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The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, November 7, 2018

Day 47

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Fourth Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, November 7, 2018

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. members, as we continue Veterans' Week, let us reflect on the military, police, firefighters, and paramedics who keep our Armed Forces safe both home and abroad, and let us also keep in mind the first responders in Sherwood Park, who have been working diligently to keep their community safe.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 19

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

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

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and move Bill 19 for third reading.

This bill represents a significant advance in protecting affordability for students as far as the cost of higher education goes and is also a significant advance in making sure that more Albertans get the opportunity to pursue the postsecondary education of their dreams.

You know, Madam Speaker, when our government was elected, we inherited an oil price in free fall, an economy that was going into one of the worst recessions in a couple of generations. Our government chose not to turn our backs on the people of Alberta and instead invest in the people of Alberta to make sure that they had the opportunities that they needed to continue to be successful and make their lives better, and that included the students of our province. So we continued to invest in every university and college by providing predictable and stable funding, and we continued to guarantee affordability for higher education by freezing tuition and fees at every university and college in the province so that every Alberta student had the opportunity to pursue an affordable higher education.

Madam Speaker, it's also important to know that the tuition freeze couldn't last, that we had to recognize that we needed a long-term plan for the sustainability of the cost of education for our students, and that's what's reflected in the bill that we are presenting for third reading this morning.

Madam Speaker, our government listens to Albertans. This bill is the result of extensive consultations with our stakeholder groups. We know how important this legislation is, so we ensured that the voices of our stakeholders were heard and respected. We consulted with postsecondary institutions, with student advocacy groups, and, most importantly, with the students themselves to ensure that their needs were met. I'm happy to report that the feedback from our stakeholders has been extremely positive, and they know that we're making improvements that will make postsecondary education more attainable for learners without sacrificing the high-quality education that Albertans expect from their universities and colleges.

This bill introduces important changes to keep postsecondary education affordable by creating checks and balances needed to

better control tuition and fees for domestic and for international students. While this bill does give the minister authority to set fees for apprentices, the institutions will continue to set fees for all other students, allowing them the flexibility and the ability to continue to provide high-quality programs for students. I want to repeat that there will remain a difference in treatment between tuition fees for apprentices and other postsecondary students. Apprenticeship fees are the same at every institution and are set by the minister. Bill 19 doesn't change that. However, this will place some restrictions on the minister's authority by requiring apprenticeship fees to align with other student tuition increases, namely through the consumer price index.

This bill also includes explicit parameters for mandatory noninstructional fees, which are fees that students pay in addition to their tuition. This bill ensures that public institutions must keep mandatory noninstructional fees at or below the cost to provide the goods or services for which the fee is set. These fees cannot be used as revenue generators for institutions. This bill also ensures that institutions must have written approval from student councils before they introduce a new mandatory noninstructional fee. This ensures that all students across our great province continue to have access to high-quality and affordable educational opportunities.

We're creating a system that is accountable and transparent not only for the students but for all Albertans. We've listened to our postsecondary partners. We're continuing to ensure that the needs of our postsecondary partners are heard and respected. That's why this bill strengthens the collaboration between sectors and ensures that research across the province is co-ordinated and aligned with the Alberta research and innovation framework.

We've also told our postsecondary partners that our intention is to provide them with backfill funding while we continue our tuition freeze for a fifth year. This will offset the cost of the tuition freeze for those institutions. We know how important stable and predictable funding is. Our government, as I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, restored funding to institutions, and we've provided 2 per cent operating grant increases every year since 2015.

Our postsecondary institutions are highly regarded and respected across the country. The many changes in Bill 19 will ensure that the quality of postsecondary education in Alberta remains extremely high.

I'm proud of this bill and what it represents to all of our stakeholders. I know that it will serve our stakeholders and our province well. This proposed bill continues our government's commitment to the students of our province, a commitment that we've upheld during our government's mandate. Bill 19 will ensure that affordable postsecondary education is accessible for every Albertan. The initiatives in this bill will create a postsecondary system that continues to provide learners with the skills that they need to succeed in Alberta's diversifying economy.

I look forward to the rest of the debate at third reading of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the bill, Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. I will say that I am in support of the bill. I think it's an important bill, one that needed to happen although there are some challenges.

I think there are a few things that, just for the sake of government and for the sake of Alberta, we should address a little bit in this conversation although I am sure that students are happy with the bill. I know that some of them have been consulted, and I think the stability that it will create for students is definitely going to be a

valuable thing, and it allows them to plan. It allows them to figure out how they're going to get their finances in order. I think it will be helpful to them in that regard.

I do think the tuition freeze of 2015 was a concern. Any time you have a radical departure from policy in government, it creates challenges for one group or another, so I think resolving that and figuring out a reasonable rate of return for the colleges and costs for the students is something that's important.

I understand that student bodies were pushing for a cap that was tied to the consumer price index, so I think that they should be happy and satisfied with that. I do have some concerns about the consumer price index, though, and how it might impact Alberta. It hasn't always been stable and low as it's been the last few years. There have been times where it's been very challenging.

There are also economists who question the validity of the CPI, the way it's calculated. The way it's calculated has changed over the years. My concern also with that is partly that the reality is that we're tying our Alberta tuition and university funding to a figure that is set federally. Quite clearly, it's set for federal policy benefit, not necessarily Alberta policy benefit. The way it gets calculated gets tweaked at different times throughout its history. There are some who claim that the federal government deliberately keeps it a little bit low because that suits their own personal position. I'm not sure that it's a perfect measure, but it's something we'll have to watch, something that we'll have to continue to monitor as we move forward in Alberta here because, quite frankly, I think we need to make our own decisions and not be tied in everything to the federal government.

But I think it will, as I said, provide predictability, and it does provide at least a framework that the institutions can work with, a framework that gives them important predictability. As in every business – and universities are also a business besides an educational institution – the costs are sometimes not nearly as significant as the reliability or the predictability of them and the policy framework in which they exist. So this is good.

9:10

The reality is that many students have to pay for their own education. They have to work very hard to get a postsecondary education, sometimes two jobs. We often hear that. People who have succeeded and who give inspirational challenges often tell their stories about how hard they had to work. It's no different here in Alberta. To get a postsecondary education, for the majority of people, is a huge challenge. I know it was for me. I had to earn every cent of it, and many, many students are in the same situation. The thing that scares me a little bit, though, is the escalating cost of that tuition, that has to be earned. I've always sort of thought that way back in the late '70s, when I started my education, it somehow seemed easier than it appears to be today.

I tried to do a little bit of research on that, and I think there are some extremely interesting numbers that arise. Unfortunately, I don't have detailed numbers for Canada. I do have some American numbers, and I think the entire western world is facing this escalating challenge. For instance, in 1971 the cost of a public college education in the U.S. was \$8,700. In 2016 it was almost \$21,000. Now, here's the important part. If you compare that to median income and put it into a ratio, it's almost scary. I have it here for both women and for men, and it's different but in different ways. In 1971 the average cost of a college education was 58 per cent of the annual median income; 58 per cent in '71. By 2016 that same ratio had jumped to 80 per cent. So we have an over 20 per cent ratio increase for women. This is a huge increase for them. For men, as I said, the numbers are slightly different. In 1971 the average college cost divided by the median income was only 20 per

cent. By 2016 that 20 per cent had jumped to 51 per cent; over a 31 per cent increase in costs.

When I went to college, you could go to work in the summertime. You could get a job. For me it was either construction or tree planting, actually. Did that for a summer, fighting mosquitoes and mud. You could go to work for the summer, and you could come out at the end of summer. There were jobs available, and you would have enough money for the next year to get through school. Now that is almost impossible.

I think this is a trend across the western world. When you have these kinds of escalating increases – 80 per cent of average income for women, 51 per cent for men, with a 20 per cent increase and a 30 per cent plus increase – these are challenging numbers for our educational realities. We need to take into account the economics of this for students. Students really do need the opportunity to earn the money that it will take to pay for their education.

I do have some numbers for Canada in terms of debt financing, and it tells much the same story. Student loans for Canada in the various ratios, by the time you're done, whether it's \$5,000 or \$5,000 to \$10,000 or \$10,000 to \$15,000 or over \$15,000, have increased. For those who have over \$15,000 in student loans, just from '91 to more recently – I don't even have the number here, but it's more than tripled. The size of student loans is increasing dramatically. We have a real problem here where both the tuition-to-income ratio and the size of student loans are increasing at a rapid pace. It is important that these kinds of issues are addressed and fixed and somehow looked at by government.

Capping tuition rates for students I think is one potential solution, one step, but there's a much bigger puzzle than that, a much bigger challenge for us. It has to do with the fact that students need jobs, and we need good-paying jobs. We need the kinds of jobs that make it possible for a student to earn enough to actually pay their way through education and not come out with massive, multiple years' worth of debt to have to try and address. To me, that would be extremely depressing. I don't believe in personal debt. I don't believe in government debt except in rare situations. I just think it's a huge risk for us to cause the young people of our day to start out their life with a net debt situation in terms of their own personal finances, their family, their ability to provide for children, to buy a house, to even have a car to go to work. I think that these are challenging issues that government needs to address.

As I said, years ago you could get a job in the summertime, and you could earn enough to pay your way. Now you may not even get a job in Alberta in the last few years. Some of this, quite frankly, is the cause of macro government policy. It's not just the price of oil. I mean, you look at other jurisdictions, and they're booming. I just noticed yesterday that in the U.S. the leading market index is actually oil and gas extraction. Their economy is booming. Young people are getting jobs in those industries. They can't even hire enough people. Here we don't have any jobs to offer them. So macro government policy in terms of the economy actually has a huge impact on the accessibility and affordability of education, which is what this bill is about.

I note that if you take a look back through history, the glorious times of education in any society in history are those times where they were economically prosperous. One of the benefits of economic prosperity is the need to not have to work so much of your life, which grants you the freedom to engage in not just education but also the arts and culture. When economies are struggling and poor, people don't have those luxuries of both education and the arts and culture and all of those things. So I think it's extremely important that we do maintain in Alberta a vibrant economy, a growing opportunity for employment, and not just the kinds of jobs that cause students to struggle through but, hopefully,

the kinds of jobs where over four months of the summer they could actually earn enough to pay for the next year's education. Unfortunately, in Alberta in recent decades the only place where you could really do that, for the most part, was in the oil and gas industry, earn that kind of money.

Now we have a government that's put a cap on much of our oil industry. We have a government that too often has tried to shame our oil industry, drive it out of our province, drive it into the U.S. We've seen a number of companies leave just recently, this week, take all of their investments and move them into the U.S. We are building the education of U.S. students and leaving our own students strapped for income and the opportunity to succeed and to get ahead. I think this is a part of the big picture that is a huge challenge for us. It's a problem.

I'm pleased in one regard, that there's some stability and that there will be some ongoing framework there for both students and the universities. I think that while the cap for international students is good for international students, we need to make sure that it's presented in a way that actually invites international students in because they do a lot to fund our educational institutions. We don't want to create a situation in Alberta where we lose the economic benefits of international students. They bring a great benefit to our province. As I said before, many of them stay and become great contributors to our culture, to our economy, to our industry, and to innovation. They bring fresh ideas, and that mix of international ideas being brought to us is part of what we need in Alberta to make us prosperous and to make us successful.

I am a little disheartened that it took three and a half years to get this tuition review done. I think it was an important, urgent issue that probably should have been done earlier than that.

I think we also need to take a much broader look at the other policies that affect the whole picture of the massive rising increase of university education and the decline of our economic strength, of our economic vitality, because these policies can affect the whole province and, in the end, affect how we go about creating a context where a university education is entirely possible for students.

9:20

When we cripple our economy, university education as well as students suffer. There are now 184,000 unemployed Albertans, 40,000 more than before this government took office, in 2015. We need to make sure we get people back to work, not just in low-paying jobs but good-paying jobs, the kinds of jobs that can pay for a university education. That's what students are dealing with. Those are the things that we really need to be thinking about and the things that we need to continue to address on sort of a macro level.

I'd also like to say on sort of the broad picture of things that I think we need to encourage our universities, which are educational institutions but are also businesses, to really focus on the business side of their model. We have universities that teach business education. We have some of the brightest business minds in our universities. So I think we need to encourage the universities as well to also look at ways that they can adopt lean business models. Every other business in the province has had to do that.

I would encourage them to wrestle a little bit more with how they build endowments. I know all the big universities in the U.S. have massive endowments. In many cases they're able to fund tuition. Stanford University, I think, has gone away from tuition altogether because they have the endowments, so they just endow every student. For them, it's about grades. If you have the grades, you make it into the university. We need to encourage them to build those endowments, and I know that's been a challenge in Canada. Canadians need to be more generous, I think. We should endow our

universities so that they're not struggling and hampered so that they can be world class.

I'd also encourage that government should try and find ways to incent universities to be innovative and business class, basically, to be innovative in terms of revenue and find value-added means. Businesses have to do this all the time. There are some ways I think they could build additional revenue through the sale of product, leasing of physical assets – I mean, they hold immense assets in many cases – consulting, and speaking. I'm just saying that we need to encourage them to model best business practices in every way possible so that they can offer their students an absolute premium university. Quite frankly, students looking for a university are sort of like shopping for a car. Everybody wants the Lamborghini but can probably afford the Volkswagen. It's a challenge to try and find a price point that provides us with what we need.

These are some of the broader challenges, I think, facing universities. I also question a little bit – and this isn't my idea; I read quite a bit in different areas – the trend of universal four-year degrees. It used to be three. In Britain it still mostly is three unless you do an honours four-year extra program. You know, you could cut student tuition by 25 per cent immediately if we would grant a three-year degree instead of a four. My point with that is that I don't think every student necessarily should take a university degree and especially not a four-year degree. I think that a more basic education – I think it's what they call a basic degree in Britain – for many students will serve well. It will help keep them out of debt, and it's an immediate 25 per cent cost to the tuition of a bachelor's degree.

The push for a four-year degree in some respects is driven by a revenue drive by universities wanting more money out of students, and I think it's something that needs to be challenged and questioned because not everybody actually benefits from a university degree. It's not a guarantee of a job, and when we sell it for that, in some ways we're deceiving students who go into debt to get a degree that then does not serve them well.

I guess my point is that we need to be a little bit more careful about the appropriateness of education for each student and where the best value is. I understand that university degrees generally make more income and that there's a whole scale of that. All of that I totally understand and agree with, but it's not the right choice for every student.

I was just reading here yesterday, in fact, an Edmonton Food Bank report, 2018 Beyond Food: Revisited. I was shocked to read that actually 48 per cent, almost half, of food bank recipients in Edmonton, have a postsecondary education of some kind or other. There's only one of two things going wrong here when half of our food bank recipients have a postsecondary education of some level. Either the economy needs to be improved, or the education isn't focused in a way that provides them the opportunity to get what they need in order to hold a job, in order to advance their own personal lives and careers, in order for them to provide for their families. There is a need, I think, to refocus some of our university training.

Now, I totally, totally agree that esoteric academics does have its place. We do need very, very technical and scientific and focused people in our society for sure, but it's not beneficial for everyone. I think working more toward helping students find the right education for them, that will truly serve them well, so that we don't have all these postsecondary graduates who cannot get a job, having to go to food banks – that's a tragedy when they're carrying debt for education already. I think we need to focus as well on the suitability of the education that we're offering to students.

Those are just a couple of insights and a couple of remarks that I would like to make. Thank you.

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

Connolly: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. Now, I listened very closely to the comments from the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, and quite frankly I find it astounding that his main idea for lowering tuition fees and to keep students out of debt is to have students stop going to university altogether. Usually when I meet with students, I tell them how important it is to get an education. But, you know, I guess that's just the difference between the NDP and the UCP.

Frankly, bills like this are why I entered politics and put my name forward in 2015. Before I was elected, I was a student, and I'm really proud of that. Governments need to have a diversity of views. Making sure that students' voices are heard in this Legislature is incredibly important because it brings about decisions and bills like this.

Before I was elected, I was working minimum wage jobs, full-time in the summer, part-time during school. On top of volunteering, on top of my studies, and on top of extracurriculars, I needed a part-time job so that I could afford to study. On top of that, I had to take out loans because even then it didn't cover my expenses. Now, my parents aren't rich – in fact, I'm making more in this job now than anyone in my family has ever made – so it wasn't always easy. The vast majority of students I studied with and who are studying now in Alberta cannot afford to get a degree without taking out massive loans.

I'm incredibly disappointed that the opposition will not be supporting this bill. However, I'm not surprised.

Mr. Orr: We are supporting this bill.

Connolly: Oh. They're finally supporting the bill. That's good to hear. The last I heard, the large majority weren't supporting.

But I'm surprised because any time we put forward legislation that sets out to help students, to help LGBTQ youth, to help women, the opposition seems to sit on their hands or to leave the room entirely. So I'm very glad to see that you're all here and debating today. But if the opposition really wanted to help students, they would have talked to them to begin with and put forward this bill when they had the chance, when they were in government.

Now, the UCP has really shown who they are, and it's time for Albertans to see them. The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills said that if they get into government, quote, it's going to hurt. It's obvious to me that some members of this Assembly ran to help Albertans and others ran to hurt them. Voting for this bill will help Albertans, and that's why I'm supporting it. Students deserve affordable high-quality learning opportunities.

For decades whenever there was a drop in oil, Conservatives used students and postsecondary institutions as scapegoats, cutting their programs at every chance they got. My friends were attending Mount Royal when the previous government cut the programs they were in. They didn't even know if they were going to be able to finish their degrees because the former government had absolutely no plan whatsoever to help those students.

I'm sick and tired of Conservatives saying that they care about students because their record shows the exact opposite. They have absolutely no plan to help students. If they were in government today, they would have cut advanced education like they always have. If they were in government, our tuition fees would be sky-high, with multiple market modifiers and no plan to fix the problems that this bill finally fixes.

9:30

If the members opposite finally got off their seats and talked to students, they would know why this bill is important. They would know why this bill has been needed for decades. But the Leader of the Opposition stated that he has no intention to consult with anyone if, God forbid, he's elected Premier, because he doesn't want to get bogged down.

If they had spoken to students, they would have heard from people like Andrew Bieman, chair of the Council of Alberta University Students, who said:

We have been asking for these changes for a long time, and we're happy to see the government addressing students' concerns regarding the costs of tuition. We're looking forward to legislative changes that help support students in the long run, as students are the largest stakeholders in the post-secondary system, and it's encouraging to know that our voices matter.

Basically, Madam Speaker, the UCP have been showing, time and time again, their true colours. They're not in this Chamber to help students. They're not here to help anyone that may be struggling. They're here to help their rich friends in the top 1 per cent. They're here to give tax breaks to the rich and hurt everyday Albertans.

Our government will continue to work to improve the lives of every Albertan. We will make sure that students have access to mental health supports. We will make sure that Alberta's students can afford to go to school. We will make sure that Alberta students have what they need to succeed in Alberta, because without an educated workforce, our province is doomed to fail. But it seems that our province's failure is exactly what the UCP has been cheering for.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It was interesting listening to the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood talk and go on his rant, I guess, on the UCP. Now, he suggested that the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka was discouraging people from going into postsecondary education. Maybe he should have been listening more carefully, because that definitely was not the case. He also suggested that we weren't supporting the bill. Of course, maybe he needs to attend the House a little more and pay attention to what's going on here, because I don't remember the members saying anything of the sort. He also said that this bill should have been done a long time ago. We even heard the minister speak here just yesterday, talking about how we had the highest tuition in Canada. Of course, that's not true either. We had some of the lowest tuition in Canada, way below the national average.

One thing I think the government fails to realize and that the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood maybe needs to realize is that this government has raised costs to universities. They brought in a carbon tax, that has cost universities and colleges millions of dollars. This carbon tax has cost students money, too. It's cost them money to travel. It's cost them money for heating the places that they live. All these costs have been increased due to this government here.

We have the highest unemployment and the highest youth unemployment. How are students going to support themselves in college and university when this government has done nothing to support them getting jobs? Madam Speaker, I think it's pretty rich for the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood to get up and go on this rant on the opposition here when they have done nothing to help the students in Alberta.

There are lots of different things that this government has done that are not very helpful at all to students. In fact, I actually had a member's statement yesterday, where I talked about all the different things this government is saying that are just not true. Then the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood gets up and reiterates the same things. Now, I wish that the member opposite would take a little more time and maybe think of what their government's actions have done and what their inaction has done, too, to unemployment, to the cost of living for everyday Albertans. They talk about the tax breaks. Madam Speaker, they've raised taxes on every single Albertan, from the top income to the bottom income.

I think it's pretty rich to have the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood get up and speak like he just has, railing on the opposition, when we've been supporting Albertans every step of the way. We've been fighting with this government as far as the damage that they've been doing, and we will continue to fight this government on the damage that they're doing. When they come up with something good, we'll support it. We will. We'll try to make it better.

I think there are a lot of things that could have been done with this bill as far as some more consultation. They say that they've done all this consultation, but they don't have the regulations in place yet. They don't have the guidelines in place yet. I think colleges and universities in Alberta are worried about that. I think they're worried about what the government is going to come up with as guidelines and regulations for this bill.

Obviously, some more time could have been taken as far as having the opportunity for these colleges and universities to look at what the guidelines and regulations are going to be so they know how it'll affect them. There's lots of opportunity for that. We could have sent this to committee and had a little bit more time for input. It still could have been passed in this legislative session, but we could have had just that little bit more information that the colleges and universities could have used so that they could make a decision on whether they would like to support this or not. Obviously, without all that information, how are they going to know what they're getting with this bill?

I think there are a lot of different things here, Madam Speaker, that this government could do. Again, if we'd had this input from these people – we could have had students come in and talk about this. We could have had the colleges and universities come in and talk about this, and had they known what the regulations and guidelines would be, they would have had that opportunity to have that input, and we would have been able to have that input, too, so that they would know what they're doing and what's going to happen with this bill and how it's going to affect them.

I'll leave it at that. I appreciate the time.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. Education is one of the pillars of our society, and it's through education that we make our province competitive with other jurisdictions, we create a more active community in regard to actions like voting and donating, and we innovate and stimulate the economy.

Everyone here values education, and it's disappointing when you hear members from the government side being so arrogant as to assume that they are the only defenders of education, that they're the only ones that believe in postsecondary education. I guarantee that everyone in this room believes in education, especially on this side of the House.

Let's move on with this. You know what? Education is not just about what you learn from your professors or read from your textbooks. Postsecondary education helps us to develop essential skills such as time management, interpersonal skills, critical thinking, unless you're enrolled at Wilfrid Laurier. But other than that, most schools do try to teach some critical thinking. These skills are absolutely critical if we are to remain competitive and grow as a society. Certainly, there are lots of studies that talk about the benefits of postsecondary education in regard to job prospects. Those with postsecondary education have a higher employment rate, they make more money, and they enjoy longer term careers.

Postsecondary education has benefited me greatly, Madam Speaker. I might not have a university degree like some of the folks in this room, but I went to technical school. I went to NAIT and also AVC, Alberta Vocational College, in Lac La Biche to get my EMT and then my paramedic at NAIT. When I got on with the fire department in Fort McMurray, I got the pleasure of going into a more technical program, the firefighting program at Vermilion college, and that was a good experience. So I had a very interestingly diverse education that was more on the technical side.

But in order for me to proceed in my career, to grow as a firefighter paramedic, Madam Speaker, I started taking courses at our local community college, Keyano College, up in Fort McMurray. I took a class a semester, working my way towards my business admin certificate. My hope was to get, like, a diploma or a degree in it. I tell you what. That program alone put me ahead of all my co-workers, so when there was a position available in the management ranks, I was able to procure that job by applying. Definitely, my abilities on the floor really helped. I went into administration, and it was thanks to that business administration certificate. I believe that really helped me stand apart.

9:40

But the flip side to that, Madam Speaker – well, let me first talk about that. Going into the management side was great, administration. I was running EMS for an entire region. It was a time when I was developing a lot of the stuff for our own protocols and that. It was a time when Alberta Health Services came and took over everything. It was a time of great grief because even my boss, my fire chief, came up to me and said: how do you like answering to two masters? I had Alberta Health Services on one side and the mayor and council on the other, that I had to address, and it was very difficult because sometimes there were conflicting issues in there. It was a pain in the butt, quite honestly. But I digress.

I enjoyed the job in the administration, and then education helped me get to that side, but my lack of education also created that glass ceiling, and I couldn't climb any higher. Even though I had the smarts and I had the work ethic and I knew our industry, any applications I had to a more senior position weren't being considered.

I remember going in to ask my chief: "You know, what do I have to do? Where am I at here? Like, I'm stuck in this position. I'm not enjoying it. I have to deal with Alberta Health Services. Like, I want to get into a higher position." He said, "Come into my office." The chief walks me into his office. On his desk I remember there was a stack of papers, and he takes a handful of them and throws them on the table in his office there. "Tany, take a look at those." You know how the pile hits that table and just slides right across, right? I just start randomly picking them. They were all resumés for the positions that I was applying for. He said, "Look; keep looking." I started looking at all these resumés. Every one of them had a degree or a master's degree, a higher level of education than I had.

Even though I had things like project management, which was another separate course, and the business admin and a couple of

other things, classes and officer courses, it still wasn't enough, so I was restrained by the amount of education that I had. It was shortly thereafter that I realized that I needed to reconsider where I was at and consider getting that postsecondary education.

I guarantee, people across the way, that there are people over here that understand the real repercussions of not having an education and having an education. The arrogance that I see that comes from across the way is just really ridiculous and rhetorical. I know you're playing the politics game, but, you know, it is arrogant, and it is sad. Let's be clear. [interjections] Sorry. What was that?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Sorry. One of your folks from the government side was beaking off there. I was curious as to what he was saying.

The Deputy Speaker: Please continue.

Mr. Yao: Anyways . . . [interjections] Say again?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members.

Please continue, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Sorry. They're just heckling over there.

Anyways, we do understand the need to ensure that education is sustainable. That's the issue, that all of our expenses are increasing. The expenses on the schools are increasing. You threw a carbon tax on them, that they have to absorb, and they need an ability to pay for all these things. Again, we would love to have a school system that definitely didn't have financial barriers, but unfortunately that is a fact of life here because we need to pay those professors, we need to pay for those heating bills in those schools, and we need to build that infrastructure. There's only so much that you can take from Albertans, who are paying so much in taxes. So recognize that we do understand this.

You know, I was fortunate enough to talk to a student in my constituency about their experience with postsecondary institutions. The student was disappointed with the freezes because his experience was that when fees were frozen previously, he got hit with his parking and his other annual fees. Book prices went up, textbooks. They were things that they were having problems navigating, okay? He wasn't a rich guy. He had to work full-time while he attended university as, again, he wasn't wealthy. He didn't have parents that could sponsor him for his tuition. So he only took about five to six classes a semester as well as working 35 hours a week just to stay afloat. We certainly recognize where individuals like this need predictability and stability in order to budget. Living paycheque to paycheque isn't a great way to live.

Now, I'm not saying that all students have to work while they're in school, but it's sometimes a necessity. That said, they do gain valuable skills albeit they're not partying all the time. They have to work and sleep and eat and study. Those are the ones that learn the true value of their education and a dollar spent, unlike some others who get everything on a platter, I suppose. We understand that student groups have been pushing for stability in education. They simply just want to know what they're going to be paying for tuition year after year, and we certainly understand their concerns around that.

Yes, you know, one of the things that certainly impairs a lot of these guys is the taxation. Even the carbon tax makes everything more expensive. Again, the institutions are saying that the prices rise on everything, whether it's their energy bills, their construction bills to build a new annex. It just goes on and on. I'm just curious as to why this government hasn't exempted postsecondary institutions and even our health institutions, I might add, from the

carbon tax. Better yet, you should just remove it entirely because, in the end, it's just a tax, isn't it?

One point I'm pleased about with this bill is that I'm glad to see that the regulations do try to include noninstructional fees so that some of these things that students have faced previously won't hurt them as much, like increases to parking and whatnot. My constituent had mentioned to me that the institution he was attending did try to pick up costs by raising all those nontuition fees. He told me that parking costs doubled, some of his book fees increased, and it was very tough.

Madam Speaker, there is another concern about this bill, and it is the regulatory authority over noninstructional fees and other things. It seems this minister might be trying to take control of a lot of the process. We do have to recognize that a lot of these agencies need to follow some sort of due process, but part of the due process is also making sure that they're financially viable, and by putting restrictions on a lot of the things that these universities can do, it could impair them. We can only hope that the good minister has the decency to try consulting with them when he's making a lot of his decisions. They certainly haven't demonstrated a lot of consultation on other bills.

9:50

That said, Madam Speaker, I do stand here today in favour of Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Postsecondary Education. At the heart of this bill I believe his intent is good, and we understand that. The benefit, again, of more predictable financing for students' tuition fees is greatly desired, but again we have to balance that with making sure that universities have the ability to be fiscally responsible and to spend within their means. To that effect, I would ask the minister: what are his conversations with these schools? Do they have ways of reducing some of their costs? I wonder if these professors are all collectively willing to take a bit of a drop. I have students that complain about their professors that work a day a year. I don't know if that's an exaggeration or not, but they don't see them around. It makes me wonder if they'd be willing to pitch in for the collective good. Who can say for certain?

To this bill, Madam Speaker, I do understand the intent, and I recognize that they want to try to get some stability there. I certainly recognize that. Let's see where we go from here.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for taking some time and commenting on this bill. I thought it was interesting, his talking about his real-life experience with the education that he had and how he chose to extend it and go back to a postsecondary institution to expand his education. I think it's good to have those real-life experience stories, you know, to encourage the youth in Alberta today to look at other options as far as education and what they can be doing.

I also want to thank the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for his service as a first responder, which, of course, is what he went back to school for, to improve his education. I think that's definitely something that can be lauded and respected. Of course, we rely so much on our first responders all across Alberta. We've been talking about first responders in some of the bills that we've been discussing in the Legislature already and the importance of having our first responders, our volunteer firefighters, and things like that, especially in the small communities in Alberta.

I thought it was interesting, too, his comments on the carbon tax, how it affects the costs of universities and colleges and how that money could be so much better spent on the actual education rather than on a tax, and also on the cost of that carbon tax on students and how it affects them and their living expenses, in particular students that travel from outside the centres to the colleges and universities, students from rural Alberta. Some of the biggest costs of an education are those living expenses and travel expenses. Of course, those living expenses and travel expenses are all affected heavily by the carbon tax.

He also talked about the importance of universities, you know, being sustainable, being able to have the income and the expenses balanced so that they can actually provide the proper education for students, which they need to do, which is their job to do. Universities and colleges: I think one of the things that they're always after is predictability in their funding and their income and expenses so that they can make decisions on where they spend that money and how they serve the students. I think that one of the most important things that we can do for colleges and universities is to come up with something that's predictable both on the income and on the expenses side so that they know how much money they have and what they can spend it on.

Like I said, I enjoyed listening to the member's speech. By giving that real-life experience, I think that was a good opportunity for people to listen and to understand the importance of postsecondary education.

I did want to go back to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka and some of his comments. Of course, we didn't have the opportunity to ask him questions on what he said, but I thought it was interesting how he talked about the consumer price index. It seems simple to just add in . . .

Mr. Westhead: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order, hon. member.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe that under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the intent is to comment on the comments of the speaker, not someone who has spoken in the past. I would just like to ask the member to focus his comments on the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone wish to respond to the point of order?

Mrs. Pitt: Yes, Madam Speaker. The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky was simply stating that some of the comments from the previous speaker and then the speaker he was referring to are relative to this conversation and some of the comments from the original speaker, from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I can assure you that if you allow the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky just a little bit more time, you'll see that this will make its way around to a fulsome conversation that will be understood by all members.

The Deputy Speaker: I will agree. I was actually giving you a little time to see where you were going with that, but I was at the point of cautioning you, Member, that you were drifting into an area that wasn't going to be appropriate for the intent of Standing Order 29(2)(a). Again, please confine your remarks to the previous speaker, as is intended by this particular provision of the standing orders.

Go ahead.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that leeway there.

Debate Continued

Mr. Loewen: I was talking about the consumer price index and, of course, how it's calculated and how it could be politically manipulated or adjusted for political reasons. What that does and how that leads back to what we're talking about is that the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo talked about the importance of universities being sustainable and being able to know what their costs are and what their income is and being able to make sure that they had a balance so that they could continue providing the education that they should. This idea of the adjustment of the consumer price index: the idea of having it tied to that is maybe a good idea. Maybe it's the best idea. I don't know. What it does do is allow for a little bit of adjustment there, and maybe the colleges and universities may not know from one year to the next what's happening as far as that's concerned. I think that's the segue that I was using to bring that back into this discussion.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak in support of Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. Our government is dedicated to fair legislation that improves the lives of every Albertan, including the many postsecondary students in Alberta.

In 2015 our government, which I'm very proud to be a part of, committed to stable and predictable funding for postsecondary institutions. Madam Speaker, because this government has frozen tuition at 2014-2015 levels, the average undergraduate degree program tuition in Alberta is more affordable, something I hear every time I walk through the halls of Red Deer College. Because of our government's foresight and actions, tuition in Alberta is now the fourth-lowest average tuition in the country, something I'm very proud of.

Bill 19 proposes a number of updates to the Post-secondary Learning Act that will set our province's postsecondary learning system up for continued success. This bill creates the checks and balances needed to better control tuition and fees for domestic and international students. By tying tuition to the consumer price index, it ensures that tuition costs remain affordable and do not spike for domestic students and apprentices. That means that here in Alberta the average tuition costs at each institution cannot increase more than the consumer price index and that each program is capped by a 10 per cent increase per year.

10:00

This government is also updating the act to give the Minister of Advanced Education the authority to order future tuition and fee freezes so that the government can keep the costs of postsecondary education affordable in the face of an unexpected economic downturn.

Furthermore, Bill 19 will provide the regulatory authority needed to implement the new tuition framework. It will deliver on our promise of affordable and predictable postsecondary costs for domestic and international students. Bill 19 is also capping mandatory noninstructional fees, or MNIFs. These fees are often used for things like health services, athletics, sexual assault centres, et cetera, and have been a point of contention that was mentioned repeatedly in the consultations carried out by this government. Bill 19 is also capping the apprenticeship tuition, the same as the

capping of postsecondary tuition, so the increase cannot exceed the CPI.

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

Madam Speaker, this bill will also be modernizing and reorganizing the postsecondary system to create increased access for learners across Alberta. Since this government was elected in 2015, requests by many institutions asking for the government to grant approvals that would allow institutions to facilitate student success poured in. To ensure that students across our great province have access to high-quality educational opportunities, Red Deer College and Grande Prairie Regional College can pursue degree granting, and both institutes are on the path to university status, something that the people of central Alberta and the Grand Prairie region have been asking for for years. I hear about degree-granting status at RDC on almost a daily basis, and people of central Alberta are absolutely thrilled that their kids won't have to leave home to get their degree. This legislation will formalize this change and will ensure that the postsecondary system continues to adapt to serve the needs of students and communities in the province.

Madam Speaker, Bill 19 demonstrates this government's commitment to improving the lives of learners in our province so that they can achieve their educational goals, get good jobs, and contribute towards our province's diversifying economy. Albertans deserve a postsecondary system that provides high-quality education that is affordable and accessible, and this bill delivers on that promise. I encourage everyone in the House to vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Absolutely. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I really appreciated hearing the comments of my colleague from Red Deer. I understand that this bill is indeed a very important step forward for the work that's being done through Red Deer College and now its opportunity to work towards becoming a university. I know I've had the chance to speak to students who've been part of the programs there. They have had some challenges at Red Deer College. I know that, unfortunately, they had to let go of their well-respected music program. I remember speaking with a number of students and indeed some of the faculty that were involved in the program at that time about the challenges they were facing there.

It's fantastic to see that now they have this opportunity to transition and that the city of Red Deer, as it continues to grow, is now, through this bill, going to be able to have a full degree-granting university over time, that we're going to be able to work towards that. I appreciated the comments that the member made there, and I was thinking that perhaps she would have a bit more to share on that.

As well, I thought the member might also have some good perspective here in that, you know, she has long been an Albertan. I believe you've raised children here in the province, and indeed I imagine you have grandchildren here in the province. Of course, they've taken advantage of the postsecondary system. I imagine the member might have some good reflection on her own experiences

coming through a postsecondary education institution, the experiences of her children, and the type of future that this bill is going to provide then for some of her grandchildren as they go through that same system. Perhaps the member would have some thoughts on that.

The Deputy Speaker: Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you very much. I myself attended the U of A, Grant MacEwan, and I also did distance learning. The reason I ended up with my education going to Grant MacEwan College rather than continuing at the university was the costs. I've talked to many students at RDC that had moved or were planning to move from the U of A or the U of C to get their studies at RDC and places like Grant MacEwan because the tuition costs were so much lower.

I've got a granddaughter who wants to be a teacher, and I know that the cost of tuition will be a concern for her mother. Anything we can do to keep it more affordable and keep our kids closer to home so they don't have to have the extra expenses of dorm fees and meal plans and travel, the better. I am so proud of this bill, and I am so proud of the work that our minister has done on this.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to rise to speak to Bill 19. It's clear, and it may be contrary to the comments from the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, whose speech writer was both out of tune and out of date on some of the sentiments on this side of the House. I rise to speak in support of Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education, in Alberta.

Madam Speaker, I have three children, and many of our members on this side have children and grandchildren in the postsecondary system now, and if not, they're anticipating their moves to seek postsecondary education of one sort or another. So I'm in the middle of it. I have children that are well along in their postsecondary education, some that are pondering it, and I'm fully aware of the costs of education and some of the concerns that we all as Albertans, I think, have about the affordability of postsecondary education for our children, for the next generation, for the students of today and the leaders of tomorrow.

Madam Speaker, I hear about it from within my household; I hear about it on my board. I have five members of my board between the ages of 18 and 22. I have a further five or six members of my board between the ages of 22 and 28. Some of them probably are still paying off student loans and moving forward in their careers. I hear it from them, and I hear it from my constituents all the time, the concerns, not just the concerns but the hopes and dreams they have to pursue an education in one field or another so that they can have a future, a bright future, and have those opportunities which we've heard about from the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, where he faced barriers because of educational disadvantages versus other candidates and jobs that he was looking at.

Madam Speaker, I'm quite happy today as well that I'll be speaking to some representatives from CAUS to hear their concerns and their input on some of these issues about affordability and tuition and some of the other items and issues that are addressed by this bill, I think many in a positive manner. But I think they only go part of the way in dealing with this. We're now freezing tuitions and controlling the increase in tuitions with the consumer price

index, which I think is a good thing, but we are still in a situation where the affordability of postsecondary education is a challenge.

I remember that when I was going to university, I could work, as was mentioned, I think, by the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. You could work hard all summer and work those 8-, 10-, 12-, 16-hour days and save up your money and have enough to pay your tuition and pay for your books and pay for most of your living expenses throughout the year, sometimes leaning on your parents a little bit when those funds ran out, sometimes taking a part-time job to supplement that income so that you could do more than just go to school. You could actually enjoy that postsecondary experience and have some spending money on the side, important to pay for gas, pay for insurance, and those sorts of things, which are just a part of life.

10:10

Many of our students are not in the position where those are paid for them. They have to earn and pay for those themselves, for the privilege of being able to have those opportunities and that flexibility. Madam Speaker, it's a concern for me. In today's world I know that my kids work hard all summer long, and there's no way that they can save, even if they've got a good job, to pay those same costs that I could afford when I was a student back in the late '70s and early '80s, so that concerns me.

I also was just looking back at some of the current situation with respect to student loans. Madam Speaker, Canada student loans has \$19 billion in outstanding loans right now. Now, I know that number might seem like a small amount for the members on the other side here compared with approaching a hundred billion dollars' worth of debt, but \$19 billion across this country in student loan debt. That's \$19 billion of debt. But in doing a little bit of research, since 2010, rough calculations, we've actually had to write off, the Canadian government, over \$1.8 billion worth of student loan debt that was either uncollectible or people had declared bankruptcy and for various reasons. That was between 2010 and 2013 that it was \$541 million; in 2013, \$175 million; 2014, \$231 million; 2015, \$295 million; 2017, \$178 million, and in 2018 it was \$203 million. These are the student loan amounts that are being written off because students not only can't afford — so they're borrowing money to go to school, but now we're getting into the situation where they're not able to pay back that money.

That's one of the things that concerns me, not so much about this bill but just about the situation that our students are in in this province and in this country in terms of being able to afford this, not only to be able to afford it, but they think they can afford it, and then it ends up that they can't repay the money that they borrowed to do that. A lot of that, Madam Speaker, is because they can't find jobs.

I spoke in the House the other day, and if I recall correctly, youth unemployment in Alberta is at about 11.7 per cent, which is a huge number and one of the highest amongst demographic groups not only in the country but in the province, certainly, as well. If I recall correctly, I think the unemployment amongst students is around 44,000. I think it was 37,000, but it's bumped up to about 44,000 individuals. Well, those are the same students. These are the youth. This is the unemployment rate, and those students when they are seeking positions in the summertime to work, that high unemployment rate is something which affects them year in and year out, whether they're trying to get a part-time job, whether they're trying to get a full-time job to pay for their postsecondary education.

That is a huge problem for us here and then even more so when they graduate. What I hear more from students today who absolutely want the tuitions controlled and whatnot: more

importantly, they're concerned about getting a job when they graduate, Madam Speaker, about getting a good-paying job, that they've now invested anywhere from a couple to four years of their lives or even more if they're into graduate programs so that they can have higher earning potential. What we're seeing are students graduating with bachelor's degrees and choosing to go back to take a graduate degree because they can't find employment. But what happens then?

You know what I'm hearing from them? A good friend of one of my sons has a bachelor's degree in geology. She goes back and takes a master's degree in geology. Do you know why she's doing that? She can get a job internationally with a master's degree. The minimum requirement to be hired and employed internationally as a geologist is a master's degree, and that's why she's pursuing that. Here in Alberta she'll have six years of education under her belt, seeking jobs here in this province to try and pay back her student loans but also to fulfill her dream and her vision of becoming a geologist, and we're going to lose that talent overseas after six years of education in this province. That's a problem, Madam Speaker, those people who are seeking employment.

I hear it now from people in their first year and second year and third year or approaching graduation from their postsecondary education. They're worried about a job, worried about a job in their field preferably but just worried about a job. That's why we see so many students that are doing jobs that are not in the fields of education that they've been in, Madam Speaker, and not able to earn enough money to pay back those student loans, to the point where we've got \$19 billion in student debt in this country. That's just the federal debt. I'm not sure what the amounts are here. I'll be doing some more research on that to see what it is on the provincial debt side as well. But 1.8-plus billion dollars' worth of written off debt because people can't pay for that because of bankruptcies, because of lack of collectibility on those debts: that frightens me. That's a large number, and I think if we divided that over the number of graduates per year in this province, we'd see that it's a huge problem for us.

Moving on, again, as I said, I will be supporting this bill because I think that the intent is a positive one to try and control the costs of postsecondary education. I believe we need to work with postsecondary institutions to ensure that they are doing what they can, the best they can to control costs. Maybe it's not just the rate of inflation, but maybe over time we can increase productivity and we can increase efficiency and delivery of the education while not undermining the quality of that education.

Some of the previous speakers, Madam Speaker, have talked about some of the other impacts that we need to consider. The carbon tax: I am sure that the impact of the carbon tax across this province with postsecondary institutions is in the millions of dollars. And it's not just postsecondary education; I hear it from all fronts. I hear it from nonprofits, I hear it from recreational facilities, I hear it from the faith sector, who are trying to deliver services. And here again we run into this same situation with the postsecondary institutions with respect to carbon tax. It's a burden on our students. It's a burden on our faith-based institutions. It's a burden on our nonprofit sector. It's a burden on the recreational facilities that all Albertans use as well. As was mentioned, you know, maybe we should be exempting those.

I happen to agree that we should scrap that tax entirely, but that's another issue altogether. It is impacting the affordability of education today in this province and is a burden and is a problem, and it's going up 67 per cent, Madam Speaker; 67 per cent, that carbon tax is going up. Let's take that number today and increase that burden on the postsecondary budgets by 67 per cent and see how that impacts the affordability of education in this province.

That concerns me. Here we have a good initiative to control costs, but actually we're layering costs back on those same institutions at the very same time out of the two different sides of that same mouth.

Now, I believe the students will be here. I'll talk to the members from CAUS this afternoon. We'll be happy with the cap on tuition, and I think that that's a good initiative. I think that the increased representation that they'll have within their own institutions on the boards of governors is a positive step as well. Students' voices deserve to be heard.

Members on this side, we're listening to those students. They are our children. They are friends of our children. They are members of our boards. They are members of our community, and we listen to them when we're knocking on doors. We hear that at the doors. Very often, you know, knocking on doors, it is a student or young person who's coming to the door. What a great opportunity to hear from them, to hear what their hopes and dreams and visions and concerns are and how they view things, how they perceive things, because it's different. We need to ensure that we embrace that in a positive way and that we do something about it, not just listen, not just hear, but that we do something about it.

We've heard about the international students' situation. I think international students enrich the postsecondary experience in this province. Yes, I know there are concerns with the costs and how we should allocate those costs to international students. But there's no question in my mind that having international students, having the diversity of the student population in our country, in our province is a positive thing, and the bridges that we can build through those relationships are incredible. Many of those students choose to stay here in Canada and in Alberta, and that enriches our society as well. Those that go back are bridges for our students, who in many cases spent those four years together, shoulder to shoulder as fellow students, maybe into the graduate programs as well.

Those are bridges to countries around the world for us, Madam Speaker, which I think are vitally important to the future of this province. The bridges we build today as youth and as students are the bridges of commerce and the bridges of friendship and the bridges of culture in the future because one day those students will go back and they will be leaders in their communities. We've all experienced that, I think, as we talk even to some of the immigrants here in Canada. I talk to some of my dear friends who have been in Canada for 30 and 40 years, who left places like Hong Kong as young students and came to Canada and have done well and have prospered in this province and in this society here. But guess what? Their former fellow students back in Hong Kong are now leaders of industry, and those are bridges that we can build. I do believe that the protection of that for international students is a positive, positive step and a positive thing, and I do support that and thank the minister for that initiative.

10:20

The tuition framework, I think, is a positive thing to ensure that we have a positive framework. Predictability is a positive thing, giving students predictability at all levels, whether it is, again, international students or whether it's our own local students, in terms of understanding, even if the budgets are too high – I believe they're too high and the costs are too high – the opportunity, again, for some predictability so that they can plan ahead, so that their parents who have RESPs can say: "Here's how much we've got in our RESP. We can allocate that."

I know that, for me, my wife and I have saved as diligently as we can and put money into RESPs because we have three children. We kind of have to allocate it accordingly, not necessarily equally but subject to the costs that they're facing in the various postsecondary paths that they choose. That's important to us, that they can work

and contribute to their own education, that we can contribute some savings to them, and that they in some cases may take on a small amount of student debt as well.

I want them to be able to find the good jobs when they graduate to be able to pay that off, to not be one of those defaulting debtors, 1.8 billion plus dollars of defaulting debtors in this province. Do you think that that feels good for our students, Madam Speaker, when they default on that or have to declare bankruptcy? I don't think so. That's because they can't find the type of opportunities when they graduate.

Sadly, we see so many graduates, talented, talented young people, working in jobs that are not commensurate with the type of education they have. They're driving a taxi, they're working in the hospitality industry, they're doing so many different things. I mean, talk to somebody in a hospitality sector that you go to, a service industry you go to, and ask them. I challenge all of us to ask the people – the baristas and the taxi drivers and the service staff in the restaurants and the hotels that we go to – what their background is.

Madam Speaker, I'm very honoured to be able to speak . . .

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to take a few moments to address some of the comments that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek made in his speech, particularly around student loans. I don't have any issue with the data that he used. I'm relieved that he used a credible source, which is not always the case with the members opposite. I just wanted to enlighten the member and any others listening to his speech about some of the facts for Alberta student loans. I don't have the numbers – I don't know the numbers off the top of my head – but I have rough approximations. Right now we have slightly less than \$700 million in student loans outstanding to students here in Alberta. That's made available to about 90,000 students. Ninety thousand students across Alberta have taken out student loans, which is approximately a third of the total number of students who are in the system. So a third of Alberta students right now currently hold student loans, and that total is slightly less than \$700 million.

Every year we write off about \$60 million in student loans. It's single-digit percentages, Madam Speaker. It's a significant cost; \$60 million, of course, could pay for the tuition freeze four times over. It could certainly be used to enhance the student experience in a myriad of other ways. However, that is one of the risks that we're willing to assume as a government, of course, when we provide a loan program like that. Some of these loans are going to be written off.

The member opposite seems to think that there is this vast group of unemployed students – you know, they're working hard, or they're trying to find a job, and they just can't find one – and they've got their degrees in hand, and because of his imagined state of the economy here in Alberta, our students can't find work. That's where he is completely wrong, Madam Speaker.

The vast majority of the student loans that we write off as a provincial government are for students who have attended private colleges. They're not students who go to the University of Alberta. They're not students who go to the University of Calgary. They're not students who go to Red Deer College or NorQuest College. They're students who go to CDI or Reeves College. They are victims of unsavoury private education practices. They're sold a bill of goods. They're told that they're going to enrol in a program that will get them a job that pays them enough money to pay back the extremely high student loans that they have to take in order to pay

for these programs, and that turns out not to be true, Madam Speaker.

We get complaints to our office every single day from people who are taken advantage of, who signed up for student loans, in many cases unbeknownst to them, student loans that they cannot pay back because of the questionable practices of a lot of these private career colleges, Madam Speaker. So I share the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek's concern. The Member for Airdrie is laughing. I challenge her to prove me wrong. I have the data. My staff tell me about this all the time.

Private career colleges are the vast majority of the student loans that we write off, so our government is taking action to make sure that we are addressing some of the problematic practices that we find in private career colleges. We're tightening up their ability to – we monitor them very closely, making sure that they behave properly according to the regulations that we have in place. And we're taking additional steps to make sure that they don't rope in students to student loans that they're unaware they're actually signing up for and they have no hopes of paying back.

All that to say, Madam Speaker, that we share the member opposite's concern for the number of student loans that we're writing off. I'm pleased that I have had the opportunity to make everyone aware that the vast majority of those student loans that are being written off are for students who have received programs from private career colleges that were told that they would get high-paying jobs and ended up not being able to and were sold a bill of goods that turned out not to be true. Our government is taking action to protect those students.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the bill? Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this bill on the main bill. I did have the opportunity to speak to the amendment, fairly early on, that was brought by members of the opposition and speak to some of the elements there, some concerns they'd raised around consultation and some other pieces here.

I'm very pleased to see that in the time since, though I haven't been able to be here for some of the other debate, they've shifted their position and they have come around to supporting this bill. It's fantastic to see. I'm glad to hear that they are echoing in this House the concerns of students, recognizing the challenges that they face both in the job market and in terms of affordability. I think it's fantastic that we should see a unanimous vote in this House to support this legislation so that we can support students in our province.

I'd like to begin by noting a quote from the president of one of the universities here in my constituency, Deborah Saucier, the president of MacEwan University, someone I've had the chance to start to get to know. I've really appreciated the progressive vision she's brought to MacEwan University, both in terms of outreach to the community and highly valuing the voice of students. She says:

The transformative experiences students take away from Alberta's post-secondary institutions fundamentally change them in ways that benefit not only those students, but also shape our province's social and economic future. It's why we support the government's commitment to making it possible for more Albertans to access – and be able to afford – a quality education.

That is the core of why we have this legislation here today, Madam Speaker. We are here to ensure that more Albertans can access and be able to afford a quality education. I'm incredibly happy that one of the presidents of one of the universities in my constituency

agrees with that and supports this legislation as a step in that direction.

As I noted in my previous remarks, Madam Speaker, there has been robust consultation that went into this bill with the presidents of universities, with boards of governors, with the staff, with students. And, indeed, members across the aisle have acknowledged, now that they've had their meetings with students, they've spoken with them, that they have heard that this indeed is what students are asking for.

I'm very pleased to see a number of things within this legislation. Certainly, we've had quite a bit of discussion so far about the tuition cap, and that has been a very important piece of what students have been asking for. So I'm very pleased to see that piece here.

10:30

I'm also very happy to see the changes in governance, which some other members have addressed, now allowing there to be two student representatives on all boards of governors within the province. Madam Speaker, I can tell you that for MacEwan University, for NorQuest College, and for other, smaller institutions that I have the pleasure of representing, the honour of representing, this has been a real concern for students. It's a lot of work for a single student on a board of governors to represent all of the concerns of their entire student body. It can be a real challenge for them sometimes at those meetings, then, to have the sole responsibility of making those voices heard. Now having that opportunity for there to be two students at that table to raise those voices, to provide each other with support, and to provide that additional voice at the table, I think that's a very important step, and I deeply appreciate that the minister has taken action on that.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, these are things I heard from these student representatives within my first six months in office. I think it was in the summer of 2015 that I first met with representatives of the students' association at Grant MacEwan – or at MacEwan University. Pardon me; I sometimes revert to the old name. They raised that particular concern around governance, they raised the concern around tuition, and they raised the concern around wanting MacEwan University to have the opportunity to be classified in a different place within the sector model in the province. Those were some of the initial asks, and here we are three and a half years later. We finally have the opportunity to bring this forward.

Now, some members have said that it's taken too long for this bill to come forward. At the same time, members have said that there hasn't been enough consultation. I'm not quite sure how they square that circle, Madam Speaker. But what I would say is that I think it was important that the minister took the time he took to sit down and have these discussions with students. This is one of the things our government does. We plan for the long term. We give careful thought to how we're going to move forward in terms of these complex situations. [interjection] The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo seems to find this amusing. I'll tell you that I didn't find his comments terribly amusing earlier, but I'll attempt to refrain from the kind of condescension I often hear from that member.

The reality is, Madam Speaker, that the members opposite have talked about their concerns around certainty, how postsecondary institutions are going to be able to move forward, but in the history of Conservative governments in this province with postsecondary institutions, stability and certainty have been the farthest things from that relationship. Every time the price of oil would drop, Conservative governments would make cuts. Institutions wouldn't know by how much. They didn't know what their budget was going to be from one year to the next. Conservative governments would go on spending sprees when the price of oil was high, and then they

would make cuts, never predictable from one year to the next. What could postsecondary institutions do but double down on the tools that they had at their disposal that they could trust: tuition, noninstructional fees, other things that went directly on the backs of students. For years Conservative governments abdicated their responsibility to provide stability to the postsecondary education system and left that on the backs of Alberta students.

By contrast, Madam Speaker, over the last three and a half years we have provided 2 per cent increases year over year; stable, predictable funding that allowed our institutions to plan, that allowed them to move forward, that allowed them to adapt to increasing costs. We recognize those exist as student numbers increase, as other pressures increase. That is the first time in many, many years that they have had that kind of stability and certainty.

They speak about capital costs, Madam Speaker, and speak about the concerns they have over the additional pressures that universities and institutions face as they continue to have to deal with maintenance, as they continue to look at issues around building and how they move forward. Well, our government has made heavy investment into the maintenance renewal fund for postsecondary institutions. In fact, we have drastically increased funding to address the massive infrastructure deficit that was left behind by previous Conservative governments, because, again, the tradition in this province was to tie all of our public services to the price of oil. There was no long-term plan. There was no further thought given than to the next election.

Our postsecondary institutions, and therefore what was downloaded to students from there, were left to deal with the aftermath. Conservative governments, in order to try to maintain a sense of prudence but, again, not thinking in the long term, skimmed on infrastructure and providing universities, colleges, our postsecondary institutions with the dollars they needed to be able to keep up the infrastructure they had, let alone go on to build.

Indeed, shortly after I was elected, again, one of the first conversations I had with the board of governors and the president of NorQuest College was around concerns over a cut that had been made by the previous Conservative government for the Singhmar Centre for Learning. They were short millions of dollars that had been promised to them and that the Conservative government had suddenly decided they were not going to bring forward. I had conversations with our Minister of Advanced Education, with our Minister of Infrastructure, and I'm pleased to say, Madam Speaker, that our government stepped forward and we turned that around. We provided them with that additional funding so that they could complete that centre, open it, and now have it there serving students in my constituency.

This is the record up until now. When members opposite criticize our government and this piece of legislation around their concerns about predictability and stability, I can't say that I can take that very seriously. Now, the fact, Madam Speaker, again, is that we recognize the complexity of the system we are dealing with in the province of Alberta. We recognize that there are many pressures on students. Members opposite have spoken about the carbon tax and the pressure on postsecondary institutions. Again, we have worked with these institutions. We have provided them with support so that they can move forward and develop more energy efficient infrastructure. Indeed, again, by actually addressing the maintenance deferral, we're helping them do precisely that. As you upgrade older buildings, they become more energy efficient, therefore reducing the actual energy costs.

Our government retains the ability to walk and chew gum at the same time. We can move forward on addressing the larger issue of climate change in partnership with our postsecondary institutions, in partnership with business, nonprofits, all Albertans, frankly,

while still also addressing other issues that are on the table here. As I have made clear, Madam Speaker, our government has not simply left postsecondary institutions hanging. We have worked with them on a number of fronts to help address their costs, their cost pressures so that ultimately we can help them help students, which all members in this House have so far said that they absolutely agree with. That's why I'm pleased to stand and support this legislation, which I truly believe is going to make life better for students and, as a result, for all Albertans, because as Ms Saucier, the president of MacEwan University, noted: doing this for students, providing them with this opportunity, provides a net benefit to our province as a whole. Again, that is about investment and long-term planning.

Now, I recognize that members opposite may not agree with all the directions we choose to take in how we plan for the long term, and I recognize that members across the way have raised, you know, some other concerns that we also certainly agree on. The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka spoke about the concerns that he had around tuition getting more expensive, and certainly all members have agreed with that here, that jobs don't pay enough for students to be able to earn enough over the summer to be able to pay for the full school year. Indeed. That was one of the first things I noted when I had my first opportunity to rise and speak to this bill.

There have been comments and discussion around the size and number of student loans as they're ballooning, yet, Madam Speaker, I have not heard the members opposite offer any solution on this. They have said that they agree with capping tuition. That's a good step. That's a good first step. That addresses one piece here. But I have yet to hear them offer any solution to any of the other challenges that our students are facing here. Wanting to take the minimum wage and roll that back now for youth: that's not going to help them be able to earn more in a summer to be able to afford postsecondary tuition.

10:40

I am proud to say – and indeed I spoke with representatives from CAUS yesterday – that our government brought back the STEP program to keep students employed in this province and help them not only be able to earn a better wage in the summer but also to be able to work in degree-relevant fields, and indeed that's what the students from CAUS were talking to me about.

They are incredibly thankful that our government brought that program back, but what they would like to see now is that program targeted in a way that it helps provide students with degree-relevant experience. They appreciate the fact that they can get a job with a landscaper or with another business who applies to the STEP program, but they would love to see far more accounting firms or, say, organizations or nonprofits that are offering opportunities to get experience in social work or engineering firms or others stepping up to take advantage of that to provide students with the opportunity to get that kind of employment.

Frankly, Madam Speaker, the only kinds of solutions I've heard from the members opposite always involve just simply cutting taxes. They believe that if we simply cut more taxes and leave more money with top earners in the province, that will magically somehow trickle down. That hasn't been the case. There is no jurisdiction that I've seen where they have made those kinds of tax cuts and it has benefited their postsecondary institutions. We've seen skyrocketing tuition across many parts of the United States and in many other places. The fact is that this is a public good. This is a public value. It requires a public investment.

There's work that we're going to need to do in a lot of other fields, absolutely. We have more work to do to continue to build Alberta's economy back up. It's come a long way since 2015, and indeed we are continuing to lead in Canada, but there are still many,

many people that we need to work to support, and I recognize that students and youth remain among them. But there are better ways we can do that than simply cutting taxes for the top 1 per cent in the province, giving that \$700 million tax break.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's always a pleasure listening to the Member for Edmonton-Centre talking on any topic, especially one that's close to his heart in the middle of his constituency, where so many educational institutions reside.

It struck me while listening to the Member for Edmonton-Centre that the debates we often have in this House are not necessarily debates couched in terms of right or left on the political spectrum, but they are, really, debates about living in the past or embracing the future: the future of high-tech jobs, for example, that are going to be needed in this province to allow the economy to move forward in our energy and agricultural sectors, the future of our innovation economy, that's going to be necessary in order for our students who are now graduating to be employed.

I'd like the member to maybe wax a little bit more on this theme about living in the past versus embracing the future by talking about how granting accessibility and affordability to quality education continues our pattern here in Alberta of fighting to support Alberta families and, really, with concrete measures, putting money in their pockets, serious money in their pockets, serious savings that they can use to invest in their family or in other ways that they so choose and how the value of a postsecondary education not only helps those individual families but also moves ourselves forward as we look towards a new, technologically advanced economy that is going to be requiring a much higher level of expertise from our students and that we need to make sure we embrace the future in getting those students prepared for the new economy that's emerging and that we take advantage of all the opportunities that we as a government can do to make sure that the workforce, the brainpower of this province is employed to best advantage, to take every opportunity that we can to grow our export markets and technological capacities so that we look forward towards the future with great excitement and know that there's no market in the world that we can't touch and that there's no technology that we can't be a leader in in this province. I'd like to hear a little bit more from the member about those topics.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the comments from my colleague from Edmonton-McClung. Yeah, I would love to touch on that a bit. You know, one of the big things over this last year that's really been of value to me, again, another great decision, I think, involving the Minister of Advanced Education, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, and some others, has been our government's decision to create new postsecondary spaces in the province for people in technological fields. Now, members opposite have spoken about the need to help ensure that students are getting education in fields that are going to help them find work. Indeed, I talked to start-up companies here in my constituency that have come up through Startup Edmonton, TEC Edmonton, that are working in the many co-working spaces we have here who are part of that new economy, and they tell me that they are having a challenge finding people with the skill set and the knowledge that they need in digital technology and computer coding and some of these other fields.

These are big opportunities that our government has invested in through the Alberta investor tax credit, through the new screen-

based industries tax credit. These are things that are going to grow and move our economy forward. Indeed, keeping that postsecondary education affordable and accessible is incredibly important. I'm very pleased that our government is making that investment to work, again in partnership and collaboration with our postsecondary institutions, who are themselves happy to open this up, to provide that opportunity.

I would also note that in this legislation we are limiting fees and helping to control costs for apprenticeships. We have talked in this House – indeed, the leader of the loyal opposition has expressed it himself in a few different venues – about the importance of giving more high school students opportunities to access vocational trades. I'm very happy to have programs at St. Joseph Catholic high school here, at Centre High here in my constituency, where they do exactly that. Those students get the opportunity to begin to work towards getting certification in the trade, begin to work towards getting their apprenticeship while they are still in high school. By keeping tuition and these costs lower and more affordable, we make it easier for those students to be able to move into that postsecondary realm, complete that work, and get to work sooner. Not only that, Madam Speaker; they have experience, which then also opens up the opportunities for them to gain employment more quickly.

I'm proud of the work that our government has done on this and many issues. Thank you.

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

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and Happy Diwali. Actually, today is the Deepavali. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie was reminding me this morning to greet Diwali to everyone. Last night he himself, the members for Grande Prairie-Smoky, Chestermere-Rocky View, Calgary-Lougheed, and Edmonton-Mill Woods were all there celebrating with a few thousand Hindus and Sikhs from Edmonton at a temple. Diwali is all about, you know, light triumphing over darkness and good triumphing over evil, but also that light signifies the purity and the power. That's why on this occasion I would wish everyone Happy Diwali and that the light in each of our souls shines and brightens others' lives.

This bill that we're talking about today, Madam Speaker: in the spirit of Diwali, I'm going to personalize and customize. I'm very moved hearing the debates on both sides of the aisle here, particularly from the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. He said that he had all the qualifications, smarts, but because he didn't have the degree, that would have taken him to the next levels of employment, he was disappointed. We don't want other kids in this province to lose the opportunities due to lack of education. That's why our caucus is very happy to support this bill. Although my neighbour and good friend from Calgary-Hawkwood thought that we were not supporting it, actually we are supporting it. If there is any good legislation brought forward by the government, we are always there to support it. But, at the same time, as the Official Opposition it's our job to talk about how we can make it better. There is always hope for improvement.

10:50

In this bill we talk about making tuition affordable, which is a great thing. We also talk about: when the students take student loans, how do they pay it back? Right? If the province is waiving loans, are we able to afford it? In most of the cases in the cultural communities – I mentioned quite clearly South Asian nations – the parents pay for kids' tuition fees. As a cultural practice they don't like their kids to borrow money and take student loans. They don't want them to be indebted. They don't want to put them in debt. So

are the parents able to pay back for their kids' education? That's the thing. So we have to look at the big picture.

I know that the Member for Edmonton-Centre talked very passionately about the tax cuts, but he's only talking selectively about \$700 million given to the rich people, which is not true, because by cutting taxes, actually you are attracting more investment. That will provide opportunity for the students to get jobs. The Minister of Advanced Education said that it's not true that students who graduated from postsecondary are not finding jobs. It is true; they are not finding jobs. I can tell you from my own experience. My son's classmates, after they graduated, were not able to find employment, so they're actually trying to apply for a master's, thinking that in the future, after they finish their master's degree in two years, the market might improve and give them opportunities. I heard from many people in Calgary-Foothills coming to my office telling me that their kids are not able to find economic opportunities here, that that's why they had to extend their education. That is true. Whether you agree with it or not, it is a fact.

Madam Speaker, my colleague from Calgary-Hawkwood also said that members on this side of the aisle are out of touch, that they don't have the same issues that regular Albertans face or something like that. It's not true. I'm a parent. I'm an engineer, and my wife is an architect, so as parents we wanted our kid to have a better economic opportunity. That's why we came here. He actually went to U of C. My son got his first degree in the biomedical sciences honours program. He applied to med school in Calgary. He was interviewed twice, but they didn't offer him the seat. At that time I was quite busy fighting for my Calgary-Foothills nomination in the by-election. I didn't pay much attention to what was going on. After his second interview with the Calgary med school, the second time they didn't offer him the seat, he chose to apply to overseas schools. The fee there is ridiculously high for foreign students. He is paying, just in tuition fees alone, \$80,000 and, on top of it, living expenses like boarding and travelling and all. Each year he is spending more than \$110,000.

That was the time when I took the pay cut. When I got elected to this position, I had to take a huge pay cut. But because of the cultural practice I mentioned to you – I was busy, and he was discussing it with his mother. His mother promised him: "Don't worry about it. Go ahead. We'll pay for it." Right? So we said that we'll pay for it, but I don't want him to take it easy. He should have some responsibility, and he should go and get some loans. He applied for a loan. Apparently, he got some federal loan, some provincial loan. He will get about \$150,000 out of that half a million he's going to spend on his four years of med school.

So why I'm saying that is: we know the issues. As a parent I know. I'm paying. I'm paying for it. Don't assume, like, that your opponents are heartless or that they're not regular Albertans. We are regular Albertans. It's our job to debate with you and improve your bills. And the same thing: if we get the honour to be in government next year and some of you are on the opposition benches, you'll do the same thing because that's what you'll be elected to do.

Anyway, coming back to this bill, Madam Speaker, having the tuition guarantee, particularly for foreign students, is a great thing. Like my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek said, all those foreign students, when they come here, get better education, and then they become good ambassadors, and if they choose to stay back here and become citizens of Canada, they will add to the skilled workforce. That's why recently, when I and the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake accompanied our leader on the trip to India, we met with many stakeholders overseas, including some of the people involved in postsecondary education. What they're looking for is predictability,

particularly with the situation with the visas in the United States. President Trump has tightened H-1Bs and student visas and all.

Most of the students from South Asia used to go to the U.S. as students. Once they got their MSc and other master's degrees, then they went to Silicon Valley, and then they did a start-up. Many of them became entrepreneurs, and that's how they contributed to the booming U.S. economy. If we could bring some of them here and retain them here, they'll be good contributors to our economic growth here. That's why I like that aspect of this bill, giving some predictability and guarantee for foreign students and also for our local students.

Also, I have an issue with the Minister of Advanced Education when he was slamming private schools. All of them are not that bad for the reasons I mentioned to you, like my own kid and even myself, actually. Although I was in the public system till grade 12, the engineering school I went to was privately managed by a trust, and they had a world-class institute. I got the benefit of studying in that school. I mean, their motto was to educate students and help them. All the private schools probably did. Maybe some – I mean, there are always some issues with educational institutes, but all private schools are not bad. If that is your opinion, I would want you to reconsider what you said.

Then coming back to what the Member for Edmonton-Centre said about the overall economy, it's two ideas here. In your case you're saying: "Okay. We won't reduce the taxes, but we keep on adding layers of regulatory burden. We'll bring in bills like the carbon tax or a cap on emissions" and all that. Those policies are making the bad situation worse. We don't blame you for the world oil price, but then your government, the NDP government, made the bad situation worse. That's why the companies and the jobs are fleeing. The investments are fleeing Alberta. That, I think, you have to acknowledge at some point rather than saying that we don't have any ideas, that we are not offering solutions.

We are offering solutions. We are opposing the carbon tax. We said that we'll repeal it, and we gave you the reasons. We said that why we want to reduce taxes is because you increased taxes, but your revenue has gone down. Those numbers are there for you to look at. Your government revenue has gone down even though you increased taxes.

11:00

When we reduce the taxes, we believe all those investments will come back. That will create jobs for these postsecondary graduates. That's our idea. That's what we're going to campaign on in the next election and let the people decide. They'll have options to choose between the NDP platform and the UCP platform. Also, this week, during the QP when the Leader of the Opposition asked about those economic issues, the Premier threatened: oh, those youth will vote. Remember that? Now I'm saying that all those youth, when they graduate, don't have economic opportunities, employment opportunities, and if their parents are at home not working, they will remember that, too. The Premier also should realize that all those unemployed 150,000 or 180,000 Albertans: they too vote. They'll remember that. They'll look at both platforms, and they'll choose which platform fits better for their economic prosperity.

For us, we had to create wealth first to be able to pay back our way with the student loans. First, we had to create the wealth. That's the difference in the ideas between the NDP and UCP. Our thought process is: we had to first create the wealth so we can distribute it. In your case, you're taking on debt. A \$96 billion debt: that's what your budget said. If you get the opportunity to be in government for a second term, in 2022 you'll balance the budget, but till then you said that you'll have a \$96 billion debt. Somebody has to pay it back. Who will pay it back? If people are not working, if they're

not paying taxes, how will we pay back that debt? That's something we have to think about, Madam Speaker.

Also, when some of our members said that we won't trust the government about consultations, there is a reason, like, previous bills like Bill 6. Although I'm from Calgary, Madam Speaker, I travel all across Alberta . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's been enjoyable to listen to my hon. colleague here. I wanted to say that a while back I had read an article about a one-cylinder engine. It could go two speeds, zero or a hundred. It was phenomenal, but it could only do two things, you know, zero or a hundred. Unfortunately, what I've heard here today, especially from Calgary-Hawwood, is absolute vitriol, overheated rhetoric about this issue when in reality we have said – right from the beginning we've talked very positive. We've talked about some of the negative things about this bill, but we talked very positively about the bill. For him to be able to get it so wrong, that we were not in favour of this bill, just goes to show that he needs to think about maybe some kind of a middle, that the people on this side are actually in favour of some of the good policies that are being brought forward on the other side.

What I liked about my hon. colleague is that he got up, he spoke about some of his concerns, he did it in a measured response that I felt was respect, showed respect for this House and respect for his colleagues even in speaking about the Member for Calgary-Hawwood. Just the way that he spoke about this was – you know, he said: my friend from Calgary-Hawwood. This is the kind of respect and this is the kind of dialogue that we should be having in this House, Madam Speaker, and one that I actually really respect.

Now, the member that just spoke has a lot of experience. He has a lot of education. He has seen the benefits of an advanced education. He has seen the benefits of being able to help his children get advanced education. He's speaking from an experienced position.

I have two children right now that are in school, that are going to university, and I know how hard they work, Madam Speaker, to be able to have ownership of this experience. Now, yes, their mom and dad can help them. But they choose, they want to have ownership. They want to be able to say: "You know what? I earned it myself. I'm the one who actually got out there, and I worked hard during the summertime. I made some sacrifices. I learned some money management. I did the things that actually made me be successful." They have ownership of it. You know, you have to take your hat off to these people, to these kids, to these young Albertans that are really working hard.

Now, that's why you've seen from this side of the House a lot of support for this bill. We've tried to show a balance. We've tried to show that there is a balance between what is happening with the costs of universities – when you cap the tuition rates in perpetuity, it's not a sustainable model, Madam Speaker. So I applaud the government for addressing that issue. I applaud them for recognizing that it is not sustainable. I've heard members from the opposite side say that it's not a sustainable model, and I applaud them for doing that.

However, the overheated rhetoric that we heard, that the Conservative governments in the past have only raised rates and they've only caused problems for the universities, only caused problems – in fact, I think it was his "always." The Member for Edmonton-Centre said: always. I just thought: okay; well, show us the evidence that shows that the Conservatives and the past governments have always caused problems for the universities.

Again, it's this overheated rhetoric, Madam Speaker, that, in my opinion, is not helpful to the debate.

The debate we're trying to have is: is this a good piece of legislation? Is it something that's actually going to be good for students and for universities so that it's sustainable? If there can be some better things added to it, then that's our responsibility. It's not only our responsibility but backbenchers on the government side's responsibility to try to make it better. This is what we're trying to do, yet unfortunately what a lot of the discussion that we've seen here, Madam Speaker, from members opposite is – and again I go back to Calgary-Hawwood – is just absolute, over-the-top rhetoric and a fight against the approach . . .

Mr. Feehan: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we have a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Feehan: Madam Speaker, we've had this addressed already in this House today, that the point of 29(2)(a) is to address the previous speaker and not to reiterate everything that has been happening in the House for the morning. I'd like to see the speaker focus on the previous speaker, to which he is supposed to be addressing his comments, and not use it as an opportunity to review.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the hon. minister for those comments. I can assure you that my hon. colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner was about to get to the point.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this is already the second time this morning that this has come up, so I would just really caution you. The intent of 29(2)(a) is to question the previous speaker, make comments on it, but it's also the intent to have a bit of a dialogue. I think we're tending to lose sight of that. I do give a lot of leeway on this, but I think it would be a far more productive conversation if we tried to encourage more back-and-forth dialogue with it and used it as it's intended, you know, referring to the previous speaker.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Speaker: I will allow you to continue. You've only got five seconds left, but try to stay focused.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm answering his 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Panda: So . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Five seconds goes very quickly.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to third reading on Bill 19. I will say from the outset that I will support this bill in third reading, but I would like to expand a little upon some of the comments that I made during committee debate on this.

They have to do with, actually, a word that was just spoken here in the House, and it's a word that I believe in very strongly. The

word is “balance.” I think that my belief in balance comes partly from my veterinary background. As veterinarians, as human physicians, for that matter, as biologists we learn that systems, animal and human systems, act in balance and that there are a number of different things within those systems that provide checks and balances to make sure that things don’t go out of whack.

11:10

I’ll give you an example. Blood sugar is governed largely by two hormones, insulin and glucagon. Thanks to the interplay of those two hormones, which is truly an amazing thing, blood sugar is maintained within a relatively normal range in the vast majority of healthy people and healthy animals. It’s when one of those hormones goes out of balance that we see disease issues. As we know, insulin, which was discovered some 97 years ago thanks to the work of Dr. Frederick Banting, is the hormone that’s missing from that balance.

But balance is not easy, and balance, for example, when we are doing government policy is not easy. Right now there is a debate – and it’s a difficult debate – between the rights of persons wishing to express their religious beliefs and the rights of patients who wish to access specific health services that have been deemed to be necessary and legal. There’s a balance there, and it’s a difficult one to balance off, but finding that balance is truly critical.

You know, even just this week we learned, for those of us who didn’t already know, that there is a balance between the autonomy and independence of MLAs and iron-fisted caucus discipline. There’s a balance, and striking that correct balance can be difficult.

Well, in the postsecondary sector, from my discussions with both leaders in the postsecondary sector and students – clearly, this bill addresses one side of the lever, and it’s the side of the lever of accessibility and affordability. We know that that is something that is vitally important to this minister and this government and, for that matter, all members of this Legislature. Many, many of us have had personal experience attending university, have had children or other relatives attend university, and affordability and accessibility are very important. We do not want to ever have a situation where capable Albertans who wish to attend a postsecondary institution are unable to because it is not affordable or accessible. To address that side of the equation is a good thing, and Bill 19 does.

The concern that I have – and I raised this in debate in committee – is that the other side is the sustainability and the quality of postsecondary education. That is something that is held within the purview of the leaders of the postsecondary sector. Many of them have told me that they have grave concerns about how this might impact that balance. Indeed, if the quality of postsecondary education that is offered at our institutions in Alberta declines because those institutions cannot provide the same quality of programs, well, Madam Speaker, that’s a concern. Then it won’t matter that the education is accessible and affordable. You could make it as cheap as you like. You could make that price zero, but if the quality of the education has suffered, then we’ve accomplished nothing. In fact, the lever or the teeter-totter, whatever you want to call it, has broken on the fulcrum, and both sides are now sitting at rock bottom.

So I think it’s vitally important that now that affordability and accessibility have been addressed – and in my conversations with some of the student leadership I said: “I think, you know, you can spend some time celebrating this victory that you’ve won, but your work is not over. Now you need to address working alongside the leadership in the universities. You need to work alongside them to ensure the sustainability and the quality of that education that is now, hopefully, more affordable and accessible.” That’s the first thing that I wanted to talk about in my address on third reading.

The second area that I wanted to talk about is to offer my colleague the hon. Minister of Advanced Education some advice. We learned yesterday that, in his own words, he is “a humble and deeply reflective person, dedicated to continual improvement.” I’m quoting his words here. As we should all be dedicated to continual improvement, then as someone who has had the experience of sitting in cabinet and being in government and making some of those difficult decisions that required balance, and even more so, Madam Speaker, because both the minister and I belong to that small group of people – yes, we are accordionists. The accordion: an instrument that is despised and rejected perhaps only more by the bagpipes. We both play the accordion, so we are both men of sorrows and acquainted with grief, to paraphrase from the prophet Isaiah.

Madam Speaker, when the minister took his oath of office – and I took the same oath some years ago – there is a one-page oath for the ministry that you are moving into, and there is a four-page oath that you take when you become a member of Executive Council. That’s a big responsibility, and if you read through the words of the oath of Executive Council, you will find an indication of expected behaviours, expected deportment, expected now that you are a cabinet minister, now that you are a member of Executive Council, expectations that you have.

I must say that with this minister – and I’m not alone in this. Certainly, I have, you know, many people in the postsecondary sector who feel the same way, but goodness knows they don’t want to be attributed. I’ve talked to many people who are disappointed in the deportment of this minister, this minister who just a few months ago accused one of the most respected university leaders not just in the province but in Canada of lining his pockets, a shocking and completely uncalled-for attack upon someone whose reputation, I can assure you, is much longer and much stronger than the current minister’s. We saw it earlier in debate on this bill, when the minister made a comment about “the son of a rich farmer” in attempting to make his point. Well, Madam Speaker, that’s not what people expect of cabinet ministers.

So if the minister is indeed a humble person, dedicated to continual improvement and deeply reflective, I’m going to suggest that he reflect on this. Albertans, especially those with involvement in the postsecondary sector, including the students that he was so happy to be photographed with and, you know, enjoying himself with during the course of the announcement on this bill, expect their cabinet minister to behave like a cabinet minister and not a frat boy at a kegger.

Madam Speaker, that is my word of advice to this minister.

Mr. Feehan: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Relevance Insulting Language

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise on a point of order under Standing Order 23(b) as well as under 23(h), (i), and (j). The first point of order, under 23(b), is that a member speaking in the House needs to speak to matters that are relevant to the question at hand, and that is the bill. This speaker is clearly not speaking to the matters at hand or the question under discussion. I would like to see him discontinue his present course of comment and move back to the bill.

Secondly, the comments being made are clearly intended to impute motives to a member in the House and are essentially

insulting language at this point to the member of whom he's speaking and are not relevant to the concerns that we are talking about this morning. Using this as an opportunity merely to take a slam at another member seems to be a violation of at least two sections of Standing Order 23.

Thank you.

11:20

The Deputy Speaker: Do you wish to respond to the point of order, hon. member?

Dr. Starke: Madam Speaker, I would like to respond. First, to the first point on 23(b), I can assure the hon. Deputy Government House Leader that commentary with regard to the department of the minister specifically during the introduction of this bill is entirely relevant to the bill. We've had lots of discussion in this House. We've had discussion about the carbon tax, and we've had discussion about a wide variety of other things from members on both sides of the House that had, at best, a tangential relationship with the bill at hand. I was talking specifically to the bill at hand. Now, if you wanted to point of order me when I was talking about insulin and glucagon, okay. Fine. But a point of order here? This is not a point of order under 23(b).

As for 23(h), (i), and (j), Madam Speaker, I chose those words carefully. I said: behaving like a frat boy at a kegger. I didn't suggest that that was what the member was doing. I was saying that the preference of people was that their ministers behave like cabinet ministers. As far as that goes, I was not imputing motives. I was not intending to attack the character of this minister. I was simply offering this minister some advice.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others wishing to comment on the point of order? Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to speak to the point of order, in particular 23(h), (i), and (j). I read: "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." The Minister of Advanced Education over the course of this entire sitting has continually displayed behaviour that is unbecoming of a minister of the Crown. That is not imputing false or unavowed motives in any way, shape, or form but, in fact, in a roundabout way generally explains the behaviour that continuously comes from this minister in this House.

In regard to 23(b), I would speak to that matter as well. The way in which the minister has spoken to other members in this House during the course of this debate, being the minister and the mover of this bill – absolutely, one has to do with the other, Madam Speaker. Perhaps if the minister or the government is offended by the way in which the minister does offend members of this House, the government members would encourage their minister to improve his attitude towards opposition members in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I have to say that I was a little concerned myself with the use of that language under "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," because it certainly does have that effect when we use those types of words. I will remind the House that the minister did withdraw and apologize for the statements that he made previously on this.

Usually we move on. We're here to debate the bill; we're not here to debate individuals' behaviour or conduct. I would caution the member. Certainly, you have the experience in this House to know what is and is not appropriate. I would encourage you to use language that is not going to create disorder and to confine your remarks to the bill.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I do appreciate that, and in order to achieve what you're asking us to do, I will withdraw that comment, and I will sincerely apologize to the minister and to the House for having used that if that is your ruling. That is just fine.

Debate Continued

Dr. Starke: What I will say, Madam Speaker, then, by way of concluding my remarks: I have concerns about this bill though I will support it. I have concerns about our postsecondary sector. I mentioned during committee debate that Alberta has the lowest level of postsecondary participation anywhere in Canada. The lowest level. In order to just get to a point where we're at the Canadian average and to allow for population growth, which in Alberta has always been robust, we need 90,000 additional spaces in the postsecondary sector. That's going to cost some money.

My own opinion is that money spent on education and advanced education is money well spent. I will point out to the House – and most people probably don't remember this – that one of Peter Lougheed's base tenets was that even in difficult times, if you have to cut everything else, preserve education. That was Peter Lougheed that said that.

As a Progressive Conservative I note that I have been moved progressively to the right, which, I can assure you, many people have tried with all the tenacity of a border collie trying to herd that last lost sheep into the sheepfold. Madam Speaker, I can assure you that as a Progressive Conservative, the assurance that education be accessible, that it be affordable, that it be sustainable, and that our postsecondary institutions can always provide a high quality is something that I think is in all Albertans' interest. This is a nonpartisan issue.

As I said, I'm in support of Bill 19. I would like to thank the minister and his staff for having done the work on this. I, frankly, disagreed with the notion that there wasn't enough consultation and that we needed to send it to committee. I felt that the consultation on this was long standing. He commented to me when I mentioned about the fullness of time – Minister, you made a crack during your opening remarks on second reading. You know what? That's fine; I'm okay with that. I'm in the House and can quite easily absorb those things. I've had worse, let me tell you.

Madam Speaker, I am in favour of Bill 19. I hope that all members vote in favour of it, but I also hope that not just the minister but subsequent ministers and subsequent governments act to guard that balance, that balance between affordability and accessibility, and sustainability and quality, and not only do that but make the lever, make the teeter-totter even bigger so that we can accommodate more students so that more Albertans can get a higher education, because I think that is good for our economy and it's good for our society.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a), the hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Perhaps I'm rising to take the bait. I'm not sure. I'm pleased to offer a few comments to some of the comments made by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. For the member's knowledge, my mother is a keen observer of the proceedings here at the Legislature. I would have to say that, after me, her favourite speaker in the House is the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. I just say that he has created probably some significant emotional pain and cognitive dissonance for my mother because now she's pitted between her two favourite

speakers here as to whom to believe. I am not entirely sure that my mother will take my side in this matter. The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster has put me in the uncomfortable position of having to explain to my mother why her second-favourite speaker has said what he did.

In the spirit of accordion player solidarity, I will kindly take the advice of the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster as to deportment. Certainly, we're all guilty of letting our emotions get the best of us in this House. I meant what I said when I said that I am a deeply reflective and humble person, dedicated to continual improvement, and I will take the member's advice.

I did want to take issue, though, with one of the comments that he did say. He said that he adopted Peter Lougheed's vision of funding education above all else, which is interesting, Madam Speaker. Forgive me; I don't recall if the member was in cabinet at the time. Certainly, he was a member of the House and the government caucus at the time that the government of the day cut funding for advanced education by 7 per cent.

11:30

Certainly, I appreciate the advice that the former minister, the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, has given. It's unfortunate that his government didn't live by that creed that Peter Lougheed set out when given the opportunity to. Those 7 per cent cuts in budgets had a significant effect on the quality of education and the affordability and accessibility of education in the province of Alberta, and that certainly contributed to the downfall of the government of the time. They didn't support services.

The interesting thing, though, Madam Speaker, is that when his caucus, the PC caucus, existed as more than one member, they did release a shadow budget. He signed off on it. They proposed a cut of an additional \$400 million, give or take, to the Advanced Education budget of the day, which represents about 20 per cent of the operating grants that we give to universities and colleges across the province. So it is very interesting to me that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster seems to be a follower of Peter Lougheed's valuation of education, yet when given the chance to bring a budget, he voted for a budget that cut Advanced Education by 7 per cent. And he didn't learn from that lesson. His caucus presented a shadow budget that proposed an even bigger cut to Advanced Education, possibly because he felt that maybe the 7 per cent cut in 2013 wasn't big enough, didn't go far enough.

You know, I appreciate the member's comments on my deportment. I would just ask that the member do me the return favour of actually acting out what he says he believes in. If he believes in the value of education, then he should have voted to support it through the budget. He should have voted for our budget, which supported education. He shouldn't have been a member of a caucus that prepared a shadow budget that proposed a 20 per cent cut in the operating grants of universities and colleges.

With that, Madam Speaker, with that helpful bit of advice to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, I will take my seat.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today in support of Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. First off, I would like to thank the Minister of Advanced Education for bringing this forward. Over the last three and a half years I've had the opportunity to speak to many of the student groups who have advocated for the very things that are within this bill, and I think it's important to finally see this moving forward.

Of course, in the 2015 election there was an opportunity for our party, the NDP, to put forward a platform which, I believe, included tuition freezes if I'm correct and for the governing party at that time, the Progressive Conservatives, to put forward a budget that included market modifiers or the continuation of those. I think that was one of the reasons why we are here today on this side of the House and the other party, while essentially dissolved as the Conservatives, are on that side of the House.

I will just start off by saying that, of course, in 2015 our government committed to stable and predictable funding along with the tuition freeze in our platform. As we are all aware, this freeze has been put in place from the 2014-2015 year, extended into the 2018-2019 academic year.

This bill represents the conclusion of years of hard work by this minister and this government, meeting both with the student associations and students that are outside of those associations as well as the administration of these institutions. Of course, Bill 19 proposes a number of updates to the Post-secondary Learning Act that will set our province's postsecondary learning system up for continued success; first of all, tying tuition to the CPI, which was one of the main issues that the student associations brought forward to us, starting in 2015. I'm very proud to see that moving forward. We're also updating the act to give the Minister of Advanced Education the authority to order future tuition freezes, which is very important as well.

I think it's very important that we continue to see the cost of postsecondary education as affordable. I think back to my own life. While I didn't go to university, I first attended NAIT for radio/television broadcasting. Following that, I went back to work towards my journeyman ticket, which I didn't get before becoming elected, but I did some apprenticeship training there as an electrician. While I was able to afford both of those programs, in the instance of the apprenticeship training I was actually able to be reimbursed by AIT, I believe it was, which was wonderful. But I am happy to see that we're moving forward with moves to make that more affordable or capping the tuition as well.

When I think back to my own life, I think I've mentioned once in the House before that my mother, the most inspirational woman in my life, was 14 years old when she had me. I mean, there's a lot that comes with having a child that young. I can't imagine even having a child at my age, 26 now. She went on to university. She didn't miss any school. She said: you know, I want to make sure that he has the best life that he can have. So she went on, finished – well, it was in Saskatchewan, so they don't have junior high – elementary school, went on to high school, and then went to the U of S to gain a sociology degree.

Now, she is very happy that she was able to do that, but she still lives with the ramifications of having to take on a student loan. I mean, not only was she having to pay her own way through school; she was a single mother. She didn't have any support, or very little, from other family members. Honestly, if anything, she was supporting other family members other than myself. So she took on a student loan, not only having to pay for school but having to support a child, and, as I said, still lives with the ramifications of that today. I mean, this is not something – you know, not everyone goes to school and is able to find employment in the industry that they are working towards.

With that being said, I mean, we hear a discussion a lot about whether arts degrees are worth it, you know. She went and took sociology, which is a bachelor of arts program. I would never discourage anyone from doing that because no matter what you're going to postsecondary institutions for, I think you're learning something and you're becoming a better person. I would just start by saying that I do have concern with the Member for Lacombe-

Ponoka saying: well, maybe you shouldn't go to postsecondary education. Somebody else said that that's not what he meant. But I have concerns with that.

As I mentioned, you know, having a mother that young and her living with these costs still to this day, I think it's very important that we're moving forward to put a cap on tuition. I just want to say that there were other comments made by Lacombe-Ponoka – well, there were many that I have concern with, one of them being that universities should be more lean. I have great concern with that. I mean, over the last several decades, being under a Progressive Conservative government, they've had to find ways to become lean.

When I think back to my education at NAIT even, in the radio/television broadcasting program, they've had to make a lot of adjustments with such a small amount of funding. You go there and you see. I was just there last week, actually, and the instructors are putting together sound panels at home, essentially, because there's not necessarily the funding there. But they don't complain. They do with the funding what they can.

I also have other concerns with what was said. I mean, the carbon levy piece continues to come up. I will just remind the members on all sides of this House that Advanced Education has invested \$929.8 million in capital projects since April 2015. We have doubled the budget for maintenance and renewal since 2015. That's \$60 million in 2014-15, which we increased to \$118 million now. To say that the carbon levy is killing these institutions is completely ridiculous. We've seen increases to these funds, which are very important. I think that it's important to recognize that students want to see these renewable projects and green energy projects moving forward.

The person who created carbon pricing is a Nobel prize winner. When we have 97 per cent of scientists agreeing that climate change is real and that we need to do something about it, when the author of carbon pricing is winning Nobel prizes, at what point do you start to agree with this? I mean, we have prominent Conservative leaders that are agreeing with this. I don't understand. But I digress. That is not what this bill is about.

Once again, the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka said: "What have you done for students' education? Costs are increasing." Well, the tuition freeze was the first thing. He said that we're not moving fast enough. Well, you did not agree with the tuition freeze when we implemented it, but now you're here saying: oh, we agreed with everything all along. It's very silly.

11:40

Meanwhile you're saying that we haven't done anything for students. We increased the minimum wage, and this goes back to the story of my mother. She worked entirely through high school, probably through elementary, and, of course, through university. She was working at a bank as a front teller. She was making the minimum wage. To say that the minimum wage does not help these students: it's not true at all.

Let's see here. There was also mention that there should be accelerated programs, which I don't understand. We do have accelerated programs. You know, there are four-year programs. There are accelerated one- or two-year programs from a variety of institutions. This kind of reminds me of the Leader of the Official Opposition saying: you know, RAP programs are a great idea. He said that a couple of weeks ago. Well, we already have those. Those are things. It's not something he can bring in.

I guess my final piece would just be that if you are in support of this legislation so much, which you say you are – I don't necessarily believe you from the comments that you've made previously through the last three years. When the students meet with you over the next week and over the next six months, I hope that they will question your intentions. You know, if you were to become the

government of the day next year, then these students should understand and make sure that they get a promise from you, because if that were to happen, I think you'll go back on it, and I hope that they hold you to account.

Once again, thank you to the Minister of Advanced Education for bringing forward Bill 19. I'm very happy to see it move forward. It was one of the main reasons that I got involved with politics, to see more opportunities for students to succeed. I hope everyone supports it.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The hon. member from the government side had mentioned the carbon tax, and I'm wondering if the member opposite could explain to me how exactly the carbon tax benefits students, particularly around the issue of increased costs to students. The carbon tax literally increases the cost of absolutely everything. Students are not immune, and we know that, despite the rhetoric from the government in regard to the carbon rebate cheques, that that absolutely does not cover the output costs of everyday needs and expenditures in a student's life.

I would be particularly interested to know what the member thinks a carbon tax is doing to help benefit students and help them to have a more affordable life not only now, in the course of their university or college education, but how exactly, moving forward, that is going to benefit students and their families.

Ms Jansen: The green line.

Mrs. Pitt: Madam Speaker, the minister opposite yelled "green line." You know what's a fun fact? The green line was actually approved prior to this government and was not tied to any of the carbon tax funds that the government is currently putting into general revenue. They're absolutely misleading the public in these types of conversations. Everybody knows that the carbon tax money collected by this government goes into their general revenue funds and that they dole it out as need be. Particularly, the Calgary green line project was approved, actually, while the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, was a minister with the federal government.

Again, it's one of those situations where, you know, we say or do something on the Conservative side, and the government members freak out, saying: it's the world's worst thing. Then they realize: actually, it's a good idea. Then they take our talking points and use them moving forward.

Mr. Feehan: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. For the third time this morning we rise and speak to the fact that 29(2)(a) is supposed to be about the previous speaker and the comments they made. Clearly, we have drifted off into a speech and lecture with facts derived from the ether, not related to anything happening here on Earth. I really think that we need to admonish the opposition yet a third time for wasting the time of this House to use it as an opportunity to lecture and berate, completely inappropriately and without value, when we actually should be speaking to the bill at

hand. I'd really like to see them try to focus on that at least for one morning. I know it's hard. It's been a whole two hours and 45 minutes, and some attention spans really are unable to get through a whole morning.

Mrs. Pitt: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Before I address the second point of order, would you like to speak to the first point of order?

Mrs. Pitt: I would like to speak to the first point of order, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to do so.

When I was asking questions around the carbon tax and the impact that it's having on students, making their lives less affordable, the Minister of Infrastructure had yelled across to me: the green line project. I was simply explaining the facts around the green line project and where the funding was actually coming from, Madam Speaker, completely relevant to the conversation. Perhaps if the government members want to participate in the debate, they would stand up and do so. But when I was speaking on 29(2)(a) in regard to another member's comments and concerns in this House, I was completely on topic and particularly answering some of the heckling that's coming from the government ministers.

So this is not a point of order, Madam Speaker. In fact, I don't recall that the minister actually made a citation either in regard to his point of order, but this is absolutely relevant to the conversation and it's a matter of debate.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. We have discussed this issue several times already this morning, and perhaps we need to have a broader dialogue again about the use of 29(2)(a). I will say that I think that everybody has been very congenial in this House this morning for the most part, which is nice to see. That said, yes, there was some heckling occurring while you were speaking. That doesn't mean that you necessarily respond to it and get distracted by that heckling. I think that there is an onus on all of us to strive to a higher level of debate in this House. Again, I have been giving a great deal of leeway with 29(2)(a), but I encourage members to really try to stick to the intent of that standing order.

If you would like to continue your remarks on 29(2)(a), please, hon. member. Just a clarification: you cannot call a point of order on a point of order. Go ahead.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Pitt: I thought I'd try.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was talking about earlier, the affordability for students. The government is expressing concerns that it's very expensive for students for life, particularly in regard to postsecondary education, and I would absolutely agree. I would question why the government is making it even more expensive for students with their carbon tax. Students understand that, and their parents understand that. Albertans understand that the carbon tax is making life more expensive, and I don't understand why this government doesn't get it, particularly one of the younger members in the government caucus who is very likely making a significantly higher wage than most of his peers. So maybe because he doesn't understand the impacts of the carbon tax, he doesn't understand that students absolutely feel those effects. If he could explain to me why or how this carbon tax makes sense, I would be grateful and make an effort to understand where he is coming from on behalf of his constituents, not just personally for himself.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you have a few seconds to respond.

Mr. Carson: Well, I just said that I was raised by a 14-year-old mother, so for you to say that I don't know what living in poverty is like is completely ridiculous.

11:50

I'll say that the valley line LRT, completely funded by carbon levy funds, is a massive investment for my community. People understand that that investment is going to change the way people move through the city, and that is going to positively impact students across the city. It's an incredible investment in my community.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: I thought that that would be the constituency on everybody's lips, so it would be easy to remember.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 19 on third reading. Before I begin, I'd just like to make a comment, with all due respect to your position, on your response to the first point of order, where you acknowledged that the minister had withdrawn his comments and apologized. I'd just like to correct you. He has never apologized for his statement. He withdrew the comments. He has never apologized to the member, and he has never apologized to the farmers of Alberta, who he slighted in his comments.

That being said, getting back to this bill. It will put in place a cap on tuition in postsecondary institutions in Alberta, indexing them to the CPI, which will make the rate by which the tuition rises every year more predictable and controlled, and that is a good thing. I see the necessity for students as they have dealt with massive and volatile tuition hikes in the past.

But I'd also like to mention that just today in the *Edmonton Journal*, I believe, the president of Grant MacEwan University made some comments. Grant MacEwan University is a great institution that's accessible right downtown. We have a lot of people that otherwise would not be able to afford to go to an institution, but we have some that are in the inner city, and it's accessible to people that live downtown. It's a great advantage to the downtown community, much like Portage College is out in St. Paul and Lac La Biche and Cold Lake, where people can go to school right in their own community, so it does give that advantage.

Now, her concern is the unforeseen consequences of this cap. She talks about the reduction in the ability to provide competitive wages to their instructional staff, resulting in what they call cherry-picking by other institutions. Now, we've already seen this with the cap on our Crown prosecutors, Madam Speaker, where Alberta put a cap on wages, especially for people just coming out of university, and a lot of those good Crown prosecutors have left our province to go to B.C., where they can make 20 to 25 per cent more. It puts an extra burden on our legal system, especially out in rural Alberta where we have Crown prosecutors with an average caseload of upwards of 2,000 cases.

You know, I've had meetings with the chief Crown prosecutor, where he's admitted in public that they've taken 200 of their cases and just said: "You know what? These are cases that didn't involve violent crime or are mostly just petty theft, which, if it happens to be your quad or your truck that was stolen, I mean, it means a lot to you, but in the grand scheme of things in the prosecution office it didn't." They would want to stick to the violent crimes and domestic violence and that, so a lot of those cases were just thrown into the garbage and

will never see the light of day. So this is one of those unforeseen or unexpected consequences of an action of the government.

Now, you know, when they put that cap on the Crown prosecutors, they possibly didn't think about how it was going to affect especially rural Alberta and the stresses that we already have and the rural crime. People are getting the idea that they can break into houses and steal vehicles and steal RVs and all these things or just tools out of somebody's shop, and they know that even if they get caught and arrested, they're never going to be prosecuted for it. These are what we call the unforeseen consequences.

Now, while it is a huge benefit for students, especially those of low income, and for accessibility to universities and colleges, the concern from the president of Grant MacEwan University is the ability of the universities and colleges to maintain the level of education that we're accustomed to here in Alberta, and it is a great education. Two of my children have gone through, one through Grant MacEwan University and one through the University of Alberta for a lot of years. A medical degree takes a long time. A nursing degree is a four-year program.

I know that not only the tuitions but as rural students living in Edmonton it's the extra costs of accommodations and just living your life and having enough money to buy your lunches and not have to work extra jobs just to make ends meet so that you can concentrate on your studies.

My only concern with the cap on tuition is, you know, listening to the president of Grant MacEwan and her concerns about how it may affect the quality, the number of courses that are available, and also that they may have to cap the salaries of some of their high-end instructors and some of the best instructors. These people have a limited career just like everybody else. Not saying that they're totally focused on money, but a lot of times it is a really big thing, where if you have a choice to work in Edmonton for \$100,000 a year or in Victoria for \$150,000, a lot of times you may choose to go to another institution. That being said, I guess that is my only concern with the bill.

We are supporting. We do understand how it affects students. In an attempt to continue increasing revenue, postsecondary institutions continued increasing their prices in the form of noninstructional fees when tuition was frozen. My understanding is that this bill also gives the minister the ability to cap those expenses as well. From my understanding, reading what the president of Grant MacEwan University said today, a lot of times the gym fees and access to exercise facilities and even some of the food is subsidized, and a lot of times they're already covering a lot of those costs, so putting a cap on those is going to make it even harder for universities to operate in that way.

Again, I just hope that we don't end up in a situation where we look back at this cap on tuition three years down the road and say:

"You know what? It was a very well-intended bill, but here are the consequences that we've seen. We've had a reduction in courses at Grant MacEwan or the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary, and we've lost some really good instructors from these programs, and we very, very likely will never get those folks back or increase that level of study." With this legislative step to increase the transparency of noninstructional fees, it's my hope that students will no longer face vague and undefined fees during their education.

Further to this, the bill enacts a limit to the increase in tuition, stating that program tuition can be raised by a maximum 10 per cent as long as the average across the board is not greater than the CPI. We can recall a few years prior to the tuition freeze, since this government took over, that tuition went up by the rate of inflation already. This set a precedent for what Bill 19 aims to accomplish, and also means that the same can be achieved through ministerial orders rather than new legislation altogether.

Again, just before I run out of time here, Madam Speaker, I'd just like to reflect, and hopefully the minister will consult with the president of Grant MacEwan. I know that I've met with her. She's a very, very intelligent lady and has the best intentions for her students and her faculty in mind when she's making her decisions. I don't think she would come out and just make reckless statements in regard to Bill 19. That being said, this bill protects students from postsecondary institutions hiking such fees as a roundabout way of increasing revenue. We do see that. The measure affords more security and confidence for students, commendable in all ways. I know that it was an issue when my son was going to school and when my daughter was going to school, the tuitions were a big part of it.

Like I said, as far as from a rural student standpoint, far more than that is the cost of rent. If you're trying to live in downtown Edmonton so that you're close to Grant MacEwan University, it is very, very expensive to live down here, and food costs, transportation costs as well. There's more to the whole issue than just the tuition when it comes to student's accessibility, especially coming from a rural setting. I know that it does hold back a lot of rural students from making those choices of furthering their education because they don't have the same access that a student born and raised and living in Edmonton and Calgary would have, being able to live at home while they go to university. It can be quite costly for rural students to come into Edmonton and Calgary. If there's something we can do to help subsidize the . . .

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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