



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, October 30, 2018

Day 42

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)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
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Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Conklin (UCP)
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Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 3 Alberta Liberal: 1 Freedom Conservative: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 30, 2018

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Hon. members, if I could just speak to a couple of administrative matters first. As we continue the proceedings for today, I want to make a couple of reminders. First, I would ask that you please remember that you do not cross between a member who is speaking and the Speaker's chair. [A child vocalized] That's a wonderful sound to hear in here, believe me. They won't have to agree to the rule, but these guys do.

If the Speaker is standing and you are waiting to enter the Chamber, please wait until the Speaker is seated before you take your chair.

Thank you.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the high commissioner of the United Kingdom to Canada, Her Excellency Susan le Jeune d'Allegershecque as well as Ms Caroline Saunders, the consul general for the United Kingdom in Calgary, and Ms Alyssa Perron from the British consulate. Alberta appreciates its historic connection with the United Kingdom and its people. Her Excellency's visit has presented the occasion to explore a number of opportunities. Earlier today we met and discussed opportunities for collaboration in the areas of energy, health, and artificial intelligence, to name a few. We look forward to working with Her Excellency and the consulate in Calgary on further developing and strengthening our relationship with the U.K. I would now like to ask the high commissioner and Consul General Saunders to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to the House, through you, Falun school. I believe these students are in the gallery today. They come from Falun school, which is a school in a little community in my constituency that many may not know about, but if you have been in my constituency, you do know about Falun school. Could these students please rise and receive the introduction of this House.

The Speaker: Hon. member, your class may not yet have arrived.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's really an honour to be able to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly, from the beautiful town of Bashaw, the Bashaw school. I would like to introduce to you the students, that are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. McIntosh and Ms Lischynski, along with their chaperones, Ms Miller, Mr. Chipley, and Ms Peterman. Would you please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome. Yeah, everybody please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you 56 amazing grade 5 and 6 students from Afton elementary school. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Baird, Mrs. Rizzato, and Ms Clulow Haennel, along with their chaperone, Mr. James Hornbeck. I had the opportunity to ask them, "If they could see one law introduced in the House, what would it be?" They said, "More ice cream for breakfast," so with unanimous consent – I would now ask them to please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups here today?

Seeing and hearing none, the Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. First, it's a privilege to rise and introduce the Parkhill and Gillies families, who are advocates for the Phelan-McDermid Syndrome Foundation. Phelan-McDermid is a complex syndrome associated with the deletion of chromosome 22. I was very proud to declare October 22 Phelan-McDermid day in Alberta to help increase awareness of this rare syndrome. I ask that Mike, Gail, Stan, Carol, and Marian please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly. [A child vocalized] I can tell how excited she is for this.

My second is a group of health care aides, who are seated in the members' gallery. October 18 is Health Care Aide Day in Alberta. HCAs are the second-largest health care workforce in the province, and they are very valued members of the health care team. I am grateful for their tireless work to care for Albertans when and where it's needed so families are supported as their health care needs change and evolve. I'd ask that all of these guests and their allies please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

Lastly, seated in the public gallery, I have some guests who are here to witness and support the introduction of Bill 21, An Act to Protect Patients. I ask that they rise as I introduce them. Debra Tomlinson is the CEO for the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services. MaryJane James is the executive director of the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton. Katie Kitschke is the executive director of the Saffron Sexual Assault Centre in Sherwood Park. Dr. Cathy Carter-Snell – sorry about that, Cathy – is a sexual assault nurse, examiner, and professor at Mount Royal University. Dr. Karen Mazurek is the deputy registrar of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta. They are also joined by Marian Stuffco, the government relations adviser. Please join me in welcoming these women and showing our gratitude for their efforts.

The Speaker: Welcome to all of you.

The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives of the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers local 424. I would ask that they please rise as I call their names. From CUPE we have John Vradenburgh, CUPE local 474 president and CUPE Alberta recording secretary; Barry Benoit, CUPE local 474 business agent; James Niven, CUPE local 784 president; Lee-Ann Kalen, CUPE local 1099 president; Alejandro Pachon, CUPE national researcher; and Dustin Abbott. From IBEW local 424 I'd like to welcome journeyman electricians Robert Gibbons, Sean McDonald, Ray Parker, Ashley Mycholuk, and Richard Nally. I would now ask all

members of the Assembly to please provide them with the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House Mike Bonner. Mike Bonner has been a long-time supporter of me through multiple elections and was there right when I started my political career. He's a fierce advocate for workers who've been injured and has been a long-time advocate for those who are working with or on occasion dealing with WCB. I'd like him to rise now and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House Alberta's first Advocate for Persons with Disabilities, Mr. Tony Flores. Mr. Flores is an accomplished parathlete and a leader who has devoted his life to disability issues. He believes strongly in self-advocacy, empowerment, and breaking down barriers. I'm excited to see Tony lead the disability advocate's office to make life better for Albertans with disabilities, and I encourage anyone with concerns to contact his office once it's open, this November. I ask Mr. Flores to please receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a few introductions today. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly various members of food banks from across our province. They're here today to talk to their local MLAs to discuss some of the issues that they're facing and some of the successes as well. As you know, the food banks of Alberta feed many hungry people in this province and have seen an increase in usage year over year. I will ask you to rise as I call your names: Suzan Krecsy, Alison Richards, George Thatcher, Kevin Leahy, Valerie Leahy, Gert Reynar, Cindy Carstairs, Tia Fox, Bruce Ironshirt, Leni Schielke, Mark Schielke, Doug Tweddle, and Executive Director Stephanie Walsh-Rigby. It's a personal honour of mine to introduce the chair of Food Banks Alberta and the executive director of the Airdrie food bank, Lori McRitchie. Please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very good friend of mine, Lori Rehill. Lori, please stand. Lori is the former executive director of Airdrie victims' services. She is a volunteer of all wonderful things. She's also here with Food Banks Alberta as an adviser. She's my campaign manager, and we're very excited for the things that are to happen in Airdrie.

At this time I would also like to recognize the staff and students in Airdrie at C.W. Perry middle school that are watching at this moment.

Please, all, receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Official Opposition and Government Policies

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to the working men and women of Alberta: firefighters, nurses, social workers, plumbers and pipefitters, teachers, road builders, and educational support staff. We are a province of working people who believe in Alberta, and we fight for Alberta every day.

I'm speaking about the many in Alberta that the Conservatives want to leave behind, the people the Conservatives want to hurt with their backroom promises to their friends and insiders.

I'm speaking about the men and women who want basic protections that will keep their families safe, the people who want workplace rules so they can be treated with basic dignity and respect.

I'm speaking about the men and women who deserve retirement security, not looming threats that their pensions will be gutted, the social workers who hold up their fellow Albertans in their darkest hours, the nurses who deliver direct care and emotional support for our families when they are sick and vulnerable.

I am speaking about the pipefitters who are fighting for the energy economy and for our strong future.

I'm speaking about the teacher who is putting in that extra care and attention to ensure that each of their students has the best chance at success.

I am speaking about workers. I am so very proud to do so, and to you working Albertans I say: we hear you, and we are working for you because we are a government of workers. We are teachers, nurses, tradespeople, public servants, and social workers. We are electricians, utility workers, policy analysts, and, yes, most shocking of all, we are the people who identify with the mice, not the cats, in Mouseland. We are workers, and we are Albertans. We are working for you, and we are fighting for you, and together we are going to keep this province moving forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Natural Resources

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The world needs more Canadian energy. Did you know what our energy sector does for Albertans and this great province and our amazing country of Canada? Do you know the impact that our energy sector has on bringing prosperity to Albertans? We have become such poor storytellers about our natural resources, the lifeblood of our province, the heartbeat. The technical language that surrounds the energy sector can make it challenging, but we can't get lost in acronyms and technical jargon and forget the heart of the issue. Our magnificent natural resources, our trees, our mountains: these things bring meaning to our lives and prosperity to our families and bring us together as a nation.

We need to work to speak authentically about our natural resources. We have nothing to be ashamed of. We need to continue to fight back against hyperbole. We need to stop letting Hollywood stars like Jane Fonda and Leonardo DiCaprio or activists like Tzeporah Berman define the narrative around our resources. We need a government that is proud of the history of our energy sector and has a vision of where it needs to go and isn't afraid to speak out about those things and those attacks on our province, our country, and our prosperity.

We are not telling a story of how our resources represent freedom, social stability, compassion, authenticity, and how our resources have created the world we live in now. Why are we not telling the story, a national story of connection, of how resources have brought us together as a country and as a nation? Why are we not building up our nation and creating pipeline infrastructure, that means something, Mr. Speaker, that is so much bigger? You are building the morale of a country through claiming what is ours and being so proud that you are filled with joy to help seed growth, opportunity, and prosperity. We need to do better because Albertans are counting on us. As my friend Cody Battershill says: our natural resources are a great story, and all of us should be telling it.

Thank you.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Westhead: Affordable housing has been a long-standing concern in Banff-Cochrane. Everyone deserves a safe and secure place to call home regardless of their income. Access to a home is about fairness and is the foundation for a better life. This is at the heart of our government's \$1.2 billion provincial affordable housing strategy.

I'm proud to say that we've taken concrete steps to implement this strategy in Banff-Cochrane. Just a few weeks ago, in partnership with the town of Banff and Parks Canada I helped cut the ribbon on the Ti'nu housing complex. Ti'nu provides homes for 131 families and individuals in a town with a zero per cent vacancy rate. The week after we cut the ribbon on the Ti'nu project, I announced a \$2.6 million investment in the Banff YWCA's courtyard project on behalf of the Minister of Seniors and Housing. This project will provide 33 families and individuals with below-market housing. A more stable housing market is also good for employers, who often struggle to attract and retain workers due to the high costs and lack of housing options.

But affordability goes beyond just housing. Our government lowered school fees, ushered in \$25-a-day child care in Banff and Canmore, froze tuition, improved the child benefit, and, together with municipal partners and Parks Canada, created their own public transit system that now connects residents and tourists all the way from Canmore to Lake Louise.

Meanwhile the UCP proposes hare-brained affordable housing solutions like sacrificing wildlife corridors, a \$700 million tax giveaway to their wealthy friends and insiders, deep ideological budget cuts, rolling back protections for working people and consumers, and slashing wages for young people.

I know that our plan is getting results, but there's more work yet to do. I'll continue fighting for constituents to have a place that they can afford to call home and to build communities that include Albertans from all walks of life.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Seniors' Housing Placements

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to make a statement about a constituent of mine, an 87-year-old senior who was spoken about in this House earlier. Zoe Bleau is a resident of Bonnyville who needs placement in one of our local seniors' lodges. Her doctors have supported this placement and even wrote letters reinforcing the need for her to be allowed access to care in the Bonnylodge. However, due to a survivor's benefit that she has as a result of the passing of her husband many years ago, she was denied admission to this wonderful facility. Despite desperate pleas from her family and even myself, the government is unwilling to

accommodate Ms Bleau in her wonderful, wonderful state that she is in, which is stuck in limbo. The system that is more or less alienating people with pensions is shameful, and the ministry needs to see that seniors have more flexibility getting into our seniors' centres.

Every day outside of a lodge holds the risk of a fall for a senior. One fall, in many cases, is fatal for a senior. Unfortunately, Zoe was doing her household chores, and she had a fall. Her daughter describes this fall as what left her immobilized and, quote, crying and shivering in a pool of water. End quote. As a result of this fall Zoe suffered a fractured hip, that required her to be sent hundreds of kilometres away for surgery in Edmonton. Clearly, this is regrettable news, yet we all knew the possibility that this would eventually come to pass.

Mr. Speaker, what the family asks and what I hope for is flexibility in the system so that people like Zoe Bleau get the care they need. It is unbelievable that in this day and age our seniors have to beg the government for the ability to age in dignity in local facilities like the Bonnylodge. The family of Zoe Bleau is begging, and sadly this government is turning their back on her. This needs to stop.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Budget Revenue Forecasts

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend at the NDP convention they considered a resolution congratulating the Premier and the government on, quote, securing the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline. That's curious. The government's entire budget was predicated on securing the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline. Does that continue to be the case? Do they continue to plan in their fiscal plan for the completion of the Trans Mountain expansion?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If the member will recall, this matter was discussed when we introduced the budget last spring. In fact, the Trans Mountain pipeline is not factored into the assumptions that underline our budget. In fact, our path to balance is secure because it is based on very cautious and conservative and prudent assumptions. You know what else is the foundation of our path to balance? It does not include firing 4,000 nurses. It does not include having to fire 4,000 teachers. It does not include giving a \$700 million tax break to the top 1 per cent. It includes conservative assumptions . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the only person talking about firing is the Premier, whose government is planning on taking 2 billion extra dollars out of the pockets of ordinary Albertans through their 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax.

The Premier just contradicted her Finance minister, who, on the day he introduced the budget, admitted under questioning from media that it was predicated on additional revenues coming from a higher price for Alberta oil through the completion of the Trans Mountain pipeline. This is a very simple and objective fiscal question. Can the Premier tell us whether or not her budget and fiscal plan continue to be predicated on the completion of that pipeline?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've actually just answered that question in my previous answer. What I will say, though, when the member talks about the carbon levy: one thing that our government didn't get into office to do was to hurt Albertans, unlike the members opposite, whose Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills decided in a fit of transparency to say that the UCP plan will hurt Albertans. It's going to hurt. That's not what we're here to do. Our plan is not premised on that. Our plan includes cautious, prudent assumptions. We will get to balance, and we will support Albertans in the process.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government hurt Albertans when it decided to raise income taxes, the carbon tax, property taxes, to support the Trudeau payroll tax increase, to increase taxes on employers and job creators, all of which deepened and prolonged a recession from which 177,000 Albertans are still out of work. The question is: does the government's fiscal plan continue to be based on a 67 per cent increase in their job-killing carbon tax? That would be the same carbon tax that they didn't tell Albertans about in the last election.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I just really do need to correct the record because, in fact, what happened when our government got elected was that we got rid of a health care levy that this member's predecessor party brought in on all Albertans. What we did instead is that we also brought in a progressive tax regime. Now, I understand that the members opposite are very keen to eliminate that and to give a \$700 million tax break to the top 1 per cent and pay for it by firing nurses and firing teachers and making sure that it hurts Albertans. That is not our plan going forward. We're going to continue to have Albertans' backs.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Second main question.

Carbon Levy Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, nearly half of Albertans don't pay income tax, but one hundred per cent of Albertans pay the NDP carbon tax. It is the most regressive tax in Alberta introduced by the NDP. It makes it more expensive for seniors to heat their homes, for single moms to fill up their gas tank to drive to work, and now the NDP's fiscal plan is to raise that tax by 67 per cent with no increase in the rebate, making it even more regressive. Why does the NDP continue to plan on that 67 per cent increase in their job-killing, regressive carbon tax?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, the member opposite is of course entitled to his own opinions, but he is not entitled to make facts up. We have been very clear, first of all, that the additional costs of the carbon levy and pricing pollution are not built in to our path to balance at this point because of the decision of the Federal Court of Appeal around Trans Mountain. In addition, the fact of the matter is that two-thirds of Albertans get a carbon rebate, so in fact the member opposite . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I'm simply referring to the government's own published policy, which in its budget confirms the 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax with zero increase in the rebate – zero increase in the rebate – making this a massively

regressive tax. The Premier knows full well, if she wants to be honest with Albertans, that carbon tax fans, like the NDP and their close friend and ally Justin Trudeau, really want the carbon tax to go to \$200 or \$300 a tonne. Under the NDP plan that means a massively regressive tax on the poor. Why is the Premier still planning on punishing poor Albertans with the increase in the carbon . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I don't know how many times I have to say this. The member opposite knows that he is quoting something that our government has since moved away from as a result of the Federal Court of Appeal decision. Yesterday I made it very clear to the member opposite that the financial implications of that are no longer considered in our path to balance and are not required for us to meet our path to balance, yet he continues to repeat things which are simply not true. The member opposite: if he ever wonders why it is that people don't have a lot of faith or trust in him, it's this kind of thing right now.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, in terms of faith we can see the results of recent by-elections, in one of which the NDP won 14 per cent of the vote and the United Conservatives won 83 per cent and then 69 per cent and 20 per cent. We'll trust Albertans to make a judgment on who's telling the truth about the carbon tax.

Now I have a very simple question for the Premier. Is she planning for the completion of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion? Does she believe that will happen?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that we are absolutely committed to getting the Trans Mountain pipeline completed. We are working on it each and every day. We are standing up for Albertans in front of the National Energy Board as the matter goes forward. In about 20 minutes I'll be leaving here to fly to B.C. to continue to make the case in B.C. for why this project is so important, not just for Albertans but for British Columbians and all Canadians. We will not stop fighting until this pipeline is built.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Mr. Kenney: I take it, then, Mr. Speaker, that the government assumes that the Trans Mountain pipeline will be built, in which case they assume the carbon tax will be increased by 67 per cent. What am I missing here?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite is missing is that we are focused on getting the job done and standing up for Albertans and not cheering for the failure of Albertans or the failure for the jobs or the failure for the pipeline like the members opposite have been doing from day one. That's why, of course, we have a Leader of the Official Opposition who said in Ottawa that no pipeline is a national priority. You know what? We disagree. This is a national priority. That's why we're going to keep fighting for it, and that's why the pipeline will get built.

Mr. Kenney: That's a complete misrepresentation. I said that getting Canadian energy to global markets was a national priority. It's the Premier who said that she only wanted one pipeline, Mr. Speaker, and that's how we got into this situation.

Let me ask the question again since she didn't even try to answer it. Since the government's assumption is that the Trans Mountain

pipeline expansion will be completed, is it not also the government's assumption that it will raise the carbon tax by 67 per cent? You can't have one without the other under the NDP's policy.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I've answered that question enough times already. What I will say is that there is something missing in a budget that would be put forward by the members opposite if they ever, God forbid, got the opportunity, and that's the \$700 million a year tax cut that they want to give to their friends in the top 1 per cent. The members opposite say that they can balance the budget, that they can give massive tax cuts, that they can get rid of the carbon levy, but they never say how they're going to pay for it except when the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills speaks, and he says that it'll hurt.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

I think we're at the second supplemental.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, let's try this another way. Is the Premier ruling out under any circumstances the government's planned 67 per cent increase in its carbon tax? For clarity, I'll repeat it. Is the government ruling out the planned 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax under any circumstances?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite knows the plan that this government had in place with respect to the pricing of pollution in the province of Alberta. The member opposite also knows the position that I took as Premier of Alberta when the Federal Court of Appeal rendered its decision on Trans Mountain. This is all a matter of public record. I have since talked about what the implications of that are for our path to balance, which is that our path to balance is secure. We have this under control. The member opposite, however, needs to explain to Albertans what will happen if he cuts the levy altogether or he gives his \$700 million tax break to his friends.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The Member for Calgary-South East.

Grande Prairie Regional Hospital Construction

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Grande Prairie hospital is still sitting incomplete, and with the construction manager having left the project back in September, it's unclear when exactly the people of Grande Prairie and region will be getting this much-needed hospital. The Minister of Infrastructure assured Albertans that a new manager would be hired by the end of October. Well, we're one day away from the end of October, and there's been no news from the minister or this government. To the Minister of Infrastructure: has a new construction manager been hired for the Grande Prairie hospital, and if not, can you please explain to this House why?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as the member well knows, we both sat in government, the two of us together as colleagues, when this issue first came up. Certainly, we have decided not to make this a political issue. Now, I've had wonderful conversations with the member from Grande Prairie, and as we work through the process, I have kept him fully involved in what's going on. You and I both know that as we work towards a solution

for the people of Grande Prairie, politicizing it is the last thing we should be doing.

Mr. Fraser: I would agree, Mr. Speaker, but it's about transparency and honesty.

The original timeline for the Grande Prairie hospital has construction finishing by the end of 2019, with the doors opening to the public in 2020. The lack of progress over the last two months and the absence of an updated timeline from the minister points to those dates being pushed back. This is troubling news for the residents of Grande Prairie, who have been anxiously waiting for this important piece of infrastructure to be completed. Minister, the people of Grande Prairie deserve to know when they can reasonably expect this project to be completed. To the same minister: is your department able to issue an updated timeline on when we can expect the Grande Prairie hospital to be completed and open to the public?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are actively working to ensure that we have a new construction manager in place. It's a process that we consider extremely important for the people of Grande Prairie. I would ask this question of the member. My door is always open for a conversation. I have had many conversations with folks about the Grande Prairie hospital. I would question that if he is so concerned about it, why has he not approached me for a conversation, with my open-door policy?

Mr. Fraser: I appreciate the open door, but it's also open aisle, and this is question period.

The last construction manager left the project in part because of the large number of change orders and design clarifications, changes that the manager claimed weren't properly accounted for in the funding. This means that we're likely going to see the cost of this project moving higher, and a new construction manager will want to make sure the province actually commits the necessary funds. In addition, given that the previous manager was treated the way he was treated, the new manager will probably ask for a premium to offset the risk of a public fight with the minister. To the same minister: will you detail to this House the additional cost overruns, and will you admit that your treatment of the previous contractor will make completion of this project more difficult?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, as we looked at this project – and the construction project contract was signed in 2016 – both sides agreed to both the scope of the project and the cost of the project. Both groups signed that contract and agreed that that was completely reasonable. We have a situation now where we want to move ahead and get this project done, so we have taken the actions that we've taken in order to make sure the people of Grande Prairie have a hospital as quickly and effectively as possible. We will shortly have a construction manager in place and move forward from there as quickly as possible, and we are pleased to be able to say that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control and Wildfire Prevention

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. There has been a large influx of mountain pine beetle

into the Jasper area in recent years. Now we are seeing large areas around Hinton being impacted by the beetle. What is your department doing to fight this pest that threatens our pristine forests?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. The fact is that successive federal governments have not adequately addressed this issue in Jasper national park. Through my department we're active on a mountain pine beetle working group with stakeholders in the Hinton-Edson area and other orders of government to co-ordinate efforts to control the pest. The Member for West Yellowhead is in that group, as are local governments and forestry companies. To date the government has invested more than \$500 million to address this concern, and more recently we called on the federal government to help contribute to this fight, just as they do for pests that have affected forests in eastern Canada.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Minister. Given that thousands of Albertans rely on our forests for jobs and that more than 70 communities rely on the forest industry, how are you working with the industry to ensure that this pest doesn't impact the jobs and prosperity of our communities?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to continuing aggressive survey and control activities to address the mountain pine beetle and to maintain a vibrant forest industry. Our 2017 budget maintained funding at about \$25 million for those activities, with about 70 per cent of those funds going to the Edson forest area, with the main goal of protecting provincial resources. We've also given a grant to FRI Research to study the mountain pine beetle so that our policies are informed by science and the best available data. As always, we co-ordinate our efforts with stakeholders in the forestry sector to ensure the most effective and co-ordinated use of provincial resources.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Minister. Given that the trees that are killed by these beetles increase the risk of wildfires and given that there are increasingly large sections of forest impacted by this beetle, what are you doing to ensure that the beetle-impacted communities are safe from wildfires?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, community safety is always the top priority when it comes to forest and wildfire management. The best way to fight fires is to prevent them in the first place. I'm proud that this government more than tripled funding for FireSmart initiatives. The FireSmart program helps communities and residents reduce the threat of wildfire through things like vegetation and fuel management, public education, and emergency planning. Furthermore, we updated our laws to address things like the use of fireworks and exploding targets, which increase the risk of fires during dry conditions. We have extensive contracts with firefighters and heavy equipment operators should the need arise. We have agreements with other provinces, states, and countries.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Emergency Medical Worker Wait Times in Hospitals

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, 650,000 hours spent by two paramedics in Alberta emergency rooms in 2016 with their ambulance out of service waiting to transfer care to the emergency room staff, four times longer than the best standard; 135,000 hours of overtime of paramedics in 2016. This summer our

survey of paramedics got the response that there is increased frustration, that their patients' health and their own continues to be compromised, as is confidence in their leadership. To the minister: what has changed since 2016 in hallway waiting times?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. We are incredibly proud of the paramedics and all EMS professionals and the work that they do every day to ensure quality care for Albertans. Last year our dispatch system handled more than half a million requests for service. Certainly, demand is up, and despite the significant increase in calls, response times have remained steady. We know there's absolutely more work to do. That's why we increased the budget for EMS by \$23 million. That's why we're getting more boots on the ground. That's why we're expanding community paramedicine, and we won't let up.

Dr. Swann: That's all very interesting, but what has changed in hallway wait times?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Some of the work we've done to ensure EMS professionals are being used more effectively is reducing the use of ambulances doing interfacility transfers; building new long-term care beds to ensure that there are appropriate places for folks who are waiting in hospital for placement, to ensure that residents who need to access those beds in emergency rooms have a way to do so; encouraging crews to consolidate patients so that fewer crews are waiting in hospital. We know that there is more work to be done, but as we've seen under previous governments, firing nurses, closing hospitals won't do the job. It is something that you can close things quickly, but it takes time to build. There is more to do.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Dr. Swann: Again to the minister: has anyone in management been held accountable for this continued waste of resources and manpower?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Certainly, there are a number of issues that we've been working diligently to address. Actually, indeed, I believe that all of the recommendations that the member opposite brought forward are initiatives that we are implementing, Mr. Speaker, and already had been prior to the release of his recommendations. More is absolutely to be done. One of the reasons why we're in this situation is because we lack acute-care hospital space where it's most needed. That's why we're building the Calgary cancer hospital. That's why we're building a new hospital in Edmonton on the south side. That's why we're building the Grande Prairie hospital. We need to invest. The Official Opposition wants to slash billions of dollars from the budget. That would only make things worse.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Budget Revenue Forecasts

(continued)

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On page 84 of the NDP budget this spring it says: "Beginning in 2021, additional revenue resulting from the federally-imposed carbon price tied to the construction of the Trans Mountain Pipeline will be used to support

vital public services.” Does that continue to be the case? Will the increase in the carbon tax to \$50 a tonne continue to be implemented in order to “support vital public services”?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I’ll thank the member for the question. Our budget is not tied to the federal increases in the carbon levy. Our Premier was very clear that until Trans Mountain pipeline construction is well under way, we have removed and pulled out of the federal climate leadership plan. Quite frankly, without Alberta there is no federal plan. I can tell you that our Premier and our government will continue fighting for Trans Mountain. We’ve been strong advocates. We’ve supported Keystone XL with 50,000 barrels per day because we need better prices for our top-notch resources.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the hon. the minister just said that a planned increase in the carbon tax is, quote, not part of the NDP’s budget, end quote. Page 84 of that budget says that the government is banking on a 67 per cent increase in carbon tax revenues. Why did the minister just contradict the black-and-white words in the budget presented and voted on by his government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me be clear. Our path to balance is intact, and the member opposite should look at our last budget. Now, our Finance minister will provide clear evidence at the appropriate time that it is intact. Let’s be clear that we are fighting to get the Trans Mountain pipeline built and that it will get built. Team Failure across the aisle there wants to see this project fail, with 37,000 jobs lost and more than \$15 billion to the national economy. I wonder when the members opposite will stop cheering for this pipeline and our energy sector to fail.

Mr. Kenney: Albertans would be forgiven for not understanding the position of the government, Mr. Speaker. The government is claiming that it will ensure the construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline and that if it is constructed, there will be a 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax, but now it’s telling us that there may not be a 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax. So which is it? Should we believe the budget or what the government is saying in the House today?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, we’re very proud of the fact that we have reduced the deficit by \$3 billion. We are on track to balance the budget by 2023. That will continue. In due time the Finance minister will make clear that our budget is intact. What is interesting is – let’s look at the history of the Leader of the Opposition when he was in Ottawa: six straight deficit budgets, a \$56 billion deficit in just one year. He added \$145 billion to our national debt, and \$309 billion have gone on interest payments alone. Pretty rich taking advice from the opposition.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, a few minutes ago the Premier claimed that the construction of Trans Mountain was not factored into the government’s budget projections, but a Global News headline the day the budget was presented says: Alberta factoring in Trans Mountain pipeline in budget forecasts. They reported that because the Finance minister said, quote: we’ve built the revenue associated with higher prices from Trans Mountain into the budget because that’s what everybody believes will happen. Why did the Finance minister say that the budget was based on the completion of Trans

Mountain in the spring but the Premier claimed that that was not the case today? Why does the government not understand its own budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’ll say it again for the hon. member that our path to balance is intact, that we will have and we have a clear path to balance by 2023. The difference between this side of the House and that side of the House is that we are not going to fire 4,000 teachers and 4,000 nurses and give a \$700 million tax break to the richest 1 per cent of Albertans. We’re fighting for Albertans, we’re standing up for our energy sector, and we will continue to do that.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I feel for the hon. minister – I understand the baffle-gab and the attacks and the distractions – because he’s incapable of explaining this profound contradiction in the government’s fiscal plan. According to the Finance minister – I just quoted him – his budget is based on higher royalties coming from the completion of Trans Mountain. Not my words, his. According to page 84 of the budget it’s based on a 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax, a \$2 billion increase in revenues. Is the government now saying that all of that additional revenue has been . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I’ll thank the member for asking the same question yet again. I’ll give him the same answer, that we have cut our deficit by \$3 billion. We are demonstrating that we can invest in Albertans, that we can invest in front-line services like education and health care. Unlike the members opposite, who would fire 4,000 teachers and fire 4,000 nurses, we are showing a clear path to balance while supporting small businesses and the business community and our energy sector across this province. We have their backs. The opposition would let them fail.

The Speaker: I believe we are at the second supplemental.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP’s so-called path to balance takes us to a projected \$96 billion debt in 2023, but that’s based on \$2 billion in additional carbon tax revenue and additional royalties from a higher price after the completion of Trans Mountain. Now the government is saying that neither of those things are in the budget or the fiscal plan. Fine. You know, events happen and governments change policy. That’s okay, but can they tell us, then: how are they going to make up for the billions of additional revenue that they say they’ve now taken out of their fiscal plan?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ll thank the member. Again, as I’ve mentioned to the hon. member, our Finance minister will provide clear evidence at the appropriate time and demonstrate that our budget, our path to balance, remains intact. But what we do have in front of us are the numbers, the fact that our economy is growing. In fact, last year Alberta led the country in GDP growth of 4.9 per cent. Part of the reason is because we had a choice, and four years ago, when the price of oil collapsed, we chose to invest: invest in Albertans, invest in our economy, invest in health care. Members opposite would have fired teachers and nurses and hurt our . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'd like to stop the clock for a moment, please. I'll be back with you.

Could I have a table officer here.

I'm sorry, hon. member. Please proceed.

Provincial Revenue and Carbon Pricing

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, on April 10 of this year the hon. Finance minister said, quote: we built pipeline revenues into our path to balance projections; we're confident all the pipelines will be built, so we're just going to keep going down this road. Unquote. The government's fiscal plan: is it still based on an assumption that Trans Mountain will be completed, and is it not therefore evident that it's still based on a planned 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has been clear as far as our position on the federal price on carbon and the fact that Alberta has withdrawn its support from that plan until the Trans Mountain pipeline construction is well under way. What I can tell you is that we know that Enbridge's line 3 is well under way, that the pipeline was approved, and that this is creating good jobs right now, today. We know that Keystone XL is proceeding next year. We've committed to supporting that project with 50,000 barrels per day because we know that this project alone will help reduce the differential and get Alberta producers a better price.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Kenney: Given that the minister just said that the budget was based on the federal climate plan and given that that plan is predicated on a \$20-a-tonne carbon tax this year, why are Albertans paying a \$30-a-tonne carbon tax? Why does the government think that that'll show Ottawa by imposing a higher tax on Albertans than the one that their close friend and ally Justin Trudeau is asking for?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll encourage the hon. member to get out from under the dome and talk to some companies like Exxon Mobil and other major energy industry leaders who have a fund to be advocating in favour of a price on carbon. You know why? Because these companies have invested hundreds of millions of dollars into energy efficiency, reducing their greenhouse gas emissions, increasing their efficiencies, decreasing their costs. They are world leaders, and they celebrate and agree with us on our price on carbon because it is getting us to where we want to go. They do not want to go back into the Dark Ages.

Mr. Kenney: Modern Alberta is the Dark Ages according to the NDP, a government that has members that praise the socialist dictatorship in Venezuela. You can't make this up.

Mr. Speaker, the government says that it's pulling out of the federal climate plan. Will it therefore join the governments of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and New Brunswick in challenging the constitutionality of the federal carbon tax plan, which this government claims it's pulling out of?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, Saskatchewan is the last province I'm going to take advice from. If we look at the tale of Saskatchewan and the choices they made four years ago, when they brought in an austerity budget, they cut services across the board, they fired thousands of teachers and nurses, and they increased taxes. What is the result of that? Last year Saskatchewan created 1,000 new jobs. In Alberta we created 90,000 new full-time jobs, most of those in the private sector. I can tell you that Alberta is leading when it comes to manufacturing, exports, and growth.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Refugee Claimant Driver's Licence Eligibility

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency office works closely with refugee families that are moving to Alberta and are fleeing violence and persecution so that they can begin a new chapter in their life. To the Minister of Service Alberta: what is the province doing to remove those barriers that they may face when they're trying to settle?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for my first question in this House as a minister. I couldn't be prouder to answer a question about how newcomers are a valued part of Alberta in our province and deserve the same opportunities to succeed as every other Albertan. I've heard from many new Albertans who are unable to work or even to drive a pregnant partner to the hospital because they couldn't drive. That's not right, and that's why we took action. I'm so proud to say that since June of this year our government has allowed refugee claimants to get a driver's licence in Alberta, and I'm proud of the work that our government has done on that point.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister once again: please explain how this will benefit newcomer families in my constituency and across this entire province.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have the right to live in a province that respects and celebrates diversity and where we can all belong. Refugee claimants endure a considerable amount of hardship and loss to get to Canada, and they shouldn't be forced to face unnecessary barriers for building a better life for their families once they get here to Canada. Many jobs require employees to have an Alberta driver's licence, so waiting unnecessarily to apply for a driver's licence can also mean waiting for work. That's not something I support. With this change Alberta joins the rest of the country in helping refugees get to work as soon as possible so that they can support themselves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After a Syrian refugee brought this issue to my attention, I found out that Alberta made changes back in 2012, under the previous government, and that they no longer allowed refugee claimants to obtain a driver's licence. How did it occur that Alberta became such an outlier in this area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Malkinson: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member correctly stated, the changes made in 2012, under the previous Conservative government, made us an outlier in Canada. Those changes happened while at the same time the Leader of the Official Opposition was in Ottawa cutting health benefits to refugee claimants, and apparently his Conservative colleagues here in Alberta were following his example. At the same time, he was detaining refugees in jails, described as a former three-star hotel with a fence around it. He even went so far as to separate mothers and children in these facilities.

Instead of putting up barriers for newcomers, Mr. Speaker, we are removing them and helping them build a new life for themselves.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Dementia Care

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I've been pushing this government to come up with a proper plan for dementia care for nearly two years, but Albertans continue to struggle. The dementia strategy put forward on the last business day before Christmas simply is not good enough. Albertans are right to question the NDP's commitment to dementia care when the word "dementia" is mentioned only a single time in the 165-page business plan for the government of Alberta and exactly zero times in the 172-page fiscal plan. To the Minister of Health: is your dementia strategy working, and how do we know?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our targeted and strategic approach will lead to quality care, timely diagnosis, better brain health, and stronger community supports for years to come. I want to commend everyone in the community who was involved in this. We had experts in public health, and we had people with lived experience. Albertan Roger Marple said: "As a person living with dementia, I have never felt more optimistic. I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the provincial government on the release of the dementia strategy." I really want to say that we're fighting for Roger, and we're happy to work with him to help address the needs that he has and that his family has.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those are a lot of words, but I'll simply ask again: what specifically has changed in the time between December 22, when you released the dementia strategy, and today?

Ms Hoffman: I'll go back even a little bit before that, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to note that since 2015 roughly almost \$7 million has been invested in measures specifically to give families tools to support their loved ones living in a home or in the community, including expanding the First Link program, almost \$2 million; mental health first aid for seniors, more than half a million dollars; and we specifically have dementia-trained nurses through Health Link. If anyone calls 811, they can get support from dementia nurses right over the phone. These are a number of important initiatives that were driven by the community to help support the community.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, again, with respect, those are not net new dollars, and it's not like we did nothing for people with dementia before this government came into power.

I'm going to ask about stigma as something the minister mentioned. Given that stigma continues to be a challenge both for people living with dementia and those who fear the stigma and therefore do not seek a diagnosis, again to the Minister of Health: I would like to know what specific, measurable efforts have been undertaken to reduce stigma in the 10 months since your strategy was released, and what are the results?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're proud to work with people with lived experience and with folks who are experts in public health around this important initiative, including the appropriate use of antipsychotics. We are working to reduce stigma, as the member mentioned, with partners like the Alzheimer Society. There is a significant effort under way, and we're proud to work with the community and support them. The Official Opposition wants to fire nurses and teachers, 4,000 teachers, and give a \$700 million tax break to the richest 1 per cent. We're proud to work with the community and to invest in the things that matter to them and to support Albertans living with dementia.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Government Spending

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spent this summer connecting with my constituents, and I found time to consult with Albertans on the state of our province's finances. What I heard repeatedly was that they are very concerned with the government's wild spending ways. Since 2015 the NDP's unrestrained borrowing has ballooned Alberta's debt by 668 per cent to \$50 billion. That is a burden of \$50,000 per family of four. To the minister. Debt means more in interest costs, less in services. What is your government's plan to get Alberta's debt back under control?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me be clear that we have a path to balance. Our path to balance is intact. We have that in addition to the fact that we've reduced our deficit by \$3 billion. I'm very proud of the work we're doing investing in critical infrastructure in this province, which is helping our small businesses as far as growth goes. I'm not going to take advice from the members opposite. We've heard that the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills had said that their plan is going to hurt, is going to hurt Albertans. Well, you know what? There's a different choice, one where we invest in Albertans, invest in infrastructure, and get . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Given that many of the Albertans I spoke to noted that since the NDP raised personal and corporate taxes, they have actually brought in less revenue and given that stakeholders overwhelmingly favour the UCP's plan to conduct a thorough review of government regulations with an eye towards meaningful reductions of red tape and a focus on free enterprise, calling it thoughtful, reasonable, and justified, to the Finance minister: will you commit to a full review of provincial regulations and focus on free enterprise, or will Albertans have to wait for a change in government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd love to know how many constituents of the member opposite like the fact that they're proposing a \$700 million tax cut to the richest 1 per cent of Albertans, which means that the majority of his constituents would see nothing.

Mr. Speaker, we've invested in this province, and we are seeing the benefits of our government's decisions through the 90,000 new full-time jobs that were created last year, most of those in the private sector. We've seen businesses expand in the province. Flair Air moved their headquarters out of British Columbia over to Alberta. We see Nexen. We see Amazon, Champion Petfoods . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that NDP unrestrained spending levels lead to massive borrowing, which leads to skyrocketing interest costs, and given that annual government interest costs already total \$2 billion, nearly \$2,000 a year per family of four, and given that \$2 billion is more than most departments spend each year, making the department of debt the fifth largest department in this government, to the minister: will you acknowledge that your undisciplined spending plan, six credit downgrades, and now rising interest rates are jeopardizing the futures of Albertan families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you what: Albertans pay \$11 billion less in taxes than the next lowest taxed jurisdiction in Canada. Eleven billion dollars: that's with the carbon levy.

But I'll tell you what else. Let's review here. If the member opposite dislikes deficits, let's talk about what his leader did when he was in Ottawa: six straight deficit budgets, a \$56 billion deficit in just one year. I'm surprised you're not applauding. This was your leader. Mr. Speaker, he added \$145 billion to our national debt and \$309 billion in interest payments. I think the member opposite . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

High-risk Offenders

Alberta Review Board Decision on Patient Transfer

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, on April 15 of 2014 Matthew De Grood murdered Kaitlin Perras, Jordan Segura, Lawrence Hong, Josh Hunter, and Zackariah Rathwell, five young people less than five years ago. Under the Not Criminally Responsible Reform Act it is the responsibility of the province to pursue a high-risk designation. To the Minister of Justice: does this government deem the worst mass murderer in Calgary's history to be high risk?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, as I've said, the entire province was shocked by those tragic incidents. This province lost five young people, and I think it's of great concern to everyone throughout the province. As I've said before, those decisions are made by independent Crown prosecutors. They are based on the facts and the law. That law is governed at the federal level. The member opposite clearly has a concern about the way the law is written. I would suggest that she write to the federal government about that.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have written the federal minister. I'll table that letter later.

Given that the families of the victims have to live their lives with permanent scars of grief and loss and given that the province is responsible for the Not Criminally Responsible Reform Act and the Alberta Review Board – facts – and given that Albertans have been communicating their concerns about the very real chance that a violent murderer will be released from our justice system, Minister, what are you doing to ensure that this individual will not walk freely in Alberta's communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I completely understand the concerns around this case. I don't think that there is any Albertan in the province who doesn't feel for the unimaginable loss that these families have suffered. The member opposite is incorrect. The province is required to set up a review board based on, again, the federal legislation. We are governed by that law, and we must abide by it. I do understand that the families have some concerns about the process, and I . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, I'll help her out. Section 672.72 of the Criminal Code states that within 15 days any party may appeal against a disposition or placement decision made by the review board. Given that the administration of justice is within the provincial jurisdiction and that this minister is totally wrong to claim yesterday and just now that this is a federal process, why has this minister refused to listen to the victims' families and do something about the review board's decision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, the member opposite has just cited the Criminal Code, which, as all members in this House should know, is, in fact, federal legislation.

Mrs. Pitt: Provincial jurisdiction.

Ms Ganley: It's federal legislation, Mr. Speaker. She can yell and scream and heckle me all she wants, but this is a very serious case, and I think it should be taken seriously and nonpolitically. I am happy to work with the families on the things within provincial jurisdiction, but the Criminal Code is not one of those things.

Renewable Energy Environmental Concerns

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, it appears that once more the current NDP government is borrowing from the UCP playbook. This time they have decided that it would be a great idea if renewable projects were required to make the land whole again. Now, as of September 14 of this year, there will be reclamation directives that need to be followed. Minister, why is there still no equivalent of the oil and gas industry funded orphan well fund included in the directive despite landowners and the Property Rights Advocate repeatedly asking for one?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud of the projects and legislation we have brought forward as part of our renewable plan to replace 30 per cent with renewable electricity by 2030, our 30 by 30 plan. When we brought forward that legislation, we also brought in tools for landowners to negotiate with the companies who wish to be proponents of the projects, and there are

a number of tools available to landowners. It is not subject to the Surface Rights Board, as is oil and gas, but there is a lot of help . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government provided lucrative incentives for renewable companies to set up and operate in Alberta, Minister, why has it taken three years before you have finally acknowledged landowners' and the opposition's concerns, before you issued these new directives?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we do a lot with landowners, both in my ministry and in my colleague's Ministry of Environment and Parks. First and foremost, when we talk about oil and gas, we have a certain set of rules, and when we talk about Environment and Parks, there's another set of rules. A number of the rules are administered by the AER on both of our behalves, but there are other ones that fall outside of that. Again, there is assistance for landowners, should it be through the Farmers' Advocate or through the workbooks and tools that we have provided for renewable projects.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has continued to make things harder for Alberta's farmers and ranchers and given that I'm sure the minister of agriculture agrees with the seriousness of this issue, Minister, in this directive's best practices guideline why is it that the Alberta clubroot management plan is the guideline that only should be adhered to when the possibility exists that contamination could occur?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we've listened to a number of folks in all sectors, including the agriculture sector. When we did our climate leadership plan and the carbon levy, we excluded farm fuel, as an example of one of the things that helps. We've also provided regulation and legislation to help farms, for example, get solar panels, to work on irrigation and other energy efficient projects. We've invested \$225 million on innovation projects just in the ag sector alone to support research, commercialization, and investment. We continue to listen to our farmers, as we . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-Bow.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budgeting is about priorities. Given the collapse in the price of oil our government must find savings. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: can he give us examples of what savings he's found?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. It's true that when the price of oil collapsed, our government had some difficult decisions to make. Now, we could have followed the advice of the opposition and fired 4,000 teachers,

4,000 nurses, and recklessly cut services that Albertans rely on. These cuts, as the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills has said, are going to hurt. But instead we made a decision to carefully find savings and also to invest in much-needed schools and hospitals. We cut government waste created by the PCs like the sky palace and lavish golf memberships. Our plan is working. Our GDP is up. Our economy is recovering. Jobs are up. Manufacturing is up. Exports are up. I'm very proud of the work that our government is doing standing up and fighting for Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans were tired of the sense of entitlement by the previous Conservative government: private jets, the sky palace, runaway salaries for their insider friends, and through-the-roof hospitality charges. Can the minister tell us what he's done to correct these issues and how expenses compare to the previous Conservative government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since we formed government we've been bringing salaries in line with other provinces. We've cut perks that certain executives have had like access to private health care. In fact, if you compare travel and hospitality expenses with the previous government, we've brought expenses down by a whopping 933 per cent. Now, while we work to eliminate the waste that the previous PC government exuded on a daily basis and get the budget priorities right, we know that Conservatives only care about a massive \$700 million tax cut for the richest 1 per cent of . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that beyond cutting Conservative government waste, our government has found additional savings, savings that were achieved without firing thousands of teachers and nurses. Can the minister tell us more about those details?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. We also extended the salary freeze for management and non-union employees. That saved us about \$29 million. We strengthened the hiring restraint. That has saved us over \$107 million. Now, all in all, we found about \$750 million in savings without firing 4,000 teachers, 4,000 nurses, which is what the Conservatives are looking to do. As a result, we've cut the deficit by \$3 billion, and we're going to continue to work hard to find those savings.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will continue with Members' Statements in 30 seconds.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Day of Arbaeen

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday marked the Day of Arbaeen, which occurs 40 days after the Day of Ashura, when Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was martyred in the Battle of Karbala. Husayn ibn Ali

was a seventh century revolutionary leader who sacrificed his life for social justice. The Day of Arbaeen is the day on which Husayn's family returned to the land of Karbala to properly bid farewell and grieve their loved ones.

Today, 1,400 years later, the Day of Arbaeen is mourned by millions of people around the world. It is a day to pay tribute to the sacrifice of Husayn for social justice. Large marches are organized in cities across the world to symbolize the eternal nature of Husayn's revolution and to show that they stand for social justice, honour, and peace.

Yesterday the march of Arbaeen was also hosted in Calgary by the Hussaini Association of Calgary. To commemorate Arbaeen, people from all over the globe participate in the tradition of walking 80 kilometres from Najaf to Karbala every year. Volunteers distribute free food and drinks to those undertaking the pilgrimage and offer places to relax, wash, and sleep.

Arbaeen is the largest peaceful gathering in the world. The number of pilgrims has risen to 25 million despite the threat of terrorists who have vowed to attack this stand for peace and social justice.

As the Minister of Culture and Tourism said yesterday, "No one should have to worry about their safety when they . . . worship." I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to standing up against intolerance and ensuring that Alberta is a place for all people of all faiths.

Thank you.

International Trade

Mr. Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, over the summer I was honoured to be chosen by the Leader of the Official Opposition to be the trade critic, and with the inaction of this NDP government on numerous trade files, it's going to be a busy role. I've worked in a federal Conservative government that signed over 50 free trade deals, each one gaining more market access and economic opportunities for Canadian businesses and families. I've represented Canada on numerous trade missions, promoting free trade, open market access, and reduced trade barriers for Canada in Hong Kong, Beijing, Moscow, Istanbul, and the United States.

Mr. Speaker, over the last few years we've come to an unfavourable position in Canadian trade relations, stemming from the NDP-Trudeau alliance. CETA and the CPTPP were negotiated years ago by the former federal Conservative government, both yielding huge benefits to Canada's exporting industries and workers. However, it took over three years for Canada to sign off on one, the trans-Pacific partnership. Both these trade deals are important for Alberta, and to use a sports analogy, the walk-off home run for a Team Canada win happened years ago. The NDP government just needed to convince their ally Prime Minister Trudeau to sign the ball.

Regarding NAFTA, Mr. Speaker, this government did a disservice to Albertans. There were no economic gains, no demands by this government. No expectations were set for Canada going into this negotiation. The best this NDP government could do was to join the media commentators and decide that a do-no-harm outcome was the best outcome for Canada. That's not how you win at baseball, and that's not how you win in free trade negotiations.

Mr. Speaker, under this government we don't have new pipelines, our rail lines are clogged, we can't get our products to market, and when we do, there's a massive discount that we receive. The NDP has recently put on a show of caring about pipelines, but it doesn't . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Bill 21 An Act to Protect Patients

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise and introduce Bill 21, An Act to Protect Patients.

Mr. Speaker, our government believes that women and all Albertans deserve to feel safe while accessing medical services. Albertans place their trust and even their lives with their health care providers. They must know that without a doubt they are in safe hands. This past spring I was made aware of a situation where a doctor was convicted of a sexual assault and got his licence back. When I dug into this situation, I was frustrated to learn that the tools available to the regulatory colleges here in Alberta were inadequate to protect patients.

Bill 21 will strengthen protection for patients from sexual abuse and sexual misconduct by regulated health professionals. I am so proud to be able to move on this with first reading for Bill 21, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table some of the letters and technical submissions that my colleagues and I have written to the government of Canada with respect to Bill C-69 and Bill C-48. The first of these letters is dated as far back as April 12, 2017, the latest just a few weeks ago. While this doesn't record the numerous conversations and meetings that have been held with our federal colleagues, it does in fact establish a timeline of how long our government has been speaking up on behalf of Albertans on these important matters.

The Speaker: Any more reports? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an e-mail correspondence from the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. I'd like to highlight the part in her letter in response to the Matthew de Grood case here in Alberta: "The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General of Alberta, who is the appropriate authority in this regard." I think the minister is wrong.

I would also like to make a second tabling, the requisite copies of a copy of the Criminal Code, that states under Grounds for Appeal in section 672.72(1): "Any party may appeal against a disposition made by a court or a Review Board, or a placement decision made by a Review Board, to the court of appeal of the province . . ."

The Speaker: Move along, hon. member. They can read it themselves.

Mrs. Pitt: Sorry. That's just an excerpt. That's all I have, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other members? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter to table from Mrs. Zoe Bleau. An excerpt from the letter:

We are desperately pleading that [my] Mom be put into the lodge in the first available opening. She is in dire need! If Mom had been placed in the Bonnylodge sooner, she would not have been performing household chores that could put her at risk of a fall. Also, in the event of a fall, she would have been in a safe place where . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, the same issue. I'm sure they're going to read it.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other reports? The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a newspaper article by Ms Corbella from the *Calgary Herald* discussing the neglect of this government when it comes to Bill C-69 and the hypocrisy that we've seen from them when it comes to Trans Mountain. I would encourage everybody to read it. It's a good article.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe there were no points of order today, so I believe we are at Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

The Acting Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 8

Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2018

The Acting Chair: Are there any speakers to the bill?

Seeing and hearing none, are we ready for the question on Bill 8, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2018?

[The clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The Hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Chair. At this time I'd like to move that the committee rise and report Bill 8.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 8.

The Acting Speaker: Having heard the report, are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? That's carried.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 19

An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education.

Our government is committed to fair legislation that improves the lives of all Albertans, including the many postsecondary students that study here in our province. This includes our proposed bill, that will update the Post-secondary Learning Act to ensure that Albertans have access to affordable, high-quality postsecondary education now and in the future.

Back in 2015 our government committed to stable and predictable funding for postsecondary institutions. We also began a tuition and fees freeze that has kept tuition at 2014-2015 levels. This freeze has since been extended through the current 2018-2019 academic year. Because we've frozen tuition at 2014-2015 levels, the average undergraduate degree program tuition in Alberta is now more affordable and is now among the lowest when you compare average tuition across the country.

This has had a substantial impact on the lives of learners and their families all across our province. During the four years that our tuition and fees freeze has been in place, we've worked diligently to consult with stakeholder groups, including students in postsecondary institutions, to develop a long-term strategy to protect and strengthen our postsecondary sector. This bill represents the culmination of years of work by our government and by the staff of Advanced Education.

Now, Madam Speaker, those keen observers of legislative history will recall that I was questioned on when we would release the results of our consultation on tuition. When asked, I said that we would deliver those results in the fullness of time. Now, at the time the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster heckled me and informed me that the fullness of time, as he understood it, meant never. In fact, I don't blame him for thinking that, because when he was a member of the government, they had a strong tradition, a proud tradition of making a bunch of promises that they never delivered on. So it's natural for him to think that when he heard the phrase "in the fullness of time," that was the old Tory way of telling people it was never going to happen.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

That has changed under this government, Madam Speaker. When we make a promise, we deliver it. We promised to review tuition and come forward with a framework, and in fact we have delivered it today.

Bill 19 proposes a number of updates to the Post-secondary Learning Act that will set our province's postsecondary learning system up for continued success. This bill will create the checks and balances needed to better control tuition and fees for domestic and for international students.

First, in order to ensure that tuition costs remain affordable and do not spike, we will be tying tuition increases for domestic students and apprentices to the consumer price index. This will mean that the average tuition costs at each institution cannot increase more than the consumer price index, with each program capped by a 10 per cent increase maximum per year. Secondly, we're updating the bill to give the Minister of Advanced Education the authority to

order future tuition and fees freezes so that the government can keep the cost of postsecondary education affordable in the face of an unexpected economic downturn.

3:00

Finally, this bill will also provide the regulatory authority needed to implement the new tuition framework that will deliver on our promise of affordable and predictable postsecondary costs for domestic and for international students.

Passage of this bill will give our government the authority to enact our proposed extension of the tuition and fees freeze for a fifth and final year through 2019-2020. This bill will also allow us to ensure that postsecondary costs don't spike once the freeze ends in 2020-2021, when we institute a new tuition framework for domestic and international students. This new tuition framework will formally remove market modifiers put in place by the previous government and will place unprecedented caps on the amount of tuition that can be raised through the regulation.

We're also capping mandatory noninstructional fees. These fees are often used for things like health services, athletic facilities, and the like and have been a point of contention that was mentioned repeatedly in our consultations. We heard the voices of students during our consultations through both formal and informal consultations, so to keep students, our largest stakeholders, a part of the conversation, institutions will not be able to create new mandatory noninstructional fees without student approval.

Our changes to the tuition framework will also impact apprentices, who will now be part of the PSLA for the first time. As we're doing with postsecondary tuition, we're capping apprenticeship tuition so that increases cannot exceed the consumer price index.

Madam Speaker, our government is also taking unprecedented action when it comes to international student tuition. For the thousands of international students who study and live in Alberta, our government is removing the fear of unknown changes in tuition and fees by creating a tuition guarantee. With this guarantee international students will be told the tuition cost for each year of study before they accept admission in a program. That way international students will have the peace of mind of knowing what their education will cost and will be able to study in Alberta without the fear of unpredictable tuition spikes.

In addition to the introduction of new protections which will keep tuition and fees affordable, we'll also be modernizing and reorganizing the postsecondary system to create increased access for students across Alberta. Since our government was elected in 2015, we have received requests from many institutions asking us to grant approvals that would allow the institutions to facilitate student success and ensure that students across our great province have access to high-quality education close to home. Therefore, we have allowed Red Deer College and Grande Prairie Regional College to pursue degree-granting status and have moved both institutions along the path to becoming universities. We also approved the Alberta College of Art and Design's request to change to university status to better reflect its programming and mandate. This legislation will formalize these changes and will ensure that the postsecondary system continues to adapt to best serve the needs of students, communities, and the province.

In addition to these changes at these institutions, this bill will also update the current six-sector model to better reflect the unique roles of each sector and to describe the sectors in terms that are relatable and easier to understand. All of the proposed updates to the roles and mandates outlined in the bill serve four purposes. First, they increase collaboration between sectors, creating new programming for students and increasing accessibility. Second, they clarify mandates, ensuring that a wide variety of programming from

foundational learning up to graduate degree programming is available in all regions. They ensure research across the province is co-ordinated and aligned with the Alberta Research and Innovation framework, and they increase degree access for Albertans, especially those in rural areas, because in certain circumstances comprehensive community colleges will now be able to offer degrees autonomously.

As you know, our government is taking steps to ensure that boards at all agencies, boards, and commissions are as diverse and as varied as our province. In fact, Madam Speaker, you'll remember that when we took office, the public members at our postsecondary institutions were comprised two-thirds of men. I'm happy to say that as of today the majority of public members appointed to the boards of governors at postsecondary institutions across the province are women, which is a better reflection of the student population that they serve, also a majority of women.

To ensure that boards of governors at PSIs follow this larger government trend to increase diversity and variance, we're making changes to update representation so that the unique voices of all of our stakeholder groups can be represented. We're proposing changes so that all publicly funded postsecondary institutions have two student representatives so that our largest stakeholder group, students, have an amplified voice on their campuses. This bill will also allow for an additional public member to be added to the board at all institutions so that diverse voices and underrepresented populations can be heard.

All of these changes are necessary to keep Alberta's postsecondary learning system affordable, accessible for all, and functioning at the highest level. This bill demonstrates our government's commitment to improve the lives of students in our province so that they can achieve their educational goals, get good jobs, and contribute to Alberta's diversifying economy. Albertans deserve a postsecondary system that provides high-quality education that's accessible and affordable for all, and this bill delivers on that promise.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in the House today to speak on Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. As the UCP caucus critic for Advanced Education I'm happy to kick off the debate. Bill 19 will legislate an inflation-based cap on increases to domestic student and apprenticeship tuition. Tuition increases will be tied to the consumer price index. This means that postsecondary institutions will not be able to raise the average tuition past Alberta's consumer price index. From my understanding, individual programs will be able to raise tuition up to 10 per cent as long as the average, across-the-board tuition does not exceed the consumer price index. Bill 19 also gives the minister power to regulate noninstructional fees such as fees for athletic facilities and bus passes. The minister will also have regulatory authority over international students' tuition. Further, students will have a greater representation on the institutions' boards of governors as all institutions will now have at least two student representatives.

Madam Speaker, much of the bill also looks at updating the six-sector model with new names for the different types of institutions. The new names of the institutions are the comprehensive academic and research universities, undergraduate universities, polytechnic institutions, and comprehensive community colleges. Specialized arts and culture institutions and independent academic institutions keep the same name. These sectors more or less carry over from what they were called before with a few minor changes. I see nothing wrong with updating the names.

Madam Speaker, as Advanced Education critic I've had the pleasure of speaking to many students all across this beautiful province. I know the struggles that university students face. Schooling isn't cheap, and many students have to work at least one, sometimes two jobs to cover their expenses. I have a great deal of respect for university students. I know the hard work they put in. Postsecondary students have been asking for predictable tuition increases since this tuition review started, and I commend the government for listening to the students and tying the tuition to the consumer price index.

The government also took action, good action, when they increased the representation of students on postsecondary institutions at the board of governors level. Previously some institutions such as Grant MacEwan in Edmonton and Mount Royal University in Calgary only had one student representative, which would have been quite a burden for one student to carry. All institutions will now have two student representatives and a third if the school has a graduate program. I'm also pleased that the government legislated this change and that they were able to listen to the student groups.

Madam Speaker, my greatest concern, though, with this bill lies with the power this will give the minister. If Bill 19 passes, the minister will be able to control almost all revenue-generating capacity of the institutions. I believe that our postsecondary institutions should be able to make decisions independently and in the best interests of their own institutions. I do not like having so much government control.

So much of the action that the government is taking on in this legislation is up to the discretion of the minister. The minister, for example, can dictate international student tuition. Same with the mandatory noninstructional fees. The minister says that he will increase transparency and predictability for both international student tuition and noninstructional fees. I fully support this move. However, how do we know that this is the case?

3:10

The minister is asking us to trust him with these regulations. Trust him. The problem is: how can we trust this government? I don't believe that Albertans trust this government. Why should they? The government has already broken trust with Albertans over the past three and a half years on a number of occasions. The Bill 6 fiasco in the first year of the NDP mandate caused more than just a little bit of anger from Albertans, especially in rural Alberta. The increased red tape for business has made Alberta a much less economically viable place. And most of the carbon tax, which has never been campaigned on and is imposed on Albertans, is affecting jobs, household income, and day-to-day expenses for all Albertans. This government has had so many missteps since they've been elected. Why should we further trust that they'll get it right with Bill 19?

Speaking of the carbon tax, Madam Speaker, universities are on the hook to pay for the government's ideological agenda through this tax. This can be a burden costing our institutions millions of dollars every year. I hope the government understands how many instructors or teacher assistants or student services this could fund. There is also no rebate option for postsecondary institutions, so universities are forced to bear the full cost of the carbon tax. This can really affect their budgeting. At the end of the day, taxpayers are supporting the universities, so taxpayers are getting less value for the money that they give to the institutions and the universities. If the government cares about helping students and cares about increasing the amount of money institutions can provide for students, maybe they should look at repealing their carbon tax.

Speaking of budgeting, the tuition freeze will be continued through the 2019-2020 school year. A decision to earmark money

to postsecondary institutions to make up for this freeze won't be made until budget time next March, which means that we don't know for sure whether money will be made available for postsecondary institutions. It's a guessing game. The government says that they will provide the money. However, once again they're asking us to trust them, and once again we have to ask: why should we trust them?

Madam Speaker, I support the Alberta students in the province, and I'm glad that they were able to advocate effectively to tie the tuition to the consumer price index and to put some form of regulations on other fees. However, I have many concerns with this bill, and I'm very concerned with the power that will be vested and given to the minister. Therefore, at this time I have to say that I will not be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Postsecondary Education. As with so many government bills, the name of this one is ironic. Why? Well, because the NDP's homegrown carbon tax has already created operational issues for Alberta's stellar postsecondary institutions. Quite simply, it costs them millions of dollars more to operate under this government when the NDP surprised them and all of Alberta with a carbon tax. They continue to struggle with ways to cut back so that they can incorporate Alberta's carbon tax into their budgets, and they have to figure out ways of absorbing future increases that this government will continue to add on when it adds the Trudeau carbon tax on top of Alberta's existing tax. Now the government introduces an act to improve accessibility and affordability of postsecondary education without regard for the already struggling institutions' ability to lose even more revenues.

We're concerned that the financial model the NDP is imposing on postsecondary institutions is not sustainable. The bill, if passed in the House by the majority of the NDP, is another case of unintended consequences, a theme that has occurred over the past several years. The reality is that it will very likely erode the quality of postsecondary education in Alberta. Who suffers for that, Madam Speaker? Why would an NDP government create a fiscal model that would cause this to happen? Time and again they do not think their policies through to the obvious conclusions. Curiously, these conclusions are obvious to others, but we know that short-sighted policies are something of a bit of a hallmark with this particular government, like the carbon tax itself. Wasn't that going to bring us the social licence for the Trans Mountain pipeline? We certainly heard lots about it in the first two years of this government. Now they hardly mention it except in a defensive manner when Albertans point out that the carbon tax has failed to display any form of social licence.

In fact, my newest colleague on this side of the House, the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, was able to ask representatives of the Energy ministry in committee last week if they had quantified the carbon tax. The reps, to their credit, answered honestly: no, the department had not put a dollar value on social licence. Now you will hear differently from government members. They will tell you that it is invaluable, but Albertans and constituents in Calgary-West, however, know the truth. There is no value to those 13 letters.

So you can see why I am looking at Bill 19 with a bit of a critical eye. The NDP is setting up to add more fiscal constraints on postsecondary institutes, and they just don't see it. That's why we need to point this out, and we have precious little time to do that in this Assembly, Madam Speaker.

Let's look at the long-term consequences of further constricting the budgets of postsecondaries. If they have to cut back even further, first due to the carbon tax and now because of Bill 19, they will have less funding for research, which is so critical for them, and less funding for instructors. In fact, Madam Speaker, when I was part of the heritage trust fund committee meeting just only a few days ago, there was what I believed to be a doctor or professor, a researcher, that certainly had concerns about funding for some of his projects as well, and he and others may be facing even further constraints, which for sure is a concern. If they're not offering tenure, as an example, because they cannot afford it, they will not be able to attract the kind of quality instructors that they would like.

When students are investigating their options – and remember that they have options for higher education all over the world – they may well take a pass on Alberta even if it is their home province. That would be a loss to Alberta, and how unfortunate that would be. Madam Speaker, this is a competitive sector, one of the most competitive around the globe. Students are educated about their choices, and they're mobile, especially in this era.

Bill 19 is looking to cap much of the flexibility to fund their programs, their operations, and their personnel. Restricting funding sources on top of the carbon tax is not a positive move for a government that purports to focus on affordability. It is absolutely forgetting the affordability for institutions.

Let me quickly address another concerning aspect of Bill 19, as mentioned by my colleague, and that is the amount of authority it gives the Minister of Advanced Education to set noninstructional fees in international student tuition. Handing authority to ministers is another hallmark of the NDP legislation. If Bill 19 passes, a minister can choose not to consult with postsecondary boards. The minister can make snap decisions that once again result in unintended consequences.

As this bill moves through the House, we look forward to the minister addressing these concerns if he chooses to. I would request that he particularly address the issue of competitiveness within the broad sector. Alberta has world-class institutions and other institutions that are still fairly new to the university sector, but they all need a fiscal model that lets them focus on the areas that will provide them with the greatest ability to compete in their specific areas of expertise. Madam Speaker, if Bill 19 hampers them from doing so in any way, then the concerns we are voicing today must be taken into account as the bill moves through further readings of this Assembly.

I thank you for your time, Madam Speaker.

3:20

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

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and I want to thank the Member for Calgary-West for his comments and just take a few moments to address them if I could. First of all, one of the issues that he raises in debating this bill is his concern around financial constraints that we might be placing through this bill. Now, certainly, we are limiting the amount by which tuition can increase. That is, in fact, the goal of this legislation, to promote affordability for students. Students are the number one priority of the higher education system, and we're just reinforcing that by making sure that affordability for students is the number one principle when considering the institutional budgets.

But on the matter of fiscal constraints, you know, let's talk about their record of imposing fiscal constraints on universities and colleges. It was only six years ago that the then minister of

advanced education, who currently finds himself unemployed, imposed a 7 per cent cut on the budgets of advanced education institutions all across this country. Staff were fired. Students were crammed into classrooms. Faculty had to give up their telephones, Madam Speaker.

But not only that; they weren't happy enough to make those kinds of cuts back in 2012-2013, Madam Speaker. When those guys existed as the Progressive Conservative caucus, they brought forward a shadow budget that actually proposed a \$450 million cut to the higher education sector. In fact, the last PC Premier proposed a budget before the 2015 election that cut more than \$550 million from the budgets of advanced education systems. And, you know, if they ever have the opportunity to make a budget again, we can expect those kinds of cuts to come as they pursue tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires and throw students under the bus.

Now, Madam Speaker, the Member for Calgary-West also issued some concerns about the carbon tax, and I want to just make him aware of an article that ran on a news site that's dedicated to University of Calgary news, called UToday. This article is dated September 18, 2018, and it's entitled "Ahead of the Curve: UCalgary Reaches Canada's 2030 Target to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions More than a Decade Ahead of Schedule." I want to take this opportunity to commend the good work of the University of Calgary in reducing their greenhouse gas emissions by 30 per cent, ahead of schedule. They had committed to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions by 30 per cent by 2030. They are well ahead of schedule. Part of that is due to the action of our government. We loaned the money to invest in energy efficiency programs through the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, millions of dollars that we invested in the University of Calgary through that loan, that are yielding positive results in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and greenhouse gas emissions reductions here in this province.

I think that there is a lot of other exciting work going on at university and college campuses all across this province to tackle climate change because, unlike the members opposite, people at universities and colleges recognize that, one, climate change is real, it's human induced, and we have to do something about it to prevent it from having a negative impact on our world. They are actually taking action on that, and I commend them.

Now, the third issue that the Member for Calgary-West raised was this issue around quality. I want to direct the member to the section of the Post-secondary Learning Act where we talk about tuition and fees and, in fact, authorize tuition freezes through the tuition framework that we're proposing to create through regulation. In fact, that regulation will contain a system for exceptional tuition increases in cases where programs may be needing additional revenue to improve the quality of their instruction, Madam Speaker.

It will be incumbent upon the institutions to demonstrate how additional revenue for that program will improve the quality of the program that they deliver to students and get students' buy-in for those increases. Under the old system, that was, you know, created by those guys over there, students had no voice. University and college administration could jack up fees willy-nilly, and students were left to pay the bill. In this case, a university will have to be completely open and transparent about how they intend to spend the money and how that money will be used to directly improve the quality of education in their classrooms, and students will have the power to say yes or no, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very proud to rise in the House today in support of the bill and one of the cosponsors of

Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. This bill is very close to my heart because when I came to Canada with my family, when we immigrated to Canada, one of the biggest excitements for me was to pursue higher education, in particular postsecondary education.

I would like to quote something from an article that has been written by the president and CEO of Lumina Foundation. His name is Jamie Merisotis. Talking about how important postsecondary education is, he says that it

isn't just about jobs and economic success. When it comes to building a fulfilling life, good jobs and careers are certainly necessary; but they're not sufficient. Intangibles matter, too – things like personal growth and citizenship and the commitment to equity and social justice. And postsecondary education contributes significantly in all of these areas. In fact, statistics show that individuals who have earned postsecondary credentials are healthier, live longer and are more deeply engaged in civic and community life than those who lack credentials.

Talking about providing a platform to students and making sure that higher education is affordable to them and accessible to them is basically saying that we are making a big difference to make the lives of Albertans better. Our government always stands up for fairness. It stands up for every Albertan, and it stands up for the protection of every Albertan. With this bill, by discussing this bill and moving it forward, we are making sure that our objective of improving the affordability of adult learning is achieved, which is crucial for the progress of our society. We need to keep costs of higher education under control so that it gives more certainty and predictability when it comes to affording postsecondary education.

When it comes to universities and colleges, the engagement of students is very important. When there is no voice of the students at the table of discussion of what their overall experience is going to be like for the universities and colleges they are going to sign up for, then basically the institutions are missing a big piece of how they can make a difference in their lives.

When people are committing to pursue higher education, it is a long-term commitment. It could vary from taking a course for a few months to the point where the education would be for a number of years. It is a commitment that a student makes every time he or she applies or when they apply for a university and get admitted into it.

Education is something that is evolving with time and all the time. To keep up ourselves with education will be doing justice to the students by preparing them for how the future is unfolding and how they can have good control when it comes to navigating their own lives by choosing the program they're in and how they can prepare themselves financially to plan their education to ensure that they meet their objectives and they complete their degrees, diplomas, or certificates.

Therefore, this bill is very important and does have complexity because it does involve a lot of matters and a lot of issues that need to be addressed. They have been overdue when it comes to addressing those issues. That's why our government has been engaging massively with students from all over the province, with students from different walks of life, so that we can ensure that we are addressing the barriers that students are facing, so that we can allow them to have access to postsecondary education, making sure that we listen to their concerns and how we can improve our system, which is an ongoing process because our needs are changing on a daily basis.

3:30

To make sure that we are able to provide a high-quality education that is advanced and that is addressing the issues that are taking

place at a given time, we need to be providing them with a modernized system. That's why this bill is bringing that modernization to the system, to abide with the needs of our students in this time frame. That's why a lot of time was taken to be thorough and to do consultations with the stakeholders when it comes to compiling this bill together. This bill is basically a compilation of the discussions and feedback that has been received from the stakeholders by our government.

Our government heard clearly in our consultations that affordable adult learning needs to be carefully constructed and based on a solution-based approach. We came to a solution that will work now and in the future. To avoid uncertainty during the process, we extended the tuition freeze.

The administrative change is to streamline the process for initiating a freeze instead of having to amend the regulations. It means that the government can respond more quickly if economic circumstances change and a freeze is necessary. Considering the fact that changes happen very drastically, we want to make sure that every time a change happens, it's addressed in a timely fashion, that's when we're making sure that the needs of the students are met. Therefore, this streamlining through this bill is important and is a very efficient way to ensure that when it comes to our postsecondary education, there is no compromise.

In summary, it's an amazing bill because, first, the consumer price index cap is moved from the regulations into the act. This response is to student concerns around transparency. It ensures that Albertans, through their MLAs, will be part of any potential future debate on how tuition increases are regulated. There is a 10 per cent cap on tuition increases for individual programs. The CPI cap applies to institutions.

Tuition for individual programs may vary. We are putting necessary limits on how much they can vary. In at least one case a program saw a 50 per cent increase. New regulations around mandatory noninstructional fees ensure fairness and transparency. Such fees must reflect the actual cost to deliver services without any markups.

Student associations will have to approve any new mandatory noninstructional fees. The market modifier mechanism is replaced with a quality-focused process. This mechanism can be used for a program of study once every five years. Proposals will be joint submissions by student associations and institutions and must show how additional tuition revenue will improve program quality. Proposals must ultimately be approved by the minister in order to be implemented.

A new tuition guarantee will protect international students from unexpected tuition increases. Institutions must communicate to international students the exact amount of their tuition for each year of the program. These amounts will be guaranteed.

All in all, Madam Speaker, this bill is adding security when it comes to postsecondary education. We are making sure that our students feel safe and secure when they're signing up for higher education. We are making sure that we are providing our citizens with the right tools to have a better quality of life by making our postsecondary education more affordable and accessible.

Thank you very much.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today in the House to speak on Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. Bill

19 focuses on placing an inflation-based cap on tuition fees for postsecondary institutions based on the annual changes in Alberta's consumer price index starting in 2021. This is being implemented after years of tuition freezes under this government.

Students in Alberta are already paying well below the average annual tuition rates for the country. In Alberta here we're paying approximately \$5,700 and change annually while the national average is a thousand dollars more at about \$6,800. While reducing fees for students is a great concept, unfortunately we just still have to go back to the fiscal responsibility and the longevity of being able to finance such programs.

Don't get me wrong; I think that in an ideal world we'd love to have our kids have free education. We want all our kids to have that postsecondary because it's brilliant, right? We want our society and our culture to excel. We want our kids to grow up with all the options in the world. I do know a country that does provide free education. Eastern Canada buys all of their oil from Saudi Arabia, and the Saudis actually provide their students with free education. I know because my neighbours are of Saudi Arabian descent, and they stayed despite all the things.

I asked them: "How do you guys get it paid? Like, how do you pay for this education?" You know what? They apply for the school themselves, they decide where they want to live, and then they go into an office. There's a lineup of students going in there, and they just tell them: "This is my school. This is where I'm going. This is where I want to go. I'm going to Canada." "Okay. How much do you need?" They have a chart, and it says exactly what the cost, expenses are, and they basically write them a cheque: "Here you go."

These kids, they live very, very comfortably and a free education. That said, you have to be from a certain lineage in Saudi Arabia to access these free funds. They are extensions of the royal family, but there are thousands of those kids. But I digress.

Here we're broke because we cannot get Canadians to buy our oil. This government has been running multibillion-dollar deficits every year since this government took office, and this bill will continue to suppress postsecondary institutions, preventing them from raising tuition beyond what the consumer price index is. Postsecondary institutions have restrictions on how they can raise money. They can't recuperate their revenue that's lost by the tuition freeze through other means due to these restrictions. Students have already seen the costs of other services skyrocket: student union fees, their parking that they have to pay for. I understand even some of the rents in some of the places, the student accommodations, have climbed a little bit.

Again, where does all this revenue come from ultimately? It does come from us. It comes from all of us. We're the taxpayers. We are all paying. Every Albertan is paying for this education, and Albertans are continuing to get taxed more and more. Now this government wants to add the burden of student tuition fees onto the taxpayer. At the University of Alberta our provincial government grants account for over half of the budget, 51 per cent. Only 17 per cent of the cost of the university is covered by tuition and fees.

Alberta's taxpayers can't keep picking up the tab from this government's meddling otherwise future generations will not be able to afford this education. That's the thing that we have to recognize, the future generations. It's great now while you're in government. You want to show some restraint on what these kids have to pay for their tuition fees, but you're forgetting about future generations, and that is a concern here. But, you know, you're trying to get elected next year. I get that.

With all these revenue restrictions on postsecondary institutions, we risk making our institutions uncompetitive. Postsecondary education should certainly be affordable but not at the expense of

the quality. Universities are running out of ways to raise money and pay for their day-to-day operations.

Let us recognize that we do value our postsecondary education. Higher education provides numerous benefits to our economy. It supports higher wages, which ultimately strengthens our economy. It reduces unemployment and increases the overall health of our province and its people. Albertans who choose to attend postsecondary education, who get a postsecondary education make nearly 40 per cent more in lifetime earnings than those with high school diplomas. That allows for more revenue to be collected by the government in order to fund essential services such as our health care system.

3:40

The return on investment for a university education is 16 per cent. Businesses would love to receive that kind of return on their investments. Education is the driving force behind our growing economy. Innovation from students in Alberta makes us a world leader in our oil and gas industries, our tech, our health care, and so many other fields. Our economy grows because Albertans know the value of education.

I asked this Health minister: have you looked outside these borders to see how other institutions raise money? I know that in the United States they changed the legislation around universities to allow them to profit from inventions that are made in their institutions. Stanford University in California, which is where Facebook and all those others in Silicon Valley – my cousin is a professor there. They get money from every invention that they come out with, every website that has been developed there where they were working with students. That school, Stanford, has benefited from a lot of those inventions and those initiatives. It's an entrepreneurial way. But it did allow the universities south of the border to have another stream of revenue, encouraging development and ingenuity and entrepreneurship.

In May of 2017 a study was done to calculate the impact of the seven postsecondary institutions, and the study concluded that the institutions added \$8.6 billion in additional income for the region in 2014-15. They also went on to say that over their lifetime the benefit to the region would be \$180 billion. The president of Calgary Economic Development stated that, quote, the impact of postsecondary institutions as economic engines in our city is extraordinary and is highly underappreciated, that higher education's benefit is that it inspires Calgarians to the innovative thinking that drives our progress as a great place to make a living and a life that is immeasurable. Unquote. Again, there's no doubt that everyone in this House respects education. We all do. We all do.

You know, there's a quote on Mount Royal students coming from Calgary, that more than 70,000 alumni remain in the city, as stated by the president of Mount Royal University. Given that, it's vital to demonstrate in real dollars how those postsecondaries like Mount Royal deliver value to our local economies like Calgary's.

These two influential individuals praise the effects of postsecondary institutions. They bring numerous benefits to our communities, and we must ensure that they do remain competitive and efficient at training Alberta students.

I personally take great pride in our institutions. I've gone to technical schools, more the community colleges. The rest of my family have gone to universities across this fine nation and around the world, but ultimately they come back home here. They choose the schools here, my family has, because we do provide a high level of education. It is very good quality. But, again, we have to ensure that we can maintain that. It does start with maintaining our education.

Those with postsecondary education benefit from employment stability and often pension plan coverage. This allows individuals to invest in houses and businesses and allows them to donate to the local charities. They continue to participate in our economy. Most new jobs require some sort of skill training with some type of education or training. We're watching our education systems evolve, and we're going to continue to evolve. Other nations have exceeded us in some ways.

As a paramedic I went to a technical school here in Alberta. That was more than two years. It was a 20-month program. Then I went to Australia for a year after. I thought I might be able to get a job there, just part-time or something like that. In Australia they demanded a four-year degree for their paramedics, so for obvious reasons I was not able to apply for a position in that. But it was a good learning experience for me. Our systems are always evolving, and all of our careers that we go into are continuing to evolve. You see the high pinnacle that some places place on some of these aspects, and we're going to continue to see other aspects of our workforce grow in their educational requirements. Again, postsecondary education is very, very good for us. It benefits us, and it helps us become better at what we do.

Obviously, another benefit of the postsecondary growth is the job creation that follows, the replacements needed for all the people that are currently around. It's a continuous evolution, and we're figuring that two-thirds of those people by 2024 are going to require some sort of college or postsecondary or vocational education. In Alberta we need to maintain that high quality of care in order to capitalize on that economic growth that comes from these educational institutions. But, again, it's about being fiscally responsible. It is about ensuring that there's balance in how you spend that money and invest that in our education. I know that Albertans know the value of their education, but, that said, they won't also stay in Alberta if they don't feel that they're getting their money's worth. If our education system degrades, if it slips and our reputations follow and it flounders, that affects all of us here in Alberta. We consider ourselves at the highest level, and we have to continue that.

Obviously, education is correlated with other things, including better health, which I am very passionate about, Madam Speaker. Studies have found that individuals with postsecondary education are less likely to smoke, have lower rates of obesity, and are more likely to lead healthier and longer lives. Parents with postsecondary education may pass on those positive behaviours to their children as well. So, again, we have to strive to maintain the highest standard for our institutions and make sure we are providing the appropriate resources to train our future leaders.

This cap on postsecondary tuition puts our institutions at risk. Unless this government has other ways of creating revenue or of finding some other efficiencies within those institutions – I'm sure we can propose some. I'm sure he's talked to all these postsecondary institutions. They have suggested things to me. They've talked about course development.

Connolly: I thought you didn't want to get bogged down.

Mr. Yao: Yeah.

This whole bill is ultimately just poor judgment. What's more worrisome is that they want to give this minister more power. The government says that we can trust them to make the right decisions, but can we really? No. If there's one thing this bill has right, it is that it is about fee transparency, and I commend the minister for that. He is trying to ensure that our children and these kids that are going to school have some predictability in their tuition fees, because, as we know, that is a large burden on our society. But, again, it's about practicality. Socialism is great, Madam Speaker,

until you run out of other people's money, to quote Margaret Thatcher.

The point is that we must have a long-term plan in place for our postsecondary institutions. We cannot maintain freezes year after year, and the Alberta taxpayer can't afford to be picking up the entire tab for postsecondary education. I mean, we have to consider that when most people in this House were kids, like, 20, 30 years ago, we were only paying about 30 per cent in taxes in total: provincial, federal, municipal, et cetera. I mean, in this day and age we're almost paying half of our salaries in taxes, and we're coming close to that half, and that's very concerning. But I digress.

Again, we must have a long-term plan in place for our postsecondary institutions. We all know the importance of postsecondary education, but we have to ensure that it is viable. I would certainly ask this minister to reconsider this or to at least provide us with a longer term plan. I'd like to understand what the discussions are with the universities because I'm sure they're under a lot of duress with the financial restrictions that they have.

Although I understand and appreciate the intent of this bill, I will have to vote against it, and I hope that all members have heard my arguments and will do the same. Thank you so much.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, I think this is a bill that is extremely important that we are debating today. It's a bill that I'm very proud to be able to stand up and speak for. Frankly, I probably remember what the effects are of having to pay tuition every single year or semester better than, well, frankly, most people in this House but certainly better than almost everybody in the opposition.

3:50

Madam Speaker, students having better access to affordable learning that's high quality is one of the most important things that we possibly can do in this Assembly. That's why I believe it is absolutely shameful that the opposition is speaking against this today. When we talk about things like cost for education, we're talking about what the cost of making sure we have a strong workforce is, the cost of making sure that future Albertans have the knowledge they need to excel in Alberta, have the knowledge they need to have good livelihoods, to have strong families. This is what we are talking about when we talk about making postsecondary accessible and affordable for Albertans.

Madam Speaker, I remember that when I first joined university, MNIFs, or mandatory noninstructional fees, were a huge issue. They were such a huge issue, in fact, that we really believed that the Conservative government, our opposition colleagues over there, were basically letting universities use them as methods to circumvent tuition caps. It was basically a method where the universities could hike at will, and it was something that students spoke out on en masse. Students were livid that institutions were allowed to do this under Conservative regimes. I'm glad that our government has listened, that our minister has decided this can no longer go on. We need to be fair to students. When there are fees, they need to be justifiable. They need to be something that we can look at and say: what is the value?

I remember that when I was in university, Madam Speaker, I paid a circulation fee, and the best that we could figure out on what that circulation fee was for was for using the hallways. There was an additional \$800 fee every year to use hallways. That's the type of thing that the opposition wants to let go on. That's the type of thing

the opposition wants to let rise at rates well above inflation. I think that's absurd. I think we should be fighting for accessible education for everybody. We should be saying that even the student that can't afford to pay \$800 to walk in a hallway should still be allowed to learn. I think that is one of the most important things that we can do here.

Madam Speaker, I think that we heard the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo speak about things like: we need to think about our future, and that's why we can't do things like lower tuition right now, why we can't cap tuition, because what's going to happen to future Albertans? That's a really interesting comment. What's going to happen to future Albertans is that they are going to get that opportunity to learn. They are going to get that opportunity to succeed. The opposition clearly does not understand the importance of our education system. They don't understand the importance of bringing in rules that allow students to have sustainable educations.

One of the things that I continue to hear today is concern around international students. International student tuitions are oftentimes quite a bit higher than for domestic students. Bringing in stability for these students – I had a number of colleagues and friends who were international students – along with our domestic students is important because it's what allows our institutions to attract high-quality students. It allows our institutions to bring in people from all over the world, whether that's researchers in Europe, in Asia, and in the United States, wherever they are. They want to come here because they know they can get a top-notch education while also being able to say: I won't have to worry about choosing between going to the food bank or paying for my tuition at the end of this month. That's what we're talking about. We're talking about taking away the uncertainty for those students that don't know whether next year their tuition is going to go up \$5,000 and that that means that they're not going to be able to afford rent or that they're not going to be able to afford lunch.

Madam Speaker, that's the type of decision we're making today. When the opposition speaks against that, I cannot honestly fathom why they would possibly believe that we should allow students to continue to have uncertainty, why we should allow students to have to go to food banks. That is the reality. How many campuses have food banks? I would say, actually, a number of campuses. I know the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary have campus food banks, and that's shameful. We shouldn't have to have those facilities. We should be able to tell students: this is exactly what you will need to succeed in university.

I think it's wonderful to see that our government is listening, and I think that Albertans that are watching right now – I know that I have a number of colleagues that are students or were students that are listening to this debate because they care about student issues. They care that we have strong educational institutions. I know that they can see really clearly right now that the opposition is coming up and saying: well, we need to let universities raise tuition at whatever rate they want, we need to let them raise fees at whatever rate they want, and we think students should just suck it up and pay for it. That's what the opposition is trying to say today. What our government is saying is that we listen to students. After years of consultation, we finally came back and said: "This is what you wanted, and we agree with you. We agree that students should be sustainable and have steady and reliable metrics to work with. We believe that making sure that your tuition isn't rising significantly above the cost of inflation is a fair thing to say. We agree with you."

Our government decided that we would side with the everyday Albertans who use postsecondary institutions, the ones who go out there and say: I want to make a better life for myself. We sided with

those Albertans. What the opposition did is that they decided that they wanted to side with the wealthy elite. They sided with the wealthy elite. They sided with the 1 per cent. They're going to give huge tax cuts, \$700 million in tax cuts, to the wealthiest Albertans and then decide: "Oh, but, students, you guys can pay a little bit more. That's okay. Let's let the students pay well above inflation, but let's make sure that our wealthy friends don't have to pay any more. They pay enough. We can't use that money to fund your education. Your education doesn't matter as much as them." That's what the opposition wants. Madam Speaker, it is something that I really don't understand some days, how they think that Albertans believe them when they say: we need to stand with the rich and let students fail. That's essentially what they're saying.

Madam Speaker, I am so proud to be able to speak in favour of this legislation. I am so proud to be able to say that everybody should be voting for this. It's something that students have asked for for years, and it's finally being granted them by a New Democratic government. I'm pleased to urge all my colleagues to vote in favour. But I'm afraid it sounds like our opposition friends really don't have students' backs.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. That was very passionate. I can say that as a past student myself I also went through the hardship of paying for my tuition. To say that I am out against students is a little harsh. To say that Conservatives want to see students fail is even more harsh. I think that we have a good record over the many years of supporting our students. I hear chuckles from the other side. But I will tell you that when it comes to caps, I do have some concerns. Now, what happens is that when we decide that we're going to place caps on it, I'm asking: did the NDP actually do some sort of study to show what the result of this is, an economic impact study, if you will?

Are we going to be making our institutions unviable, to the point where they're going to start shutting down and our students won't be able to go to school? That is a question that wasn't asked to the minister. This is a credible question. I'll tell you that as a past student myself – I went to the University of Lethbridge, and I'm very proud of my time at that university. You know what? Lethbridge will always be a city that I hold deep respect for. I also understood that as a student I needed to support the university both with money and with making sure that the bachelor of management department also had support from me as well as making sure that the government heard that being responsible with its money is important.

How can this, an argument on Bill 19 – it's named An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education – devolve down to: the Conservatives want to harm every student across Alberta? I think it's reckless to be going down that road. I think that by saying that, that also is very inappropriate, and I would ask that member to apologize for it.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What I won't apologize for is standing up for students. What I won't apologize for is saying that \$700 million in tax cuts to the wealthiest Albertans would be better spent if we invested that in things like tuition freezes. What I won't apologize for is that Conservatives think they can get away with taking the money that we want to spend for students and using that to line their friends' pockets.

4:00

When he talks about things like economic impact, I think the economic impact is that students won't have to go to the food bank anymore. Who can argue against that? I think that what is amazing here is that the opposition has decided that they can't support our students. They can't support our postsecondary students having accessible education. They've decided that this is the hill that they want to fight on, that this is something that they believe is going to allow them to fight against our students' rights to have education and to learn those things. He spoke passionately about how he went to the University of Lethbridge, Madam Speaker, and I believe that University of Lethbridge students would probably agree that they want to know what tuition is going to be next year and the year after that. If you're in a four-year program, well, maybe for all four years you'd like to know what that's going to cost you.

I think that those are the things that our government listened to. Those are the things that most students probably agree with, Madam Speaker. Students agree that knowing what your expenses are going to be is something that's a very fair ask for somebody who has to plan the next four years of their life. We know those next two, four years, depending on the program you're taking, those next years of your life are going to set you on the path for a career for the rest of your life. That's why we believe that investing in this small number of years for students is one of the best investments we can make. It's one of the best investments that we can make, and students deserve that much. They deserve to know for those two years, for those four years. Some students take six years. They deserve to know for the length of time that they're in university. They deserve to have stability.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other speakers to the bill? I'll recognize Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. I'll start by congratulating the government on listening to students and seriously consulting with them over the last two years. Of course, that's only part of who needs to be consulted with, but it's an important part of those who are going to be affected by tuition changes.

It's very clear. My consultations with students revealed much the same information. They don't believe that a freeze indefinitely is in their long-term best interests either. They want to see a gradual, predictable, stable increase that reflects a cost-of-living increase and inflation. I think the minister has clearly heard that. As indicated in the bill, it's going to make things more realistic in the real world.

If there's one little irritant, that would be that you're postponing it till after 2019 as opposed to bringing it in next year, which, to me, would smack a bit of political opportunism. But that's a minor issue in a bill that is really addressing some serious issues with both provincial and national students and also international students, both of those having been a big irritant and uncertainty in the past number of years.

The tuition cap, then, is scheduled to take effect in the fall of 2020, and it's not clear to me to what extent we'll see noninstructional fees increase. It's not clear to me from this bill yet the extent to which a cap might apply to noninstructional fees. I hope the minister can clarify some of that.

The cap certainly appears to apply to all postsecondary institutions and apprentice fees, and individual programs are permitted to increase by 10 per cent. I assume that by "program" we're referring to faculty, because if every program in a university or college increased by 10 per cent in a year, that would be a

substantial increase. It's not entirely clear to me what "program" means there, and I'd appreciate some clarity around that.

The tuition cap does not apply to international students, but postsecondary institutions will be required to give them a tuition guarantee at the time of admission. Doing so will certainly prevent international students' tuition from rising inordinately or unexpectedly, again assuming that noninstructional fees will not be allowed to make up the difference in a postsecondary budget.

In passing, I'll say how much I as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View appreciated the support from the ministry in moving the Alberta College of Art and Design to university status. It has been struggling for years with a less-than-equitable budget, a tremendous demand from our students to have a place at the College of Art and Design. This will not only provide much stronger opportunities for outside investments but also a credibility and status that will be more deserving of an organization that's really one of the premier in Canada, certainly western Canada, in the areas of art and design.

It also clearly provides and mandates, in fact, greater collaboration and innovation across our postsecondary systems. That can only improve efficiency and attractiveness and, I would say, excellence in our postsecondary institutions. So I'm pleased to see that as well.

The establishment of at least two student representatives on the boards of each postsecondary institution is, again, a positive statement that recognizes and empowers those who are in these institutions and who have to come to grips with more and more of the responsibility for not only their own well-being but the institution's well-being, finding that balance in terms of affordability and accessibility with the fiscal responsibility of the institution.

I think many of these are excellent decisions. Certainly, I support them, and I will be supporting this bill.

One other question came up. If the minister has the authority to regulate going forward, does that mean that each decision of each program needs to be passed through the ministry even if it's below the 10 per cent?

My information, for the record, is that our average university tuition in Alberta is \$5,700 per year. Nationally it's \$6,800 per year. So it's not nearly as dramatically different as what my colleague in the UCP mentioned.

Overall, I think this is much needed, overdue. I certainly support the direction that postsecondary education is going, which is our future in all dimensions. Whether it's academic or apprenticeship training, all those dimensions are the key to our economy, to innovation, to a future that is going to move us towards what I would call a more sustainable future, one in which we're seeing much more thoughtful approaches, much more critical voters, much more active citizens, that I would hope strengthen the leadership in government, strengthen the long-term well-being of this province and the prosperity of this province.

It is a critical investment. There is none more important than education, and postsecondary education is a big part of that final phase of formal education. I applaud the government for its efforts to address in a balanced way, I would say, both the fiscal realities and the need to make education a priority and to be seen to be a priority.

I have mentioned in the past that in medical school in the '70s I paid \$650 a term. That was under the Lougheed government, and it makes me realize just how much that government valued education and was willing to make it easily affordable. I could earn as much as I needed for the whole year by working for the four months in the summer on a farm.

4:10

To say that we have moved away from that level of support for postsecondary education is an understatement. I've long since felt

that we needed to encourage, in any ways possible, students to continue their education and find the success and contributions to our society, including taxation, that they will be contributing to everything that we value, as they could.

I'm sorry that I don't have more in the way of details about these noninstructional fees, but I assume that will come up in discussions. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before I get started, I want to do a quick shout-out to my friend Tiffany, who is watching from home in B.C. We used to organize together. We worked together at the Simon Fraser Student Society back when I lived in Vancouver, and she and I used to talk a lot about how budgets are political documents.

Budgets speak to priorities, and I would like to just say that our government has made postsecondary learners and their families a priority by freezing tuition fees and with this bill, if it passes, by tying tuition fee increases to the consumer price index. This bill also guarantees a fifth year of a tuition fee freeze in Alberta. I'm going to say that again: a fifth year of a tuition fee freeze in Alberta. Our government has supported students and institutions by backfilling that freeze with \$129 million to date, with the amount for 2019-2020 being determined through the debating process of Budget 2019.

Now I want to speak a little bit to the B.C. experience and why that bit of increasing funding to institutions while freezing tuition fees is so critical. In the years before I moved to B.C., the previous government had frozen tuition fees, but they did not increase funding to institutions to keep pace with rising costs. When there was a change in government, the tuition freeze was ended, the cap on tuition fee increases was lifted, Madam Speaker, and in the time that I worked at the students' union, tuition fees increased 30 per cent per year. To put that into context, that means that from when a student started first-year university, all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, looking towards building that future of theirs, to the time they reached their fourth year of study, their annual tuition fees had doubled.

Our government learned from that example, and that is why we funded that tuition freeze, because, you know, when fees increase rapidly, students are faced with really difficult choices. I knew many students who had to drop out because of the fee increase, a rapid fee increase, because they couldn't afford to keep going. Other students took a year or two off study to work full-time and save up some additional money to finish off that last year of their education. That was the year that we created the student food bank at Simon Fraser. That's not a proud moment, Madam Speaker. Those students shouldn't have needed to go to a food bank while they were pursuing their education and building their futures.

By tying tuition fees and mandatory noninstructional fees to the consumer price index, this bill will allow learners, their parents, their families, and our postsecondary institutions to plan for the future, to know what to expect, and to be able to budget accordingly.

Now, many in this House know that I am the mom to two young kids, and as a parent you get a lot of mail, particularly when you're expecting, from people who want to talk to you about saving for your kid's future. One of those companies estimates that in the year 2036, which would be the year when most babies who are born in 2018 will reach postsecondary education, the cost of the tuition alone for a four-year degree by then will be \$84,000. Madam Speaker, that's \$12,000 per year in tuition fees alone.

I just want to shout it from the rooftop. I'm so excited that if this bill passes, that means that Alberta families and Alberta parents can rest a little bit easier knowing that under this government their children's tuition fees, their tuition fees will be much lower and their futures that much brighter.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure as always to rise in the Assembly. It's interesting that we talk about postsecondary education today, also for you and me who both have had the privilege of being elected and serving on the same student association in our past. I don't know if you're aware of that. I believe that that is, in fact, true. Though we may be in different political parties in this place, in our previous lives we served in the same organization in student politics at different times, of course.

I am going to today, Madam Speaker, move an amendment. I have the appropriate number of copies for the pages. I will wait for your instructions. I almost didn't send the original, which would have been a problem. I'll wait for your permission to continue.

Okay to go, Madam Speaker? Sorry, I didn't see that. Thank you. I appreciate it.

The amendment I will move reads as follows, Madam Speaker. Mr. Nixon – again, I think we must not have been here for a while. I'm starting to say names inside the House. I see the Chair of Committees laughing at me and probably rightly so. Let me try that again.

I will move that the motion for second reading of Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Madam Speaker, the reason that I move this amendment today – I was listening with interest trying to determine where I would be with this legislation as it progresses through the Assembly and having a look at what the answers of the government to some of the questions coming from the members on this side of the House would be. As you know, we see legislation for such short periods of time when we're in opposition because the government gives it and then calls it. Sometimes we're trying to understand if the government actually has it right, if they have taken the time, of course, to consult with universities. Have they consulted with student groups? What are the other aspects of the bill? As you know, sometimes there are other things that are planted within bills by the government.

Our role, of course, as the Official Opposition is to work with our staff to go and rout that out, to have a look and try to find those types of things, and that takes time. What I did notice was that there were not a lot of answers to some of the concerns that members were asking about today. I question at this point whether consultation has been done all right. I've been talking to some stakeholder groups who I know will be part of this process or will be impacted by the decision of this legislation, and they're indicating to me that they have not had an opportunity to be consulted on this process. I think that halting the process and making sure that consultation can happen is a good idea.

You know, we talk often when we move procedural amendments like this about the fact that the government seems to only want to actually go and consult or actually work through committee processes or those types of things when it's a piece of legislation that they recognize that they can't politically vote no to in this building with the cameras on and everybody watching. They recognize that they can't vote no to it, so they'll send those pieces of legislation to committee, but they won't send other pieces of legislation to committee.

You know, it's interesting. A great example – and we'll spend some time debating this next Monday in this place – is that the hon. Member for Highwood brought forward a private member's bill last session in the spring. We agreed and worked with the government, actually, to send that to committee because we recognized that there were some parts of that bill that probably still needed to have a discussion. That's how the system works. That's the process for making legislation. That's how we designed it. That's why we have standing committees and we have other groups where witnesses can be called, people can flesh out thoughts, talk to experts, talk to people that are involved to make sure that we've got that legislation correct.

4:20

In that case that bill went primarily because what was happening, Madam Speaker, was that the government was in a position where they could not vote against firefighters because that's what it would look like, but there were some issues with the bill. We agreed. We got the bill off to committee, had a look at it, and to the credit of the members on there, we recognized that that bill was just not going to work, that that legislation needed to be halted and looked at from a different angle, and the committee recommended that to this House. I don't want to presume where we'll be, particularly because it's private members' business, but I suspect that this House will agree with that as we make that decision in the following private members' days in this Assembly. That's a good way for this process to work.

We've seen it with other pieces of legislation that the NDP government in Alberta were scared to make a decision on inside this place, so they sent it to committee. The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler had a bill, pretty famously in the first year of the 29th Legislature, which was sent to committee because you could see the Government House Leader and everybody on the other side at that point go: oh, man, we can't vote against that. So they sent it to committee and then essentially killed that bill, didn't let it go back. We've seen many examples of that but not when it's a piece of government legislation.

The problem, Madam Speaker, is that the government, because they do that, continue to get it wrong. Interestingly enough, each time we've come to this place for a sitting, the government has had to bring forward another piece of legislation to fix their legislation from the time before. Every single time since this NDP government came into power, the following sitting they've had to bring bills forward to fix their legislation: elections financing, election rules, labour legislation, on and on and on. In fact – and I'm sure you won't be surprised – I anticipate that will happen again in the next few weeks. The government will have to bring forward legislation to fix it. The problem with that, then, is that in the meantime you have a law that has been put in place that's not working or something has been missed, which is why I would move that.

We see that consistently with this government. It concerns me because we see it consistently with this government on all sorts of issues, which is why we need to refer this. Bill C-69, something we've talked about a lot, is a House of Commons piece of legislation which, unfortunately, passed in the House of Commons.

Over and over and over in this House we were warning the Alberta government: you've got to deal with Bill C-69. Then across the way, as you know, Madam Speaker – we watched them do it – they would rise and mock the Leader of the Opposition. They would make fun of us. They would say that we were wrong and that we were spending our time focused on Ottawa. Of course, we were spending our time focused on Ottawa. Ottawa was attacking Alberta. It's our job to focus on Ottawa. Then fast-forward several months, what happens? That side of the House gets up and realizes: "Oops, we made a mistake. You guys were right. We were going too fast. We made a mistake."

Another great example: the shut-off-the-tap legislation. The Premier and the Deputy Premier and many other people across from me today made fun of the Leader of the Official Opposition even before he was a member of this place, said hateful and terrible things about him when it came to that legislation. They compared him to Donald Trump, said he wanted to build a wall, said all those types of things and really made fun of him on a regular basis. Then you fast-forward a few months, and they bring in the exact same piece of legislation that the Leader of the Official Opposition recommended to this place.

Now, funny enough, as I've already said in this place before, Madam Speaker, in this Chamber, they had no intention of ever using that piece of legislation, sadly, and we know that history will record that they never did. In fact, they filibustered their own piece of legislation to prevent it being used to protect Albertans because they would rather stand with their close personal friend and ally Justin Trudeau. But I digress for now. [interjection] The Deputy Premier is bragging about that right now. Through you, Madam Speaker, to her: she should be ashamed. She should be ashamed of her behaviour, that she would not stand up for Albertans and brought forward a piece of legislation that they never intended to use. It's disappointing. Albertans don't like that. They deserve better.

Connolly: What bill are we on?

Mr. Nixon: We're not on the bill right now. We are on an amendment to refer it to committee, and we're talking about why we need to refer this type of legislation to committee. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood may want to reread the amendment because that's what we're on right now. We are talking about why this government can't be trusted on legislation.

Again, here we are, the second day into this sitting, listening to the minister and to other members discuss this bill. No answers to any questions. Are they really ready? How do I know? This has always been the problem, Madam Speaker. How do you and I know that they've actually done it this time? The history, the track record when it comes to these types of things with this government is clear. This government has a history of repeatedly getting legislation wrong and either not acting and then watching Albertans face the consequences as a result of their inaction or having to come back to this place, to this Assembly, and fix the mistakes that they made in their last legislation, often mistakes that had been noted by this side of the House and, certainly, mistakes that would have been noted by experts or other people if they'd had a chance to participate in committee.

That is the question that is before the Assembly with my amendment, and the reason I bring that forward is simply this. I think, at first glance of this legislation, that there's some good stuff in it. I have some other questions, serious questions, though, about whether or not they got this right. I think that our universities and our colleges, our postsecondary institutions, are too important for this government to get this wrong.

The other thing that makes this more complicated at this moment, Madam Speaker, is that we know that if the Premier is to follow the law, the election law, which I expect that she would, she may be calling an election before our Assembly could be recalled in the spring. So you could be in a place where they got it wrong this time and there is an extended period of time until it can be fixed.

So we're kind of at a spot now where the NDP pattern of bringing forward legislation, messing it up, and then having to come back here and working to get it fixed ain't gonna work possibly this time. So then what happens to the people that are facing the consequences while that's happening? I want to make sure that we get it right. I think that by following this amendment, we have an opportunity to do that. We have an opportunity to be able to make sure that we get a good piece of legislation out of this that will deal with a very, very important issue.

As you know from your experience in postsecondary student politics – and I don't know, Madam Speaker, if you sat on your university's board in your position; I think you probably did. I know I did. It's complicated, running a university. There are complicated aspects to it, lots of different factors that result in the funding, and making sure you get this right is obviously important. Our institutions can't afford to wait six months for this place to come back to be able to fix the mistakes that, possibly, this government is getting ready to make again.

Now, they might not be, and that's why we should be having a conversation to make sure they get it right. As I go back to my constituency and talk to my constituents, I see the suffering that they've had to go through the last three and a half years as a result of either inaction from this government repeatedly, particularly on the energy file, or as a result of them getting legislation wrong. I don't want to see the same thing happen. I think it is our responsibility as members of the 29th Legislature to stand up and say: you have not shown us that you've not got this wrong. In fact, they're not even answering the questions that members have raised already this afternoon in this place. They just get up, stand up, and go into full on fear and smear attacks that a government that can't run on its own record often does, and that's fine. That's their tactics. Go for it. I get it. But don't get it mixed up with such an important piece of legislation that impacts a lot of people that aren't in the middle of that argument.

I get it. I understand, Madam Speaker. You have a government that is in chaos. It is running nervous. They're very, very worried. They recognize that they've made terrible mistakes and that very shortly they're going to have to go to the ballot box, and the boss is going to decide if the behaviour that has happened from this government in the last four years is right. I get that; I get why they would be nervous about it. But to accelerate a piece of legislation without getting it right, without taking the time to answer the questions and to respect the process that is here – this is not an election right now, and this bill has nothing to do with an election. This government has a responsibility to get it right. So let's send it to get reviewed to make sure we got it right. It could still be done before the next election if the government would co-operate with that process. Certainly – certainly – the government should take some time to actually answer the questions in this place.

4:30

I will close with this, Madam Speaker, as I know I'm running out of time. I would encourage all members to support my amendment to help us get this piece of legislation right and to help us help this government, who continues to make mistakes over and over when it comes to legislation. I don't care about this government's credibility – they've lost all credibility where I come from; they've lost all credibility with me – but what I do care about is that when

they make these mistakes, they hurt the people that I represent. I want them to stop doing that and to take the time to consult, and I hope they support my amendment to do so.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have to say that when the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre was speaking, when I did speak up, it was in agreement that when the member referred to the fact that he was digressing, he wasn't on topic. I do agree that he wasn't on topic.

There were a number of things that he raised that I do want to respond to. One is that he said that when things are referred to committee, it's because this side of the House doesn't want to debate them. Nothing could be further from the truth, Madam Speaker. We've debated many things in this House. Actually, members on this side of the House have voted on every single bill that has been brought forward in this House.

I wish I could say the same for the members opposite. The members opposite rose at every opportunity they had to speak on Bill 9 in the past session. They didn't even bring forward a motion to refer. If that's something that would be so helpful, why didn't they do that? The reason why they didn't do that is because they said that it didn't matter to the people of Alberta, that it wasn't an issue of importance. Well, I'll tell you that protecting women from harassment when they're accessing health care services is an issue of importance to many Albertans. I'll also tell you that protecting students from being gouged when it comes to postsecondary education is also a value that this side of the House and many Albertans think is of crucial importance.

I also want to appreciate that the member opposite talked about his time in student government. I also spent time in student government. I was very proud of that. I googled the member's time in student government, because when he referred to his time in student government, I had a recollection that there was something interesting about that time when he was president of his student association. I have to say that one of the things that popped up was how – there's a piece online about how he violated his own bylaws and how his association violated their own bylaws, without issuing notice of an AGM, while interfering with a student newspaper, pulling the student newspaper's website link down without the managing editor's consent. The assumption is that it was because a student newspaper wrote a piece noting that very quickly, without a lot of notice, the executive itself voted to make their then president and student executive the highest paid student executives in the province of Alberta, Madam Speaker.

I have to say that I will very happily work with student leaders across this province on issues of importance to all students. I find it pretty rich that somebody who, it appears – I think there was a motion to remove the hon. member. The motion was recommended for the member to be expelled from the organization, and that motion was passed. Anyway, it's interesting.

I, too, spent time on student government and am very proud of that. I know that many Albertans have served in a variety of ways. I have to say that the student leaders who spend their time advocating to make life more affordable for all students rather than to raise their own compensation are ones that I'm very proud to work with on things just like this legislation, that indeed does protect all students by bringing in safeguards and protections for students to ensure that they can plan ahead when they enrol in postsecondary. We know that many working-class families and lower income families are reluctant to take on debt, and one of the reasons is because they want to have certainty that they have a plan

to be able to repay that. Being able to give certainty to students about what their tuition will be in the future, being able to give them that predictability, I think is vitally important.

Again, students who have advocated for all students to have life made more affordable through having controls around the tuition rates, having five years of frozen tuition fees in this province: those are the voices I'm really proud to stand up for and defend.

That's why I was deeply troubled when I read that instead of doing things that focused on affordability for students, the member chose to increase his own compensation to make it the highest paid of student executives in the province, assuming that the story I've read is true. If it isn't, I'd be happy to be corrected. I guess my question would be: does the member have a different recollection of that story? That would be my question to the hon. member.

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

Seeing none, on the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to rise and speak to this amendment to Bill 19, my first opportunity to rise in this legislative session. I'd like to welcome everybody back. I'm glad we get to start with some good debate on what I think is an important piece of legislation.

Of course, as the representative for Edmonton-Centre I have three major postsecondary institutions here within my constituency, those being Grant MacEwan University, NorQuest College, and, of course, the University of Alberta at Enterprise Square. Should I have the honour in the election next year to continue to represent the residents of Edmonton-City Centre, that will also, then, include NAIT. So I have the opportunity to speak with many students, Madam Speaker, and indeed with faculty and indeed with the presidents of those institutions, and certainly this has been a topic of conversation over the last two years.

Now, the concern that's been brought forward, under which the member justified bringing forward this amendment, was around the question of consultation. He is concerned that not enough thought has been given to this bill, that therefore it is imperative that we sit down and study this further in committee to ensure that all voices are being heard and all possibilities are being considered.

Now, I find this a bit ironic or perhaps even approaching the hypocritical, Madam Speaker, given that recently the hon. leader of the loyal opposition stood in front of the Calgary Chamber of commerce and stated that should he have the privilege of becoming the Premier of Alberta and should they have the privilege of becoming the government of Alberta, their intent would be to eschew consultation. He said that he did not want to get bogged down in consultation. He wanted to move quickly so that nobody could get a word in edgewise, so that nobody could oppose, no opposition. He said that he would have the right and the mandate to do this because he has been going around the province of Alberta and speaking with all the people that he thinks are important to listen to in making these decisions.

And now, Madam Speaker, their House leader stands here today and tells us that we should slow down because we have not talked to enough people and we have not done enough consultation on making these kinds of changes, nowhere near the impact of the kinds of changes that the Leader of the Official Opposition has been talking about making.

Now let's talk for a moment, Madam Speaker, about the consultation that has gone into this bill. This has been in process since 2016. All Albertans have been well aware of this, and indeed members of the opposition have stood in this House and often asked

questions about how this process was going. How were those consultations moving along? Why was the minister not coming forward with a decision and a plan sooner? We took that time because we wanted to ensure the proper consultations were held.

There is not a single educational institution in this province that did not have the opportunity to provide their input on this bill. The Minister of Advanced Education spoke to the head of every single postsecondary educational institution in this province. He spoke to every single student group. He spoke with the faculty at these institutions. We consulted Albertans in general: an online survey, an online process, to which we received over 4,000 responses. He consulted also with the nonfaculty staff at postsecondary institutions. This was a process of speaking and hearing from everyone, Madam Speaker.

I dare say that the minister got pretty much every view on this issue that could be had, in a process that lasted two years, and what has come out of that is the bill that we have in front of us, a bill which, when it was announced yesterday, every single student leader that was there spoke out on and thanked the government for bringing it forward.

4:40

Frankly, Madam Speaker, I'm troubled by – I don't know any other word to use – the condescension towards students from the members opposite, that they don't know what's good for them, that they could not possibly understand what they're dealing with here. This is not the same world in which many of the members opposite had the opportunity to get their education. Their education was much more heavily subsidized than that of students today. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View noted that they were able to earn enough in four months to pay for an entire year, an absolute impossibility for the majority of students today. It is a different reality. But you say to those students: "You don't understand what you're dealing with. You need to build better character. You need to learn more about how to earn what you think you deserve. You need to work harder," with perhaps in parentheses, "like I did."

I cannot agree with this amendment. I know the consultation process. I have sat down every single year, at least twice a year, with the leaders of student organizations in the province and heard what they have been asking our government for, and, Madam Speaker, this bill is exactly that. I know that members opposite have sat down with those students, too, because they have happily retweeted the photos of those consultations. They've put them up on Facebook. They've spoken with pride of how they sat down to listen to student leaders.

But they will not stand here today and support what those student leaders have asked for, those student leaders, Madam Speaker, who are incredibly hard working, who understand the modern economic environment, who know that they are not going into the same sort of work situations that so many of the members opposite were able to enjoy during their careers. The ground has shifted. The students know that they are looking at a future often of increased contract work, less benefits, less guaranteed employment, having to shift careers multiple times.

On top of that, members opposite want to tell them that they should pay more. Frankly, Madam Speaker, maintaining affordable education is one of the least things we can do to help young people in the modern world be able to get off to a good start. I cannot think of a better investment that the government can make than to ensure that all students in our province can afford a postsecondary education, not only for the benefit and the improvement in quality of life that it will have for those students but for the economic benefits, therefore, that we receive as a province when people who

are better educated are able to go on to better careers, are able to fill the jobs we need, are, frankly, able to create the jobs we need.

I'm incredibly proud to have many organizations here within my constituency like Startup Edmonton, TEC Edmonton, others who are the future entrepreneurs of this province, the people who are building the new economy, frankly, that is going to help carry us into the future with the eventual waning of the energy industry. I wouldn't predict when that's going to happen, but we know it will. Frankly, these are the people that are building the new jobs, the new industries, the new companies that are going to carry us there and help us prosper as a province. Frankly, Madam Speaker, these are people who are students. They're going to school, they're working on their education, and at the same time they are working hard to build new ideas, to take research that they're doing, develop that into new products, techniques, services that are putting our city on the map. Our investment in their education is an investment in that economic benefit for our province.

So when those students come and they say to us, "This is the support we need from our government," Madam Speaker, I'm going to listen, just like we listened to all of the presidents of all of the educational institutions in the province and heard their thoughts and concerns, just like the minister went and listened to all of the staff, the faculty, everybody involved in the postsecondary education system.

This bill may not give everybody within that what they want, but I think all involved in this process would agree that this is a reasonable balance and compromise.

Postsecondary institutions are happy with the flexibility that they're being afforded within this bill. Again returning to the question of consultation, members have raised their concerns about maintaining the quality of education. Madam Speaker, as has been noted by the minister, if an institution feels that the quality of a course or a program is being compromised, they can sit down with the students. They can have that conversation. They can have consultation. I don't think that they'll take the view that such a process is being bogged down. They can sit down with the students. They can have that conversation. They can talk about the value that students would receive, and if they can make a good case for it and students are willing to support it, they can bring that to the minister and the minister can approve it. How much more democratic of a process could you ask for? Far more democratic than the proposal of the Leader of the Official Opposition, should he have the privilege of taking government next year.

Madam Speaker, I cannot support this amendment. The minister has consulted. He has spoken; we have heard. We have the example of other jurisdictions across Canada that have had tuition caps in place. Frankly, it is high time that we provide some certainty to students in this province, to educational institutions and move forward with a fair and balanced plan that is going to ensure that we have an educated generation to continue to move this province forward.

Thank you.

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

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I stand to support the amendment that my colleague and friend the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre made. It is a responsible amendment and done with good reason and in a spirit of making sure that the legislation that passes through this House is as good as it can be.

Now, we just heard a pretty fiery speech from our colleague from Edmonton-Centre a minute ago about how the consultation has been great and everybody has been consulted and nothing has been missed. You know what, Madam Speaker? If only we could trust that was true, we would probably say: "Okay. Good enough." But the problem is that that's not the history of this government. That's not the history of this cabinet. This government has a track record of coming in here and saying, "We've consulted with everybody," and then when the opposition pushes them and then other people come forward, very often they say, "No, they didn't talk to me," or "They did talk to me, and I didn't get anything I wanted."

A great example – there are so many great examples. Bill 6 is a great example, their farm legislation, but a more recent one, Madam Speaker, where they brought forward a bill – the Municipal Affairs minister brought forward a bill in the last session where we actually pointed out to him right here in the House direct discrepancies within the legislation, direct discrepancies between the legislation and what was currently on the ministry website. By direct I mean exact opposite discrepancies. The minister stood up and berated us and said that we don't care and that we don't listen and that everything was perfect and that if only we loved Alberta we would support this. The same minister the next day walked in with three pages of amendments to a four-page bill.

So you'll have to forgive me, Madam Speaker, if, while I was impressed by the previous fiery speech, I don't trust the content of it. This government has a long, established track record of insisting that they've consulted, and when the facts are checked, it turns out that those facts are not facts at all but rather what the government would have Albertans believe rather than what actually happened. It was an impressive speech. It's just that the government's track record leads me to not trust the impressive speech that we heard ever so recently in this House.

4:50

And you know what? It's only a matter of the Official Opposition trying to get it right. As I've often said in this House, very often the government would do well to remember that the best advice they often get in this House comes from the opposition. If they would follow it sooner, they would get in less trouble, they would probably be more popular with Albertans right now, and they would probably have gotten a lot of things right in the last three and a half years that they keep getting wrong. I think what we're offering here to the government is an opportunity to make sure they've got it right. We're not even saying that they got the bill wrong. You know what? That's not what my hon. colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre said. He said that we need to know that the consultation has been done before we make such an important decision.

Postsecondary education is one of the main underpinnings of the current, past, and future success of the province of Alberta. Why? Because while it's not exclusively for young people, young people are the future of our province, and – let's face it – they are the main consumers, main users, main beneficiaries of postsecondary education. They go out into the world and actually make us proud. They actually make Alberta the wonderful land of opportunity that it is for 4.3 million people, and we don't want that to stop. We do not want that to stop.

I also found it interesting in the remarks I heard earlier today that the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia talked about how there's been five years of tuition freezes. Well, I guess I would remind that member and all members of the House that that means that the first two years of those five were under a Conservative government because the current gang has been here for three and a half years. The government of the day, today, actually saw fit to continue a

program that the previous Conservative government put in place. History may show that to be a great decision. It may show that to not be a great decision. I haven't researched the remarks that the Member for Calgary-Acadia gave, but if it turns out that they're true, and I have no reason to believe that they're not, it would indeed show that those tuition-freeze years started with the Conservative government.

This is important, Madam Speaker. This is a bill that talks about tuition freezes, limiting the tuition increases to the CPI, all things that, if we are able to send this to committee and check, may turn out to be the right answer. We just want to make sure it's the right answer. There's too much at stake to get it wrong.

When I talked to student groups – and the one thing I do agree on with the hon. member that spoke earlier and gave his impressive speech was that I have talked to these student members and have gotten my picture taken and was proud to put it on Facebook because I talked to those people, and those student representatives from the postsecondary institutions are bright people. They're serious people. They're serious about their future. They're serious about the future of Alberta. They're serious about wanting to make a good living and contribute to the world and be successful, and I'm so grateful for that.

When we have these discussions, they always turn to – you know what? If I was a student, I would want a lower tuition as well. Who wouldn't? If I paid \$2 for a loaf of bread, I'd rather pay \$1. Who wouldn't? This is much more important. I'm certainly not suggesting that a loaf of bread isn't important because it is, but this is a bigger purchase than a loaf of bread. I think we can agree on that.

Some of the discussion that I often have with those students when I'm together with them is: this is an important decision. This is an important decision, whether you perhaps have a higher tuition and pay for it for four years while you're in university or college – I realize some programs are two and some are eight, but four is a reasonably good average for discussion – whether you pay a higher tuition now with less support from the taxpayer or whether you pay a lower tuition now with more support from the taxpayer and then be that taxpayer and give higher support for the next 44 years.

You know what? I would say to you, Madam Speaker, that if the student says, "No; I want to pay a higher tuition now and lower taxes later," they're right. Here's the funny thing. I would also say that if they want to pay a lower tuition now and are willing to contribute to other people's tuition for the next 44 years, they're also right. It's really a matter of their personal preference. These students understand, because they're smart people, that there is no free lunch. There's no free education; somebody pays for it. They understand, actually. They actually understand the relationship, that there's a certain amount that students should reasonably pay and a certain amount that society should reasonably provide so that young Albertans and all Albertans who want to and can achieve the admission standards get a chance to be all they can be, to make themselves the very best contributor to society and the most successful human being that they can be for not just them but for everybody. They get that.

But what I haven't heard the government explain yet – and this is why it would be interesting to go to committee to talk about that balance of costs in a constructive way, not a partisan way because I don't see this as a partisan issue. Those kids in that university are Conservative, they're NDP, they're Liberal, they're Alberta Party, and politically unaffiliated, of course. This matters for all of our kids and grandkids and all of our future. This is not an NDP issue. It's not a Conservative issue. It's not a political issue in my view. It's an Alberta issue that needs to be managed and taken care of correctly.

Here's what I imagine, Madam Speaker, that we would talk about in committee. We would talk about: does this legislation have the balance right between what part of the costs are paid by students, what part is paid by the institutions themselves through the institutions being able to create revenue in other ways, and with the government itself putting money forward and saying: yes, this is how much we're going to support each of the institutions. It's a complex issue because, of course, what you have are thousands and thousands and thousands of students, each with a different financial ability to pay, and then we get into the supports for those students with less ability to pay, which matters because the ability for all Albertans is important.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The discussion I have heard so far doesn't for me, anyways – I think we need to talk about that I'm not sure all the institutions are in a same place. The reason I don't think they're in a same place is because some have stronger balance sheets than other ones do, and we need to probably have that discussion. Will this legislation perhaps limit one institution financially while giving another institution a lot more than what they need? That would be a worthwhile discussion. It would be a worthwhile discussion to talk about the fact that the students are different, the institutions are different, and also it may come down to that different programs require different considerations. These are the things that we could hash out at committee and get it right.

Again, I think it's not the biggest bill we've had in here, but it's biggish. I'm looking here at, you know, 51 pages. We've had it for a couple of days, a day, I guess. This, actually, for the Official Opposition says: "No; you know what? Maybe we should have a better understanding of this before we go forward." I think that's a responsible position for us to take and one that I would hope the government, frankly, would embrace because those kids in school will be all of our kids, all of our grandkids, and all of their grandkids and kids. They're all going to win or lose together based on this thing, and I think taking some time to get it right is a responsible position to take. I would hope that the government sees their way clear to say: "Okay. Let's kick it around together. Let's talk about it. Let's make sure we got it right because there's too much at stake to get it wrong."

That, Madam Clerk – sorry, Madam Speaker. My apologies. You know, I need to get your title right. There's my debate, and with that, I will move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:00

Bill 20 Securities Amendment Act, 2018

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a real thrill today to be able to rise on behalf of the Minister of Finance to move second reading of Bill 20, Securities Amendment Act, 2018.

The Alberta Securities Commission is mandated to protect investors and foster a fair and efficient Alberta capital market. This requires balancing investor protection and the integrity of the financial system while allowing innovation and ensuring a competitive investment climate. Achieving this balance is complicated given the increasing complexity, sophistication, international scope, and technological advances of the securities regulatory landscape.

The following amendments have been developed as part of Alberta's commitment to ongoing reform of the securities regulatory

system: implementing a capital market whistle-blower program for misconduct under the Securities Act; creating a regulatory regime for benchmarks and benchmark administrators that will be compatible with the benchmark regime being adopted by the European Union; broadening the scope of provisions for Alberta Securities Commission members, staff, and/or agents that protect them from being compelled to testify about information collected in the course of their duties in third-party proceedings; and implementing consequential and harmonization amendments. These amendments are intended to improve regulation of Alberta's capital market, enhance investor confidence and protection, and keep our securities laws harmonized with other jurisdictions.

I'll just quickly go into some of these that are coming. The first of the amendment proposals is to advance investor protection. An addition of a new part 2.1, whistle-blowing, would allow the Alberta Securities Commission to implement a whistle-blower program similar to those adopted in 2016 by Ontario and Quebec. These amendments would help protect Alberta investors and encourage investors and employees of publicly traded companies to report serious securities- or derivatives-related wrongdoings. Securities regulators such as the Alberta Securities Commission believe that a whistle-blower program will assist in preventing or limiting harm to investors.

The program would protect whistle-blowers who report misconduct in the Alberta capital market by prohibiting retaliation against them, providing them with limited immunity, and keeping their identities and the information that they share confidential. These amendments are consistent with the public sector whistle-blower policy introduced by our government earlier. However, in the proposed program protection would apply to individuals working in the private sector, employed by or otherwise connected to an entity where securities violations may be occurring. The whistle-blower program would also protect the integrity of Alberta's capital market by prohibiting false reports of wrongdoing, obstruction of whistle-blowing, and agreements aimed at restricting whistle-blowing.

The second of these amendment proposals would implement a regulatory system for benchmarks and benchmark administrators. For your information, benchmarks are indexes that include a group of securities, the intent being to represent the performance of a particular segment of the market. An example would be a benchmark that provides an indication of short-term interest rates that are used in setting the floating interest rate on some derivatives and loans. The provisions are designed to harmonize with similar systems for benchmarks now in place in the European Union and most recently put in place in Quebec and Ontario. The new benchmark system will require administrators of designated benchmarks to be registered and identified by the regulator as a designated benchmark administrator, clearly define a designated benchmark, and ensure that a designated benchmark administrator has to comply with the same requirements as an administrator under the EU regulations.

Another harmonizing initiative will further the protection of investor information by no longer requiring Alberta Securities Commission members, staff, and agents to testify in third-party hearings regarding information collected in the course of their duties. This ensures that investors' information, especially from those who come to the Alberta Securities Commission to report wrongdoings, is not provided to a third party who would not otherwise have access to that information. Further, this allows individuals entrusted to enforce Alberta's securities laws to carry out their duties without fear of civil liability. Ontario recently passed a similar amendment, and this change would result in this aspect of Alberta's securities laws being harmonized with Ontario's.

Around section 223: amendments to Lieutenant Governor in Council regulations would also permit the Alberta Securities Commission to make rules regarding the manner and form of material provided to the Alberta Securities Commission under other Alberta legislation such as the Business Corporations Act.

To quickly wrap this up, with these amendments we are ensuring Alberta's securities regulatory system reflects the realities of today's markets and evolves with international standards and global regulatory reform initiatives. I would certainly encourage all members in this House to support this bill, and I appreciate the chance to move second reading here.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thanks to my colleague from Edmonton-Decore for introducing for second reading Bill 20, Securities Amendment Act, 2018. I, too, rise to speak to Bill 20. This bill, of course, is bringing forth a number of amendments to the Securities Act. It has only been 24 hours since the bill was tabled, and we're still in the midst of doing a lot of outreach to securities dealers. But at this point, as the intention of second reading, I support the intention of Bill 20, Securities Amendment Act.

I'm slightly concerned about how broad and how important this act may be, Madam Speaker, so I'm hoping at Committee of the Whole to have an opportunity to seek some clarification and some answers, and I look forward to that.

To start, Madam Speaker, I make no secrets: I'm not a fan of additional regulation, more red tape, more paperwork, more work for public servants and regulators. On this side, while the UCP consistently calls for less regulation, less regulation does not mean no regulations. Securities are complex financial instruments, and when not regulated properly, events like the 2008 financial crisis and the great recession can happen.

To back up a bit, on a positive note, Bill 20 does take a giant leap in recognizing the work of Conservatives on the negotiated comprehensive economic and trade agreement, or CETA, with the European Union. We welcome European capital for investment, and our businesses, our families, and our employees look forward to this investment from Europe and investing in Europe. Madam Speaker, the free flow of capital is essential for the workings of Alberta and Canada's economy. Particularly now, with the layers of burden that this government has added in the last three and a half years, the free flow of capital is especially essential.

Canadian securities regulators have committed to implementing a regulatory regime for benchmarks equivalent to the European Union's regime to ensure that the European Union market participants may continue to use Canadian benchmarks. In other words, if Canadian Western Bank makes an overnight loan to Deutsche Bank, they may make it using the Canadian benchmark rate, or Barclays bank may use a Canadian benchmark rate to make a loan to Canadian Western Bank. Benchmarks are interest rates banks charge other banks for short-term loans. In Canada, I'm told, we have the two.

Madam Speaker, you may recall the most famous global benchmark is the LIBOR rate. That is the London interbank offered rate. The LIBOR is an average interest rate calculated through submissions of interest rates by major banks around the world. You may also recall that in 2008 a major scandal arose out of the fall of the world financial crisis when it was discovered that perhaps the banks were falsely inflating or deflating the rates so as to profit from trades or to give the impression that they were more creditworthy than they were.

5:10

Couple this with the fact that LIBOR underpins approximately \$350 trillion in derivatives. An attempt to manipulate an exchange rate could also be an attempt to manipulate derivatives in violation of law, and because mortgages, crucial things like student loans, family loans, financial derivatives, exchange rates, ETFs, and other financial products will rely on these, the manipulations of submissions used to calculate these rates can have significant negative effects on families, consumers, and Albertans.

Madam Speaker, I hope you're starting to see why it's so important, and I hope it's starting to become clear how important it is that we get this right, that the regulation of securities by the Alberta Securities Commission is right. I thank all the Alberta dealers that we've reached out to that have had the time to get back to us in just 24 hours, and I look forward to their consultation continuing, and I look forward to the process of Committee of the Whole.

This is also where whistle-blower protection comes in. Madam Speaker, it's essential – it's essential – for Alberta employees, Alberta communities, wealth creation, Alberta job creators that our stock exchanges and our security markets be as fair, as transparent, and as efficient as possible. Couple that with the impact that these exchange rates could have. At this point in time I absolutely support the enhancement of whistle-blower protection, whistle-blower involvement. Whistle-blowers need confidentiality. They also need to ensure that the information shared by the Alberta Securities Commission – they also need to ensure that the information they share remains confidential. Whistle-blowers can take a great risk to ensure that markets run fair and smooth so every Albertan has the opportunity to create wealth, create jobs in a free-enterprise Alberta. There needs to be a prohibition on retaliation against whistle-blowers as well.

There also needs to be a prohibition on agreements that purport to restrict whistle-blowing. This is like making sure there is nothing untoward in someone's employment contract. Again, we need to ensure that in a fair, legal way whistle-blowers have the maximum opportunity to come forward in the fairest possible sense. But, just like a whistle-blower, employers need to have a prohibition on false reports of wrongdoing. In other words, whistle-blowers need to be right and know what they are doing when they call for a halt to certain activities.

Madam Speaker, sometimes whistle-blowers are themselves caught up in the crime until they realize something is wrong. That is why there also needs to be limited immunity for whistle-blowers. Yes, the whistle-blower may have come forward when they realized something was wrong, but because they were involved in the crime, they have to be held responsible for that as well, and that has to be balanced with the need for them to come forward versus the need to protect an innocent investing and working public.

I've also just heard that Bill 20 will amend section 222 of the Securities Act such that Alberta Securities Commission members, staff, and agents will not have to testify in third-party proceedings unless it is directly related to something to do with the Securities Act. That seems very reasonable, very fair, and important for liability protection.

Section 223 will be amended so that the Alberta Securities Commission can also decide how securities and companies submit paperwork, whether hard copy or electronic. I believe that this could help modernize the information system and technology that will help track all these critical filings, save time, save money, and I hope not only for our good bureaucrats and front-line workers but also for our investors.

I'm also told that there are some smaller harmonization pieces to this legislation, and I think that's necessary and good, too, as it sounds like Ontario and Quebec have gone there before. I'm especially pleased that it protects Alberta's right to be the free-enterprise leader in Canada. It protects Alberta to have say and control over our own Alberta Securities Commission. For generations Albertans have been the leaders in taking risk, innovating, whether it's agriculture, oil and gas, or information technology. I'm so glad to see that that is continuing.

Madam Speaker, in summary, I support the intent of this bill. I will be voting in favour of it at this point, and I look forward to getting some more feedback from the investors we've reached out to and some more answers to questions during Committee of the Whole.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I too am very pleased to stand and contribute to the debate on second reading of Bill 20. At a previous iteration of this I stood up and I think I surprised at least the Minister of Finance by saying that I thought this was, at that time, some of the most exciting legislation. Usually securities legislation is seen as quite dry and arcane, even obtuse. I really want to congratulate the Minister of Finance for that previous legislation, which provided a lot of consumer protection and actually strengthened the Alberta Securities Commission in its work.

I really, actually, want to echo the comments of the previous speaker, in that a well-functioning Alberta Securities Commission is essential to the economy of this province. I'm proud to be part of a government that has continued the support of the Alberta Securities Commission and basically protected it from the predations of a national securities commission that would have robbed, in my opinion, the ability of Alberta companies, particularly in oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, mining, other areas that we have particular expertise in in this province and particular interest in terms of the economy.

If we're going to make this legislation work well for the economy of the province, we need to make sure that in particular the whistle-blower protection is solid, and that's one of the things that I'm really pleased with here. Investors, whether they're here in Alberta or elsewhere, need to know that the financial transactions that come out of this province are done above board, and they need to have faith in the Alberta Securities Commission, that it can do the job for which it is set up and for which, actually, our government and Albertans in general pay a large amount of money. The Alberta Securities Commission is a very expensive proposition, and it's a place where I'm pleased to see my taxpaying dollars go to.

When I hear the opposition complain about the inefficiencies of government spending and how they would cut a lot of this sort of stuff, I often wonder how that Alberta Securities Commission would actually be able to continue to function if it didn't have the taxpayers' support to do its job. That's something I'd like to hear more about perhaps in Committee of the Whole, how the opposition might, if they were to get into power – which I'm dreading – how that might actually work out. Anyways, I digress a little bit.

You know, the Alberta Securities Commission needs to be trusted, needs to be credible, needs to be transparent in its activities, and if it is, our economy is going to be much more successful. We are going to be able to tell constituents of mine, who have come to my office and complained about concerns that they've got about

some financial transactions that have gone on in the past, that we're actually seeing a way through to the future.

5:20

This program is going to protect whistle-blowers who report misconduct by prohibiting retaliation against them, by providing them with a form of limited immunity, and by keeping their identities and the information they share confidential. The previous speaker referred to section 222. Section 222 is being expanded to do just what I've talked about, making sure that a whistle-blower can make a report and institute some action without concerns about being harassed – I'm not sure whether that's the English or American pronunciation.

The whistle-blower program is important. The benchmarks are also important. This is one of the more arcane and obtuse aspects of securities regulation – and I'm not going to get into it, largely because I don't understand a lot of it – but if we're going to have a credible Securities Commission process, we need to have benchmarks. I think that's the simplest way to mention that. These benchmarks are indexes that include a group of securities, the intent being to represent the performance of a segment of the market.

Now, to come back to what I was talking about, how the market here in Alberta is predominantly mining, exploration, oil and gas, forestry, agriculture. Those would be the kinds of segments that we'd need benchmarks in. There are also benchmarks for things like the LIBOR, the floating interest rates. Probably what's most important about these benchmarks is that they're going to harmonize our system with the European Union and recent new legislation in Ontario.

These are just two different examples of why this legislation is very important. I'm very pleased to hear that the opposition is going to support this legislation.

Thank you for your attention.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are now on 29(2)(a). Are there any members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore to close debate.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair – Speaker. Sorry. My apologies. I keep getting the two confused.

Very excited to hear, as we're moving through second reading here of Bill 20, the Securities Amendment Act, 2018, that we're getting some support to move this conversation along into Committee of the Whole.

As I had mentioned earlier, the Alberta Securities Commission, again, is mandated to protect investors and foster a fair and efficient Alberta capital market – we've heard the previous speaker for Edmonton-Whitemud refer a little bit to that – of course, requiring a balance to investor protection and the integrity of the financial system. You know, I think as we're moving forward, we're seeing this system becoming more complicated with the complexity, sophistication, the international scope in there as well as all the

technological advances that are coming along, and we need to ensure that our securities regulatory landscape is as secure as possible.

As we had talked about earlier, implementing the whistle-blower program in there, benchmarks and benchmark administrators will be compatible with the European Union. We've seen that as we move forward, trying to harmonize all of these systems will allow the entire securities system to move more fluidly, broadening the scope of provisions for Alberta Securities Commission members, staff, and their agents, and protect them from being compelled to testify about information that's collected in the course of their duties in third-party proceedings. We've heard quite a bit around individuals that are getting pulled into litigations simply because they had access to information simply by doing their jobs. Thus, we're protecting information that would not have otherwise been available to these third parties and all of the harmonization that goes forward.

I'm glad to see, as we standardize things across Canada, that implementing similar changes that were already adopted in 2016 by Ontario and Quebec will allow our jurisdictions to interact a lot more clearly rather than simply duplicating processes over and over again throughout all of the jurisdictions, thus making things more efficient. As our friends across the way like to say, "We don't like red tape" so this will allow us to smooth that system out.

I will comment though that with whistle-blowers, prohibiting retaliation against them, there was some great work done not only in this House but also within committees around whistle-blower legislation here in Alberta when, of course, the biggest thing that we had heard was the fear of retaliation from people. By providing them with some limited immunity as well as keeping their identities and the information that they share confidential, it will strengthen that part of the legislation and allow us to provide a system where whistle-blowers will feel confident coming forward and bringing the information that could be of serious consequence, and thus protect them.

Benchmarks, you know, standardizing that system, benchmark administrators: again, just a simple matter of smoothing out the system and allowing jurisdictions to interact with each other in a much faster and more efficient manner.

With that, I'm happy to close debate on second reading.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has moved second reading of Bill 20, Securities Amendment Act, 2018, on behalf of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think that we have made great progress this afternoon, so I thank all the members for the fantastic debate. I would like to move that we adjourn until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:28 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Introduction of Visitors	1655
Introduction of Guests	1655
Members' Statements	
Official Opposition and Government Policies	1656
Natural Resources.....	1656
Affordable Housing.....	1657
Seniors' Housing Placements	1657
Day of Arbaeen	1665
International Trade	1666
Oral Question Period	
Provincial Budget Revenue Forecasts	1657, 1660
Carbon Levy, Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project.....	1658
Grande Prairie Regional Hospital Construction.....	1659
Mountain Pine Beetle Control and Wildfire Prevention	1659
Emergency Medical Worker Wait Times in Hospitals	1660
Provincial Revenue and Carbon Pricing	1662
Refugee Claimant Driver's Licence Eligibility	1662
Dementia Care.....	1663
Government Spending	1663
High-risk Offenders, Alberta Review Board Decision on Patient Transfer	1664
Renewable Energy Environmental Concerns	1664
Provincial Fiscal Policies.....	1665
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 21 An Act to Protect Patients	1666
Tabling Returns and Reports	1666
Orders of the Day	1667
Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole.....	1667
Bill 8 Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2018.....	1667
Second Reading.....	1667
Bill 19 An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education	1667
Bill 20 Securities Amendment Act, 2018	1681

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