



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, October 31, 2018

Day 43

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature**

Fourth Session

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van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)

Party standings:

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

9 a.m.

Wednesday, October 31, 2018

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Good morning.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

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

Morning Sitting Cancellation

33. Ms Larivee moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that, notwithstanding Standing Order 3(1), the morning sitting of the Assembly on Thursday, November 22, 2018, be cancelled.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. For the benefit of the House I should indicate that this motion is being moved, as was a similar motion last year, in order to facilitate participation of members in the Rural Municipalities of Alberta fall convention and, in particular, in the ministerial forum which takes place that morning.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, Deputy Government House Leader, do you want to close debate?

Ms Larivee: Sure. Consider it closed.

[Government Motion 33 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 21 An Act to Protect Patients

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an absolute privilege to move second reading of Bill 21, An Act to Protect Patients.

As we've seen in recent years, sexual abuse has received a lot of media attention, and it's top of mind in our society. The Me Too movement and other actions are bringing these issues to the forefront of our consciousness while challenging us to do better here in government and in all parts of society. We all know, of course, that this has been an issue for much longer than it's been talked about and that it has taken far too long for our communities to address sexual violence and harassment. This is a very important issue because sexual abuse leaves untold trauma in its wake and damage that can last a lifetime.

This past spring, when I was made aware of a situation where a doctor was convicted of sexual assault and got his licence back, I

was shocked when I heard this news, and I was angry because I didn't feel that Alberta patients were being properly protected. The reality is that we hear too many of these stories, and indeed just one story would be too many. My office has heard from Albertans who have experienced sexual abuse or misconduct by regulated health professionals. These stories are gut wrenching, and often they're extremely difficult to hear. But I'd like to take a few moments to share a few today, with personal identifying information omitted, of course, just so you can get a sense of some of the themes that we're here to address today.

A father told me about how his son, living with autism in a mental health unit, was punished for making an assault complaint. We heard about an alleged molester taken to court multiple times, only with arbitration. We heard from a woman assaulted by a nurse who cried for help and no one ever came. We heard from a mother whose daughter told her over 10 years ago that a doctor touched her genitals. The mother never told anyone. She didn't know who to tell. She didn't know what to do.

Madam Speaker, these are the kinds of stories that inspired us to introduce this legislation, because when I dug into the situation, I was frustrated to learn that the tools available to the regulatory colleges in Alberta were inadequate to protect patients. I sat down with my team and I said: we must fix this. We began working with our partners at the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta as well as other regulatory colleges, who govern health care workers to develop the right tools to keep Albertans safe. I am proud to say that the colleges have been willing partners in this work, sharing our commitment to patient safety. Today I am proud to announce the result of that critical work, legislation that will help to protect patients and prevent sexual assault as well as provide greater transparency.

Madam Speaker, Albertans should always feel safe when accessing health care services. Those were the values behind the legislation we introduced in the spring to protect women's choice in accessing health care, and we continue to champion those values today. Albertans place their health and often their very lives with the health care providers. Ultimately, Albertans give their health care providers their trust, and with that trust must come responsibility and accountability. Albertans must know, without a doubt, that they are in safe hands. They must know that the gift of trust they give to their health care provider will be met with respect and honoured. Our government is taking actions through this bill to ensure Albertans feel safe while accessing their health care services. We have zero tolerance for sexual abuse or sexual misconduct towards patients, and it's a significant betrayal of the public trust.

Through the proposed amendments to the Health Professions Act in Bill 21 we are strengthening protection for patients from sexual abuse and sexual misconduct by regulated health professionals in Alberta. We are proposing a number of initiatives through this bill, including imposing mandatory disciplinary penalties for sexual abuse and sexual misconduct, enhancing public transparency by requiring that information about professionals' discipline histories for sexual abuse or sexual misconduct towards patients be published on the college websites indefinitely, and establishing patient relations programs that must include measures for preventing and addressing sexual abuse and sexual misconduct towards patients.

The patient relations program will also help Albertans better understand the complaints process and where they can go to for help. It will include training and an educational requirement for health providers as well as college staff.

The bill will also provide funding for treatment and counselling for patients who have alleged experience of sexual abuse or

misconduct by a regulated health professional, ensuring complainants have greater participation in the investigation and hearing process; conducting more stringent background checks for registering health professionals; implementing new reinstatement rules for regulated health professionals who've had their practice permits cancelled due to sexual abuse or misconduct; and mandating the creation of new standards of practice for sexual abuse and sexual misconduct that must be approved by the Minister of Health.

Madam Speaker, Alberta will be the second province in Canada, after only Ontario, to take this kind of targeted legislative action to protect patients from sexual abuse by regulated health professionals. I am so proud – and I think we all should be proud – that Alberta has an opportunity to be a leader on such a crucial issue. There is no circumstance where sexual abuse by a regulated health professional will be tolerated. That's why we are making it clear to perpetrators that the age of impunity is over. These crimes have been confined to the shadows for far too long, and it's time that we bring them into the light. This bill, An Act to Protect Patients, will help protect Albertans, and it will also ensure appropriate penalties are in place.

I want to thank my cosponsors for this bill and for their collaboration and for their leadership on this issue: the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, who, when this issue impacted families in the community she represents, wrote me immediately to find out what she could do to help these families and to prevent this from ever happening again; the Member for Calgary-Bow, who showed tremendous leadership when she introduced her own legislation enabling survivors to break residential leases without penalty when escaping domestic violence. I know how proud she was the day that legislation passed in this Assembly, and I remember how I felt, too, to work at a place that stood up for women and for survivors.

Our government will continue to stand up against sexual assault, harassment, and bullying, whether it's in the workplace, the home, the school, on your way into a doctor's office, or when you're in that doctor's office, because Albertans deserve to know that their government and indeed all of their representatives will fight abuse and harassment and stand with survivors at every opportunity.

I encourage all members of our Assembly to show support by voting yes on second reading for Bill 21, and I look forward to debating this bill with all of my colleagues. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an absolute privilege to be here and to speak to this bill, the protecting patients from sexual assault by health providers act. You know, one of the most wonderful things about what we get to do is that we get to meet a ton of wonderful people – wonderful people – but we also hear some of the most horrible things as well. Thank goodness that when that happens, sometimes it leads to legislation that helps out the people that we represent. The fact that someone in a position of power can abuse at this level and could potentially just leave with a slap on the wrist is absolutely horrible. And the minister has outlined other situations, other than the one that I brought forward in the Legislature, and I am grateful for that. Thank you for sharing.

9:10

This is a piece of legislation that I feel very strongly about, and I'm absolutely thrilled that the government has brought this forward. All Albertans have the right to high-quality, timely, and safe health care. As patients we share our most private concerns and

are incredibly vulnerable with our health care workers, be that doctors, nurses, lab techs, and this is the way that the system needs to be. The public's trust in physicians is crucial, especially when we're ensuring that when an Albertan walks into a doctor's office, they feel safe and trusting and comfortable to share that intimate information which enables health professionals to diagnose, prescribe, and make informed choices about a patient's health.

Unfortunately, for thousands of dedicated and upstanding physicians, who dedicate their lives to their patients' wellness, there are a few individuals who have leveraged their position as physicians and broken the trust of patients and Albertans. It's unfortunate but true that just one horrible incident can spoil the whole bunch. The consequence for a few select individuals damaging the overall reputation of physicians as a whole has the ability to cause chaos in the health care system. Without public confidence and trust our entire health system can break down.

So, with this in mind, I'm pleased to see this legislation that will return public trust and accountability and openness as well as provide protection and legal recourse for victims of sexual assault and misconduct by health care providers.

The issue first came to my attention last spring, when I was absolutely horrified to read the story of Dr. Ismail Taher, who was found guilty in a court of sexually assaulting an 18-year-old woman during an August 2013 examination in Sherwood Park. The woman, who had concerns about nose piercing, testified that Taher had touched her buttocks and massaged her breast during the visit. About a year later he was found guilty twice of sexually assaulting a nurse in a north-side clinic in June 2018 by brushing her breasts and later grabbing her breasts and then pinching her backside. He was also exonerated of another charge of sexual assault on a clinic manager but found guilty of physically assaulting her.

After this proven track record of shockingly inappropriate behaviour and a record of repetition, Dr. Taher was then allowed to continue practising medicine following a hearing tribunal by the College of Physicians & Surgeons. According to an occupational assessment in the report completed in October 2017, the college found Dr. Taher fit to practise medicine and a low-risk offender.

For the life of me, when I read those words, I couldn't believe it. The college had determined that Dr. Taher could practise medicine as long as he had a chaperone when seeing female patients, participated in a monitoring program, and worked with other doctors who know his discipline history. In what world should a physician with a proven track record of sexual misconduct and assault of female patients be allowed to interact with patients ever again?

Being a doctor is a privilege and not a right. For those that have proven themselves repeatedly unworthy of that privilege, why have they been given such lenience and grace by the regulatory bodies that have overseen them in the past? The ruling from the college was incredibly disappointing. It was because of this shockingly inappropriate response that I asked the Health minister what her government would do to address this on three separate occasions during question period last spring.

While I wish that the government had been able to implement legislation sooner, I do understand what goes into this kind of legislation, and I understand how difficult it is to bring these forward. I'm extremely pleased to see that it is here now and that it will give Alberta patients the protections that they rightly deserve, and I would like to congratulate the minister on taking the time to learn from some of these growing pains that Ontario experienced when they implemented the same legislation. It's important that we get this bill right the first time and that we don't leave any room for these physicians to appeal convictions based on loopholes and technical definitions.

The disciplinary system of the past was one which Dr. Gail Robinson said was a system of protectionism of the professions as opposed to being more concerned about the welfare of patients. I am pleased to see that this legislation will change this to a system that prioritizes the needs of patients and public trust. There are so many important pieces of legislation that will provide much-needed accountability.

The fact that there will now be mandatory penalties for those found guilty of sexual misconduct and abuse is crucial. The current system gives a lot of discretion in sentencing to the college and hearing tribunals, which has led to what I believe to be lenient decisions and a loss in public confidence, and we just can't have that. We saw that in Dr. Taher's case.

I'm pleased to see that Bill 21 mandates educational training on sexual misconduct and abuse for physicians, tribunal members, and the colleges.

In a world, Madam Speaker, where we are still fighting the stigma of sexual assault, in the wake of the Me Too movement, as the minister had mentioned, where there are still many people not aware of the inherent biases in sexual assault cases, it's incredibly important that we are educating our professionals on this issue. Whether this is our judges, first responders, or physicians sitting on tribunals that are overseeing sexual misconduct cases, education is a key piece.

I also think that it's excellent that the victims will now be provided with counselling supports as well through the colleges. Despite amazing efforts of sexual violence counselling centres across this province to address this tidal wave of need, there are still enormous wait-lists in most cities, and the cost of private counselling for victims can be very prohibitive. The colleges are accountable for the actions of the members that they oversee, and they should be accountable for addressing the fallout from unethical behaviour that hurts patients and requires them to need counselling. This being said, these are excellent organizations that will be able to collaborate and cost share on both the counselling and educational components of this bill so that smaller colleges are not disproportionately impacted.

Another piece of this legislation that I think is critical and crucial is the fact that physicians who are convicted of sexual assault or misconduct will be named publicly and available online in perpetuity. While there may be instances in which physicians are rehabilitated, reapply for their licences following a suspension or cancellation, and are able to get back to treating their patients, Albertans must have the right to know if the doctor they're seeing has a history of misconduct. Albertans should not have to depend on ratemds.com to see if they should feel safe going alone in a room with their physician. In fact, this information was previously only available for five years, and that is unacceptable since I can guarantee that those who've been victimized by sexual misconduct by a physician will certainly be concerned and processing that incident, and for some people that takes more than five years.

As I've said, what it really boils down to is the right of an Albertan as a consumer to make an informed choice, which they can only make if they have all of the facts. I'm glad that Albertans will now have access to the full history of physicians with misconduct convictions with no time limits.

Another important aspect of this legislation is that it will end physician amnesty in Alberta. By this I mean that physicians who have been convicted of sexual misconduct or assault elsewhere will no longer be able to flee to Alberta and continue practising. I do have a couple of questions about this after, that I'll say at the end of this discussion. If a physician has been found guilty of misconduct, they should not be able to head to Alberta to continue to be a risk to patients simply because there's no legislation preventing this.

This piece of legislation will address a substantial gap in the current system and ensure that people coming from other provinces do not see Alberta as the land of opportunity in this manner. It is also important that physicians who would like to practise in Alberta are legally required to disclose any of their previous convictions.

In the interest of doing my due diligence, I would like to seek some clarity with regard to some specific questions that I have. This would be greatly appreciated – and feedback from the minister – so I'm just going to bring these up here.

The five-year licence revocation is a process for Health, so what is the threshold that would be used to determine if this professional should have the ability to practise again? Then requirement for health professionals to disclose unprofessional conduct in another jurisdiction: is Alberta requiring the regulatory bodies to check all the existing professionals or just the new ones coming in, or is the professional on an honour system? How can Alberta Health be sure that this is occurring? What if a health professional does not disclose? Is there a penalty for that?

9:20

Also, Madam Speaker, section 96.2(1), on page 9, indicates that their permit to practise will be cancelled if the misconduct was sexual abuse and suspended for a specific period of time if it involved sexual misconduct. My questions are: how long is the cancellation for sexual abuse? Who decides the specific period for sexual misconduct? And what is the process for reinstatement of their licence?

Obviously, we support ensuring that Albertans are not at risk from any doctor with a record of sexual abuse, but if doctors who are practising here must suddenly leave their practices because this record has been disclosed, does Alberta Health have a plan to help ensure that Albertans have access to another physician, especially in rural areas? If a doctor has been taken out of there, what's sort of the backup plan to replace doctors in those areas?

Public disclosure on the websites, Madam Speaker: how will Alberta Health monitor the websites to ensure that all colleges are providing the transparency that's required in the bill?

Finally, in section 135.5(1), minister's direction, I just have questions about if there's possible overreach here. I'm happy to hear whatever the minister, obviously, has to say about this, but the section allows the cabinet to change standards of practice for any of the 29 regulatory bodies covered by the Health Professions Act if the minister deems it in the public interest. As I recall, the minister had indicated, in Dr. Taher's case, that she did not have this authority. Is this section included to deal with that particular issue? I'm assuming so. If the minister wouldn't mind outlining the kind of consultation she had with those regulatory bodies regarding this.

In conclusion, I cannot imagine going to my doctor and being violated. I can't imagine how, after enduring something like that, I could ever go to another physician and feel safe again. So to the brave people, the brave women who have come forward against their perpetrators only to watch them get a slap on the wrist and continue to practise medicine: you are so brave and you deserve better. Thank you for your courage, your resilience, and for being the leaders in this issue. Without your bravery this issue may never have been addressed, and I am, for one, extremely grateful for those of you who stood up and said: "No. I will not accept this."

I know that it must have been terrifying to go to court and to discuss and rediscuss your trauma only to be disappointed as you watched those who wronged you continue to live comfortably and continue to work. I know it must have bothered you in the first place, but you must have wondered why the system was stacked against you. I hope that in reading about this legislation, you are able to find some peace, knowing that your outspoken courage

changed the system in our province for the better. I'm very grateful to the government for bringing forward this piece of legislation, but more than that I'm grateful to the survivors of sexual assaults and abuse at the hands of physicians and those people who led the charge. My colleagues in the UCP caucus and I are honoured to support this legislation on behalf of those powerful men and women.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always a pleasure to get up in this House and speak. It's wonderful to be back here in session and see all the smiling faces on the other side of the room. It's always wonderful to see them.

I wish I was getting up to speak to something better though. I've got to be honest. You know, with every piece of legislation that comes forward in this House, we have to ask ourselves: well, what is the problem that we're trying to fix? Madam Speaker, this goes a lot further than just patient rights because of course we know for a fact that in our society we are plagued with this problem of abuse of power. That's what this is all about. At the root of what we're trying to fix here is the abuse of power, people who are in positions of authority using their power to sexually abuse, in this particular case patients, but of course this happens in all kinds of scenarios and, unfortunately, relationships. At the real root of this is patriarchy, something that, you know, not all of us in this House would really want to talk about.

This has to do with a culture, a culture where specifically the tendency is that men abuse their power over women. Now, if we ever want to change this culture, then particularly us men – and I know that a lot of the men in my caucus are open-minded. They want to be willing and able to listen to what women have to say and, more importantly, understand where these women are coming from and then learn how we can build a better society that is more just and fair, where everybody can treat each other with the respect and dignity that we all deserve.

I find it heartbreaking that women in this province when they're going to a doctor, a place where they're going to deal with their health issues, a place where they should feel safe, are not getting that experience because there are men who abuse their power.

You know, unfortunately, Madam Speaker, I've had in the last six months two cases – two cases – of young women who have come to my constituency office to talk about how men, in particular, have abused their power and actually sexually abused them; one in a place of work, and another when a nurse, in particular, was invited to a doctor's home where they were supposedly going to be working on some kind of nonprofit initiative. So it breaks my heart. It breaks my heart that this is the case because I know that we can do better.

Now, if we can put forward a piece of legislation that will help move this forward, that will help educate, that will help people learn, but more importantly, say that we will not accept that this will happen in this province, this is something that we are proud to put forward as the Alberta NDP. Here we are making an attempt to establish within legislation supporting a culture of just relations between women and men.

If passed, Bill 21 will strengthen protection for patients from sexual abuse and sexual misconduct by regulated health professionals here in the province of Alberta, and it's going to impose mandatory disciplinary penalties for sexual abuse and sexual misconduct. It will be ensuring that Albertans have a tool to find information about a professional's disciplinary history for

sexual abuse or sexual misconduct and establishing patient relations programs that help prevent and address sexual abuse and sexual misconduct toward patients. The patient relations program will help Albertans to better understand the complaints process and where to go for help if they experience something like this. It will also include training and educational requirements for health providers and college staff.

In addition, the bill would ensure that patients have access to treatment and counselling if they've experienced sexual abuse or misconduct when visiting a health professional, and it would also give complainants access to more participation in the investigation and hearing process. On this one I want to take a little bit of time.

You know, I say heartbreaking. I don't know if people actually are listening to what I have to say when I say how hard it is to sit across a desk from a young woman who has gone through an experience of sexual abuse and says: the system didn't help me. Until when? Until when are we going to stand around and just let these things happen, and then, worse, when it does happen, we do little or nothing to actually correct the situation?

9:30

This is why I firmly stand behind this piece of legislation. We are promising to do more, to be better. In the unfortunate circumstance where something like this actually happens to somebody, we are going to make sure that there's a full investigation and that there will be a hearing process where that person can then bear witness to what actually happened to them, and they will be listened to. You know what, Madam Speaker? In this Alberta NDP government when a woman comes forward with complaints of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct, we believe them. Our government believes strongly that every Albertan should be able to live free from sexual harassment and assault, and this legislation would make it clear to the perpetrators that the age of impunity is over. We need to do more. These crimes have been confined to the shadows for way too long.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to get up in this House today and speak to this particular piece of legislation. I know that everyone on this side is going to support this particular piece of legislation. I want to urge everyone in this House to do the same.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I will now recognize the hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak on Bill 21, An Act to Protect Patients. This is an important issue that I think impacted so many of us when it came to light by my hon. colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View just this spring. I'd like to thank the Minister of Health for taking action on this, for doing so many things but, very importantly, sending a message to particularly women. I know that there will be situations of abuse towards men as well, and men and women in this province are being sent a message that we've got their back, that they don't need to be afraid to go to the doctor and have a checkup. My heart just aches for a situation, you know, where I might find myself in, being violated in such a manner by somebody that is in such a trusted position.

I would like to commend and I think that it's important to recognize that there are so many wonderful health care professionals in our province that do such a great job of taking care of us. Madam Speaker, I know that certainly in my community of Airdrie there's a wonderful slate of doctors and health care professionals that are top notch, and I'm so grateful that we have

such a wonderful team to rely on in our community. I'm grateful that the patients in our community can look back on this piece of legislation and know that if anything were to go wrong, an assault were to take place, the perpetrator would have some consequences. That's such a significant thing.

What shocks me the most about this whole case that came forward in the spring, Madam Speaker, was that this health care professional, this doctor, was accused and convicted of sexual assault but was still practising, and nobody knew. Nobody knew that this man – his patients didn't know; his future patients didn't know – had a history of assaulting his patients.

One of the things that I do believe is addressed in this bill is that convicted health care professionals will be on a website. There will be public disclosure that can be accessed by patients. Maybe I could be corrected if I'm wrong. Perhaps that doesn't go far enough. Some sort of notification to patients of the conviction would be a good idea. I know that I don't really think of going on a website to see if my doctor has been listed as an abuser, and I don't know if most people do. But I guess now we will. The conversation is happening. It's here, and that will be the case. So I think that's really good.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to applaud the women that did come forward and did use their voices and made a complaint. It's unfortunate that there weren't real consequences for Dr. Taher at the time. That's rather unfortunate, but here we are today.

I'm really pleased to see that a mandatory penalty on those that are found guilty of sexual misconduct or abuse is put forward. There's a suspension for sexual misconduct and a five-year licence cancellation for sexual abuse, and they must reapply after the licence cancellation. I think that's an important point to make in regard to this legislation. It's not an automatic back-to-work. There is a process and an interview at least that takes place before the doctor gets his licence back, Madam Speaker. I'm shocked that in 2018 there was no process – I think everybody in this Assembly was – for the college to take action.

It was great to see some of the college representatives here yesterday when this bill was introduced and see the collaboration that has happened in regard to this legislation with the college and, I would assume, doctors as well in this province. I will appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak with some of the physicians in my constituency. I hope that we're able to evaluate this process and continue communication as it rolls out, make sure that it works as effectively as it possibly can, and should it present any challenges as it rolls out, that we're able to act swiftly in terms of making some of those changes that would be effective for everybody involved.

It's good to see that this is in place. I would imagine that it would also include maybe an evaluation of that five-year licence suspension, if that's an appropriate amount of time for a professional to lose their licence. What about repeat offenders? What is the process for that? Is there an indefinite suspension built into this? What does that look like? I think that's a good question to ask. The legislation doesn't outline how long the suspension will be, just that they will be suspended for a "specified period of time." I think that would be something that needs to be addressed, Madam Speaker.

I don't have a lot of questions around this. I think that members in this House are very likely in agreement with what we're talking about here today. Hopefully, we're in agreement with, you know, being able to check back and ensure that this legislation is working for Albertans and for victims in this province, more specifically, because that's who we need to be thinking about, first and foremost, when we're making any type of legislation that affects victims. That's a significantly important factor in the decisions that myself and my colleagues make. Putting victims first is always top of mind,

Madam Speaker. It's great to see that there are measures in here for counselling for victims in these cases and that the college is picking up that cost. I really am grateful for that type of process being built into this legislation.

9:40

Madam Speaker, I would again thank the Minister of Health for bringing this forward. I again would like to thank my hon. colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing this up in the House and also the Leader of the Official Opposition for discussing this in the House as well just last spring. It's good to see that there's some action taking place, and it's good to see, you know, that an issue that the Official Opposition has been pushing forward sees results at the end of the day. We're pleased to see the minister act on this file and on this issue in particular.

I would encourage all members of this House to support this legislation as we go through and as we discuss. I look forward to the debate, more particularly in Committee of the Whole, where we could get some of these questions answered that my colleague raised as well as myself and just some clarity around that so that we all feel good. I look forward to further consultation with the physicians in my constituency, as I'm sure my colleagues do as well.

I, lastly, would like to thank the hard-working physicians in our province that do such a great job. It's unfortunate that not everyone is a good person, and that's why we need legislation like this.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to be able to speak on this piece of legislation. I look forward to hearing from more of my colleagues and continuing the debate. With that, I will take my seat.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm so thankful to hear such strong support for this legislation around the House. You know, we all bring our own experience to the table, and for me as both a woman and as a nurse who worked in the health care field I feel really strongly about the importance of this legislation.

As a nurse, as a health care provider, not a physician but still in a position of trust, I know that when people came into my office, they had an expectation that I wanted the very best for them and that I would do everything I could to make their life better as a result of that interaction. I asked them tremendously personal questions, and they answered me. You know, I think I could have asked them to do a lot of things, and because of that position of respect they would do virtually whatever I asked. That bar of level of respect and understanding is even more so for physicians in this culture. I mean, we very much understand and respect the position of a physician to have a very high bar in terms of wanting to protect our well-being.

As a health care provider in that situation and knowing that level of trust that others have in me that's so extensive, you know, it truly makes me ill to my stomach that there are people who would take advantage of that level of trust in order to, well, take advantage of women typically. I think it's incredibly important that we make it clear to all of those who are in that position of trust that there are expectations, that there is accountability, and that they need to maintain that high bar, and if they don't, that we will hold them to account.

Not only that, I would feel tremendously terrible if it actually impacted the ability of those people going in to see health care providers, if they felt that they couldn't trust their health care

provider, if that would actually make it more difficult to provide high-quality care to them. In the interest of ensuring that all health care providers are understood to be in that position of trust, you know, and to continue to provide that care, I think it's so important that we help all Albertans understand that we will make sure they're protected, that we will hold them to a level of account on that.

You know, even more so from the position of a woman, flipping it onto the other side, women in our culture in many ways have been conditioned to be incredibly accommodating and responsive to individuals who are in a position of trust like a physician. Oftentimes we hear stories of abuse, and it's almost always where someone was in a position of power, and physicians do have that tremendous position of power. I think we're learning, and I think we're changing. I'm so thankful that women are starting to be less likely to just go along with whatever someone in a position of power says, but I think we have a long way to go on that. I think our culture has a long way to go for women to feel empowered and safe when it comes to challenging and pushing back against those in a position of power.

Given that there's so much more work to be done in that area, you know, I think it's incredibly important as a government that we take that responsibility on, to ensure that when they share their story, we listen. I'm incredibly proud to be part of a government who's made it tremendously clear that when individuals, particularly women but any individuals, disclose a history of sexual abuse, no matter who is being accused of that, we make it clear: we believe you; we want to hear your story; we will do whatever it is we can to help you to be safe.

As much as we've done great work in providing additional resources to support those who have experienced sexual abuse, the most important thing we can ever do is to invest in prevention. Certainly, a key and important way we can invest in prevention is to take these kinds of measures in which we ensure that physicians are held to account on this and that when we know that they're high risk, we can ensure that they don't have an opportunity to do the same thing to other women.

You know, some of the things we talk about in this House are a bit mundane. I don't think most of us in the House are quite as moved by maybe the securities legislation amendments that we'll be talking about later this afternoon, but there are things such as this on which every single person in this House knows we're being a part of something that is making life better for the people of this province. I'm tremendously proud to be a member of the government that's bringing this forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

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

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

Seeing none, I will call the question unless there's anybody that would like to close debate. No? Okay.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:49 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Fraser	Nielsen
Anderson, S.	Goehring	Payne
Babcock	Hinkley	Piquette

Bilous	Hoffman	Pitt
Carson	Horne	Renaud
Clark	Hunter	Rosendahl
Cooper	Jansen	Schmidt
Dach	Kazim	Schreiner
Dang	Larivee	Shepherd
Dreeshen	Littlewood	Smith
Drysdale	Loyola	Strankman
Eggen	Malkinson	Sucha
Feehan	Mason	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Westhead
Totals:	For – 42	Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 21 read a second time]

Bill 19

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

Mr. Nixon moved that the motion for second reading be amended by deleting all of 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.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment October 30: Mr. McIver]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will briefly speak to the referral motion made by my hon. colleague yesterday. I'd just like to reiterate that the Official Opposition and opposition members in general in this Assembly have just recently received a copy of this piece of legislation, and there's a lot of information in there. There's consultation that needs to be done in order for members on this side of the Assembly to be able to make an informed decision about the legislation that's in front of us here today.

It's always a good idea to thoroughly consult, as we all know in this Assembly, Madam Speaker. We could do that in a committee and call in witnesses. We can hear from all universities and colleges, students' union groups, other stakeholders that would be interested. Consultation and due process is never a bad thing. We can move swiftly in that process in order to have this piece of legislation in place before the next election, which I'm sure is the goal of the government members.

With that, I urge all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of the amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate you accommodating me to speak on the referral motion on Bill 19. I will rise to speak against the referral motion. I think that this is a bill that was a long time in the making. The minister likes to joke about the definition of fullness of time. It would have been nice, I think, to see, certainly, some of these changes come forward sooner. Based on conversations that I've had with key stakeholders in my constituency, students in postsecondaries in my constituency and

beyond, there does seem to be a lot positive in this bill and that does in fact move things forward, primarily for students, which I think is very important. When I talk with student representatives – and I have done so in my time here as an elected member – many of the things that students have been advocating for are reflected in the bill, which is good to see. I'm glad to see that happen.

I think you saw that the response from students who were in the gallery the other day, I believe Monday, when the bill was introduced, was broadly positive. There is still work to do on many aspects, including mental health and other areas, but embedding the tuition increases tied to CPI is very much a positive thing and something I know students have been advocating for for a long time. I won't enumerate all of them, but there are some governance changes on the university side that have a direct impact in my constituency and which I know are a positive thing and I'm pleased to see in the bill.

I will be voting against the referral motion because I think that this has actually gone through a thorough process, frankly, perhaps a process a little too long. But to say that we need to study it further in committee I think does a disservice to postsecondary institutions themselves, does a disservice to students, so I will be voting against the referral motion and in favour of Bill 19.

Thank you.

10:10

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

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

Mr. Cooper: Why, thank you, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me while I am on my feet. It's a pleasure. Happy Halloween, I suppose, is in order, and for the benefit of the House I decided that I would dress up like a politician today. Not only did I dress up like a politician today, but I switched ties with the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake so we could go as each other. It is a pleasure to be with you this morning.

I would just like to briefly comment on the amendment as I do have a couple of quick comments on that, and then I hope to rise a little bit later this morning, should we have the time, to speak in more depth to the bill. I think that at the end of the day it's important that while I disagree with some of the comments from the former independent Member for Calgary-Elbow and the former Alberta Party leader, I might add – I disagree that the consultation has been completed. Now, I do agree that there has been lots of great work done by student advocacy groups and others, and I, too, support much of the work that they have done. There are many positives in Bill 19, and I think that on balance it is quite likely that I will find it in my heart to support the legislation as I think that there is a lot of good work that's been done here, both for the minister's sake as well as for those students who have been quite involved.

Having said that, I did have the opportunity to reach out to some of my friends and colleagues in the postsecondary sector. I know that it might come as a surprise that I have those; friends, that is. But I might just add that the speed at which we are about to proceed or that I think we could expect to proceed on a piece of legislation like Bill 19 could use a pause on two accounts. One, I believe it was Monday – or perhaps it was only yesterday; I don't recall the date, either Monday or yesterday, certainly – that this significant piece of legislation was introduced, and I know that members of administration inside postsecondary are currently working through the bill and what all of the ramifications of the bill mean for them. That's not to say that we need to make all of the changes that they might be concerned with, but it would be very advantageous, I

think, to the House for us to be able to hear how the bill is going to impact other parts of the sector, not just students.

For postsecondary to work well, we need a good relationship between those who administer the system and those who are a part of the learning side of the system as well. It would be great, as an opposition member, if this particular piece of legislation was sent to committee so that we could have those folks at committee and be able to present some of their findings, their thoughts, their concerns about the piece of legislation or the successes, the way that the bill is going to have a positive impact on them. I believe that that could be done prior to the end of this sitting.

I'm not suggesting that the legislation needs to be endlessly delayed like we've seen the government do with certain pieces of private members' business, but the piece of legislation could be sent to committee swiftly and promptly and dealt with in a very quick and reasonable manner for the members of the Official Opposition and government members to be able to hear from experts as well as those in the postsecondary industry who would also like to provide feedback in a more on-the-record format than just giving my office a call and providing some of their thoughts, concerns, or successes.

I certainly will be supporting the amendment to send this bill to committee because I know I would like to hear from some of those folks at committee and have a much more full and robust understanding of exactly how Bill 19 is going to impact the system as a whole. We've seen the government make a lot of changes in the past. When they've turned one dial, it has had a negative impact on other dials inside the system. I particularly think about the negative work they've done around the capacity market and the electricity market and how that has had a negative impact. I just want to be clear and certain that the changes that they're proposing in Bill 19 won't actually have a net negative impact over a long period of time on our students having access to the important postsecondary institutions that they would like to.

As many folks in this House will know, the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is home to one of those outstanding postsecondary institutions, so I feel that it is my duty to be able to represent that, both on the student side as well as on those administering it. I think we would be well served to send this bill to committee, and I would strongly recommend, notwithstanding the comments of the Member for Calgary-Elbow, that you support this amendment to send it to committee and that we deal with it in an expedient fashion so that we can get the bill back in the House before the end of the session and quite likely support that piece of legislation once we've had that feedback.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

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

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: We are back now on the original bill. Are there any members wishing to speak to second reading? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to say that it's nice to be back in the House and to have the capacity to speak to a bill, Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education.

I have to confess that today with this evening being Halloween and with this bill before us, it has brought back some old memories, memories of myself being in university and specifically of a program that used to be quite famous in the Edmonton area and

across North America. I think some of us that are old enough – and maybe that's not that many of us in here – may remember the TV program *SCTV*, and you may remember one of the very comical and lovable characters in *SCTV* that was characterized as Count Floyd. If you remember the sketch with Count Floyd, you would remember that he was supposed to take a movie that was being shown on the TV and build it up so that they would get viewers. It was supposed to be a scary movie, but often the only ones they could afford to get would be NFB trailers. You might see Bambi walking through the woods, and he would have to come on and say: scary stuff; very scary, scary stuff.

You know, Madam Speaker, I'm beginning to wonder if I haven't been time warped into some scary stuff today, when as a member of the Official Opposition I actually am going to support two government bills in a row. That is scary stuff.

10:20

One of the things that I realized when I started looking at this bill was just how important postsecondary education truly is to this province. You know, it made me reflect a little bit on my postsecondary experiences. I know that the minister – and I believe I'm correct in this, that he's an alumni of Concordia college. No? Okay. I thought you were, but I started off my university days at Concordia college, two years there, and learned a lot of really important things in my life. I learned that organic chemistry was not in my bailiwick and that basketball was far more important than organic chemistry, which explains probably why I didn't pass that course. I learned that a small school experience, having come from Jasper Place composite high school, a very large school at the time, and having gone to a smaller postsecondary institution, just how valuable that is to a lot of our students. It was there that I was able to interface my faith with an academic background, and that was really important for me.

Going on to the University of Alberta, I learned that I had a love for teaching and discovered my passion for education. I guess just before we focus in on the bill, I think that we can see that these institutions play a pivotal role not only in the lives of individual students and Albertans but in the creation of the kind of society that we want to have and the prosperity of our society in Alberta. It just plays a really crucial role.

You know, one of the things that I learned when I was in my university experience was the value of hard work not only within the institutions but outside. My family was very middle-class. We were well off, but it was still a situation where as a student I had to work my way through university, and I had to understand what it was like, Madam Speaker, to make sure that I took those four months, that I worked hard, that I saved my money, and that I had enough for the tuition and for all of the expenses that go along with university.

Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education is a very important bill and one that will have my support. Bill 19 will legislate an inflation-based cap on increases to domestic students and apprenticeship tuition based on an annual change in Alberta's consumer price index. I want to thank the minister for having that balance in there. The minister will have the power to set a tuition freeze with this legislation but will not be able to raise tuition higher than the CPI. Exceptional tuition increases on individual programs are capped at 10 per cent. I think he's pretty much hit the mark here on that.

Bill 19 also changes the student representation on the boards of governors by having student representatives at all of the institutions, three if the school has a graduate program. It allows colleges to transition to university status without legislative amendments. I think all of these things are positive moves forward.

Now, in 2015, Madam Speaker, we understand that the New Democrat government here instituted a domestic freeze at 2014 and 2015 levels. Then in 2016 you began a tuition review, and you consulted with students and with stakeholders. We've had conversation in this House already about the length of time and the thoroughness of that review, and we appreciate it. You had a 20-person advisory group that was formed to help the government find ways to create a more predictable system of fees and fee increases. The student groups had been asking for a cap on tuition since the review started, and I think everyone in this House has been the beneficiary of these student groups as they have come before us and as they have lobbied, I'm sure, the government and the Official Opposition, providing us with their valuable point of view on how to move forward on this issue.

Now, the minister's office has indicated that regulations will push noninstructional fees to have more transparency – and we would suggest that that is a good thing – and will force international student tuition to be more predictable, and I think, again, a positive move. Bill 19 will also allow for two student representatives at all institutions and at the degree-granting, three. Again, allowing for student input at the board of governors level is a good idea.

Over the past three years I know that I have met with many university and postsecondary students to discuss the concerns that they have with their postsecondary education, and through that process I have walked away very impressed with the calibre and the quality of the students that have come to help educate us. These students are bright, they're articulate individuals, and they've always impressed me with their insight into their educational experience and how we can move forward to ensure that that educational experience is affordable and that it is world-class. Now, I know it's been a few years since I was in university. While I remember clearly my time there and I value that time there, I don't ever remember being on the ball as much as these students that have come to visit us. I truly have appreciated being able to engage in conversation and to be able to have the results of that seen in a bill that we have before us. These students have been pushing for a tuition framework, and it's good to see that the government has listened to these Albertans on these issues that are important to them.

I know that we have seen at times and we have maybe been critical at times of this government for its lack of consultation, so it's good to be able to stand up and show by example to the province of Alberta that when good legislation is brought forward, this House does co-operate and this House does move together to better the province of Alberta. I can remember trying to explain to my kids over a 30-year teaching career in my social studies classes that the government is to be held to account by an opposition but that that opposition needs to ensure that when good legislation is brought forward, it will support it. So I'm glad to be able to stand up here today and say that there is much good in this bill.

I believe that this government has listened to the students and that in revising the tuition framework, this will give students predictability for what they will pay in tuition. That's always a good thing. These students are hard-working students. They need to have some predictability. They need to be able to know that they will have affordability as they move into and continue their university career.

You know, I'm probably not saying anything that most of us in this House haven't either experienced personally or know, but these students often have to have one or two jobs in order to be able to make it through university. I know that my own kids – and I have three of them – have all had to work their way through university, and some are still working their way through university. For instance, my son Joshua is presently taking a master of philosophy

at Concordia University in Montreal, and in order to work his way through, he actually has two jobs. I know how hard he's working, and I know how hard it is on him to try and balance his education with trying to be able to afford to have that education. So I believe that it's an important thing for us to have had this conversation and to have come to an agreement on how we're going to provide some predictability for our students as they are involved in their university education.

10:30

Now, you know, I suppose that we could go down a path – and I don't want to go down too far here because this is a very reasonable bill. But the NDP has created some issues, I would argue, with the wider economy and with our students having the capacity to find the jobs that they need to be able to work their way through university. I guess that's at least in part why I think that postsecondary students need certainty and funding.

Part of it is because it's to ensure that Alberta has the capacity and the workforce to be able to move forward into a knowledge-based economy. One of the realities that we have faced over the last three or four years in this province is the need for diversifying and the need for an economy that is going to be at least in part based on information and technology. It is our postsecondary institutions and our universities that prepare our students to be that workforce moving into the 21st century.

So I believe that legislating an inflationary based cap will definitely help postsecondary students. Capping tuition increases on individual programs at 10 per cent, I believe, makes sense. Tying increases to inflation based on the annual change in Alberta's consumer price index, I believe, leaves some capacity for universities to cover inflationary creep while providing some certainty for students moving forward into the future. These initiatives, I believe, when taken together, will provide more certainty for students and for the university's bottom line, and when they assess the financial viability of a postsecondary institution, it's important that we also place that into the equation.

Madam Speaker, I think that increased student representation on boards of governors is something that student groups – I know it's something that student groups have been asking for, and we're happy to see that the government has done this in Bill 19. Increased representation allows for increased dialogue, and it ensures that postsecondary institutions work for all, including students. I just believe that in a democratic society, where it should run in the interests of the citizens that it serves, even in our university institutions, having student representation is a very positive thing.

Now, myself and the opposition are pleased to see the regulations ...

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?
The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Why, thank you. It was a pleasure to hear the inspiring remarks of my hon. colleague from Drayton Valley-Devon. It sounded to me like he was just in the last one or two sentences there. I just wondered if he wouldn't mind sharing with me the last couple of moments of what was an awe-inspiring speech.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, are you wishing to respond? Please go ahead.

Mr. Smith: Well, Madam Speaker, as much as I appreciate the remarks of my colleague, I think that there are perhaps a few

students over the course of my 30 years that would beg to differ as to how awe-inspiring I really am.

Madam Speaker, I would like to make just a last couple of points. Number one is that we're pleased as an opposition to see that the regulations will now include noninstructional fees and not just the tuition fees. Student fees: obviously, tuition fees are an important part of the cost that students face, but they're not the only costs. So when we talk about the noninstructional fees, it's a significant thing for students, and I believe that having oversight over those is an important part of that overall picture of making sure that our postsecondary institutions are affordable and that our students have the capacity to move forward in their education to serve this province.

We're also pleased that the minister has said that the institutions will be required to tell international students what the tuition will cost for the entire length of their degree.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Madam Speaker, we have a new institution in Drayton Valley. We call it the Clean Energy Technology Centre, and as a part of that centre we have got a postsecondary institution, NorQuest College. In order to try and ensure the viability of that institution in a small town, we have, I believe, 27 international students from the nation of India that are taking a business administration degree. These students also need predictability. They're travelling from around the world – in this case, India – coming to a place that's very different, a long ways away from the supports that they have at home, and financial worry is not one of the things that they need to be going through. From my constituency I want to say that I believe that this is a positive thing.

You know, we need to monitor, and we need to make sure that we hold the minister and this government to account for what happens with those regulations and moving forward with this piece of legislation, but overall I believe that this is a positive piece of legislation, and it will have my support.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd be remiss not to speak in favour of this bill, and I would be remiss for a couple of reasons. The first is that it is the right thing to do. I've always felt that education is the foundation of our future. The availability of affordable quality learning opportunities, both now and in the future, is essential for the growth of our economy.

The second reason is the information I've received over and over again from students and student associations from both Lethbridge College and the University of Lethbridge, such as stable tuition costs now and not 20 or 30 years from now, when they'd be advocating for their children. They need it now.

Like the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View said yesterday, I believe, when I went to university a few years ago, the cost was pretty close to \$600 per year for tuition, and for my first two years that cost was covered by two grants for which I applied. They were covered by my agreeing to then finish my two years and teach for two years. My summer holiday and weekend holiday employment covered the cost of my textbooks, residence fees, or room and board. This would never have happened had I been required to work much longer periods of time to cover the costs of my education.

Now, I shared this because when I heard from students, I heard the feelings that they expressed. They want the full experience of postsecondary education. Having stable and affordable education will allow them to do just this. I believe that it's my duty as an MLA to support legislation which is supportive of my constituents and, in this case, supportive of our economy by setting our students and our economy up for success, both now and in the future.

When I was a student, I participated in sports. I participated in a number of athletic teams, and that ate up my out-of-class time. I also had a bit of a social life. I came from an all-girls Catholic school, so having a social life was actually part of my social growth when I was at university, and I was very pleased that I had that. Because I did those things, they helped me to learn to focus and to really utilize my time efficiently. Because I did this, I actually probably did better in my last few years at university, certainly, than I did in high school because I had to focus on what I was doing.

10:40

If I had to work as many hours as the kids at university and college have to do now, I could never have done that. The time that I spent in school would have been less productive for me as a student. I hear that from the students that come and talk to me. So I absolutely support this bill, and I ask everybody in this room to support it because it needs to happen and it needs to happen now.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, I just want to start off by saying how disappointed I am. Now, I'm not disappointed in this legislation; I'm just disappointed in my colleagues across the way. Halloween: this should have been their day to have the colour orange, the orange crush, wearing it loud and proud. There's only one colleague over there. She happens to be from southern Alberta, and I'm happy to see that she is wearing the colours loud and proud. Disappointed.

However, I want to start out by talking about the value of this bill. It's been a pleasure to be able to talk with student union groups. They've come to my office. They've come to our caucus. You know, these are people who are absolutely passionate. They are the future, they are the hope of Alberta, they're the hope of our world, and it is such a pleasure to be able to meet with them and to hear how they feel they can make it better. A lot of what I see in this bill – and I have to take my hat off to the minister for listening to these students and for trying to be able to get it right.

There are a couple of things in here that I wanted to talk about, but before I do that, I want to, first of all, say that the cost of education is becoming a barrier for students to be able to get in and get a good education. We know that the people who actually get out there, get better education: it's the best approach for them to be able to get out of bad circumstances they're in.

I came from a home that was, I guess, considered middle class, but I know that everything that I did, I had to earn myself. It was no different when I went to university. I started out at Mount Royal College – at the time it was Mount Royal College, so that dates me – then went to the University of Lethbridge, then down to the States to finish my university. Now, my first degree, a bachelor of science: I was able to basically work during the summertime and work part-time jobs during school to be able to pay for it. I didn't have to incur any student loans at the time. However, when I went back later in life to get my master's in business administration, the cost of that

master's was prohibitive. It was very, very difficult for me as a family man to be able to go in and say that this was going to be worth it and convince my family that this was all worth it. Very, very expensive to do, so I did have to incur student loans on that.

One thing that I've said to most of the student union representatives that have come into my office is that, you know, if you are so convinced that education is the right path and the best poverty reduction strategy out there, which I am a big believer in, then you need to be talking to the federal government because those student loan interest rates are way too high. They're actually making money on students on an antipoverty strategy, in my opinion one of the best antipoverty strategies out there. I really believe, Madam Speaker – and I don't speak for my party, and I don't speak for my colleagues – that if we believe in education as the pathway forward for helping anybody to be able to get out of this cycle of poverty, we need to make sure that we're not making money off them.

Now, I know that the provincial student loan interest rates are lower, and I don't really know whether or not we make any money off that. If we do, though, I think that we need to recheck that and question that. That's one of the problems that I still see. It hasn't been addressed. I hope that the minister and the NDP government are lobbying the federal government on behalf of our students to help them realize that, you know, we should not be making money off students. It shouldn't be a business, a money-making business, when this type of a strategy of getting more education is a great antipoverty strategy.

I've always hoped that I would be able to say this in the House, put this on the record that I'm a big believer in education. I know what it's done for my family. I've seen it work in many situations where people have been able to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. They've learned so much from it. I've got two kids right now that are in university. You know, I have to take my hat off to these kids. They work really hard during the summertime, save every penny, sacrifice going out and playing and doing the fun, frivolous things that young people can do. These guys sacrifice because they recognize the importance and value of being able to get a good education. They learn important things, Madam Speaker. They learn the value of work ethic, they learn the value of money sense, and they learn how to be able to plan.

One of the things that I like about this strategy that this bill, Bill 19, actually goes through is the concept of being able to create some kind of certainty. You know, businesses need certainty. I've said this many times, so it's no shock to my colleagues across the way. I don't believe that this government has provided that kind of certainty for businesses, but in this situation I believe that they're providing certainty for higher learning institutions and for students when they allow CPI to determine what the increases are going to be in tuition and costs. The value of that, in my opinion as a Conservative, for universities is that it helps them to be able to have the certainty of: "Okay. Well, we know that if CPI is 2 per cent or 1.6 per cent or whatever it is, we've got to be able to live within those means. We've got to be able to make sure our budget follows those constraints."

The other value in terms of certainty for students is that students now can say, "You know what? When I start out on this process of going for a four-year or an eight-year" or whatever it is that they're actually going to be doing, whether it's a master's or a PhD – they have the ability to say: "You know what? Unless we see something like in the '80s, where inflation was out of control, I think we can actually plan for what the cost is going to be for my education." That certainty is what I applaud and will be voting for in this bill.

However, I do want to say this. And I have to say that I apologize. You know, it is a 50-page bill, so I didn't get a chance to be able to

read the whole thing. So if I'm missing something here, I'm sure that 29(2)(a) coming from the opposite side will happen, and I look forward to that. From what I understand, the CPI is capped at 10 per cent, so you can't go any higher than 10 per cent increases. If that's the case, I guess the question that I have in that situation – if I'm wrong, I apologize. Yikes. If we're going to see a 10 per cent inflationary rate in Alberta, that's not a good situation.

To tell you the truth, some of the policies that this government might want to look at in order to make sure that we've got students that can afford education are those inflationary measures that we've seen in the past, Madam Speaker, inflationary measures such as the carbon tax, inflationary measures like a 50 per cent increase in minimum wages. All those costs are passed on to the consumer. All of the costs are passed on to the consumer, so that is naturally going to be an inflationary measure that the student, the universities, the businesses all have to be able to eat. They all have to pay for that.

10:50

Again, I've said this many times in this House. I am concerned about policies that the NDP government has brought forward that drive up inflation in our province once again because of policy. Now, inflation happens for many reasons, obviously. Sometimes, because we live in a global economy, those inflationary parts come from external areas, commodity prices and so forth. But if we are going to be serious about helping Alberta be a great place for our kids and for our grandkids, we have to start thinking about this issue of inflation, this issue of passing those inflationary increases on to our children and grandchildren. Now, that's not even bringing in the issue of having a \$96 billion deficit, which, obviously, isn't taken into consideration in inflation, but it is later on paid for. It's something that has to be paid for by our children and grandchildren.

It's the big picture that I'm talking about here, Madam Speaker. It's the big picture of being able to say: are we doing something that is going to be beneficial to our children and grandchildren? Is this something that we can be proud of and something that can provide them with a future, a bright future and a bright hope? They are our hope. They are our future. You know, this is a good piece of legislation, and I will be voting for it, but one thing that concerns me is that the other parts, the big picture, I don't think this NDP government has gotten right. The big picture being that – you know what? – when they actually do finish their degree, there is gainful employment for them, that there are opportunities for them to be able to start businesses if that's what they want to do.

Unfortunately, we've seen a decrease of \$36 billion, foreign investment leaving this economy, since this government took office. The problem is this: there are no measures to be able to measure what kind of internal investment has actually fled or has not been realized. I have the opportunity as an MLA to be able to talk to many people, many businesses, many people who would like to start businesses. And many, many times I have heard the argument that they are not willing – not willing – to risk their capital and start a business or to grow their business, whether it's adding another pub or adding another restaurant or adding another expansion to their business. They are not willing to do that because they do not believe there's certainty in what the NDP is going to do, because the NDP are willing to change the rules on a regular basis and create that message, send the message to our wealth creators and our job creators that there is no more certainty in this market.

At this juncture what happens is we now have a stagnated economy. Our economy is stagnated, and then we have people who come out of universities that are struggling to be able to find jobs. If that's the case, then I don't think that they're getting it right. I believe that the problem that they're facing is that they might feel like: you know, we want to be able to have voter-facing legislation

here, help the students think that we're actually doing them a favour. But in reality they're not finishing the equation. The equation needs to be finished by saying: "You know what? Go in there. Work hard. Get a good education, and at the end of the day, when you come out, there will be a robust economy, that you can be able to go in and get a great job or start a business if you'd like." That's finishing the equation, Madam Speaker. This is the sort of thing that governments are supposed to be doing, in my opinion, for our children and grandchildren.

I got into politics for that very reason. Alberta has been good to my family. We have done well here. This has been a great place for us to be able to raise our family, to be able to have opportunities for growth and development. I love Alberta. It's a great place to be.

I always find it sad when I hear from the members opposite how many things we got wrong, yet what's amazing to me is that they're here. Lots of them came here because they believed that there was something right about this place. Most of the time it was because there were opportunities here. There was work, so they came here from other provinces or other jurisdictions because we had done something right. Yet what I see and have seen for the last three and a half years, unfortunately, Madam Speaker, is a government that continues to say that we did so many things wrong, that we've had it wrong for 44 years, yet this is a government that, in my opinion, has chased away all of the opportunities that we've had here, those opportunities that we had for growth, those opportunities that we had for these kids to be able to come out of university and find that gainful employment that they desire.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? I'll recognize the hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, one of the things I love about being an MLA is the amount of time we spend talking about education. In the last few years we've done so much, not only for the K to 12 system, but we've recognized the importance of postsecondary education for all Albertans. I think this is great because, as we all know, education is the cornerstone for a thriving economy and for success in all areas of our life and in Alberta.

So I am so glad that the Minister of Advanced Education has recognized the importance of education stability and has brought forward this bill, that is going to do what we've been talking a lot in the Legislative Assembly over the last couple of years, is really going to help provide education to the students who are going to power our companies, who are going to lead the innovation in the future, and that will continue to be the workers that our Alberta industries need.

As we all know – and I was just looking at some statistics this morning – a lot of our students are in debt. A lot of our students cannot afford university. I think especially of our students who come from outside Edmonton or Calgary, who have to factor into their education career not only the tuition fees and all of the fees to access postsecondary education, but they have to factor in travel to their homes, and sometimes it can be quite expensive. For example, if you attend the U of A and you live in Fort McMurray, you need to factor in a four and a half hours in a car or a plane ride and also living expenses, rent, and so on.

We all know that if students cannot afford university, they may choose not to avail themselves of opportunities for postsecondary education and be stuck in lower jobs and not contribute as much to the economy. We also know that when you're starting your education – and I have been privileged to actually attend three

different universities in my time and to have a son who went to university. I actually also worked for two postsecondary educations, so I understand that once a student starts a postsecondary education, it's really important that that student knows how much they're going to have to spend so they can plan their courses, they can plan when they can possibly work over the summer or do a co-op turn or an internship. They can also plan with their parents, if they have parents who can support them, how they're going to afford the tuition and the living expenses over the last four years.

What I really appreciate about this bill is that it's written – and I know that the Minister of Advanced Education doesn't have university students yet because his students are much lower and, I believe, still in elementary school. But I can really see that when this bill was written, it was really written from considering all of the things that a student needs to consider and his or her parents or guardians or so on in planning for a successful university education and making sure that the student has the time to concentrate on his studies and is not worried about finances all the time.

11:00

When I was working at the university of Victoria, I hired a lot of students. I had the kind of position where thanks to research grants I hired students and helped them to get access to employment that would lead to future employment in their area of work. I know, having talked with these students, that paying rent, affording food and even simple things like books – because if anyone in this House has recently looked at a bookstore, you'd realize that academic books can cost up to \$200 for one book given the nature of it. Students are forever wondering how they're going to be able to afford to live, pay tuition, the material that they need, and the supplies that they may need for some courses.

This bill is going to allow the students in our province, some of the young people that we know very well because they may be our children or our grandchildren, some certainty as they begin their education career, which will lead them to be involved in the economy of Alberta and to the success that we all see happening in Alberta in our industries.

One of the things that I also like about being an MLA, you know, is that I have the pleasure of meeting a lot of young people in terms of STEP students or co-op students, and I spent this summer, actually, meeting students who had been employed under the government STEP program in industries and nonprofit organizations. I met some really interesting students who had been hired by one of the energy companies in their control room. When I talked to the students, they all spoke about the need that they have around certainty of how they're going to afford to continue to be a student, and that stress, I know, really impacts their studies.

One of the other reasons that I like this bill – traditionally, Alberta students, after they finish grade 12, have had very low levels of attachment to the postsecondary sector. I don't have the statistics in front of me, but I know that Alberta is known as a province where our students, after leaving grade 12, do not have high rates of access to the postsecondary sector, be it university or institutions like NAIT or SAIT. This is something that I think this bill is going to help with. If students do not access postsecondary education shortly after their graduation from grade 12, it's really very hard for them to access postsecondary education in the future. I'm really hoping that this bill will encourage – I'm not only hoping; I know that it will – our grade 12 students to consider applying to postsecondary institutions and accessing postsecondary education.

When I was looking at the statistics around the grants, the provincial and federal grants for students, I also saw that it's not only 18-year-olds and 19-year-olds who are going to benefit from

this bill around affordability and accessibility to postsecondary education. There are a lot of people who did not go to postsecondary education after graduating from grade 12 who find themselves now in their 30s – they may be married; they may have children – who now realize that they should go to postsecondary education. This bill will also provide them with certainty and the ability to plan their access to postsecondary education with certainty. I think this is great.

Every time that I have the opportunity of making a speech at a university graduation, I always refer back to those Albertans who have chosen to go back to university to continue their career, to those Albertans who have seen how industry has changed and that they need now to get an advanced degree or they need to get their first degree. This bill is going to allow them to also plan for their postsecondary career.

One of the things that I always find interesting when you look at the students and you look at the diversity of students is that we have a lot of students who face special challenges in the postsecondary sector. We have students who have special needs. They may need a Braille reader, they may need access to deaf or hard of hearing interpreters, they may need access to a tutor or an assistant to be able to participate in postsecondary institutions, so these students face even more challenges than other Alberta students.

Again, by ensuring that our education system does not out of the blue ask students to pay more fees such as – I don't know; I've heard that it's not only access to recreation facilities but that there are all kinds of fees that students have to pay, and sometimes those fees are so out of proportion to what the tuition fees are. I'm thinking of those students who have special needs that already might be paying extra or have financial constraints in accessing postsecondary institutions due to their special needs. I'm thinking of how these students through this bill might gain access to postsecondary education and better jobs.

I think that we also have to be careful that we don't see postsecondary education only as a path to employment. One of the things that I've learned – and maybe it's because I'm from Europe or maybe because I've had the opportunity to study a number of different subjects – is that access to postsecondary education is really important just for our communities. When a student has the ability to study a subject of interest – and I note that one of the members opposite was referring to a philosophy degree. When we encourage students to pursue something they're interested in, something they're passionate about, it results in much better communities because it gives the young person or sometimes the not-so-young person the ability to reflect on how our communities thrive.

One of the things that I really appreciate about postsecondary education, and it's something that's increasingly happening in our K to 12 system, is the ability of postsecondary education students to learn to live with diversity, to learn within a diversity of opinion, a diversity of persons, a diversity of abilities, and to learn how to all work together and to really understand various world views and to not live in the little bubble that they lived in in the past.

I'm really encouraged that this bill will allow more Alberta students to access postsecondary education so that our percentage of students who access postsecondary education will increase. I'm really encouraged that those students will be less stressed, that they will have certainty around the amount of tuition and fees that they will be paying. I'm also encouraged that it might lead to more students with special needs, whatever the special needs might be, now finally having the financial ability to access postsecondary education.

As you can tell, Madam Speaker, I am so delighted with the work that our government has been doing to support students in Alberta. Thank you.

11:10

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

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Dreeshen: Actually, could the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills go instead?

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. It's just that I had a speakers list and you were next on it, but if you prefer, I could recognize Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills first if you'd rather go later.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, and sorry for the confusion. It's his first day here. [interjections] Okay. It's his third day, and I admire him so much that I'm dressed like him today, as I mentioned earlier.

It is a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. As we've heard this morning from a number of my colleagues, notwithstanding some of my concerns around the speed at which I anticipate this particular piece of legislation to be passed and the fact that a number of postsecondary stakeholders who've reached out to me have some reservations about understanding the full ramifications of what it's going to mean for their institutions and/or their faculty, I think that, on balance, we're moving in the right direction. I think that it would have been a good opportunity for us to consult with them and get some feedback, frankly, prior to even the passing of second reading. Since that's not going to happen, I hope that we'll be able to connect with some of those folks throughout the process and make sure that there's no significant need for major amendments or otherwise.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Broadly speaking, I think that Bill 19 has done a good job in representing a lot of the work that students have been doing on behalf of postsecondary students all across the province. Obviously, student groups are going to be happy with the cap on tuition and increased representation on the board of governors. You know, I think it's important, particularly from a governance perspective, that students, the primary stakeholders of the postsecondary sector, have a voice on the way the postsecondary that they are attending is governed. Students being the majority stakeholders, if you will, in the direction of the institution, I think it's important that they are asked for their opinion and that that is guaranteed on all boards at all institutions. I think that it is a step in the right direction to make sure that it's going to happen.

Coming into force on February 1, 2019, Bill 19 will legislate an inflation-based cap on increases to domestic student and apprenticeship tuition based on the annual change in Alberta's consumer price index, or CPI, starting in the 2020-21 academic year. Obviously, as we've heard from a number of members on this side of the House, this bill will provide the minister the power to regulate noninstitutional fees and international student tuition. The minister will have the power to dictate a tuition freeze within this legislation but will not be able to raise tuition higher than CPI.

Bill 19 also changes the student representation on the board of governors by having two student representatives at all institutions, and this, of course, is a positive step in the right direction.

Now, we've heard at some significant length from student groups that have been pushing for a tuition framework, and it's good to see that the government is finally working on that. I might add that I have also heard from a number of administrators and faculty members across the sector that they, too, are looking forward to what the tuition framework looks like. They may not entirely agree

with that framework, but they are certainly looking forward to having a sense of exactly what that's going to look like. The uncertainty of what the minister may or may not do was creating a lot of challenges for boards and administrations to prepare for what the future looks like.

As I've mentioned on a number of occasions this morning, some of those board members, faculty, and administration have reached out to me and have some reservations with the bill, but to have a sense of what the direction looks like will be useful for them and, in particular, as we've heard this morning, for student groups and for them to have a sense of what that tuition is going to look like. Revising the tuition framework will give students predictability for what they will pay in tuition. Madam Speaker, you'll know that predictability in your budget is important. At present you're not a full-time student, and significant surprises in your budget, quite likely, if your budget is anything like mine, don't create more fun but create less fun. I think that it's important that we extend as much predictability to students as possible.

You know, university and postsecondary: I think it's important that sometimes when we speak about postsecondary here inside the House, we tend to focus on the universities and larger postsecondary institutions. I don't think that it's a slight on any of the other institutions; it's just natural that we tend, when we think postsecondary, to think of the larger universities here in the province of Alberta. But I think it's important that we don't do a disservice to some of the smaller institutions or colleges or NAITs and SAITs of the world, that have such a critical role in the postsecondary framework. Now more than ever, the need for those institutions remains strong. I think it's so important that we support each and every one of those institutions and the students that attend there.

In a day and age where we see a significant push towards granting university status to more and more institutions, I get somewhat concerned about the push and what message that might send both to those institutions that would prefer to stay as they are and to the students that attend there, that if you attend Olds College or NAIT or SAIT or a diploma-granting postsecondary or an apprenticeship program, somehow those institutions or those students are less than those that attend university.

I think we need to do our part to ensure that that creep doesn't happen, that we're actually encouraging and supporting those institutions and those students and equally respecting students who attend trade schools or otherwise because in so many ways they are the builders of our province's future. They are the job creators who go on to own contracting firms and otherwise really make our economy churn in so many respects. Sometimes I think that gets lost while we're here discussing postsecondary more broadly. I think it's worth while to stop and just take a bit of a pause to make sure that we equally support all institutions and all students. I think that Bill 19 does do much of that with respect to treating all of those students equally, but I think that it's important that we do encourage those that choose smaller institutions to continue doing so.

11:20

While we're on the topic of smaller institutions and improving access and affordability to postsecondary institutions, you know, I think that there's so much that's good in terms of this legislation with respect to making tuition more accessible, creating the certainty and the framework that goes forward. But if the government was truly serious about doing all that it can to make postsecondary more accessible and affordable for all students, there are lots of other things that they could do.

One that comes to mind for me is the significant costs that students pay for the carbon tax and how that impacts postsecondary

institutions. I know that institutions like Olds College, who has a massive campus with many, many buildings, including farm buildings, barns – I know that the Member for Drumheller-Stettler will know that if you're having to heat a barn, it's significantly more costly than, say, heating a house or even a tower or a downtown building in any of the urban centres. I know that my colleague from Drumheller-Stettler will know, as you know, Madam Speaker, that the institution of Olds College is a working farm. This year, due to probably three, four weeks of winter right in the middle of harvest, the institution will have incurred some significant costs in the form of drying product and will wind up paying way more carbon tax than lots of the other institutions. In fact, Olds College pays hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars annually in carbon tax, and these costs need to be . . . [interjection] It totally is the fact, and they would be happy to confirm those facts. These costs are now absorbed into the institution.

This particular piece of legislation does speak about noninstructional fees, but when the government is legislating with the right hand but taking away with the left hand, it does create uncertainty for institutions and, as such, students. We've seen in a number of different areas that this is exactly what happens with the government. Listen, I'm going to support Bill 19. I think it's a step in the right direction. I think the fact that we're acknowledging that students need to have certainty and access to affordable tuition is an important step, but I also think that the government can do more when it comes to not punishing the postsecondary sector and the students that attend by doing small things like abolishing the carbon tax on postsecondaries. I think government members will remember that the Official Opposition took steps to try to ensure that that happened, yet the government knows better than everyone else, so we saw that they didn't listen.

You know, there's a lot more to say, but in the interests of time, perhaps I will wrap it up. The last thing I will say is that this bill does provide significant – significant – powers to the minister. I think that any time that we are strengthening the powers of the minister, it does expose some potential risk and lack of transparency in the process. I can assure you that the Official Opposition will continue to hold this minister to account.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to speak briefly to Bill 19 because I think I bring a unique perspective that hasn't really been addressed so far in the debate. Like the Member for Edmonton-South West, I'm actually a fairly recent university graduate. I did not go to university till I was in my 40s, and when I finally was able to go, I had a family to support, I had expenses, I had a mortgage to pay. It was a real challenge. I was able to get some student loans and funding to get myself going, but it certainly wasn't enough to keep me able to go to school and really focus on my education.

In fact, I had a situation where, about halfway through my master's degree, I was actually earning more than the minimum, so when I applied for student loans, I was rejected. I was faced with not knowing how I was even going to be able to finish my education.

But, of course, student loans: I think that's another area that we definitely need to look at. It's not addressed by this legislation, but as my colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner pointed out, it is an area that can be a barrier for students, so I'm hopeful that we're going to soon get to a comprehensive review of that area.

Just getting back to the bill, I know how important it is because when I was in university, I had the honour of being part of my student association. I was the president, and I also had the honour of being part of CAUS. With other student leaders at the time, we worked really hard to lobby the government, the Progressive Conservative government at the time. We would go and we would speak to them. Of course, they'd invite us into the office, and they'd smile, and they'd shake our hands and listen to us, and then they'd go away and do absolutely nothing. It really gave us the impression that the Conservative government didn't have a lot of interest in making postsecondary education more affordable and more accessible to us students. So it's really, really exciting to see this legislation because this is exactly what we were asking for. These are things that are going to go a long way towards making things a little bit better for all students.

I think, again, that it's important to remember that the face of what a student looks like is changing. It used to be that, yes, it was high school students – they were young; they were 18, 19 – but more and more we're seeing students like myself who, because of the economy, because of the high cost of education, have to go to work. They have to take a longer time to complete their studies because it's just not accessible anymore. We face other kinds of challenges, and we need a lot more support in different ways from postsecondary education and from legislation. I think this is an important step, and I'm hoping that we're going to continue to go in that direction to make postsecondary education accessible to everybody.

I also want to comment that I am the chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council. As part of NADC we have a very close relationship with the university and college presidents in the north. In the north in particular, it's incredibly important to have access to postsecondary education. It's really a key for us up there because that's how we can improve our ability to recruit and retain, because we're educating people who are already from the north and are more likely to stay there once they've completed their university and college studies. In my interactions with the college presidents they're all in favour of being creative and finding better solutions, how to make it possible. In particular, we're very proud of Northern Lakes College because they do all kinds of things to help make it easier for students to study, to balance those difficult choices between family, finances, and education that are so important.

That's really all I wanted to comment on, but I just want to say thank you very much to the minister for bringing this. As I say, I hope it's just a beginning of really good things for postsecondary education in this province.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll now recognize the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Dreshen: Thank you. I guess we were playing with fire a little bit with the outstanding Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, dressing up like each other. He was not in this Assembly when he was going to speak, so I stood up, so I guess there's a mishap on our part. I apologize for that, Madam Speaker.

I am proud today to rise in this House to speak on Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. Bill 19 seeks to cap increases to domestic student tuition and apprenticeship tuition based on a rate of Alberta's consumer price index. Individual program tuition can be raised by as much as 10 per cent as long as the across-the-board average tuition hike is not greater than the CPI.

Previously the minister had the discretion to dictate how much tuition could go up. Since the NDP has taken office, there's always been a tuition freeze. In the few years prior to that, depending on the year, there was either a freeze on tuition or it did go up by the rate of inflation. So there is already a precedent for the minister to act through ministerial order in adjusting tuition rates. However, I suppose the minister wanted to put this into legislation.

11:30

This bill also gives the minister power to make regulations on other matters in postsecondary education, including noninstructional fees and international student tuition. Furthermore, this bill also seeks to increase the representation of students on boards of governors by having two representatives at all institutions plus a third if the school has a graduate program. Previously schools such as Grant MacEwan University here in Edmonton and Mount Royal University in Calgary only had one student representative on their board of governors.

Madam Speaker, I know the struggles that university students face. I'm a little less removed from my postsecondary studies than some members of this House but not all. I took economics and political science at the University of Alberta here in Edmonton. I did try out for their Golden Bears football team but was not good enough to actually make the team. But I do understand the realities of balancing work and life at university.

Albertan students are hard-working. There is no denying that. I know many people who are pursuing higher education who have to work sometimes two part-time jobs just to cover the bills. Many have had extra costs in moving from different parts of the province to their postsecondary school, and many of them are unable to do much else besides study and work. They have put other commitments on hold as they work to create a better future for themselves.

That's part of what being an Albertan is all about, working hard to create opportunities for yourself in the future. Growing up on a farm, I spent many weekends travelling back and forth between Edmonton and central Alberta during seeding and harvest. Again, it was finding that work-life balance that was a great teacher and something that was a great opportunity in university. That's what university teaches us, to make those short-term sacrifices for long-term gains.

Madam Speaker, I commend our university students for putting in the work to get a higher education, and I believe that Bill 19 should help in these efforts. Of course, we need to look at economic opportunities available in Alberta for our youth. University students can't put in all this work if there are no job opportunities that exist after they graduate because then, really: was it worth it?

The NDP's misguided and disastrous economic policies have destroyed many of the opportunities in this province. They've raised the minimum wage. Due to raising the minimum wage, I've heard of lots of friends that have lost their jobs or their hours have been cut back, and it's punishing to people. When you look at the increased red tape pushing investment dollars out of Alberta, it's pushing those dollars to actual common-sense jurisdictions that actually recognize the importance and the value of job creators and the dignity of actually having a job. All of this has made it much harder for postsecondary students here in Alberta to find jobs when they actually graduate. The students that Bill 19 is going to help need to have the opportunity to succeed in the future.

Speaking of economic opportunities, as I said earlier, current postsecondary students often need to work to be able to cover their bills when they are in university. The issue is that the NDP has made it much more difficult to find part-time jobs that supplement their income. [interjection]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Dreeshen: The minimum wage hike has caused employers to, again, reduce hours for employees. Increased red tape has made it more difficult for people to find jobs. And the carbon tax, as was mentioned earlier, has raised costs for businesses, making it more difficult to hire workers and more difficult to give significant hours to employees. The reality is that the jobs that are affected by the NDP's poor government decisions are often the ones that would have been held by university students, the same students that Bill 19 is meant to help.

Madam Speaker, going back to the bill at hand, Bill 19 will seek to cap domestic student tuition at the rate of inflation. Given the struggles that postsecondary students are going through because of this government, as I mentioned, it's a good step that they are taking by limiting the increases to tuition. No student wants to enrol in an institution paying one amount in one year only to have their tuition increase in the second. It would be pretty unreasonable for students to stand by and have so much uncertainty about how much they're going to pay for their own education. Bill 19 will give students that predictability with their finances so that they know for sure how much their tuition is going to go up each year. Predictability and certainty are important.

On the international tuition topic, Bill 19 will give the minister power to make regulations around international student tuition. The indication from the minister is that he wants to give international students the ability to know exactly what their tuition is going to cost throughout their degree. This might improve our ability to attract international students, as we can give those potential students the certainty that their tuition won't be increasing throughout their studies. One less uncertainty for students, Madam Speaker. It's a common-sense proposal and is something that I personally support.

Bill 19 also gives the minister authority to create regulations around noninstructional fees such as athletic facility fees and transit fees. The minister has said previously that the regulations would include provisions that would give more transparency to these fees. I believe that would be a winning issue for all students. Institutions would not be able to hide these fees that they are charging to their students. Rather, they will need to be out in the open so that they would actually be accountable to the students that they are going to be charging the fees to.

These last two points are simple regulations that the minister has said he would implement. We won't be able to see these regulations before this Assembly, so our hope is that the minister gets this right. However, the NDP has gotten so much wrong since they were elected three and a half years ago that it's hard to see how they could actually get this right. From the Bill 6 fiasco, Madam Speaker, to the carbon tax, there have been so many bad policies that this government has introduced that it's hard to trust anything that they say. Just yesterday the government wasn't even able to correct the contradiction in their own budget around increases to the carbon tax. The policies that are coming from the minister seem to be promising, and if the minister does what he says, then that could result in a positive change for postsecondary students.

Bill 19 will also give additional representation on some boards of governors by having two student representatives on every board, as I mentioned earlier. Of course, many institutions already have two representatives, but some schools such as Grant MacEwan and Mount Royal only have one. This change was pushed for by student groups who wanted increased representation of students on postsecondary boards. I don't see any problem giving students a greater voice on the operations of a postsecondary institution. These students are the ones that are going to be most affected by the decisions of these boards, so it is important that their voices are heard.

Madam Speaker, I do wish the NDP would have cared as much about hearing farmers' voices when it came to Bill 6. I do think that Bill 6 will go down in history as the worst lack of consultation that this NDP government has actually ever done. It was purely based on their socialist NDP dogma. Not actually listening to farmers was a great travesty.

Madam Speaker, I do think that it's interesting how when you actually take the time to listen to Albertans – you actually take the time to listen to Albertans – and consult with them and consult with stakeholders, good legislation might actually follow. This is mostly the case with Bill 19, but it has not been the case with previous decisions by this government.

When I speak to my constituents, Madam Speaker, I actually listen to them, and that informs me as a legislator. I can tell you that my constituents are not happy with this current government. Maybe the government should have actually consulted with Albertans prior to when they introduced their carbon tax, especially when they failed to actually mention it during the last campaign. The carbon tax was one of the NDP's worst hidden agenda items, which we now are all bearing the cost of today.

Speaking of a carbon tax, Madam Speaker, I'm not sure if the NDP realizes how much postsecondary institutions are actually paying in carbon taxes. I wonder if the minister has actually asked postsecondary education institutions in Alberta how much they actually are paying in carbon taxes. The carbon tax is a disadvantage for Alberta families driving to work and heating their homes, it's a disadvantage to Alberta businesses competing around the world, and the carbon tax is a disadvantage to our postsecondary schools and even our local school boards.

The outstanding Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills was mentioning how hundreds of thousands of dollars in carbon tax is being paid by local school boards around the province, and that's coming out of buses. That comes out of things that students actually need. What this government actually, really, needs to understand is that every dollar that an institution spends on the carbon tax is one less dollar that they can spend on important student services.

11:40

There's no rebate available for postsecondary schools. They have to actually get that money from somewhere else, which is either from students or taxpayers, and most of the time that's just a student paying it twice. I would think that any form of comprehensive postsecondary legislation would include something to address the amount of money that institutions are forced to pay on the carbon tax, but I guess not. The government expects that Alberta postsecondary institutions just have to bear that extra cost. Unfortunately, the carbon tax is a cost that is borne by our colleges and universities and not by schools in other parts of Canada and the U.S. This is another ideological move by this government that makes our schools more uncompetitive when compared with other schools in other jurisdictions.

Madam Speaker, Bill 19 does a number of things well, though, and I think students will benefit from its implementation. However, if the NDP government really wanted to help students, they would repeal their carbon tax and get the economy back on track. I know that students obviously care about the rate of tuition and the affordability of going to school. As mentioned earlier, I was proud to use programs that were available to students going through postsecondary schooling, and because it is an important investment to further one's education, it should be available for everyone in Alberta. I think that truly represents the equality of opportunity, and it is very important for students in Alberta.

However, students are concerned about whether there will be jobs when they graduate, whether their degree will actually be worth

while, and whether they will be able to build a career here in Alberta. I don't want to see all of our recent graduates leave this province because there are no jobs available here in Alberta. Alberta taxpayers pay a significant amount of money to ensure that our institutions are of good quality. Let's not make it more difficult for our students to stay here and work. Let's actually cut taxes, reduce red tape, and bring back the prosperity that Alberta once had. I want to see the Alberta advantage back in Alberta so that the students that Bill 19 is intended to help are actually able to succeed here in Alberta.

Madam Speaker, Bill 19 has many good aspects to it. Capping tuition to the CPI will have a positive effect on Alberta students and their bottom line. Some of the regulations that the Minister of Advanced Education has spoken about will be good for both Alberta students and international students. I also want to commend the government – yes, actually commend the government – for actually listening to stakeholders and introducing legislation that actually helps Albertans. I would strongly encourage members of the government to continue to do that for the next few months.

While I support Bill 19, much more needs to be done to have long-lasting improvements for university students, which include cutting the carbon tax, reducing red tape, and bringing back the Alberta advantage so that students can actually succeed here in Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)? The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and respond to some of the comments that were recently made by the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. I listened with great interest, and it's quite clear that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake has been wearing his Make America Great Again hat way too tight and it's impacting his ability to share anything remotely resembling a fact in this Assembly.

I want to address a couple of things that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake brought forward, that claim that we're hurting students. First of all, one of the things that he said was apparently hurting students was the increase in the minimum wage. Now, I don't know – I'm not the son of a rich farmer, Madam Speaker – but I had to pay for my . . .

Mrs. Pitt: You know what? Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: On a point of order, the hon. Member for Airdrie.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mrs. Pitt: Madam Speaker, the Minister of Advanced Education is personally insulting other members in this House, and I'd ask him to withdraw and apologize to the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Under 23(h), (i), and (j).

The Acting Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would suggest that there was a lot of inflammatory language in this House in the past little while. I do recognize that it's been taken personally in many ways on both sides of the House, and we should change the tone in this matter. You know, again, I would hope that you would encourage all of us to change the tone, that really has been, I think, rather equivalent within the House this morning.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we were having a great morning. The tone was quite amicable, I believe. I will caution all members in this House that we refrain from engaging in what could be perceived as personal attacks. Recognizing there will be a dispute of the facts on both sides of this House about what is being said, let's keep the tone a little bit more respectful on both sides if we could, please.

Hon. minister, I would ask you to please withdraw the comment.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, let me rephrase. My parents did not have the significant financial means that other people had to support their children while they were in university, so I was in the position of having to work minimum wage jobs, as many students are to be able to pay for their education. Of course, I would have loved to have had a minimum wage of \$15 an hour when I was going to school, a time, I would remind everyone in this House, when Alberta actually saw a doubling of tuition.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. minister, can you please withdraw your comment? Although I appreciate you've changed the tone, I'd still ask you to withdraw.

Mr. Schmidt: I've completed my statement, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Minister, I've requested that you withdraw the statement.

Mr. Schmidt: Madam Speaker, I've completed my statement.

The Acting Speaker: Member, I will ask you again to withdraw the statement, or else you can please leave the House.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. I'd like to rise on a point of order.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising on a point of order under Standing Order 13(1), "The Speaker shall preserve order and decorum and decide questions of order," and Standing Order 13(2), "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision on the request of a Member."

My request to you, Madam Speaker, is to try to have an understanding as to why the options were given to the member to withdraw the statement or remove himself from the House. As you know and as other Speakers in this Assembly have ruled in this particular case, a member of the opposition was required to withdraw a statement, and when they failed to do so, they were in fact named by the Speaker, not just asked to remove themselves from the House.

I appreciate the position that you're in, Madam Speaker, as the Deputy Chair of Committees. You are rarely in the chair, and I don't want to put this on you in any way, shape, or form because the blame for the inaction of the minister lies solely with the minister.

My question to you is: why is it that a set of rules was applied to the opposition members when they refused to withdraw what were personal attacks and inappropriate statements, or perceived to be by the Speaker on that particular day, but today the member made clearly inappropriate statements, you asked him to withdraw them, yet – yet – he refused to do so and was allowed to remove himself from the House without apologizing to the member or without being named?

11:50

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I've made my decision. The minister will have an opportunity to apologize when he returns to the House. If not, I will discuss this with the Speaker.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to second reading?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

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

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Seeing as we have made great progress this morning, I would like to move that we adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:51 a.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers 1685

Orders of the Day 1685

Government Motions

 Morning Sitting Cancellation 1685

Government Bills and Orders

 Second Reading

 Bill 21 An Act to Protect Patients 1685

 Division 1690

 Bill 19 An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education 1690

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