and I still have many questions on exactly how or whom they consulted with regarding these programs that they would be potentially creating.

Now, my colleagues on this side of the House have argued unsuccessfully to refer the bill to committee. I'm getting used to going back and forth to the committee, by the way. In committee we could have heard expert opinions and hashed out the details and what the ramifications of this bill could be and would be. With billions of dollars that could be spent with the passing of this bill, is it not a bit irresponsible for the government to be pushing this through without proper study, economic consultation, maybe some experts and some expertise? Bill 1 is not a simple piece of legislation, and with the implications really unknown at this point, I and my colleagues on this side of the House believe that it needs

more time for study and that henceforth we want to send it back to committee.

Madam Speaker, in my opinion, it's just a little too risky. As a general rule, the government and/or its agencies should not be using public money, at the best of times, to try and influence the market. Now we are far from the best of times, and this government wants to throw money into projects that may or may not succeed. With a \$96 billion debt expected in the next decade, now is not the time to be throwing money away on projects at this government's discretion without consultation, without discussion, without an economic impact study, without people actually having a chance, an opportunity to deal with experts and expertise. I know that governments in the past, in this province and others, have considered situations like this, and they have not worked out well for the taxpayer.

I think everyone in this House would love to see the economy be diversified – we talk about diversification quite often, but what does that really mean? – however, we cannot do it at the expense of taxpayers. This government is already spending billions of dollars we just don't have. Let's not spend more on projects that we're not sure are really going to work out for the benefit of Albertans and for the benefit of taxpayers. The government's job is to set the market conditions that encourage investment.

If this current government really wanted to diversify the economy, there are many things they could do to increase investor confidence. Perhaps the government could look at repealing the job-killing carbon tax, which is absolutely driving away investment. Does the government think a \$30-per-tonne carbon tax is actually encouraging investment? How about when the carbon tax rises to \$50 a tonne? Will there be any investment left in our province? How about the increase in corporate taxes or the increase in regulations, red tape – red tape – bureaucracy? Has the government done anything that says that we are open for business? The answer, Madam Speaker, is no. This government has spent three years driving away investors and driving away jobs. Albertans are suffering for it.

After pushing their ideological agenda since they were elected, this government for some reason seems to be surprised that the economy is not rolling forward anymore. What's their solution? Let's spend taxpayers' money and drive us deeper in debt. This thinking, to me, makes no sense. With the current government policies, economic activity has decreased and tax revenue has gone down substantially. Tax revenue has gone substantially. So in order to try and get the economy going again, the government decides to spend money it just doesn't have. Again, I believe this is poor economic planning and, quite frankly, backward thinking.

There's a simple solution, Madam Speaker. The government needs to repeal the tax hikes, reduce regulations, and create the conditions so that businesses can succeed and for investment to thrive. We've got to put a sign on the border: we're open for business. This is far easier and far cheaper than pushing through Bill 1. Now, this would give investors the confidence that Alberta is actually open for business, which would increase economic activity, increase the tax base, and get Albertans back to work.

Madam Speaker, it's disappointing that the government is pushing through Bill 1 when there are far better solutions that could benefit Albertans, increase jobs, and, of course, increase our tax base. Now, unfortunately, I think Bill 1, as I said earlier, is a risky piece of legislation that spends additional taxpayer money without the confidence that it'll actually accomplish the outcomes the government is seeking. I think it would be prudent for us to go back, take this to committee, or at least have a chance to communicate with and involve experts and expertise and do an economic impact

study and try and design legislation that will work for Albertans without burdening Albertans and putting us more in debt.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any questions or comments? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to say that, again, listening to another one of my colleagues describe the state of our Alberta economy in detail, showing how we had a thriving economy – and, yes, oil did start to plummet. There’s no doubt that oil is a factor in this slowdown in Alberta. Now, we have seen low oil prices before. As a matter of fact, from what I understand, during Premier Klein’s time we actually saw oil plummet to about \$10 a barrel, and we were still able to move forward and bring stability to our market and show the industry, the energy industry, that we are a good place to put their money.

Now, what’s happened here is that we’ve seen ideology trump common sense. We’ve seen a government that said: we are going to fix the industry through taxes, and then we’re going to pick winners and losers on who is going to get the money and go in that direction. Now, my colleague has been very clear in his speech, saying that it’s that ideology that is preventing us from getting back on our feet. That seems to be a very reasonable statement. We see the damage this government has done when it comes to our energy industry, and it’s not just the fact that we’ve done it with the taxes. We also had our Premier and ministers showing embarrassment for our industry.

Now, what happens here is that I am proud. I am proud of everything that has happened within my Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency. I am proud of every single company. I am proud of the men and women that drive those companies. I am proud of our environmentally responsible approach to getting that oil out, and I am proud of the footprint, the ability to create smaller well sites to get that natural resource out. To the member: do you think that the government should be looking at repealing the carbon taxes, the emissions caps, and the other things that they have levied on top of our industry that more or less have chased away every big industrial player?

Thank you.

Mr. W. Anderson: Well, thank you to my hon. colleague for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. He raises some interesting points. Now, my feeling is that you can’t tax your way to prosperity. It’s a very difficult position to take. Moreover, reading through this legislation and with the lack of consultation, I think there’s just a little too much risk involved. There’s nothing specific in here that talks about or mentions how we are going to encourage investment. All it states here is that what we’re going to be doing is potentially borrowing out more capital that we don’t have to potentially provide an economic environment for investors to come back into Alberta and invest in our industry.

10:20

Now, if we wouldn’t have chased them out in the first place – what makes us think that through taxation we’re going to keep them here? The reality is that if you lower taxes and you create an economic environment that makes sense for people to invest and they can receive a good return on their investment for their shareholders and others, then they would really consider coming back and investing here. But all this really is is a tax play. It’s taking our tax dollars and putting them back out in the public market and saying: here you go; come on; let’s invest.

But the reality is that the investment capital that’s going to be provided for these individuals is debted product. We’re getting too

deep in debt, and this province cannot afford to continue going down this road: a \$96 billion debt over the next 10 years. It’s \$8 billion this year, and we’re going to offer more of our tax debt dollars to a market that has run away because they increased the taxes – corporate taxes have gone down – and the carbon tax. All those things are not favourable for investors in the North American market to invest in this province. That’s why they’ve moved billions of dollars into the U.S. market.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I see another Bill 1 coming from this government, a cornerstone bill. It is the government’s flagship, if you will. They’re saying that this is our most important piece of legislation, the one that we need to bring forward first and that we need to deal with quickly. Now, it’s called the Energy Diversification Act.

I would say that you would find hardly any Albertans that would say that we don’t want to get off the energy roller coaster. I would say that every Albertan is tired of the fact that when the oil prices go down, our royalties go down, and then in turn our spending either is reduced or we run deficits. With that in mind, this seems to be a bill that should be getting unanimous consent, you would think anyway. So what is it that we may have some concerns about when it comes to this?

Now, I’d like to go to a press release done by the Alberta government and released on March 8, 2018: Investing in a Diversified Energy Future. Underneath that it says:

New initiatives would create thousands of jobs, attract billions of dollars in private investment and secure Alberta’s energy future through diversification and innovation, under legislation introduced today.

What happens here is that we have more or less taken money from Albertans and said: let’s make sure that we go in a direction we want. Now, having said that, in fact, it sometimes can be reasoned that maybe taxpayer dollars can go down this road if you were to explore an economic impact study. What happens here is that you need to ensure that you end up with the result you were hoping for, and then if it doesn’t work, you stop. But what happens is that when we have no way of quantifying the results, you end up putting more and more money in, that our hard-working families put into this wonderful province, to subsidize something that isn’t doing what it was intended to.

A good example was when Justin Trudeau bailed out Bombardier. This seems to be a very clear example. Bombardier was in trouble. It went to the government for a bailout because it was not profitable. It was no longer viable to continue running in Quebec. I understand that there are thousands of jobs on the line. What happens is that instead of working with Bombardier and saying, “We cannot continue to bail you out,” what they did was just gave them a lump sum of money. I would say that once that money runs out five years from now, we will see the same story happening on the front page of the newspapers again, where Bombardier is requiring a bailout in order to be able to sustain its operations.

Now, what happens is that instead of calling this what it is – it’s a bailout. It’s taxpayers’ money. It’s hard-working families that paid into that. That’s hundreds of thousands of families paying into Bombardier so that we can support several thousand jobs. That seems problematic when they are not breaking the cycle, the cycle of continually asking for bailouts. Now, if Bombardier came to them and said, “You know what; we’re in trouble; we need a little bit of help; we will get through this; we have a solution in place; we

are going to ensure that a bailout is not going to be needed in the future,” that is something that we could look at with an economic impact study. We can look into it to see if their solution will work, and then we will come up with an answer that best reflects what the province feels.

In this specific case, what we had was a bailout that came to Bombardier, and then they fired a bunch of employees within Quebec, and then they gave their executives millions of dollars in bonuses. Does that not seem problematic to each and every one of you? That seems very problematic to me, and that seems to go against exactly what the intent of that money was. The money was to go and save Bombardier, to save those jobs, but in the end we saw the exact opposite. We saw abuse of the money.

Now, going back to this bill, what we’re seeing here is the government asking us to trust them that they are going to get this right without an economic impact study. Clearly, that is something that we as the opposition need to do our job on and say: “This is too general. We need specifics. We need to ensure that we end up with the result you’re trying to move forward.” But you know what we end up with? Silence. We end up with a government that says: “You know what? Trust us. We’re going in the right direction.”

Now, you’re saying that Bombardier isn’t even an Alberta company. Well, fine. You know what? I’ll give you an example that is in Alberta, an example that this government is responsible for. What happened is that we ended up with a government that forced a 3 per cent growth mandate on our Alberta heritage trust fund. They said: you have to invest in Alberta. What they did was that AIMCo, who is responsible, invested in a company called Calfrac. This company unilaterally got loans from the government and equity agreements and then moved their operations, a large part of it, to the United States. That’s shameful, and that is something this government is responsible for. It did not do an economic impact study. They didn’t ask Calfrac: what are you going to do? Yes, we saved jobs. We saved American jobs. That is what we did. You know what? That is sad.

We’ve got Bombardier. It’s a great big number, billions of dollars saving them, and we’ve got a smaller one, and, yes – you know what? – several million dollars in the grand scheme of things doesn’t make or break Alberta. But I will tell you that it is an example of when ideology gets in the way of common sense. What we need to do is that we need to ensure that we always are respecting the dollars that Albertans are putting forward. That’s why, when we have a bill that comes forward that says, “Let’s put money into diversifying the economy,” we need to be very cautious. This government has shown a repeated lack of foresight when it comes to managing the money that our citizens have given them the responsibility for.

10:30

Now, when we see the fact that we’re running almost a \$9 billion deficit – and most of that is to keep the lights on – what we’re seeing, then, is the fact that we have a government that isn’t even trying to manage itself. It won’t even put forward a real, credible plan on balancing a budget, and that is troublesome.

You know what? As we continue to go down this road of issuing credits and loans and guarantees and all these wonderful, creative ways, what ends up happening is that when the money runs out, the system collapses. When the money runs out, the system collapses. This is what we see in green energy projects across the world. When governments stop subsidizing those green energy projects, we see the entire company collapse.

Now, I am convinced that Bombardier would collapse its entire Quebec operations the very minute the Quebec government and the federal government stop bailing them out. That clearly isn’t

working right for Quebec. That is clearly not working right for the Canadian people.

When you bring in a bill, Bill 1, the cornerstone of your entire mandate, it’s important that you do a little bit more. Now, we had my hon. colleague speak before me here about how the government brought forward a plan for jobs, their Bill 1, the last Bill 1. It was more or less a job description for the Economic Development and Trade minister. If he needs a description for his job – you know what? – power to him. But I will tell you that when it comes to the fact that that minister was told that one of the programs that he was going to be bringing forward was going to fail and he refused to do an economic impact study on that, it’s shameful. You know what? In the end, it failed, and it was because what happens is that it was offering businesses money to hire employees when they had no profits. That is a strange way of putting forward a program.

Now, thankfully, the government has collapsed that program. I will tell you that it was poorly thought out. This is my concern here. We had one cornerstone bill before that clearly was a mockery to this government. Now we’ve got the government putting out a bill that says that we need to diversify our economy, which, I will reiterate, every Albertan agrees with. We should be looking for diversification, but when we do it, do it responsibly.

Another quote, and this is from our Energy minister.

We’re taking bold steps to help the energy industry innovate and diversify. These measures are not one-off fixes – they’re part of our made-in-Alberta plan for a more diversified and resilient economy that’s built to last – one where no Albertan is left behind.

That’s from that press release that I just referenced.

Let’s talk about this even further. We’re starting programs that aren’t just going to be affecting this year; they potentially could affect generations. That’s troublesome. It is troublesome that we have not done economic impact studies and that we are maybe putting forward programs that could affect generations to come because of the decisions you’re making today. If you’re looking at buying equity in companies, if you’re looking at loan guarantees, if you’re looking at creative ways of getting money to diversify our economy, putting our entire province at risk is not the way to do that.

Now, the government continues to say that they’re all about diversifying the economy. What we see is a tax levied against Alberta. We see families paying, we see seniors paying, and we see the results for companies. A good example is Lafarge Canada in my constituency. Two ready-mix cement plants, one in Bonnyville and one in Cold Lake, have said that they’re no longer economically viable within my constituency. That’s 15 families now that have no job, no source of income.

Now, let’s point to what potentially created this, the storm that created this. What we’ve got are oil companies that are saying that you’re too unstable. We’ve heard our leader, the opposition leader, Calgary-Lougheed, say that companies are now doing risk assessments and showing that dictatorships are less risky than Alberta to invest in right now. That means that the people – the residents, the families – of Bonnyville-Cold Lake no longer see the incredible growth that we had before because of the unstable nature of this government. The fact that they have brought about a situation where companies feel that we’re so risky here that they’re unwilling to put capital here is very, very sad.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Yeah. I’ll just be very brief. I just wanted to correct one thing. Calfrac actually does have a presence in Calgary

and western Canada. They're on 4th Street and 8th Avenue. They're also in the United States, Russia, and Argentina or Brazil, I believe.

When the opposition speaks about the good old days and the Klein days with the oil prices, I would encourage them to look at where the royalties truly came from in those days. It wasn't as much from oil royalties as it was from natural gas, and that situation has changed.

The plan for EDAC: it was consulted on for over a year. The number of companies and people who were consulted is in there. It's available online. It's 167 pages. I guess my question to the hon. member or members is: have you actually read the plan? It gives how it's going to be done. We've accepted all the recommendations. We're acting on three of them right now. It's got who's on the committee, who was consulted, how long, what they heard, the plan for financing, and all that. Just read the plan, 167 pages. It's not that much, and it's all nicely outlined in 10 sections. Most of the answers are there for you.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. It's always great to see the Minister of Energy up defending her government.

Now, let's talk about that advisory committee. They met four times. Wow.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Wrong.

Mr. Cyr: The minister is calling me out on that. Absolutely. It's in the report. Did you read it?

Yes, I actually did read the report. You know what? I can actually list the dates that they met: March 13 and 14, March 28 and 29, May 2, and June 12. That's in the report. What we've got here is a group that is highly partisan that met, and what we've got are real problems when it comes to the fact that this report does not seem to have a balanced approach.

Now, having said that, let's move on to Calfrac, which was her other concern. They moved the equipment from Alberta to the United States. Yes, they have a presence here still, but – you know what? – a box number is not a presence, in my opinion.

You know what? When we've got a government that is making decisions that, clearly, I question, clearly it shows that what we've got here is an ideology moving forward. You know, when we've got a committee that appears to have been formed when we actually have standing committees that are not being used in this House, that is completely insulting. We have the Resource Stewardship Committee, that should have been consulted on this specific piece of legislation before it went anywhere. But what we did was that we decided: why would we actually use MLAs for their function? Why would we actually bring all parties together to try to find a solution here?

10:40

What we found was a government that decided they already had a path. They already knew the direction that they were going to go. They decided to bring people together, and in the end they created a 167-page report which, I would say, has some good ideas. I am not discrediting the entire report. I am discrediting the fact that we could have done a better job of consulting. Now, they do have a large list of people that they did one-on-one meetings with. They have a large list of people that met, it appears, with government staff, not even with board members. I asked that question; there was no answer.

We have an advisory committee that doesn't seem to be functioning at its best capacity. We do have a Resource Stewardship Committee, that is tied up in an endless inability to be able to meet with stakeholders. My colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two

Hills has repeatedly brought up that they haven't had somebody come before their committee for two years.

Mr. Hanson: Three years.

Mr. Cyr: For three years no stakeholders.

What other purpose can we have other than to go out and reach out to our stakeholders? But what we end up with are decisions made beforehand. We have committees tied up in things that are probably important in the function that they're doing, but we are looking for more.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 1? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak on this. It's interesting, for me anyway, when we talk about diversifying and growing support for our petrochemical sector. I think what we sometimes forget in our discussions: the province and the amazing folks that work here in this industry have already done that.

I mean, when I had the Energy portfolio, one of the most interesting things that I found out in meeting with people was the way that the industry is able to pull resources out of the ground, for lack of a better word. I remember having a meeting with some of the geoscientists and some of the geophysicists, and they were talking about how they were able to extract bubbles of oil and gas from underneath incredible structures under the ground. Like, they're able to extract tremendously difficult, wonderful resources from our ground that are not easy. It's not like you just drill straight in and pull it out. It is extremely difficult.

These folks are unbelievably innovative. That has come from a province that has had to be able to figure that out. They've had to be able to figure that out. I mean, if you think about SAGD or all of these other things that have come from this province and all of those amazing things, the technology and the work and the innovation that have come from the industry are really quite astonishing. I was really a novice in this industry and really wanted to learn. You know, you find out why people that are working in this industry love this industry so much and why we have a responsibility as legislators here to really be, like, the biggest cheerleaders of our industry that we can be.

I just want to be clear, though, that diversification has been going on for a long time, and some aspects of diversification have been going on just fine without government involvement, too. Now, I realize that other pieces have had to have government become involved in order to spur technology and all of those kinds of things. We've had some great experiences, but we've also had some really serious boondoggles in the past. That's what's always concerning about this kind of thing.

When we're talking about the original Bill 1 and diversification, why are we just talking about this now? The government has been talking about diversifying the energy sector from the moment they came in here like it had never been done before. Like I said, when I had the privilege of being in that portfolio, these were discussions that were happening then.

My questions mostly revolve around, I suppose, the discussion that all of these things look great on paper. They always do. Even when I was reading the bill initially, I thought: okay; there are some really, really good ideas in here. I think all of us can agree, like, that we can understand where the government is coming from. We get it. But if you're looking at the market and at making us a competitive jurisdiction, the only part that the government is focused on is subsidizing. They haven't focused on the fact that we

have lower productivity due to winter, that we have regulatory complexities that delay labour regulations.

There are so many things, Madam Speaker, that could have been done with respect to red tape. This has been an issue for us from the beginning. Diversification: you have to have many, many regulations to oversee what's going on because there are a lot of new products that are coming on, there are a lot of new innovations, all those kinds of things. I get that. But if we actually want to be able to get our products to places, you have to be able to look at the regulations to see if that's actually part of the reason why the industry hasn't been successful in the first place. You don't just throw money at things.

Now, I appreciate that the Minister of Energy has had these meetings. I don't doubt that for one moment. The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake mentioned a few that are supposedly on the website and within this document, that is public. I don't dispute the fact that she's met with all of these other companies. I'm not saying that. But why, within this particular bill, are we not talking about regulatory issues and red tape? That's a major issue in this industry. We all know that.

Saskatchewan is managing to drill. They're in the ground, they're creating product, and it's not just because dollars are being thrown at them. It's because the regulatory burden is completely different there. It's two years less to get into the ground there than it is in this province. Madam Speaker, that's a huge differentiation in the ability for an organization to be able to get their product to market.

The other interesting thing, too, that I want to talk a little bit about is the carbon tax with respect to this. As I understand it, you know, because these are large emitters, they will not be involved in paying the carbon tax because they're already more efficient. Maybe the minister can correct me if I'm wrong about that. The specified gas emitters already function higher, which is why large corporations are able to stand up and go, "Yay; carbon tax," because they don't have to pay it, just regular, everyday Albertans have to. But what about transportation of these products, Madam Speaker? What about that? Are we transporting it through – well, some of it will probably go through a pipeline if we're lucky enough to get that built, but what about truck transportation, train transportation? Those aren't exempt from the carbon tax, I don't think.

On one hand, the government is going to give over hundreds of thousands of dollars, hundreds of millions of dollars, actually, to incentivize an industry, but then that industry is going to have to charge a carbon tax to the people at the other end that are supposedly buying these products, which makes them less able to compete. I understand when I read this bill that that was the whole point of this.

We were the most competitive jurisdiction, and then other jurisdictions were putting in incentives that eroded our ability to be competitive. So if I was to understand this correctly, Madam Speaker, the incentives that were put in by the government were to help to stimulate this industry, to be able to get them started, to get them going. But at the same time, on the other side, all of the other pieces of this: running the facilities, the transportation, and everything else that a carbon tax is on, which is everything. Where's the cost-benefit analysis showing us how that all lays out? First of all, this is being paid for by tax dollars, and then on top of that, we have a carbon tax that we're paying into this as well to subsidize the costs that are going to come from the regular, everyday operations of these particular groups. Where is that information?

You know, this is a huge amount of intervention. The whole point of this, as I understand it, is that the government wants to create diversification. If the market is there – and as we can see, the market seems to be available – why not look at making us the most competitive? There are places where taxes could be looked at to

give incentive to these companies. I mean, on paper it looks great. It looks like PDP 1, based on their royalties and based on what would come back to Albertans within, I think – what is it? – a three-year period or something like that that we were looking at: the numbers look like they would add up.

10:50

But guess what, Madam Speaker? There's no cost-benefit analysis to hedge that, to give Albertans any sense of security that that will actually work out so that we can actually look at those numbers and see that it's been done in the past and it hasn't worked. Other governments have failed with this. It would be really, really good for this government to take a look at the failed policies of other governments or where this has worked. Policy matters. That's the thing. You know, we look at the legislation and the language and the attitude of a government that was so anti-resource for such a long time, so negative towards resources for such a long time, and now the government has to pass legislation to counter that. What if the government had from the very, very beginning promoted that diversity, looked at where the taxes could have been changed?

How much do each of these jobs actually cost? I mean, it's wonderful. Job creators are fantastic. That's what all of us want. But each of those jobs is now being supported by the taxpayer, and we don't even know what the cost-benefit analysis of that is for Albertans. What are they going to see back from this? I mean, I hope we see something.

It seems to me that this level of diversification, where we're talking about, as I understand it – and the minister can correct me if I'm wrong. But we're looking at, you know, the feedstock of propane, extending it to methane and ethane as well and using those feedstocks to be able to produce products that are needed elsewhere. Well, we're kind of landlocked here, Madam Speaker. It's not like we have a port that we can just use. We actually have to transport these items somewhere. So how are we getting it there? Trucks, trains, cars, some form of transportation that is pollution intensive. That would be my best guess.

I mean, the Kinder Morgan as it stands right now does push diesel to B.C., but aside from that, all of these other products, as I understand it, are going to have to use transportation to get there. Why is that not part of the discussion as to the overall cost of this, not only the physical cost of what it's costing the taxpayer but the environmental cost, the environmental footprint? That has to be part of the overall cost of this as I understand it. I mean, it is this government that agreed to upstream emissions being put on pipelines. They certainly didn't fight against it with the federal government. It's interesting, isn't it?

Why not look at repealing some of the harmful policies? Why not repeal the carbon tax? Repealing the carbon tax would automatically change the way that we are able to compete. Automatically. Every other jurisdiction that is oil intensive – Australia, France, United States – has repealed those because they don't work. Look at a different way, especially because these products are going to be using pollution-intensive mechanisms to get their product to market. There's no way to change that footprint, Madam Speaker, at least not at this point in time.

Then I'm not even clear about the legislation that is used to carry out this agenda. There's a ton of – I mean, the Minister of Energy has extraordinary powers on many, many, many, many levels. So when that lack of transparency is there – like, we're looking at the fact that we don't understand the cost benefit. We don't know how much this is going to cost Albertans down the line. It could end up being a really great project, but if it's a great project and it's everything that the government says that it's going to be, where's the analysis for those of us who are looking at this and going: hmmm?

I mean, it's our job to give the government an opportunity to fix any of the mistakes that might be in there. Hopefully, this is helpful.

I just have to say this again. There is nothing – nothing – in this bill to address the regulatory roadblocks, Madam Speaker. This is one of the major issues. I mean, we've been talking about this forever. We have competition in other jurisdictions that are getting there faster than we can. I mean, the government is saying this, too. These are jobs that are on the line. Even to keep a base of people to work here when they can just cross the border to Saskatchewan or go to the United States – I mean, money is mobile. It certainly is, and the energy industry realizes that. To tell you the truth, I mean, you can throw as much money as you want at these projects, but at the end of the day, the company is only going to stay as long as they can see that there is profit for them and that they're able to continue on and that the jurisdiction they're working in is actually working along with them, not against them. The industry here certainly has not seen that.

Now that the government is finally jumping onboard, it's a little too late. Like I said, I believe that policy matters. We need a cost benefit, an economic plan, an understanding of how this is going to work out.

The other thing, too, is that the government has in here some ideas about guarantees – I'm not sure; maybe the minister can answer that for me – in the feedstock infrastructure program. She talks about industry constructing more straddle plants needed to capture more natural gas liquids required to feed the petrochemical industry in Alberta; namely, ethane, propane, methane. Evidently, there are more details coming on that. Can she answer what that actually means? Like, is the government not only going to help out with the process of creating plants to create these products but also with the capture of those products as well? So we're in at all ends of this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I actually had the honour to work with the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View when she was the Energy critic and I was the economic development critic. She took a lot of interest in that file, meeting with so many stakeholders in and around Calgary. We went to those meetings together. I really appreciate her passion on this file. She's raised many good points on this Bill 1.

I know Chestermere has a similar demographic to my constituency of Calgary-Foothills. Many of the people work in the oil and gas sector in downtown Calgary, travelling every day from Chestermere. How do they feel about the overall economic environment? What do you hear from your constituents about the job opportunities and whether they're still gainfully employed? Are they able to find work in Calgary? Can you share your thoughts on that, please?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the thoughtful question. I am actually really thrilled to be able to talk about this. There are some people that are doing okay. I mean, part of it, too, is that because so many people have left the industry, there are jobs for those that have been able to stay around and been able to pick up some of those jobs. We have some people that are okay and are successful, but that's also because they've divested a lot of their interest to the United States. A lot of their capital, that was once invested here in drilling – and there's a ton of drilling out in Chestermere and around that area. A lot of those are on hold right

now. They've taken their finances out of those, and they've put them into other countries, into Saskatchewan. So some of those folks are doing okay.

But weekly the hardest – and I don't think it's just this particular timing right now. I mean, there are ups and downs all the time, but particularly right now, because of the added burdens, there are just so many things. We have, you know, the economy, that is in rough shape. The government keeps saying that we're coming out of this recession. My goodness, I really, really hope that they are correct. The folks in Chestermere-Rocky View aren't seeing a lot of that right now. We have that. We have the carbon tax. We have small businesses that are impacted by minimum wage increases.

11:00

On top of that, we have a government that is bringing in bills at the last minute to try and create job opportunities. I'm sure that they will, but the thing that we all don't understand as taxpayers and ratepayers is: why are we consistently being put on the hook for something when the government is coming literally late to the game to bring this idea forward?

Then, on top of that, we have no changes in the regulatory burden. Let's say that somebody has some capital and wants to get involved in this; they can't. They're looking at, like, a four-year date out, Madam Speaker, if they're lucky enough to be able to put their cash there. Quite frankly, as an investor there's no way that I would look at that. I would absolutely be looking to other jurisdictions. I'd have to in order to be able to maintain my investments where I want to keep them, and I would certainly direct my friends, too. I'd love to be able to invest here, but I don't know how to do that when there's this much regulatory burden.

I just think that most of what we hear in ours over and over and over again is to please repeal the carbon tax. If that was able to happen, that competitive nature and the competitive ability for the province to be able to function would certainly increase. We've seen it in other jurisdictions. We've seen it in the United States, we've seen it in France, and we've seen it in Australia, all of these places. The government will keep trying to reinforce that somehow this helps the environment, but it doesn't. There are so many other ways that you can reinforce good behaviour for the environment.

On top of that, the government has a responsibility to really, really show Canadians, especially our friends out east – or especially their friends out east – and the world what an amazing, responsible development jurisdiction we are. What I find interesting is that ...

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 1? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I thought that you'd already spoken to this bill, hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: Are you sure?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mrs. Pitt: Can I move to adjourn debate?

The Deputy Speaker: No.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move to adjourn debate on this bill, please.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2
Growth and Diversification Act

[Adjourned debate May 1: Mr. Mason]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to Bill 2? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to go to the throne speech and see a lot of the direction that the government is taking when it is putting forward a piece of legislation. Now, in the throne speech, if you go to page 6:

The first bill will focus on diversification within the energy sector. As we work to diversify the markets our energy resources can access via pipeline, we will also do more to add value to our resources right here at home. The second bill will focus on diversification across our economy. The third bill will focus on laying the groundwork for new renewable energy jobs and an electricity system with more stable prices.

That is underneath the heading *Diversifying Our Economy*. We've got Bill 1, which is on diversification, then we've got Bill 2, which is on diversification, and we've got Bill 3, which is on diversification. So it seems to follow the premise that the government has put forward.

Now, again, when we've got a government that is clearly looking at diversifying the economy, it is important that they understand that the opposition agrees that diversification is important. We do need to find ways to diversify because I don't believe that anybody likes to be on the oil roller coaster, but, again, we need to do it responsibly. We need economic impact studies. When we show that the government has repeatedly made ideological decisions over decisions that are clear and concise, when it comes to results, we get failure.

Now, to go back to the throne speech and what we've got here, I'd like to see what the government is trying to accomplish with Bill 2. The heading is *Diversifying through Education, Training, and Business Development*. What we've got here is that the government is saying that they want to train the workforce, and what they're looking to do is develop new diversified parts of Alberta that they can work in. Now, to continue quoting this:

While your government works to diversify our traditional strengths, we will also diversify by helping other sectors of our economy grow. The second bill your government will table before this Legislature will be the Growth and Diversification Act.

We do have that act before us.

This act will expand existing tax credits, introduce new tax credits, place major resources behind education and training, and help make postsecondary education more affordable.

Now, over the last weekend we had the honour of holding our founding meeting of the United Conservative Party, and we had a speaker, the past Premier of Saskatchewan, Mr. Brad Wall. He is a remarkable man who did remarkable things with that province. You know what? I had never seen a speech given by Mr. Wall, but I will tell you that no matter what party you're with – you probably may not agree with his speech if you are on the socialist side – it is an entertaining speech, and it is one that is very informative.

To get back to the point, one of his comments was that Alberta needs to thank Saskatchewan. I'm, like: well, okay; what is it that we need to thank them for? One of his points was that they helped to build Alberta, and I think there's some truth in that. I truly believe that what happened was that Saskatchewan was training their students, and those students were coming to Alberta and growing our economy. So when we've got Saskatchewan saying that they helped to build us, the question is: now that we're putting this forward – and let's say that these tax credits don't diversify the

economy the way the government is hoping because they didn't do an economic impact study – are we going to be training 3,000 new Albertans to work outside of Alberta? I don't believe that's an unreasonable question, because in the end what we need to be looking at is the best value for taxpayer money.

In this case what we see is the government saying that they're going to diversify the economy. This is important here.

We will extend the capital investment and Alberta investor tax credits to help businesses grow and expand.

Now, what happens here is that these tax credits are normally applied against profits. Right now a lot of our businesses are having a hard time attaining a profitable balance sheet or income statement.

11:10

What happens here is that until they see a stable government come in, which means a government that is less likely to implement taxes every single – well, it seems like every month we've got some new tax. But what we've got here is a government that made it so hard for businesses to actually run here, let alone start here, that that's problematic. So now what we end up having to do is to create subsidies for them to survive, subsidies to grow. This is something new for Alberta. This is something that we have never had to do before because of the tax environment that we had before. What happens is that the more you take out of these corporations, the less likely they're going to put their capital here in Alberta. It seems that when this government moves, every time they decide to, it is our corporations, our business communities, our small businesses that seem to take the right hook.

Here we've got a bill that is using tax credits, more or less, on the justification of expanding the training of students within Alberta. It is admirable that we are trying to diversify, something that I mentioned right off the bat in my speech. I said that that is something that I think we should all be trying to attain, which is: let's try to get off this roller coaster.

Going back, why is it that we see no economic impact study? Can they show us that this is going to work? Do we have anything to show success? I would say that we will end up creating a whole lot of unemployed youth in Alberta. That is unfortunate. I believe – and somebody can correct me if I'm wrong – we're sitting at about 45 per cent unemployment for our youth right now. Is it that high? I thought that I heard that.

You know what? If we start to continue going down this road, we're not going to see the youth staying in our province, which is getting back to my main point that Saskatchewan, Ontario, B.C. are going to be thanking us for these trained youth.

Apparently, that was completely false, and I am going to clarify. There are 43,000, which is where I got that number from, unemployed youth, which is 13 per cent. So I apologize. I wasn't meaning to bring misinformation to the House. But we still have a very large youth population that is unemployed. So if we don't create these jobs, like the government is hoping, that is clearly problematic.

Moving on:

We will also support [jobs] in digital industries with a new digital industries tax credit.

So they're saying that they're trying to move into new industries. Now, it's my understanding that when it comes to a lot of these industries, they are highly subsidized. If that is the case, is it the intent of the government to start massively subsidizing it beyond the tax credits that they're already offering in order to attract them here? That is a question that I have.

This act will also create thousands of new spaces in our postsecondary institutions dedicated to technology, an investment that will enable more Albertans to get the education and training they need to get good jobs in this growing sector.

We're going to be training Albertans in a sector that needs to be developed en masse. If that tax credit doesn't work, these Albertans will have no choice but to move out of Alberta because of how specialized this training is. That is problematic.

At the same time we will continue to make postsecondary education costs here more competitive with costs elsewhere. The tuition freeze will be continued, saving students up to \$1,500 on a four-year degree. To keep education affordable and to protect the gains we have made on behalf of students and families, any future tuition increase will be capped by law.

Now, we have heard from our universities that they adamantly disagree with the cap. You can see why. They need to be able to move according to what their needs are.

Now, as a past student I can tell you that I lived on that shoestring budget, like a lot of people that went through university. When it comes to every dollar that is in your pocket, that actually matters. I'll tell you that \$1,500 over four years doesn't sound like much. You're looking at – what? – about \$375 a year. That doesn't sound like a lot of money, but to me that was a large amount of money. That was an incredible amount of money. You start looking at the fact that I was eating a great big thing of spaghetti. That thing would last me for a week. It sure wasn't good at the end of the week, but – you know what? – you made it work. Your suppers, lunches, and breakfasts really depended on how much money was in your pocket, on how much you could budget.

Now, I have to say that when we start looking at this, it's very attractive to these youth that are looking to get out into the job market. They're saying: I need the money in my pocket. Fair enough. But if you end up getting out of school with no job waiting for you, that also is problematic. We always had a system where when youth got out of school, no matter what they were looking to do, there was a job waiting for them in Alberta. That has changed. That has dynamically changed.

We've got a system right now that more or less has been attacking our business community. A lot of these business leaders are saying: why would I keep capital here in Alberta? It's not being malicious. This is not businesses saying: I don't want to support Alberta. In the end, what happens is that a successful small-business community, a successful business community, means jobs. It is plain and simple. As we continue to levy more and more taxes against them, you're going to find that those jobs are not there for our students, which gets me back to Bill 2.

You're looking to diversify the economy. Why would anybody want to when it's too unstable? As we continue to put in more and more restrictive labour laws, as we continue to put in more and more red tape, as we continue to levy more and more taxes on them provincially, municipally, and federally, they're not going to see us as a jurisdiction that they want to place their business in. I can tell you that when it comes to business, we all need to be wary whenever we start attacking them.

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

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity, and thank you to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The hon. member was speaking on Bill 2, Growth and Diversification Act. I understand that the intent of the government is to look for another way to demonstrate this government's commitment to diversify the economy. Again, this bill creates tech spaces in postsecondary institutions, creates a framework to invest in new scholarships and programs in tech, launches an interactive digital media tax credit, continues the Alberta investor tax credit and the capital investment tax credit, and installs the Minister of

Transportation as a point person for the unmanned aerial systems sector.

11:20

The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, you know, spoke at length. I know it's unclear at this time, according to my understanding, if the companies who have received tax credits during the first incarnation of the program were actually in need of the tax credit support. Some would likely have been able to access investment capital through the traditional channel. I would ask the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake if he can further comment on that and share his experience and knowledge with us. Like, how does this work with the companies? Who can benefit from this program?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My colleague brings up some very important parts here. When we start picking winners and losers, the entire industry becomes the loser. That's the problem here. Let's say that there are, for argument's sake, 30 different businesses within that industry. We pick three of them, saying: you are going to get these credits. The other 27 suddenly are not competitive with those three different businesses. Clearly, that is a system that we need to be very cautious of. Now, that's where, if you were to do a tax credit, you would do it to an entire industry. In that way, they're all competing at the same level. But that is not what we have seen traditionally when it comes to this government.

Now, I would like to finish off with the throne speech, though, in this section.

To make education more accessible and affordable in northwest and central Alberta, colleges in Grande Prairie and Red Deer will begin their path to becoming degree-granting institutions.

They're acknowledging that we've got parts of Alberta – and I would argue that northeastern Alberta, actually, should have been highlighted. Actually, to be honest with you, northern Alberta should have been highlighted.

Now, what we've got here is a government that is more or less, it appears, giving up on the oil sector, giving up on the forestry sector, and they're saying that we need to retrain you for a different occupation. That is what it seems like. In the end, we're not proud of our energy industry when it comes to the fact that we continue to levy unbearable, incredibly insulting restrictions on this industry. We need to make sure that we're competitive with neighbouring jurisdictions, we need to make sure that we're competitive for the world, and we need to make sure that our oil gets to markets.

I know that the government is working very hard to get the Kinder Morgan pipeline, and it is important that they continue their advocacy. I support them and I hope they're successful in that because it does mean jobs for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. When they say that we're naysayers on the opposition side, that is categorically untrue. My constituency depends on that pipeline as much as this NDP government. That is just a fact.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. It's a pleasure to rise this morning and speak to Bill 2, the Growth and Diversification Act. I'd just like to thank my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake for some of his remarks. I think that they are certainly well and truly on point.

As I spoke earlier today about Bill 1, Madam Speaker, you'll know that Bill 1 and Bill 2 certainly have some similarities with respect to providing tax credits and the like to certain sectors. I'd

just like to highlight or reaffirm some of the comments from the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake with respect to some of the concerns around tax credits.

In particular, Bill 2 is a first-come, first-served tax credit, similar to the AITC credit that we saw in the past. About 5 per cent of that credit wasn't used in the last round of similar programming, so it begs the question: do we need another one if it wasn't fully used prior? Given that it is a first-come, first-served credit, you do run the risk of making one business more competitive than the other.

I think the highlight he used was that if there are 30 businesses and three of them get the credit and 27 don't, then you've essentially chosen winners over losers, whether or not it was just on a first-come, first-served basis or was hand-picked by the government. I know that they like to provide hand-picked handouts, certainly, to some of their close friends and allies with respect to funding from the carbon tax. In this case, when these things happen, you make one business more competitive than another, and the free market has significantly more difficulty adapting to these sorts of conditions. Any time you have the government engaging in the free market in a way that creates an unfair environment, that always will have negative impacts on that market.

You know, the role of the government should be essentially – I know that this side of the House and that side of the House have a very different view on this – getting out of the way of the job creators, getting out of the way of the market, getting out of the way of creating undue regulation whereas on that side of the House they want to do the opposite. They want to meddle in the market. They want to meddle in so many different – I mean, the carbon tax is a perfect example of this exact problem.

This government implemented the single largest tax increase in Alberta's history, that essentially removes \$3 billion from the economy so that it can be redistributed by the government. This isn't equitable, it's not reasonable, and it doesn't create an environment of competition both here in the province as well as across North America. That's one of the big, big, big problems with the carbon tax, that it continues to put Albertans at a competitive disadvantage to our single largest competitors, whether it's the province of Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Manitoba, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota. While British Columbia does have a carbon tax, it's certainly structured significantly differently than ours. In North Dakota, South Dakota, all of the northern states, and, in fact, clear around the world it's one of the reasons why we see many jurisdictions moving away from carbon taxes, because they don't have the same net positive effects both on the economy as well as on the environment.

We've heard at length from some of the government's very own experts talking about what the price of carbon actually needs to be to have the positive impacts that they say that their carbon tax is going to have with respect to actually reducing emissions. Some say \$200 a tonne, some say \$300 a tonne, but already at the current price it has major negative impacts on Albertans, in particular on low-income Albertans. In the future, as the government has now made a commitment to not having rebates and to rolling back the rebates, with all of the money moving to general revenue, what we see is a tax is a tax is a tax under the guise of having a positive environmental impact.

11:30

These are the fundamental differences between this side of the House and that side of the House. They believe that the government knows better than everybody else, and we believe that everybody else knows better than the government. We need to do things to eliminate government intrusion in the marketplace, we need to do things that eliminate government intrusion in people's lives, but we

currently have a government that wants to do the exact opposite of that.

Bill 2 is an example of just that. Bill 2 is an example of where some businesses will receive a benefit and others won't. It's an example of the government engaging in the marketplace that is – and I will submit that it may be helpful, but the opposite of that can also be true. It may not be helpful and, in fact, may be damaging.

That's one of the reasons why I would like to move an amendment. I will provide the page the copies, and I will wait for your direction.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Notice of 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 because the Assembly is of the view that the government should pursue other measures to reduce the cost of doing business in the province, including the introduction of legislation to eliminate the carbon levy, which, if implemented, would make the measures proposed in the bill unnecessary.

You know, Madam Speaker, before us we have a very reasoned amendment. I think the case has been made very clearly this morning that the reason that we're here needing to implement these boutique tax credits, these programs of government intervention, in many respects lies at the feet of the fact that the government has such a disastrous record on the economy and on taxes. I think the carbon tax is a perfect example of that.

Now, I recognize – and this may be one of the very few times that you'll ever hear me say the words "carbon levy." I think I've got something in my throat here. The reality is that if the government was to actually take the time and introduce legislation to eliminate the carbon whatever you call it, the province would be much better off. As such, I am of the belief and I'm certain that many members on this side of the House are also of the belief that eliminating the carbon tax would in fact have the same sorts of impacts or better.

In fact, I spoke earlier in the House about an economic impact assessment, and I would be more than happy to have the government do one on this very task. Unfortunately, I as the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills didn't have the available resources to do a full, costed economic impact assessment, but I can assure you that the government has the ability to do so.

I also know that the outstanding people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, certainly the thousands that I have spoken with – I'll acknowledge that I haven't spoken to every single member of the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills – have spoken at length about their concerns about the cost of everything being increased by this government and, as such, would also agree with me that eliminating this tax, that has negative impacts all across the economy, would in fact have better results than simply introducing patchwork quilt type legislation that we see in the form of Bill 1 and Bill 2.

You know, this government has such a terrible record when it comes to increasing the costs to business and, as such, a negative impact on the economy, a negative impact on small-business owners, a negative impact on employees. I know many businesses in the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that, because of a lot of the regulatory burden – the increase in costs, the minimum wage, the change in the labour legislation – no longer exist.

I think it's a very reasonable amendment. I think that the government would be well served. I can tell you that the popularity

of the NDP would increase by significant, significant orders of magnitude in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills if you eliminated the carbon tax. Just to offer you a small piece of free political advice, if you're looking to make any inroads in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the number one thing you could do is to pass this amendment and take steps to eliminate the carbon tax because they would actually believe that you're finally listening to the people.

But I think the amendment is a good one, particularly because it speaks about: "pursue other measures to reduce the cost of doing business in the province." It's not just specific to eliminating the carbon tax, although that is clearly the best path forward for everyone, but it also encourages the government to pursue other measures to reduce the costs that our small businesses and our economy are facing because of this province – because virtually the only thing that we've seen from this government is an increase in costs, with the one small exception of a small reduction in the small-business tax rate, which, if you're following along at home, was actually a suggestion that the Official Opposition had made, that was initially rejected.

Mr. Cyr: Actually, they did it, but it was 3 per cent.

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. It was initially rejected, and then in the following session the government realized that this was a good idea and that, in fact, it would be a positive for small-business owners, so then it was implemented. [Mr. Cooper's speaking time expired] I sense there's a pattern.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cyr: You know, I would like to thank the member from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. You know what? I have to say that when you start looking at a reasoned amendment, that is the equivalency of saying: let's shut this bill down. Here's the reason why. When you look at this bill and you hear why the member feels that this is important, you start to see that we really need to review the direction we're going. Going back, we have several committees that could be tasked to come up with better ways of diversifying our economy.

11:40

Now to go back to his point, let's talk about the Calgary Chamber of commerce: "73% of businesses surveyed reported that their costs will increase due to the carbon [tax]." This is the Calgary Chamber report, December 14, 2017. This is not something that was long ago or outdated.

Let's read the reasoned amendment again.

Bill 2, Growth and Diversification Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government should pursue other measures to reduce the cost of doing business in the province, including the introduction of legislation to eliminate the carbon levy, which, if implemented, [will] make the measures proposed in the bill unnecessary.

What it's saying is that we need to start taking the burden off the business community. When you start looking at any of the chambers across Alberta – I can't speak for them all, but I will say that when it comes to the chambers, many of them will agree that the carbon tax is a burden on their business.

Now, there are a few other quotes. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation: 55 per cent of Albertans received no rebate cheque, or it was less than they paid in carbon taxes.

Now, here's the thing. This is not just harming our business community; it is also harming the Albertan who spends money at

these businesses. It reduces the amount of disposable income. Some of it is not disposable income; some of it is plainly for necessities. So as we start seeing the fact that these individuals or these Albertans, these families in Alberta have less money to spend, the businesses are also feeling the pressure on themselves. They have less revenue coming into these businesses, and they also have a collapse in the fact that they're no longer being profitable.

Now, to the member I have to say that this amendment should be moved forward. You started talking about your constituency and the fact that what we see here is a business community that has gone from shock to, I guess, a standstill, and now they're declining. Do you see that this is going to change in the immediate future?

Mr. Cooper: I mean, certainly, it's not going to change in the immediate future. You know, one thing that could help change it, of course, is repealing the carbon tax. We would see significant economic growth, and we would become again equally as competitive as our neighbours, lots of steps forward that would be very positive for Alberta. But the thing that's important about this is that it's not just business; it's also Albertans. This government is taking \$3 billion out of the economy in the form of the carbon tax, and that is hurting families as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's truly a pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment. As we all know, Alberta's economic future is looking up, and it has been gaining speed over the past year, I'd say. But there's more work to be done in what we've gained and sustained and to continue on a path of economic diversification. Like I said, we've made great progress. We've introduced programs to stimulate growth across sectors, to support job creation, and we've opened doors to small business and new entrepreneurs to start and expand. We have to keep this recovery going for the long term and not return to the same boom-and-bust policies that put the security of Albertans at risk. That's what this bill supports. It supports businesses in Alberta to continue to grow, to continue to hire, to make sure that we're still on that trajectory.

I just want to remind everyone what this bill does. It's starting with the Alberta investor tax credit. The AITC encourages investors to provide entrepreneurs across sectors with greater access to the capital they need to innovate and expand by offering a 30 per cent tax credit for investments in small Alberta businesses. Bill 2 proposes to add a diversity and inclusion component to the AITC program for those investors who invest directly into companies where the majority of the board of directors as well as the CEO are members of an underrepresented group. Now, our government is encouraging companies to do more to ensure that inclusivity and diversity are part of their business models. That's part of this bill and why I don't understand why the opposition thinks that this isn't needed and that we should just get rid of some other issue instead of actually putting the details in this bill into power.

Now, businesses asked us for these things, have asked us to help them grow through tax credits like the capital investment tax credit, like the AITC; however, it seems the opposition is constantly attacking business. They don't want to help these businesses grow. They don't want to help these businesses with the tax credit that they've asked for. They've asked for these tax credits for decades, Madam Speaker – for decades – and the opposition, when they were in power, did nothing to help them in this respect. So I'm proud to be part of a government that's actually putting these measures into motion.

To remind everyone what the capital investment tax credit does, as with the AITC, the CITC has supported new jobs by fostering increased economic activity through the labour required to make these new investments in capital assets and through the positive impacts in related industries once these investments are up and running and turning a profit. The CITC offers Alberta companies a 10 per cent nonrefundable tax credit up to \$5 million, encouraging timely capital investments that offer opportunities for economic growth.

Now, this program has already seen huge success, with 35 companies from across the province conditionally approved for a total of \$62 million in credits through the first and second round of the CITC. I just don't understand why the opposition doesn't think this is a good idea, when businesses are using this to grow, to hire, and to expand.

The opposition seems to want to put the brakes on this right when the economy is growing. We're the fastest growing economy in this country, and the opposition just wants to put the brakes on, saying: "No. We need to stop now. We need to lower taxes for higher industry and get rid of these things through cuts." Cuts, cuts, cuts. That's all the opposition has. They don't want to help these businesses through tax incentives. They just want to cut taxes. That's how we got the boom-and-bust cycle that we've been living in for the past few decades, and that's why we have such large infrastructure deficits.

Now, just to remind the opposition, I just want to quote a few people who are very much in favour of this. Kevin Barrett, the executive director of studio operations at Serious Labs Inc., has said:

For Serious Labs, a groundbreaking virtual reality training company based in Edmonton, the new IDMTC would help ease the strain of our 100 per cent year-over-year staff growth rate. The demand for our industrial [VR] simulators is enormous, and we require more and more highly qualified and experienced developers to design and build them. Government assistance in helping us expand and retain our talent pool is greatly appreciated.

Once again, that's Kevin Barrett, the executive director of studio operations at Serious Labs.

11:50

From Heather Sworin, HR manager of CodeHatch Corp.:

We're happy to see the Alberta government taking a competitive approach to growing Alberta's video game development industry by coming alongside tax credit programs that have long been in place in other Canadian provinces. Edmonton is already on the development map, but it would be great to see that reputation grow much further, and to see the industry grow all over Alberta. We're excited to see how this program will help local studios to expand, both in size and ambition, as we bring our games to a global, highly competitive market.

Since the video game market is worldwide, the potential for growth is very high – we think the government will see a good return on its investment in Alberta video game developers through this tax credit program.

I just want to reiterate that I just don't understand. Maybe the opposition can explain to me why they don't think that these tax credits and this – sorry; I'm going to get the exact wording – interactive digital media tax credit are a good idea. They seem to want to be hurting businesses that have been asking us, once again, for decades to put these tax credits in place. The opposition continuously wants to put the brakes on the economy of Alberta. They want to stop business from growing in Alberta. They just want to go back to the old ideas that they've been on.

They think it's a laughing matter. I can't believe they're laughing. The Member for Calgary-Greenway is continuously laughing. Why is he laughing, Madam Speaker? He just thinks that growth in the economy is a laughing matter. It's not a laughing matter, sir. I don't know if you noticed from last time, but the Member for Calgary-Greenway was continuously talking when other people were talking in this Chamber. I'm sick and tired of his attitude to these businesses, who are just trying to grow.

They just want a little support from their government, and that side of the House could never give it to them. They just helped the oil and gas companies, which are beneficial for Alberta. We do have a lot in my riding. I would say that probably in every riding in Alberta we have people who are employed in the oil and gas sector, but that's not the only industry we can concentrate on. We have to help other sectors of the economy grow. We have to help them through tax incentives and tax credits like we're doing here.

That's why we are not going to accept this amendment, because it's putting the brakes on the economy. It's stopping business from continuing to grow. It's going to hurt these businesses that need these tax credits to continue to grow. That's why we will not be supporting this amendment; at least, I won't be. I would suggest to all members of this Chamber to not support this amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the passionate discussion. It's very nice to see the member stand up and discuss this, and I would love the opportunity to make a few remarks if that's okay and to potentially ask a question here.

I just wanted to mention that I've been living in my riding of Chestermere-Rocky View for 40 years. I've had, well, at least seven businesses over the course of that, three of which I still have with my husband, so I am this person. I am a small-business person. I represent an entire body of people who are small business in this province, and I can tell you – the member was mentioning something about the last 10 years. I'm part of the Chambers of Commerce. You know, the one thing that small businesses want more than anything is for the government to get out of the way so that they can be very, very, extremely positive in their ability to do their business.

Part of what small businesses actually talk about – I don't know. Maybe the member has some experience in small business and would like to share that back with me afterwards. That would be great. It would be a wonderful discussion. Having been a person who's been involved in small business since – I think I was probably 21 when I started my first business. I'm a musician by trade, so I started a small music school. My entire life – and I can only speak anecdotally for myself – has been about building that business, building relationships, being successful in that.

Anybody in the world who's a musician knows that it's not an easy job. The pay is not great, and you usually have to have four or five jobs to make it work out. But as a small-business person, as an entrepreneur, that is the energy, the driving force, Madam Speaker, behind the fabric of the people who have built this economy on small business long, long, long before this government was ever in power.

In fact, this jurisdiction of Alberta has brought more small business to the forefront than pretty much anywhere else in Canada. Do you want to know why? They had the ability to do that because people came here with big dreams. They came here with everything they had from different countries. They've immigrated. They've come from all over the place.

My father is a perfect example of a person who came to this country in 1963 with a few bucks in his pocket and big dreams. He absorbed the Canadian way of life, grew a business, and raised a family. My father-in-law, who came from extreme poverty in India, Madam Speaker, and was able to come here because his brother was here, raised a family of four, pulling logs at the mill for 32 years, raising his family, not asking for anything other than the fact that he could have this job and do this here and raise his family.

You know, the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood said that all we want to do is cut, cut, cut. Well, cutting taxes is actually a tax advantage, Madam Speaker. If you look at what the carbon tax is versus what these tax incentives were, the reason why we brought in this amendment was because cutting the carbon tax would significantly impact those of us who actually have small businesses, who are impacted daily in every single part of those businesses that we run. It impacts our ability to hire people, along with minimum wage increases. It impacts our ability to do our business in a way that we've done it before. It impacts absolutely every aspect of our lives.

I can speak for myself, Madam Speaker. My family are huge volunteers. We are huge volunteers. Because of our entrepreneurial spirit, our ability to be able to contribute back to our communities is because of the ability that we had to be in this province, not because the government put in some tax incentive. It's because the government gave us the best jurisdiction in the world to be able to build those businesses. People who build businesses will give back. Albertans give back more per capita than anywhere else in the world. We are a generous, giving, magnificent group of people.

Helping businesses get started is actually government being able to give an economic environment to be able to do that. It's an environment in which people will come and flock to this province because . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Oh, I get to speak again. I'm sure you're so excited. [interjection] I know. I'll just keep going.

I have to say – and I've said this before, Madam Speaker – that policy is the most important thing that happens in a government. You know, all governments have failed, and all governments have been successful. There are none of us who have the ability to stand

up here and say that one way was perfect or anything like that. I couldn't agree more. I mean, we all have different reasons as to how we got involved in politics. There are a lot of different reasons for why we're here.

As a small-business person there were a lot of reasons for me to get involved. Largely in part, though, for me, it was making sure that we're not mortgaging our children's future. I'm certainly not here for me. A lot of the things that we will put in now won't impact specifically my business or the things that I do at this point, Madam Speaker, but it'll impact my children and certainly my grandchildren and those that I may never see. It's something where we have to be able to look at ourselves every single day and know that the policies that we put in place are the most important things that we will do, not for us – it's not for us right now – but for the future.

Certain things need to get passed right away because they are absolutely necessary. There are concerns that need to get pushed through right away. I get that. But in these particular things there are huge waves and ripple effects to the impacts of these things.

When we're talking about economic policy, the biggest thing that we can do for this province, the best thing that governments in the past have done, even with mistakes that have happened, is to make the environment here the best in the world to come and invest. That is something nobody else had. You hear us talk about the Alberta advantage and all that kind of stuff. That has always been one of those wonderful things.

I mean, I've had the privilege of travelling all over the world. When I've talked to people about coming to Canada and especially coming to Alberta – I mean, this is a cold place. It's not an easy – you talk to anybody who has emigrated here, you know, from other countries. We have a new family in Rocky View that came from the Caribbean islands. I'm telling you that this winter – oh, my goodness – just about sent them home. They were freezing. I mean, there weren't enough coats and leg warmers and mittens. It was just traumatic for them. What were we at, 176 days of winter or something? I can't remember what the number was. It was huge.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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