



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, June 19, 2019

Day 16

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature**

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UCP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UCP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UCP)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UCP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UCP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeschen, Hon. Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP),
Government Whip
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UCP)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UCP)
Glasgo, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UCP)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UCP)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UCP)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UCP)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., Taber-Warner (UCP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
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Issik, Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UCP)
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UCP)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UCP),
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UCP)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (UCP)
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Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, Edmonton-South West (UCP)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UCP),
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Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UCP)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UCP)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UCP)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre
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Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UCP)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UCP)
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Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UCP),
Deputy Government House Leader
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Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UCP),
Deputy Government Whip
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Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
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Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UCP)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UCP)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP),
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Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UCP)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UCP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UCP)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UCP)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UCP)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UCP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
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Jason Copping	Minister of Labour and Immigration
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Travis Toews	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations

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Muhammad Yaseen	Parliamentary Secretary of Immigration
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Walker
Yao

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Nixon, Jeremy
Pancholi
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Rehn
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Loyola
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Rosin
Sabir
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Singh
Smith
Turton
Yaseen

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 19, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the prayer.

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of power and responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us this afternoon from the constituency of Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is the Camilla school. If you'd like to welcome the school group.

Hon. members, in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon I'm happy to welcome Joanne Penner Herron. She's joining us from Lethbridge.

Hon. members, joining us this afternoon are the father and brother of the Minister of Service Alberta, Brian and Bennett Glubish.

Guests of the Minister of Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women today are Debra Tomlinson, Corinne Ofstie, Katie Kitschke, Patricia Arango, Stephanie Hadley, Samantha Pearson, and Mary Jane James.

Also joining us this afternoon, guests of the Minister of Labour and Immigration: Mohamed Alkadi, Vivian Feng, Jacqueline and Felix Sennyah, Mervin Cereno, Adrian Untalan, Chinoso Obiorah, Margaret Amangyen, Jennifer Bertrand, Dr. Troy Davies, Carlos Exclamador, and Marjorie Newman. I invite them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Democracy and Parliamentary Debate

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, what is democracy? Democracy is the vital concept that underpins our great province's system of government. Democracy is what allows 4.3 million Albertans, each with their own unique views, to live with one another in peace and prosperity.

To most of us democracy means free and fair elections on a regular schedule, and to be sure, that is a key part of it, but another part of democracy is the idea that those who are victorious in any election will govern well, not just for those who supported them but for all. Democracy also means having the ability to present alternative viewpoints to the government of the day. Some might even argue that it's this last part, having an official space for differing views, that is the real distinction between democracies and dictatorships. As we all know, many countries that toil under dictatorial leaders still have so-called elections.

It is, therefore, the lengthy debates that we have in this House and the ability of the opposition to suggest alternatives to the government's course that truly make up our democracy. That is why I'm so thoroughly disappointed by the recent actions of this government, Mr. Speaker. The recent decision by this government to pre-emptively shut down debate on Bill 9 is not just bad etiquette, but it quite literally constitutes an assault on our democracy itself.

I can understand that the government members may not like to hear the opposition explain to them the ways in which Bill 9 breaks the law and how eventually the Supreme Court of Canada will undo Bill 9's disregard for collectively bargained contracts, but it is the ability to speak these truths to power that make our province a democracy, Mr. Speaker.

While this government is free to bring forward as much deeply flawed legislation as they wish, I would ask them to recognize that their recent actions to pre-emptively shut down debate take them to an even worse low. There have been plenty of flawed pieces of legislation in this place, Mr. Speaker, but it is the debate itself that allows us to call this province a democracy, and I ask the government to get back to honouring their oath and maintaining it as such.

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

International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and acknowledge June 19 as the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. This date was chosen to commemorate the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1820, in which the council condemned sexual violence as a tactic of war, an impediment to peace building. The term "conflict-related sexual violence" refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, forced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence perpetrated against women, men, girls, or boys that is indirectly linked to a conflict.

The year 2019 marks the 10-year anniversary of the establishment of the mandate of the special representative of the UN Secretary-General on sexual violence and conflict. Over the past decade there has been a fundamental shift in the understanding of conflict-related sexual violence as a threat to international peace and security. Threats of sexual violence leave entire communities of potential victims living in fear. This fear is used as a weapon by occupying forces to pacify the population and reinforce their grip on the community. This year's International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict will call for a survivor-centered approach that builds the resilience of affected individuals while minimizing the risk of retraumatization, social alienation, and stigma. No individual should be subjected to the kind of trauma these individuals are subjected to in conflict zones every single day.

Our United Conservative government stands in support with the victims of sexual assault and sexual violence, whether it's here in Alberta or anywhere in the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May God bless the victims of these tragedies.

Government Policies

Mr. Dang: Team Angry, Mr. Speaker. That's what the government likes to sling at the Official Opposition when they've run out of insults. [interjections] Now, the government thinks that's degrading for some reason.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is a long-standing tradition of absolutely no heckling during Members' Statements. I'd ask that the hon. member have the opportunity to restart the clock to two minutes, and he can begin again should he wish.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you. Team Angry. That's what the government likes to sling at the Official Opposition when they've run out of

insults and heckles. Now, the government thinks that's degrading for some reason. But, Mr. Speaker, I am angry.

I'm angry because this is a government which has no respect for Albertans or democracy. I'm angry because this is a government that decided to introduce Bill Hate, a bill which directly targets LGBTQ2S-plus kids and destroys GSAs. I'm angry because this government introduced legislation to break the law and attack the rights of workers. I am angry that this government is picking the pockets of everyday families to give a 4 and a half billion dollar tax break to their wealthy friends. I'm angry because this government is moving forward with risky ideological P3s that will hurt education and health care all across this province. I'm angry that this government doesn't tell the truth when it comes to their risky ideological privatization towards American-style health care. I'm angry that this government is cutting the minimum wage of young Albertans. It said, quote, people of modest human capital don't need to be paid fairly.

I'm angry that this government has protected and stood by candidates and party members who are white supremacists, racists, and who have compared the pride flag to a swastika. I'm angry that this government's House leader fired a woman for reporting sexual harassment and then was promoted. I'm angry that this government is trying to reopen long-settled issues like women's rights and reproductive rights. I am angry that this government hides from the media, refuses to answer questions of the public, and doesn't tell the truth to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, when the government calls us Team Angry, I want them to know that they're right. I am angry. I'm angry on behalf of all Albertans and all of those who were misled by this government. I'm angry because I know how important it is for us to keep fighting for the rights of our constituents. I will never stop standing up against injustices committed by this government.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Kiwanis Club of Calgary Centennial

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour today to rise in the House to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Kiwanis Club of Calgary. The Kiwanis Club is an international organization, with over 550,000 Kiwanians, dedicated to improving the lives of children one community at a time. The Kiwanis Club in Alberta began in Calgary and was founded by a group of World War I veterans on this very day in 1919. One of the most well-known Kiwanis Club initiatives is Kamp Kiwanis, which finds its home just east of Bragg Creek in the heart of our beautiful provincial riding of Banff-Kananaskis.

1:40

When I look back on my life growing up, some of my favourite childhood memories stem from attending summer camp year after year. Summer camp provided me and my friends the opportunity to get out in nature and just be kids while also learning independence while living away from our parents for a week. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend summer camp for many years of my life and eventually went on to become a camp counsellor for two summers. But not every child has the opportunity I had, and that is why Kamp Kiwanis exists.

Kamp Kiwanis is specifically for children from underprivileged or disadvantaged backgrounds. Every child who attends Kamp Kiwanis is one hundred per cent subsidized, allowing children who would not normally get to experience the joys of summer camp the gift of doing so. Last year 546 children between grades 4 and 12

were given the privilege of attending camp, all thanks to the work that the Kiwanis Club of Calgary and their generous donors do. Kamp Kiwanis also hosts an outdoor school and rents their facilities out to other community groups to run programs out of. Between all the services they offer, Kamp Kiwanis welcomes over 11,000 campers, students, and community members every single year. Kamp Kiwanis is a wonderful initiative, and I am proud to have them operate in my riding.

Today I hope all members of this House can join me in congratulating the Kiwanis Club of Calgary on 100 years well served and thousands of lives touched.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

ATCO Sale of Electric Power Plants

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was in Hanna this morning, and I'm happy to report that it absolutely poured, so this member's statement will not be about the pending drought.

I was in Hanna to meet with community leaders and the current and soon-to-be owners of the Sheerness and Battle River generating stations. ATCO has a pending sale of these assets, along with nine others, to Energy Capital Partners based out of New Jersey. The new Canadian entity will be dubbed Heartland Generation Ltd. Energy Capital Partners is a major top 10 power generator in the U.S. For context, Mr. Speaker, they own 27 gigawatts of generation while the entire grid in Alberta is approximately 10. They also own Calpine, the largest natural gas power-generation company in the United States. They purchased this suite of generating facilities from ATCO because they believe them to be best in class with strong growth opportunities.

The coal-to-gas conversion will continue at both Sheerness and Battle River. Engineering and equipment manufacturing is under way, and construction will begin in July for Battle River 5 and October for Sheerness. Both facilities will be able to co-fire – that is, burn a blend of gas and coal – by March of next year. Between March 2020 and the spring of 2022, the decision of how much to burn of gas or coal will be largely economic. By 2022 firm gas contracts will be in place, and the full weight of the accelerated coal phase-out will be felt by these communities.

The silver lining for me is that we have a company that wants to be here, will base its headquarters in Calgary, has promised to keep the same faces in the same roles, and is focused on the future and growth. However, it is lost on no one that the made-in-Alberta carbon tax accelerated this transition and cost communities like Hanna and Forestburg a hefty toll. The previous government demanded that these communities transition rapidly away from coal. We as a province are left with American-owned infrastructure and an Alberta grid that continues to import coal-fired power from other jurisdictions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie is rising to make a statement.

Grande Prairie Regional Hospital Construction

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the Assembly today to report on the progress of the Grande Prairie regional hospital build. Originally approved in 2010, this project has been problematic, to say the least, and has cost Albertans far too much in delays and cost overruns. My commitment to the constituents of Grande Prairie is twofold: to regularly visit the site and personally ensure that progress is ongoing and to meet with stakeholders from the project to learn what went wrong at each stage and compile that learning to save taxpayer funds on future infrastructure projects. In

short, I want to get this hospital completed and open to serve Albertans, and I want to ensure that the lessons from this project are learned and the mistakes are not repeated.

It was timely, then, on June 7 to host the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and the hon. Minister of Finance as well as the Member for Central Peace-Notley at the hospital build site in Grande Prairie for a tour and a review of the next steps to get this project finally completed. The directive is clear: we need this hospital completed as soon as possible, and we need to deliver a quality facility to the people of the Grande Prairie area, who have been more than patient. As we toured with site leaders, it was encouraging to see such a positive and productive work site, including as many as 450 construction personnel, and to witness their focus on timely completion and the highest calibre of workmanship.

When completed, the Grande Prairie regional hospital will provide a wide range of health care services, including surgery, cancer care, and emergency services. The new hospital will include a state-of-the-art cancer centre, with two new radiation vaults, and will serve as a health care training facility in partnership with Grande Prairie Regional College.

This facility is long overdue, and my constituents have raised their concerns over the project with me repeatedly, so I want to take this opportunity to highlight this project as an identified priority for this government and for myself as the MLA for Grande Prairie.

On behalf of the city of Grande Prairie thank you to the ministers as well as the member for taking the time to join me on this tour.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Bill 11

Fair Registration Practices Act

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move first reading of Bill 11, the Fair Registration Practices Act.

This bill introduces measures to ensure that regulated professions are governed by registration practices that are transparent, objective, impartial, and fair. This includes the creation of a fair registration practices office. This office will work with trade and professional licensing bodies to streamline, simplify, and accelerate foreign credential recognition, with the goal of giving applicants for licensure an interim decision within six months or less of their application. This legislation enables the government to work collaboratively with regulatory bodies to ensure that best practices are followed and that organizations fulfill their requirements as laid out in the act. With this proposed legislation we will remove unfair barriers while maintaining the high professional standards all Albertans have come to know and expect.

We're heard from many newcomers who are underemployed and unable to contribute to our economy at their skill level. All too often this is because they are waiting for months, even years for their credentials to be recognized. This delay not only impacts newcomers to our province; it also hurts our economy. We are inviting skilled immigrants to Alberta because their skills are in demand, and then due to unnecessary delays these skilled newcomers are not able to get to work in their profession. By introducing this legislation, we will create a win-win situation for newcomers as well as Alberta as their skills help to grow and diversify our economy. Bill 11 will speed up the process where possible, maintain high professional standards, and increase fairness and transparency. This is a key part

of our fairness for newcomers plan to reduce red tape, reignite the economy, and get all Albertans back to work.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of a tabling that I am making right now in regard to the Sherwood Park UCP constituency office, a fundraising letter that was sent out using the title of the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, which was dated on June 10.

I also have the requisite copies of a report, Supervised Injection Services: What Has Been Demonstrated? A Systematic Literature Review.

And another report: Reports of Needles Have Dropped Since Opening of Edmonton's Supervised Consumption Sites.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I have the appropriate number of copies of a news article from the Canadian Press cautiously welcoming yesterday's TMX approval. Jack Mintz, the tax policy and economics expert, echoed our Premier's comments yesterday. He said, "I think the champagne corks will come out if there's a feeling there won't be legal challenges that can stop the pipeline from being built." All my constituents are really concerned about the opposition from the NDP Premier, NDP leader . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. You've already tabled the document.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I have tablings today. Yesterday in the House, while speaking to Bill 9, the bad-faith bargaining bill, I referenced a *Financial Post* article written by Drew Hasselback, November 13, 2014, entitled Supreme Court of Canada Imposes General Duty of Good Faith in Contract Performance, which underlines the obligations of all contractors, including governments, including the Alberta government, to be honest in their performance of their execution of contracts and to do so in good faith. I have five copies.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another story which is part of the CBC news series entitled In Our Backyard. This one is called How Climate Change Is Thawing the "Glue That Holds the Northern Landscape Together."

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a document here called Simply Having a Gay Straight Alliance Reduces Suicide Risk for All Students. In schools with GSAs heterosexual boys were half as likely to attempt suicide. I have the requisite five copies.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Bill 9 Debate Time

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP are ramming through their bad-faith bargaining bill at a breakneck speed. They have invoked time allocation at all three levels of debate, and that's

something the Legislature library confirms hasn't happened in nearly 30 years. It's just ridiculous. What's more is that this bill is designed purely to gut the wages of teachers, nurses, and many more. To the Premier: why have you put a muzzle on this House? What are you afraid of?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I reject completely the premise of the question. First of all, closure has not been used. In fact, at second reading of Bill 9 I believe there's been 13 hours or 16 hours of debate. Twenty-two members of the opposition were able to speak. If that's closure, I can't imagine what an open-ended debate is. We're happy to hear from members of the opposition, but our commitment is to ensure that we get back to fiscal balance. That means getting all the information on the table, which the MacKinnon commission will be providing us with before we can proceed with correct information on the wage reopeners.

Ms Hoffman: It's the end of the school year, Mr. Speaker. Our teachers are focused on marking exams, filling out report cards, looking forward to a well-earned break, and now this government is attempting to ram through legislation that guts their wages before they've even had a chance to consider what the impacts will be. To the Premier: will you commit to actually bargaining with teachers and other workers and promise here and now that you will never impose a contract on them?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate but hardly surprising that the NDP anger machine continues to try to mislead Albertans with their tactics of fear and smear, precisely the tactics that were so resoundingly rejected on April 16. There is nothing in this bill about reducing anybody's wages. The collective bargaining agreements continue. This simply seeks a few months in order for the government to get adequate information to proceed to the wage reopeners in a way that is responsible and fully informed by the facts.

Ms Hoffman: The question was a simple one, Mr. Speaker. Will you commit that you will never impose an agreement on teachers that they actually haven't bargained and agreed to? The government has also cut the ability to bring amendments to the bill, and trust us: we want to amend it. This bill gives government both the ability to rip up contracts with public-sector workers and to impose contracts on those workers without even having to return to this House. That's right. The Premier wants to screw workers over and won't even look them in the eye while he's doing it. To the Premier: why are you such a coward?

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Hon. member, it sounded a lot to me like you called the Premier a coward. I'm pretty sure that would be considered to be unparliamentary. I'll invite you to withdraw and apologize for such a comment.

Ms Hoffman: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I certainly shouldn't have said, "Why are you being such a coward?" I should have said: why are you acting like such a coward? I apologize. I shouldn't have called him that specifically.

Bill 9 Debate Time (continued)

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the schoolyard bully tactics are not going to prevent this government from keeping our commitment to Albertans to restore the province's finances to balance after the

fiscal catastrophe of the NDP's \$100 billion debt plan. Now, Bill 9 very simply and very clearly is limited to giving the government a little bit more time to receive all of the facts about the NDP's fiscal catastrophe so we know what we're dealing with when we sit down and negotiate in good faith with our public-sector unions.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education can't keep her stories straight. Whether it be enrolment funding – the Finance minister finally bailed her out there; we're really glad about that – whether it be the GSA bill, saying that it's the strongest legislation in the country – it's not – you name it, she changes her mind every day. Yesterday during interim supply I finally got a straight answer from the minister. I asked the minister if the classroom improvement fund our government introduced and the 400 teachers it adds to the classroom would be extended this fall. She said it wouldn't. To the minister: will you confirm once more to this House that the 400 teachers aren't important to you or your government?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, of course teachers are important to this government. My dad was a teacher. The Minister of Education worked for years as an elected member of her local school board, as president of her provincial school board trustees' association.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I need to come back to the previous question, where the member said that the government wasn't allowing amendments on Bill 9. Of course, that's absolutely ridiculous. The opposition and any member can bring forward amendments at report stage, and they'll be considered by the whole House, as is normal in any parliamentary democracy.

Ms Hoffman: Well, not in second reading, Mr. Speaker.

The classroom improvement fund was critical for adding teacher support staff and programs for students with complex needs. Those were 400 teachers. That description was pulled right from the Alberta Education website. The school board this minister represented just last year, Red Deer Catholic, would have had another \$1.2 million to help students this fall. I'm sure that all the Calgary caucus members will be concerned to know that nearly \$20 million will be cut from Calgary public and Catholic boards alone by cancelling CIF. To the minister: can you explain why students with complex needs will be left behind so you can fund a \$4.5 billion tax giveaway to wealthy corporations?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the government has been clear that enrolment growth in the upcoming school year will be fully funded. At the same time, we are going to work with school boards, teachers, administrators to ensure that we're able to deliver high-quality public education more efficiently. The \$100 billion NDP debt is what really jeopardizes the future of our public services, including public education. They want to burden that generation of students with massive higher taxes through debt that has to be repaid with interest. We're not going to do that.

Ms Hoffman: Yesterday in interim supply the Minister of Education said that the classroom improvement fund would be gone this upcoming year. That's 400 teachers, Mr. Speaker. That is absolutely not what the Premier just said. Who's right: the Minister of Education or the Premier? Clearly they're not on the same page. Maybe the Finance minister needs to straighten things out again.

Mr. Kenney: Again, Mr. Speaker, we have the biggest spending public education system in Canada in per capita terms. We have the

highest paid teachers in Canada in per capita terms. [interjections] This government is going to continue funding enrolment growth. None of those facts will be changed by the anger machine angrily heckling in this Assembly. What we will do, however, is ensure the future of our public services, including education, by bringing balance back to the province's finances. We will not jeopardize the future of those services by spending billions of dollars on debt interest to the bankers and bondholders.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora for the third question.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been nine days since the Finance minister announced that the government would fully fund enrolment, and I want to thank him again for the doing what the Education minister refused to do. Unfortunately, we still can't get an answer from this Education minister on what it really means. Districts like Foothills school district have to make choices now, and they're being forced to guess. Does the minister know how many teachers are being laid off in the Foothills school district while she hems and haws?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I know that the New Democrats don't just see their opponents as opponents. There's this terrible tendency to demonize their opponents. They seem particularly uncomfortable with strong Conservative women like the hon. the Minister of Education, who's doing a fantastic job in this place to keep our platform commitments to high-quality public education, the funding levels of which we will maintain or increase, while also respecting our wonderful tradition of school choice in Alberta. We stand with our tremendous Minister of Education.

2:00

Ms Hoffman: That would be easier to believe if the Premier would actually let her speak when I ask her a question. The Member for Livingstone-Macleod might want to know the answer to that question. It's at least 10 teachers and 20 educational assistants that are losing their jobs in Foothills on top of losses through attrition.

Let's try another. Does the minister know the consequences of her bungling of the Education budget for Banff's public schools?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the opposition attacked me when I wasn't here to answer questions because I was trying to bring investment to Alberta. Now they attack me for answering questions in the place. But, you know, it's perfect, because all they really know how to do is to attack. While they attack, while they denigrate, while they engage in ad hominem attacks, particularly against the women in these benches, we instead are focused on growing, on building, and on strengthening the Alberta economy and our public services.

Ms Hoffman: I think that asking a question about how many teachers are being laid off is a fair and reasonable question, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Banff-Kananaskis probably should have asked this question, but let me make sure that I tell her the answer. The answer is that staff morale is in the tank. They're cutting the music teacher from the elementary school, half the teachers at the elementary school are going to be new, and most of them will be on temporary contracts because they are worried that cuts are going to be even deeper in the fall.

Boards are bracing for the worst, Mr. Speaker, and this minister is doing nothing. Is the minister ready to stop her messaging and admit to her own caucus that she has no idea about the chaos that she's creating in her local school districts, or does she enjoy causing stress for . . .

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the full outrage from the NDP anger machine does not change the facts that this government was elected on a commitment to maintain or increase funding levels for public education and that we have committed to increasing enrolment growth next year. We've also committed to bringing our province's finances back to balance, to stop the NDP's reckless dive towards \$100 billion in debt. [interjection] I'm being heckled now by the most incompetent former Finance minister in Alberta history, who ran the largest per capita deficit in the country. We're going to stop that disastrous record.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-McCall is rising with a question.

Energy Industry Update

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's start with jobs and the economy. Energy company Repsol has announced that they're laying off hundreds of staff from their downtown Calgary office as well as their Alberta field offices. Clearly, they haven't gotten the message from this Premier that Alberta is open for business. Perhaps it's because he hasn't done a thing to create jobs except hand out big tax giveaways to wealthy corporations and pray that in a few years it generates jobs. Clearly, Repsol wasn't sold. To the Premier: how many more companies will fire workers while we wait to see if your risky gamble pays off?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate news for the workers at Repsol here in Canada. I can tell you that I met with the CEO of Repsol last year. The Premier refused to meet with him, but I did as Leader of the Opposition, and he explained to me how the damaging policies of the NDP were jeopardizing the future of that company in this province. We inherited the worst economic record of any government since the Great Depression. We are doing everything we can to turn that around by restoring investor confidence and creating jobs in Alberta, but it won't happen overnight after four years of catastrophic economic mismanagement.

Mr. Sabir: Earlier this month oil company Nexen also announced it was laying off a hundred Calgary workers. Neither of these companies seem to be endorsing this Premier's plan. Certainly, firing workers indicates otherwise. To the Premier: have you tried to sell Repsol or Nexen on your much-touted platform? Perhaps this is something useful that your war room could do?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report to this House that last week I met with major global investors in the energy sector and in other sectors who are profoundly interested in new investments in Alberta precisely because of the job-creation strategy of this government. One global CEO was telling me that his company was getting close to a positive final investment decision on a prospective \$10 billion investment here precisely because of the job-creation tax cut enshrined in Bill 3, that I hope will be passed into law soon in this Legislature.

Mr. Sabir: One way to protect jobs while we wait for TMX and other pipelines to be built is to move oil by rail. This government is still claiming that it will rip up the contracts we signed that would move 120,000 barrels per day. The minister hasn't been able to tell us how many barrels he has secured in the private sector to replace these contracts. To the minister. Let's try again. Is it 20,000 or 100 or 20 or 10 or 1, or is it actually zero barrels?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it takes a lot of chutzpah for the NDP to stand up and ask a question like that, the party that urged Justin

Trudeau to kill the Northern Gateway pipeline. Oil should have been flowing through that pipeline by now. The NDP surrendered without a peep to the federal Liberals, killing the Energy East pipeline. The NDP supported the federal surrender to Obama's veto on Keystone XL. Why? Because they always opposed Keystone XL. The NDP appointed people like Tzaporah Berman who want to shut down the energy industry. Shame on them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Provincial Fiscal Sustainability

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2016 the Finance minister of the previous NDP government stated that they would not make the choice of balancing our books and reducing our debt on the backs of Albertans, an interesting statement for the NDP government to make before committing Albertans and their children to pay principal and interest on upwards of \$100 billion of debt. To the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance: can you comment on the need for our government, unlike the previous government, to not ignore the realities of debt and interest but, instead, to budget sustainably with the future of Albertans and their children in mind?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The members opposite had us on a trajectory of \$100 billion of accumulated provincial debt in this province. The interest payments alone would have been crippling. As it stands, Albertans pay \$1.9 billion per year right now as a result of that legacy. This is larger than most government departments' total budgets. We've made a commitment to Albertans to be responsible with their hard-earned tax dollars. We're looking forward to the recommendations of the MacKinnon panel, and we're committed to bringing this province to balance.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that under the previous NDP government Alberta has become one of the highest spenders in the country on health care and given that, despite this, wait times have been increasing while health outcomes have been declining, can the Minister of Finance comment on Alberta's current health care expenditures, including the proportion of our budget that health care represents and how Alberta's spending in this area compares to the national average and to other provinces?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to rise and answer on behalf of the hon. minister. Alberta spends close to \$22 billion per year on health care. This makes up about 40 per cent of our budget. The Canadian Institute for Health Information, or CIHI, found that we spent approximately 7 and a half thousand dollars per person on health care each year. This is about \$700 more than the Canadian average and puts us among the highest in Canada. Unfortunately, the high level of spending does not translate into stronger results for Albertans. We are committed to delivering on that value and providing Albertans with the quality health care services that they deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Health minister. Given that Alberta is also spending comparatively higher

amounts on its education system and given that, despite this, constituencies like my own lack schools, playgrounds, and continue to struggle with excessive classroom sizes and declining math and reading scores, can the minister comment on Alberta's education system expenditures, including the proportion of our budget that education represents and how Alberta's spending in this area compares to the national average and other provinces?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We owe it to Albertans to examine how to achieve the best possible outcomes for our students. Right now Alberta is in the top three provinces when it comes to spending on a per-student basis. Our education investment makes up approximately 15 per cent of our total budget. Over the past 15 years operational funding for education has increased by 80 per cent, far outpacing inflation and enrolment growth. We will always ensure that Alberta's students receive a world-class education, and we know that there are ways to do that.

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

2:10

Publicly Funded Health Care

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier because clearly the Minister of Health doesn't care about keeping health care affordable for Albertans. Yesterday I asked the minister . . .

An Hon. Member: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Feehan: . . . if he would support my Bill 203, which bans billing for insured health services. He said no. This side of the House supports universal public health care, period. To the Premier: are you aware that your minister wants to bring credit card medicine to Alberta? Is this also what you want?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:10.

Mr. Kenney: No, and no.

Mr. Speaker, this morning at about 1 a.m. I was in this place when that member stood up and compared Bill 9, a temporary delay in wage reopeners, to slavery. That is a gross abuse of the privilege of a member of this place, to draw such a grotesque and false analogy between a simple matter of getting information on collective bargaining and the practice of slavery. Will he apologize? Shame on him.

Mr. Feehan: I won't apologize to the guy who asked for an English to English translation of a Sikh Member of Parliament.

Given that the Premier has said that surgeons . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, we don't use preambles after question 4.

Mr. Feehan: I'm sorry?

The Speaker: Don't use a preamble after question 4.

Mr. Feehan: Given that the Premier has said that surgeons take too many coffee breaks when they could be operating on multiple patients at once and given that he's also said that health care workers waste their time on unnecessary duties like, say, sanitizing equipment, to the Premier: the next time you need an operation, is it okay if you're the fifth person or perhaps the 10th person to go under the knife? Is it all right if that knife is just a little dirty from the last guy?

Mr. Kenney: And they continue to descend into lower levels of mudslinging, of incivility, Mr. Speaker. But I'm not surprised. The member can't even acknowledge that his perverse analogy between Bill 9 and the practice of slavery was at best inappropriate and completely unbecoming of any member of this place. Again, I'm not surprised, though. That was the member who in the last session stood up and spent several minutes in this place ridiculing the Jewish Torah. He should be ashamed of himself.

Mr. Feehan: Well, clearly, this Premier does not want to answer the questions. Must be something he's trying to hide.

Given that both the Premier and the minister are trying to shame health care workers so that they can justify swiping their pay with the bad-faith bargaining bill and given that it's clear that to pay for his \$4.5 billion tax giveaway to wealthy corporations, this Premier will turn to two-tiered, American-style health care in the near future, to the Premier: when I turn up at the emergency room, do you prefer that I use Visa, MasterCard, or American Express?

Mr. Kenney: You know what's peculiar, Mr. Speaker? The lines we just heard: classic, old-school NDP medi-scare lines used in every campaign that we've ever seen in Alberta, including the most recent campaign. Do you know what Albertans did when they heard the medi-scare threats from the NDP? They fired them. They gave us the largest democratic mandate in history, in part based on our public health guarantee to ensure high-quality, publicly funded, and universally accessible health care.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'm still waiting for that member to apologize for his analogy between slavery and Bill 9.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows is rising.

Quebec Bill 21

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked the government to join the opposition members of this House in condemning Quebec's hateful Bill 21. The legislation poses an impossible choice between career and faith. It bans Muslim and Sikh teachers, lawyers, police officers, and judges from wearing turbans and hijabs at work. To the Premier: are you aware of the hateful Bill 21, and will you stand in this House today and condemn it?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've always been clear that I oppose this bill, this approach. In fact, when I was the federal minister for multiculturalism, I publicly threatened to launch a constitutional challenge against the former PQ government for their charter of values, which included similar provisions. In Alberta we believe in pluralism and respect for religious freedom, including the right of people to wear the ostensible signs of their religious faith.

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier is said to be building a new friendship with the Quebec Premier and given that the two had dinner together last Wednesday, before the Quebec Premier spent his weekend fighting to ram through his government's racist legislation, to the Premier: did you raise concerns about Bill 21 with your friend the Quebec Premier, and did you ask him to kill the bill immediately?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I did indicate my opposition. I think I speak for the vast majority of Albertans in saying that we believe in religious freedom and that that religious freedom should be protected; for example, for public servants wearing ostensible religious symbols.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the current Premier posted on social media that during his meeting with the Premier they, quote: discussed ways to better choose immigrants based on business needs. To the Premier: what exactly did you discuss with the Quebec Premier, and will you please speak out publicly on social media and condemn Bill 21 immediately?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I've already answered the question. The member has a hard time taking yes for an answer. I would just point out to him that when I was the federal multiculturalism minister, I championed the Multani case, for example, that allowed Sikh children to wear kirpans to the Montreal public schools. I worked to change the rules to allow kirpans, for example, to be worn at Canadian consulates and high commissions around the country. I supported the rights of girls in Montreal to wear hijabs while playing soccer, against a rule that had been adopted for them. My record of these matters is very clear.

Highway 1A Interchange at Cochrane

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, the previous PC government had the intention to twin highway 1A through Cochrane, but the project was never completed. The following NDP government promised to alleviate the traffic pressure in my constituency of Airdrie-Cochrane by building an interchange at highways 1A and 22. However, the capital list this project was apparently on was never released to the electorate. To the Minister of Transportation: is it the intention of this government to make the capital list public?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Cochrane interchange project is listed in Alberta Transportation's 2018 construction program. Perhaps part of the reason why it never was advanced by the previous NDP government is that they actually let that agreement, that I signed with the nation, on the widening of 1A lapse.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given we know this project was not budgeted for, as no budget was released for this fiscal year, and given the previous NDP government had stated that they were building the highway interchange in Cochrane and given that 1A and 22 interchange is still in the design phase, can the minister tell me if this project is still currently on the capital list?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. I discussed this project, I'd have the hon. member know – and a thank you to him for his advocacy on behalf of his constituents. I talked to the mayor of Cochrane in May on this project. I know it's important. As we move ahead, we will attempt to get it back on the list when we have the agreement back with the nation. At that point it will be under consideration in the capital planning and budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given this project is long overdue in the community of Cochrane and given that this roadway and interchange present a significant safety risk to commercial traffic, residents, and tourists alike, to the Minister of Transportation:

now that you've been able to review the situation in your department, will this much-needed interchange at 1A and 22 remain a priority moving forward?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The interchange itself is not part of the nation. I can say that to date \$2.2 million has been spent on planning, design, and engineering. Again, that piece will be considered as part of the overall capital planning and budget process for 2019. When we make those final decisions, we will certainly announce them. I appreciate the hon. member advocating for his constituency.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is rising to ask a question.

Gay-straight Alliance Participant Privacy Protection

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education seems more than willing to pass the buck to the Privacy Commissioner when it comes to protecting our LGBTQ youth. She stated repeatedly that FOIP and PIPA would prevent students from being outed, but even the Privacy Commissioner acknowledged that schools have significant discretion under these acts to decide if it would be reasonable to out students. We brought in Bill 24 because some schools did think it was reasonable to out students. Is the minister's response to queer and trans kids that they can be outed because they can just file a complaint with the Privacy Commissioner?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it's quite frankly odious that the NDP continues to suggest that there are people who want to, quote: out gay students. This is ridiculous. It's contrary to the law. If students disclose to a teacher or counsellor private information, for example, about their sexual orientation, obviously, there is both a professional obligation and a legal obligation under the privacy act for that information to be retained as private, as was confirmed yesterday by the Privacy Commissioner.

2:20

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP government had several examples of situations where schools were outing kids to their parents.

Given that the Privacy Commissioner's own website says that it takes six to eight weeks to even confirm if they'll investigate a complaint and given that it takes another, at least, nine months to investigate and that it could take another 18 months or more to conduct an inquiry and have a formal decision, to the minister: I guess what you're basically saying is that if a student is outed and feels they cannot continue on in their school or in their home, it's okay; it will be dealt with in due course.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Privacy Commissioner confirmed the law – confirmed the law – for people who work in positions of authority and responsibility with students. Of course, they are trained and expected – they are professionally required, they are legally required – to respect the law. The NDP understood exactly this, which is why they did not bring forward Bill 24-style amendments when Bill 10 passed into law here in 2014, nor did they for their first three years in government. This is nothing but cheap divisive politics on the part of the NDP.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a number of outed kids would disagree with the Premier's statement and given that the Privacy Commissioner has said that they cannot issue fines, force any form of discipline, or act as an advocate for LGBTQ youth that have been outed, to the minister: what exactly would be the point of complaining to the Privacy Commissioner, why are you passing the buck to a pointless privacy investigation, and why do you continue to stand in this House every day and defend legislation that will put students' lives at risk?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that line of questioning is so profoundly wrong and offensive. Yesterday the Privacy Commissioner confirmed that everything that the Minister of Education has said about this was absolutely correct and that the NDP has been trying to frighten people with their campaign of fear and smear. It didn't work in the campaign. It's not going to work now. We are keeping our word with Albertans to bring into effect the Education Act. Promise made, promise kept.

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Member Irwin: Mr. Speaker, this Education minister was caught on video just a few months ago saying that she believes protections for GSAs are based on, quote, flawed reasoning and were unnecessary to begin with. Unbelievable. I guess we know why she's so eager to destroy GSAs and QSAs. To the Minister of Education. It's hard to believe your position would change in just a few short months. Do you still believe that protecting LGBTQ youth is unnecessary?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education and this government agree with the law that was created almost unanimously in this place to allow for gay-straight alliances and other peer support groups to be created. We oppose mandatory notification. We also oppose the NDP's efforts to drive wedges on this issue rather than looking at the actual facts, the law, and realizing that this is a campaign of division being led by the NDP, which is beneath any member of this Legislature.

Member Irwin: It's not a campaign of division. It's a campaign of standing up for our young people.

Given that in addition to claiming that it was unnecessary to protect queer and trans youth, the minister was also caught on tape saying that these protections were just to further an agenda – you're darn right our side of the House has an agenda, and it's to protect our kids – to the minister: if this isn't on your agenda, what is? Or is there a hidden agenda?

Mr. Kenney: The accusation in that question is that the hon. minister was, quote, caught on tape having the temerity to disagree with the NDP. Well, you know what else was caught on tape, Mr. Speaker, on April 16? Over a million Alberta voters that repudiated the NDP's fear and smear politics and that endorsed our very specific platform to bring into force the Education Act, that the NDP itself promised to make law back in 2015.

Member Irwin: We're hearing from Albertans loudly and clearly that they're not going to stand for this attack on LGBTQ youth. They're going to be rallying tonight at the Legislature.

Given that the Minister of Education also thinks that any law put forward about GSAs is part of some sort of agenda – Minister, GSAs save lives; they make life better for all Alberta students – this minister has an opportunity right now to show some courage, clear

the record, apologize for her vile remarks. She's got 30 seconds. Go for it.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Education has answered dozens of questions on this, being absolutely clear about her support and that of this government for the ability of students to create positive peer support groups. It really is unfortunate that the NDP, instead of accepting that there is a broad level of consensus in Alberta on this matter, continues to try to drive wedges for their own political purposes. We instead are focused on ensuring that we keep our promises to Albertans with the implementation of the Education Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has a question.

Surgery Wait Times

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the NDP's watch surgical wait times for Albertans increased, and so did the cost for health care delivery in Alberta. In fact, Alberta health care is now one of the most expensive systems in the world. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information Albertans are waiting longer for joint replacement and cataract surgeries than they were just three years ago. Universal access to quality, publicly funded health care is a fundamental principle for this government and a significant concern for my constituents. To the Minister of Health: what are you doing to reduce wait times for Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. Under the NDP wait times increased for four straight years. The NDP talk about their commitment to public health care – they talk and they talk and they talk – but for four years they watched wait times for surgery get longer. They watched access to continuing care decline. They watched our hospitals get more logjammed, and they did nothing about it. We were elected to deliver better results for Albertans, including shorter wait times, and that's what we're going to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that this government has confirmed their commitment to quality, publicly funded health care and given that citizens of Alberta are currently waiting far too long for surgeries like knee and hip replacements and given that some Albertans are even considering going out of province and paying out of their own pockets for surgeries they can't seem to get scheduled in a reasonable time frame here in Alberta, to the same minister: when will Albertans see wait times reduced and gain access to timely service?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Again, the hon. member is correct. We campaigned on our commitment to our publicly funded health care system. [interjections] That's right. We're committed to publicly funded health care, but unlike the NDP, we want a public system which works for patients. We want what Albertans want, a public health care system where wait times go down, not up. That's why we're commissioning the first comprehensive review of AHS in 10 years. We'll have the final report by the end of this year, and Albertans are going to see a real plan for improvement by the end of this year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Given that Albertans deserve the same quality health care available in other parts of Canada and given that many Albertans are concerned about the current state of Alberta's health care and given that there are significant budget constraints as a result of the former NDP government's mismanagement of public funds, to the same minister: what will you do to ensure that budget constraints don't slow this promise to Albertans, and what are the specific steps your ministry is taking to see progress for those waiting in pain for a surgery date?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We campaigned on maintaining or increasing health care spending. There's enough money in the health care system currently to do better, and we're going to do better. The NDP ignored the data for four years, and now it's up to us to take it seriously. That's what the AHS review is all about. Finally Albertans have a government that takes performance seriously and takes accountability seriously. We're studying the Saskatchewan surgical initiative as well. The review will look at other ways we can learn from other provinces and other countries, and we're going to learn from our own people because we have some of the best clinicians in Canada.

Gay-straight Alliances in Private Schools

Ms Phillips: The day the Minister of Education announced her act to destroy gay-straight alliances, she refused to condemn private school policies that spread hate about being gay. Those policies openly state that students would be outed against their will. Will the minister rise in this House, speak for herself, and condemn those illegal and discriminatory private school policies?

2:30

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we know that the NDP has always opposed independent schools. They've always been ideologically hostile to school choice. The NDP have never wanted to respect section 26(3) of the universal declaration of human rights, that says that "parents have a prior right to choose the . . . education" that is best for their children. This government and the vast majority of Albertans, however, respect school choice just as we respect the law under Bill 10 that allows kids to create supportive peer groups, including GSAs.

Ms Phillips: Given that we just heard that the Premier supports discriminatory policies, given that the Minister of Finance served as a board member for the Peace River Bible Institute and given that that school required all students to follow rules that banned same-sex relationships and shockingly compares these relationships to demonic activity, will the Minister of Finance condemn the policy of that institute, or does the minister support the comparison of same-gender relationships to demonic activity?

Mr. Kenney: Just to confirm what I said, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite characterized our support for pluralism and school choice as, quote, support for hatred. I don't understand why the NDP has such a hard time understanding that the first fundamental freedom enumerated in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is the freedom of religion and why school choice is recognized in the universal declaration . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we heard the question; we'll hear the answer.

Mr. Kenney: The right to school choice is recognized in the universal declaration of human rights and in Alberta law, Mr. Speaker. We will protect kids, but we'll also protect school choice in this province.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, how can we actually expect Albertans to trust this government given the beliefs of people like the Minister of Finance, the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, what the Minister of Education herself was caught saying on video just a few months ago, and what the Premier just underlined in his support for discriminatory policies that we heard just a few minutes ago?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, every legacy member of the PC and Wildrose parties that make up this party voted in favour of Bill 10 to create statutory protection for gay-straight alliances and other peer-support groups. Where we differ with the NDP is that we don't believe that these are wedge issues that should be used to divide people. We believe that children should be protected, and we believe that can be done while also respecting the fundamental freedom of religion and the right of parents to choose the form of education that's best for their kids.

Royal Alberta Museum Former Site

Ms Goehring: It's collected all of our stories, and it itself became a great story: those are the words of Darrel Babuk in relation to the original site of the Royal Alberta Museum. Residents in the Edmonton-Glenora constituency that played host to the museum since 1967 are proud of its history and want this building to be there for future generations. To the minister of culture: will you commit in this House today that the Royal Alberta Museum building in Glenora is here to stay?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we'll take that question under advisement, and I'll ask the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Infrastructure to respond to the hon. member as quickly as possible with a detailed answer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that nearly 9,000 people have signed a petition to keep the former Royal Alberta Museum building, will the culture or Infrastructure minister commit to holding open town halls with residents about the future of this site, with the Member for Edmonton-Glenora as a full partner, before making any major decisions?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, actually, our department has asked for input from the stakeholders. We'll collect the stakeholder input and then make our decision based on that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the original RAM building was neglected under Conservative austerity measures that resulted in reduced maintenance and upkeep and given that this may result in a need for serious renovations, will the Minister of Infrastructure commit to dedicating funding to repairing the RAM site if it's determined that residents in Glenora want to keep it intact and viable for the future?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, decisions on facilities like the Glenora site are guided by evolving government needs, available budget, and how those needs fit relative to other funding priorities. There are no plans yet for the future of the Glenora site, but we'll look at all options regarding its future use.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Klein has a question.

Provincial Fiscal Sustainability and Budget 2019

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I campaigned on getting Alberta's finances back on track. I made a commitment to my constituents to no longer continue to leverage our children's future. What we are now seeing during supplementary supply estimates is a result of four years of mismanagement with this province's books by the previous government. To the Minister of Finance: with this new information, what commitments can we make at this time for getting back to balanced budgets by '22-23, as we initially promised?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for the question. That is right. Our government campaigned on the commitment to bring this province back to balance. I take that commitment very seriously. The previous government had us on a path to bury this province in debt. Albertans expect much better from our government. We're bringing prudence and predictability back to this province's budget. We will achieve balance by 2022-23.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his response as well as his hard efforts in getting us back to balance. Given our commitment to getting the budget balanced without damaging the spending for necessary services like health care and education, can the minister ensure that we will also be able to commit to our election promise of maintaining or increasing health care spending?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer is yes. That's our commitment to Albertans, and we're going to deliver on it. The bigger challenge is performance. We need to control costs, and we also need better results for Albertans: lower wait times, better access to emergency, better access to continuing care. Lower costs and better results: that's our commitment to Albertans.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Minister of Education recently announced plans to modernize Alberta's education system by replacing the School Act with the Education Act and given that the concern I'm hearing from my constituents is about education funding and given that I'm also hearing from teachers and parents in my riding about concern over increasing classroom sizes and given that we're about to expect 15,000 new students this fall, can the Minister of Finance confirm our platform promise to maintain or increase spending in education? [interjection]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South will come to order while the Member for Calgary-Klein is asking a question.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member again for this important question. As we have confirmed, increased enrolment growth will be accounted for and funded. Alberta's children deserve an excellent, world-class education, and

I can confirm that we will ensure that there is funding for these outcomes. We are committed to delivering the best possible outcomes for our children, period.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is rising with a question.

Rural High-speed Internet

Mr. Yao: Thank you. In 2018 the CRTC declared that stable broadband infrastructure is a necessary component for Canadian participation in the digital economy and digital age. The communications industry has invested in and enabled this in our densely-populated urban areas, but rural communities do not have the same infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, 96 per cent of urban homes in Canada have access to fast, reliable Internet but only 39 per cent in the rural areas. To the Minister of Service Alberta: is our government investing in this crucial infrastructure?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member for the important question on behalf of rural Albertans. Our government knows how important reliable Internet access is to all Albertans and how frustrating life can be without it. We know that all Albertans have strong expectations for their technology, and we're continuing to learn from them how best we can address this issue and move forward. We are serious about technology and will work to ensure that we do this correctly and do it correctly the first time.

Mr. Yao: It is given, Mr. Speaker, that stable Internet access is becoming a necessity in our education system. This platform has enabled increased access to educational resources and more flexibility in distributing and accepting assignments. It has become as essential as pen and paper in our schools. What is this government doing to ensure Internet access for rural schools to enable this basic necessity in our digital age?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that students are increasingly using digital resources for their school work. Times have changed since I was in school, but over the last 15 years in my career as a venture capital investor, I've learned a lot about the importance of technology and having technology accessible to students in schools as they're building the tools they need to succeed in their upcoming careers. One of the tools that helps them to do that is the Alberta SuperNet, which currently provides access to high-quality Internet services to 1,935 schools in addition to libraries and over 1,000 other government facilities.

2:40

Mr. Yao: It is given, Mr. Speaker, that there's a dismal divide between rural and urban high-speed Internet quality, and this is worrying for rural Alberta's economy. Businesses rely on the Internet for communicating with customers, suppliers, and vendors. They do their banking online and access legal support. In a report tabled in the Legislature last year only 13 per cent of rural communities in Alberta had access to Internet speeds that meet the target speeds as set by the CRTC. Can the government tell this House what the government's plan is to secure Internet access to support rural . . .

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to ensuring an environment in which Albertans and businesses can succeed. We recognize the importance of reliable Internet access for businesses, and that's why we're monitoring what is happening at all levels of government. We know that we need to work with the federal government, our provincial partners, municipal governments, and business owners on this very important matter. That is why we have been engaging with members from all of those stakeholder communities to look towards a path forward. I would be happy to follow up with the member offline. No pun intended.

The Speaker: I believe that the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays called a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. McIver: Yes, I did, under 23(h), (i), and (j), imputing false motives to another member. I don't have the Blues, Mr. Speaker; perhaps you do. The hon. member said something to the effect of: the hon. minister doesn't care about health care or doesn't care about delivering services. It was about caring. That, of course, is exactly the definition of imputing a motive.

Mr. Speaker, I could understand – and this isn't a matter of opinion – if they said, "The hon. minister is doing a terrible job" or "I disagree with his policies" or "He hasn't done his homework," something like that, but to actually say that the hon. minister "doesn't care" about the main purpose of their ministry, I think it's straightforward imputing false motives to another member of the House. I would ask you to rule to ask the hon. member to withdraw those comments and apologize.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is clearly not a point of order. This is a matter of debate or a difference of opinion. I believe that the member talked about how the Minister of Health doesn't care about keeping health care affordable. That is his opinion. The members on the government side may have a different opinion. This is not a point of order. He did not make claims or whatever the hon. member is arguing in his point of order. It's not a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It's a matter of opinion.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. I do in fact have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford said, "My question is to the Premier because clearly the Minister of Health doesn't care about keeping health care affordable for Albertans." I don't find the point of order well taken. I could be sympathetic to the Member for Calgary-Hays if, in fact, he did say: he doesn't care about health care. Perhaps that would be a point of order. It may, in fact, be a question of debate, but in this case I would suggest that that is not a point of order, and I consider the matter concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Bill 5
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2019

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2019.

Madam Speaker, the supplementary amounts provided by this bill reflect the fiscal picture outlined in the third-quarter fiscal update, released by the previous government on February 27. The spending is way beyond what was budgeted for in the 2018-2019 fiscal year. Now it must be approved by the Legislative Assembly.

We recognize that over a fiscal year, unplanned expenses can come up; for example, the devastating fires in northern Alberta. I know my colleagues opposite will agree that the Alberta government will always provide funding and support for Albertans in their time of need, no matter who is in office at that time. However, when it comes to other spending, it is imperative that we plan and spend appropriately. While some of these expenses may be critical according to the opposition, we will be taking a more prudent approach as we move forward.

Madam Speaker, many of these expenses before you today were not spent using that approach, and now out of respect for our parliamentary process our government must spend nearly \$1 billion ensuring that many of those obligations are met. A billion dollars is a lot of money, and when one-third of that money is spent on a project that should never have been funded by the Alberta taxpayer, it makes it all the worse. I want to make this loud and clear. This is not how our government will be doing business in the future. The poorly negotiated contracts to lease railcars, signed on the eve of an election, have left our government to pay the bill. From the moment this issue was made public, we made it clear that we did not agree with this initiative. It is an irresponsible use of taxpayers' dollars, and we will not be continuing this track under our government. Our government will be more respectful and responsible about how we spend Albertans' hard-earned tax dollars. Since we took office, barely six weeks ago, we've been working to ensure that we're getting the most value for every dollar spent.

But before we can look forward, we must deal with the mistakes of the previous government. As a matter of law, our government must pass this legislation to honour Alberta's contractual commitments despite our own misgivings. I respectfully urge my colleagues in this House to support this bill and fulfill Alberta's contractual commitments from the last fiscal year. This ensures that there's appropriate oversight of government spending by the elected representatives standing before me today.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As the hon. Finance minister and President of Treasury Board said, this is kind of a backward-looking bill and not a forward-looking bill. It's an awkward situation where the government is required to support the expenditures that the previous government made before we were elected or else have those expenditures count against this year's spending, so it's an odd one. I imagine all sides of the House will vote for it because we kind of have to, and the opposition would be voting against what they did when they were in government. Nonetheless, it is one of the procedures that we live with in this House. It becomes a bit peculiar right after a change of government, an election.

With that, I will move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 6
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2019

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 6, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2019.

This bill will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and to the government for the period April 1, 2019, to November 30, 2019, inclusive. The approval of this act will provide the funds needed to continue the business of our province while our government takes the time necessary to prepare Budget 2019, which will be presented in the fall. It also will give the Assembly time to review and debate the government's 2019-2020 budget plans.

To be clear, this is not a budget. The interim supply estimates reflect the expected costs, commitments, and timing of payments needed to keep government operating. For the next eight months we are simply beginning our work to deal with the financial mess left to us by the previous government. We must take action to reverse the province's deeper dive into debt. Our approach to interim supply places a strong emphasis on fiscal restraint as we work to meet the promise of balancing the budget by 2022-23.

2:50

Over the past four years, Alberta's spending has not meant better services for Albertans. In fact, we found that Alberta spends more per capita than other provinces without seeing better outcomes. That is not acceptable, Madam Speaker. Our government will find ways to do things differently and more effectively. However, those decisions take time. Our government recognizes that for our stakeholders and for all Albertans this is a difficult message to hear. Operating in the unknown can be uncomfortable. However, responsible choices take time and thoughtful planning. We are using the time requested for interim supply to develop a budget that reflects the promises we made to Albertans.

Recommendations from the MacKinnon panel and discussions with the staff in each of our ministries will help guide our decisions. We're looking at ways to eliminate waste, duplication, and nonessential spending so we can find ways to fund our government's key priorities and do things differently.

Over the past four years many Albertans have struggled under the decisions made by the previous government. We believe it is not fair to saddle future generations with the burden of onerous debt. If we don't begin work to balance that budget now, we'll end up spending billions of dollars on interest payments to bankers instead of funding Albertans' priorities. This is about looking to the long term, making responsible choices, and eliminating reliance on deficit spending, that steals from future schools, hospitals, and future generations.

Details on our government's plan to restore balance to Alberta's finances will be included in Budget 2019. As we develop that plan, I respectfully urge my colleagues in this House to support this bill to give us the time required to draft a thoughtful, prudent budget.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise to speak to this interim supply. We had not a lot of

time to talk about it when we were in the question phase, so I'm happy to be on the record to speak about it now.

I just wanted to highlight, I guess – I know we're repeatedly being told that, you know, with poor fiscal planning, waste, somehow the government programs under the NDP government were not actually serving Albertans. I just stand very deeply in my shoes here, Madam Speaker, to say that that's not true at all. We had invested very significantly to support vulnerable Albertans. I know that in the Ministry of Seniors and Housing, which I had the honour to be the minister of, we certainly supported so many people to live in dignity, close to their families and friends, in their communities. I guess I just want to be on the record to articulate how important it is to support people in Alberta.

Having looked at the numbers that are being presented, just as the Minister of Finance has indicated, they do seem low. They do seem like, yes, indeed, there will be cuts to these valuable programs. You know, this is a concern because we know that the needs are growing. We know that Alberta has 600,000 seniors currently, a little bit over that, but that number is going to double to a million in the next couple of decades. So actually what we should be doing is investing even more because we need to make sure that seniors are supported and cared for. Some of the ways that we have supported them which I think are extremely innovative – and I think also, you know, that even though the implication was that the things we did were not prudent, it was pretty prudent because if we support people to live in their own homes, which is what the seniors' home adaptation and repair program does, then actually that is great for the seniors because they get to stay in their same community, close to their family and friends, where they want to be, where all their connections are. The quality of life is enhanced because they have deep roots, oftentimes. So that investment in the SHARP program – that's the acronym for the seniors' home adaptation and repair program – actually, I think, saved the government money. Not only does it have an excellent social outcome, but it has an economic outcome that's excellent, too, and it actually cost the government less.

I'd just encourage the Minister of Seniors and Housing, when she's looking at what she has to slash from her budget – this is a program that we brought in in 2016, and it's been wildly successful. People from all over Alberta have applied to the program and been successful in receiving grants. We know that over 800 rural senior households have actually been recipients of these grants. That might be something for many of the members in the government to look at because I think a lot of their constituents benefited significantly from this program.

The program started in July 2016, so it was certainly our government that brought it in. Also, like, as I said, over 800 rural senior households benefited, so about 50 per cent of the loans in that program went to seniors in rural Alberta. They received \$9.6 million in loans, and the average loan was about \$14,000 for a senior. You know, they could use that to get a new roof, anything that they needed to make sure that they could still stay in their own home. That was important to them, so sometimes that was what they needed. They needed a new roof because their house was aging, and they needed to do that. Then they could continue to stay there.

I know I've shared with the House previously that I know a couple I met in Sherwood Park, and it really, you know, elongated the time they could stay in their home because the wife in the couple has MS, and she can't really manage stairs. They had a four-level split, and they needed to have some kind of a lift for her because she couldn't make it up or down. Of course, that made it impossible for them to stay in the home, but when they looked at the costs to be able to buy a lift, they absolutely couldn't afford it, and that broke their hearts because they wanted to stay in their own home.

When they saw this program, they applied to it, they were accepted, the lift was put in. They had the support they needed. [interjections] They could stay in that home for another 10 years or more, and that really made a huge difference in their lives.

So I would just suggest, Madam Speaker, that this is not . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, there's a lot of noise happening right now over the speaker. I'm just wondering if we could tone it down a little bit. Thank you.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Sigurdson: For this couple it certainly made a huge difference in that their ability – they just absolutely could not have stayed in their home.

I would say that this is not government waste, Madam Speaker. This is supporting people to live with dignity in their own homes. As I said, it not only has excellent social outcomes; it has good economic ones, too. It supports people to stay in their own homes – you know, it'd cost much more to have to live in some type of facility or things – plus their quality of life is much enhanced because they get to be where they want to be, and we know that seniors want that. That's why we developed this program, because we listened to seniors all across this province, and this is what they said: we want to stay in our communities; we want to stay close to families and friends. This is a really important program. I think that I'd just caution the government, if they're cutting programs – it does look, by the numbers, that they're going to be – that this is a valuable resource for thousands of seniors across our province.

There's also a component of it that is a grant program because sometimes seniors, you know, don't qualify for the loan because they don't have enough home equity. There are some restrictions so that the loan can be repaid. We don't want someone to be not able to repay the loan. There is a grant component, so that helps many more low-income seniors take advantage of that. That's just one of the programs that I think certainly is not government waste, is not poor fiscal planning, that we hear repeatedly from the government. That's a program that supports the dignity and well-being of Alberta seniors.

3:00

Another program that also supports our seniors here in Alberta is the Alberta seniors' benefit. One of the very important things that we did with that program is that we indexed that to the cost of living. This is an income support program. It augments people's, you know, monthly income from the federal government. This really supports quite low-income seniors who are receiving old age security, guaranteed annual income from the federal government. But their incomes are still quite low. This is kind of a top-up program that the provincial government does to support seniors on quite low incomes.

The importance of indexing, of course, is that our cost of living goes up each year. Oftentimes, if we're employed, that's taken into consideration when we sometimes have reviews each year, and we'll get an increase. But when you're on a fixed income like this, those programs don't necessarily have those bumps. So why are seniors really unfairly not benefiting from that when the rest of us are? I think that this is a very important one, especially when we're talking about people who are quite vulnerable. Those few dollars – and, really, they're not a lot, Madam Speaker, but at least it doesn't erode, you know, what they're getting each year on an annual basis.

Again, just as I was discussing the seniors' home adaptation and repair program, I would say that the indexing aspect of the Alberta seniors' benefit is also extremely important, and for seniors to live in dignity with the support, that is also a program that needs to be

invested in. In no way is this not prudent. It is an investment in the pioneers in our communities. I was very proud as the Minister of Seniors and Housing at that time to completely support the indexation.

If I move a little bit to the – there are sort of two aspects, I guess, to the ministry: one is seniors, and one is housing, and of course the two come together also as we do, you know, have affordable housing in Alberta. When we became government, we inherited a billion dollars in deferred maintenance, maintenance that needed to be done on the public delivery of affordable housing in our province. It really was quite disturbing for me as minister to come and see just how derelict some of these facilities were, and it was largely to do with a lack of funding by previous Conservative governments.

So our government made a bold move. We invested \$1.2 billion in affordable housing to address those significant maintenance needs and also augment what affordable housing we had so that people who were on low income, people who were on income support – maybe they had minimum wage jobs – were supported with their families. This bold move really created, you know, quite a significant move in building and in opening units so that more access to affordable housing could occur, because we know that we don't have enough affordable housing. We know that it's true in rural Alberta. We know that that's true in the big cities and in the medium-size cities. This investment, this \$1.2 billion that we invested, was four times more than the last Conservative government's budget, their capital budget, in affordable housing. As I said already, it was a very bold move.

We have in Alberta, you know, about 100 housing management bodies. These are organizations that do the delivery of affordable housing in our province, and these are people dedicated to making sure that people in their communities have access to affordable housing. What does that mean exactly when I say that? Like, what is affordable housing? What's our program here in Alberta? That is, like, seniors' lodges. Certainly, we know that oftentimes seniors' lodges in rural Alberta and communities – I mean, I grew up in Valleyview. We always had the lodge there in town, and it was just a hub where people came. It was a place for people who maybe could not maintain their own household anymore or maybe needed a little bit more support or perhaps one of the partners in that couple had passed away and they really wanted the social aspect and that connection. Alberta has an amazing lodge program all across the province, and they really are hubs in these small communities.

Of course, the lodge act came in in, like, the late 1950s, early 1960s, so many of those facilities were very – the infrastructure was extremely old. There had been some new building, but there still was a significant amount of need in that area. You know, in that alone we could be investing so, so much. But we did certainly step up that program to do that.

There is also seniors self-contained, and this is where, you know, seniors actually live in their own apartment-style units. We have over 14,000 of those units across our province. These are for seniors who are functionally independent, so they don't need that extra support. They can live independently, but they don't want to live in, say, their own single-family dwelling anymore. They want to live more communally. That's another program that's important.

We certainly do have community housing. This isn't based on age anymore. Seniors, obviously, are considered people who are 65 or over. Community housing is subsidized rental housing for low-income families. Here in Edmonton, Capital Region Housing is a significant provider of that. In Calgary it's the Calgary Housing Company. There are many other housing management bodies across the province.

I guess what I'm trying to do is get on the record, Madam Speaker, to have this government understand what these funds are

going to. They're helping seniors in our province, supporting them to live with dignity in their communities, and helping people who need affordable housing live so that they can raise their families in safe, secure, well-maintained, appropriate housing. I say to you, Madam Speaker, that this is not a waste. This is not, you know, us, the NDP government, acting with no prudence. This is actually a significant investment that helps many Albertans. I would say that even as a society, we all benefit from that, when we support our friends and neighbours.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

Bill 5

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2019

[Adjourned debate June 19: Mr. McIver]

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

3:10 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 2

An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. This bill has now moved into committee. An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, it is called. It is not at all that when one examines the contents of this bill and some of its more egregious elements. Really, this is an act to pick your pocket. This pick-your-pockets bill will take workers' overtime. It will scoop holiday pay. It'll cut holiday pay to pay for a tax gift to corporations.

One of the things that we see, Madam Chair, as an ongoing theme from this government is a very uncaring approach in their first bills to the most vulnerable. This reveals, I think, who the priorities are, and it's certainly not an empathetic approach to young people, to people who might be working on an hourly basis, and certainly not for people who work in the service industry. Really, you know, this is a very well-trodden trail of authoritarian, right-wing governments who go after labour rights as one of their first items of business. It's really about the fact that the working class will pay for large gifts to friends, insiders, an increasing concentration of wealth at the top such that society becomes more unequal, such that workers lose bargaining power, such that young people revise their expectations of a good life and millennials are invited to abandon the dreams of a good, middle-class life that other generations have enjoyed in western industrialized democracies. That's what this is about.

You know, on the ground what it means is that this is a government whose essentially first item of business was to follow teenagers around pilfering toonies out of their pockets. That was job number one, apparently, to create a pool of labour that is not

compensated at the same rate, that does not enjoy the same protections as the rest of the workforce, and that is less able to form associations to bargain collectively for wages and working conditions. One of the really big issues that ought to be considered at the amendment stage of this bill is, when we have this youth differential wage, this idea that vulnerable teenagers could choose to drop out of school in order to earn a higher wage. That is of deep concern.

We've had some improvement over the last few years, I think. There's no question that the previous PC government, under Education Minister Hancock, and then more recent efforts by our government have increased the high school completion rate. There's no question about that, but that's been a sort of multiyear, multigovernment initiative and a good one at that, Madam Chair. But this proposes to start chipping away at that very good progress. That is something that this government should pause and consider as an impact of this reduction in a youth minimum wage.

I think, too, that the massive amount of red tape that this proposes ought to be a place where the government considers amending the legislation given that it's a confusing and very detailed calculation that has to be done with respect to what qualifies as a youth minimum wage. It applies for the first 28 hours of work in a week while school is in session. If they work more than 28 hours a week, they must be paid the general minimum wage for every hour beyond the first 28. During breaks and summer holidays the youth rate will apply to all hours worked.

You know, really, this is a whole lot of headache, Madam Chair, and that's why even the Klein government, that was not exactly predisposed to an orderly labour relations environment – I worked in opposition at that time. I can recall a number of different unhelpful initiatives on the part of that government, but even they scrapped this because there were just too many loopholes, too many hoops to jump through for employers, too much muddy water created for employers about when people are in school, when they're not, how many hours, back and forth, and so on and so forth. For a government that has put a bill in the window around red tape, which is a bit of a mannequin bill and indeed a bit of a mannequin minister on this file, with very little substance to go with it, it would seem to me that this is counterintuitive to the stated public policy aims that the government has put forward. Therefore, this section in particular could use some tightening up and some amendment. There's no question about that.

On the general holiday pay and, you know, questions around holiday pay and questions around statutory holidays and so on, I remember being in the service industry myself and this being a rather algebraic calculation for most of us coming up to Thanksgiving or other holidays on whether we would get the stat pay or not. I recall even for management it being a headache at the time given that our rules were so far out of step with other provinces. At a couple of the places I worked, managers had come from other places, and I remember – this was even back in the '90s – they used to roll their eyes at Alberta's sort of arcane and complicated rules around general holiday pay and stat holidays. Going back to some of these more difficult arrangements, putting us out of step with other provinces, again, creates confusion for employers. No other Canadian jurisdiction has similar rules. The changes that were brought in over the last few years were simply bringing Alberta in line with other jurisdictions.

You know, there were really no consultations taken on Bill 2. That is another reason why the government may want to pause and either amend this section or send it to committee, Madam Chair, given that there were absolutely no conversations undertaken with hardly anyone on this topic. You know, really, why would they? When we look at some of the issues around overtime, we know that

there is, in fact, no mandate for returning to straight time for banked overtime. The reason we know that is because people got pretty upset about it during the election campaign, and the leader of the party at the time, who is now the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, assured the electorate, in particular private-sector oil and gas workers, that they would not lose those thousands of dollars a year in overtime for banked overtime. Assurances were given, and then classically: say one thing; do another.

3:20

There is a reason why people are already asking questions about the straight talk coming from the leader of the members opposite. Certainly, there have always been questions among the electorate on this topic. Certainly, this issue proves that out, that what is said in the heat and enthusiasm of an election campaign is not necessarily the actual facts on the ground. Certainly, that is a concern. Just at a moment when we had a positive decision yesterday on the topic of market access and expansion of energy infrastructure; just as we may be again exiting from some of the uncertainties around market access and the price of WCS, that hurt economic growth in early 2019; just as we are moving beyond some of those challenges, Madam Chair, and returning to the levels of economic growth potentially – although private-sector forecasters aren't seeing it yet – that we saw in 2017 and 2018, when the province, when we were in government, led the country in economic growth two years in a row; just as we may be seeing some of those glimmers for private-sector oil and gas workers, we have a government that is going to scoop thousands of dollars out of their bank accounts. To be clear, this was really job one for the new government.

I think Albertans have every right to ask questions about this issue of banked overtime, especially given the assurances that were given over the course of the election campaign, assurances that have not proved to be factual, Madam Chair. This is another place where the government could pause, show some empathy and some consideration for families who work hard, and ensure that they get the overtime pay that they have worked for and, indeed, that they deserve. There are enough stories of families that have gone through hard times. When the price of oil dipped, the last thing they need is to have the long hand of this government pilfering around in their bank account to take \$2,500 out. When a family needs a roof replacement or they need to pay for specific supports for maybe a child or specific activities for that child or other pressures on the family budget, that amount of money can be really, really significant. This is about quality of life for people. It's not about extras.

Certainly, on the topic of extras, we see who's actually getting them, Madam Chair, and that's already-wealthy corporations who have profits over \$500,000. Those are the beneficiaries of the largesse of this government, but not ordinary people who work on an hourly basis either on contract or in a non-union atmosphere, in particular in construction and in the oil and gas industry.

I think some of the calculations collected by Statistics Canada bear this out. The average oil and gas worker earning \$43 an hour and working 10 hours of overtime every week on a 12-week project would see their wages differ, if all 120 hours are banked, by about \$2,600. That's a lot of money. It is reasonable, I think, for the new government to take a look at a number of the pieces of legislation: employment standards, labour relations. Certainly, when our government updated these pieces of legislation – there were reviews of the code done in '07 and 2014, and I was sort of adjacent to at least the latter. But no changes were made at that time. There were some specific changes that should have been made at that time, but the previous PC government was obviously wrapped up in its own

palace intrigue and unable to actually govern in the best interest of people.

But, you know, it's perfectly reasonable for this government to take another look at employment standards, the Labour Relations Code, and if they do in fact conclude, for example, that ensuring compassionate care leaves is not appropriate, then they should consult with Albertans and change that. If they do in fact, after a period of examining the changes that were made to overtime, go out and consult with private-sector workers and private-sector workers say, "Absolutely; I'm super not interested in having a couple of thousand dollars a month every quarter in my bank account" – not everyone is interested in getting paid fairly for their time, I'm sure – and they can reasonably demonstrate after a period of consultation that people aren't interested in their overtime, then they should make these changes, Madam Chair.

Here's the reasoning behind some of the changes that our government made. We did a focused review of existing laws. There were 7,300 submissions from business, industry, different labour and worker associations, academics, municipalities, nonprofits, the general public. If after a robust review of some of the changes that were made when legislation hadn't been updated in 30 years, I think the government would be fully within its rights to make some of these changes to overtime.

But the fact is that they've moved this through so quickly, without any of these requisite conversations with the broader public, and they'd be hard-pressed to find people who would wilfully give up a couple of thousand dollars every quarter just to satisfy a few backroom lobbyists in cigar-filled rooms and other folks that are seeking a gift of forgoing overtime. Certainly, that is what they've gotten. They've gotten a piece of legislation that has not been given its appropriate time of day in terms of consultation. That is unfortunate and is one of the things that should give government pause to find places to amend this piece of legislation. Perhaps send it to committee for some of the consultation that our government undertook. I would certainly replicate such an effort.

You know, when the members opposite rise to talk about some of the changes we made to employment standards, I guess the question that I would pose back would be: "What, of these changes, do the members object to? Is it compassionate care leave, or is it long-term illness and injury leave? Is it personal and family responsibility leave?" Certainly, one of the things that we did was an unpaid new leave that provided for up to five days of job protection for personal sickness or short-term care of an immediate family member. That was something that we didn't have prior. That was something that ought to have happened out of the 2014 review that didn't happen because people were busy – I don't know – building sky palaces and flying around and other things that were focused on themselves rather than focusing on parents like Amanda Jensen, who got fired for having to care for her son who was undertaking treatment for leukemia, childhood leukemia. Is it bereavement leave, domestic violence leave, or citizenship ceremony leave? Which of these changes, that the members opposite allege have somehow been problematic, do they object to?

I think they should be clear about that. I think that they should be straightforward with people and parents like Amanda Jensen and others who are struggling to care for sick children.

3:30

I think, too, that the code really clarified some things that really are of issue to ordinary people and people who work on an hourly basis, particularly in the service sector, so here I am talking about oftentimes young people or oftentimes women, oftentimes newer Canadians. Around deductions the code clarified some of the changes that our government brought in, which deductions are

allowed from wages as well as explicitly prohibiting deductions for faulty work and cash shortages such as dine-and-dash and gas-and-dash scenarios. So the members opposite, you know, when they run down the good work of the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who was at the time the minister of labour, her very detailed work, they should be clear if they want to go back to a situation where we didn't have that kind of clarity for workers around deductions that were questionable at best around cash shortages and so on.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to pick up from where the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West left off if I could. You know, my view is also that this is a pick-your-pockets bill, that this really takes us back in time, takes away the good work that was done by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods that she undertook along with many other people. For instance, there was industry involved, there were stakeholders involved, people who had views about employment, organized labour, of course academics, municipalities, employers, many, many, many people with great knowledge about the impact of the current system of the labour code and laws with regard to employment in this province. Their work spanned a great deal of time. It took a long time because there was a lot of work that needed to be done, as the Member for Lethbridge-West talked about.

You know, it was 1987. The Employment Standards Code and Labour Relations Code had not been updated since that amount of time, 30 years, Madam Chair. Thirty years. I can remember the discussion in this House often about what was going on 30 years ago. It served as a bit of a mental reminder that the world has moved on, but Alberta's codes and laws with regard to labour hadn't. With the review that was taken, our oldest workplace legislation in Canada was updated, and I would like to spend my time talking about some of those updated standards and code changes. That's where the Member for Lethbridge-West was going.

Madam Chair, the work that the government undertook was done because we wanted to address many problems that had been left. The 2007 and 2014 previous government's actions, which didn't get followed through with, needed to be changed. For instance, in the area of minimum wage for people with disabilities it was okay prior to the changes in 2017 to pay people with disabilities less than the minimum wage, and I think all would agree that that's not a benefit to that person with disabilities. It's a benefit to the employer, and it is something that other provinces have done away with and we did away with in 2017.

With regard to leaves, I know the Member for Lethbridge-West was talking about a number of them. One was the compassionate care leave. Their job protection was extended to 27 weeks, Madam Chair, from eight weeks, to better align with the federal insurance program benefits. That also, you can appreciate, was something that is of great benefit to people who have necessarily needed to take time to grieve and to spend time away from their workplace but with the assurance that they have 27 weeks to do that instead of just two months. That caregiver status was expanded, of course, to include nonprimary caregivers; not generous but how people live.

Long-term illness and injury leave: that was an unpaid leave provision, up to 16 weeks per year for personal injury and sickness, and that, again, aligned with the federal employment insurance program. That's unpaid, recognizing that businesses need to oftentimes backfill, but they're not paying that person for that who's taking that long-term illness or injury leave. That money – they're essentially keeping their payroll the same but being compassionate, again, to the person.

Personal and family responsibility leave: Madam Chair, that's a new leave that provides up to five days of protection per year for personal sickness or short-term care of an immediate family member. It includes attending to personal emergencies and caregiving responsibilities related to education of a child. We've done a lot of discussions about the Education Act and education in general here and GSAs in particular, but, you know, you can see where it might be really helpful for a family who is struggling with all sorts of issues regarding their child, whether that child is in a GSA or struggling with their gender identity. The parent in that case can take some time off to try and sort things out with their child, with the school, with people who need to be supportive of that young person.

Bereavement leave: it's a new unpaid leave. It provides up to three days' job protection per year for bereavement of an immediate family member. I don't think anybody would see that as overly generous or unusual, Madam Chair. What is unusual is that Alberta didn't have that in place, and the work of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, as the labour minister at the time, brought that into the code.

Domestic violence leave: certainly, something new in this province, but we can all appreciate where 10 days of job protection per year for employees addressing that situation of domestic violence is critical for their families and their own safety, mental health, and of the struggles that often go on for a person.

Citizenship ceremony leave: a new unpaid leave that provides up to a half day of job protection for employees attending their own ceremonies or their immediate family members' ceremonies, something we can all be proud of when new Canadian citizens – I was going to say are made or created or struck, but that's not the right word – receive their citizenship in Canada.

Critical illness of a child: a new unpaid leave that provides up to 36 weeks of job protection for parents of critically ill or injured children. That aligns, again, with federal insurance program regulations, Madam Chair. I've never been in that situation, but I'm very proud that Albertans who have a child in that situation now can take their time off work for that necessity of giving solace and support to and caring for their sick child.

Death or disappearance of a child: certainly, a new thing as well, Madam Chair, up to 52 weeks of job protection for employees whose child disappeared as a result of a crime or up to 104 weeks if a child died as a result of that crime. That aligns, again, with the federal employment insurance program. I can't imagine what parents go through in those situations, Madam Chair, but Alberta is now similar to the federal government and the Employment Insurance Act in that regard and probably many other provinces, but we didn't have it here. There's some really excellent work done.

3:40

Leave eligibility, Madam Chair, is the next area I want to talk about, that period for current and new leaves set at 90 days rather than one year, really, you know, some immediacy to decisions being made in that regard as opposed to employers saying: "I'll get to it. I'll get to it. I'll get to it." There's some kind of necessity to get to it within three months.

Maternity and parental leave: extending that, as was done by the federal government for the employment insurance benefits, from 37 to 52 weeks. Madam Chair, of course, it's critical for young children, babies that they have the care and ability to be cared for by parents who have that ability to take that time off work, and this gives them up to 52 weeks, another 15 weeks. We did that in alignment.

Rest periods: it's unbelievable, but it wasn't in the code that there should be a minimum of 30 minutes' break, paid or unpaid, for

every five hours of consecutive employment. We know that some work is taxing, back-breaking, and for people not to have rest periods is obviously a potential danger to them and their colleagues on the job. This rest period was another way of extending the best-in-class support to people in the workplace.

Overtime: we've talked a lot about overtime agreements and how we increased the allowable time to take that overtime to six months rather than the current three months, and that mirrors every jurisdiction in Canada, Madam Chair. The area that doesn't anymore is the removal of 1.5 hours for all hours worked of overtime banked and calculated at that amount. We have got out of step now with every other jurisdiction in Canada with regard to that, and that really doesn't benefit workers at all. Who it benefits in this case, I think, quite clearly is – the restaurant association of I think it's Canada lobbied quite hard for this and other things. That's a retrenchment or a step back for workers in this province.

Madam Chair, next I want to go to the whole idea of minimum wages and spend some time on that, particularly the youth minimum wage for youth under 18 years of age going back to \$13 an hour. When this bill hit the House, many employers like the Calgary Stampede, the Edmonton public library, I think, and others were in the process of the contracts they had established with young people. They were asked, you know: what are you going to do around all this? Because it's taking effect June 26, 2019, you can legally pay youth \$13 an hour who are going to be working for you. Of course, the Stampede has, I think, somewhere around 500 youth who will be a part of their summer contingent.

The Stampede, to their credit, said: you know, we made a handshake deal with those young people and had told them that it was going to be the minimum wage of the previous government's labour code that was brought in, and we're going to stick with that. The Edmonton public library said that as well, Madam Chair, and probably other entities that were put under the kind of glare of public scrutiny also said the same thing. It begs the question: if the Stampede, if the Edmonton public library, if many other places are sticking to their word of \$15 an hour, why is there a need to roll this back to \$13 an hour? I know the rationale from the other side is: well, it's going to help more youth get employed, and it's just going to be better for them. Well, it's not going to be better.

The words of our former minister of labour, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, were that the value of your work should depend on the effort and skill you put into it, not on what year you were born. So the value of your work should depend on the effort and skill you put into it. This change will make it harder for teenagers, who are often working to save up for their first car or put money away to pay for college. Vulnerable teens in particular, she outlined, may even choose to drop out of school in order to earn a higher wage, which is very concerning.

Madam Chair, I just don't see why we're rolling things back in some areas. It looks like it's targeted. "They can't speak up for themselves, so we'll take this opportunity to address our campaign promises to, particularly, the employers," whose lobby effort comes through the restaurant association and other kinds of similar things. Our Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, was very comprehensive. It was done to update something that was 30 years old, that the previous government attempted several times to throw up trial balloons around but, frankly, jammed or chickened out all of those times because they didn't want to upset the employers of this province. That's another thing that is pretty clear, that the balance here has shifted now away from an equal balance between employers' and employees' needs and addressing those needs and towards employers only. Employees give up much – employees give up much – and employees are the losers with regard to this bill, a bill to pick your pockets, and who benefits is not employees.

When we were in government, we made sure that Albertans had modern workplace laws that respected working people, set modern standards, and ensured that Albertans would be treated fairly. We worked on those things after decades of inaction, Madam Chair. The current bill before us does nothing to improve the situation for employees. When you roll back wages – it looks like this is what's going to be happening, not only for youth but for people and their banked overtime – the younger people are muzzled because they don't have a vote here and don't have a say. But that's why we're up here talking about that, spending time making sure that Albertans know that young people, people whose banked overtime is going to be affected, people who want to organize in the workplace, will be affected. Those and many, many other changes will be taking place.

The whole area of labour relations, I think, really needs to be outlined as well, because the certification process that was in place was working, Madam Chair. It was updated and mirroring other provinces who have done the same things. But the update was because PC governments before the current one were not supportive of organized workplaces. They took all actions to try and make sure that Alberta had the most regressive labour organization approaches in the country, and it worked for a long time.

3:50

It only worked until 2017, Madam Chair, when we had the foresight to make changes that would improve workplace relationships as a result of conflict being lessened because there were clear rules around how organized unions could be established. Establishing a program to support and assist employees who were seeking that information about their rights as a union member only had the benefit of improving situations in the workplace for both the employer and employees. Strengthening those rules in the workplace reduced the number of complaints that were going to multiple bodies, including the Human Rights Commission and the Labour Relations Board. Those changes are going to be rescinded, and that's another thing that's not going to be working out very well for the people in employment in this province.

Madam Chair, as I said earlier, the balance seems to be shifting back . . . [Mr. Ceci's speaking time expired]

The Chair: Are there any more comments, questions, or amendments to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. A pleasure to have the opportunity to rise this afternoon and speak once again to Bill 2, an act to pick the pockets of Albertans. My colleague the MLA for Calgary-Buffalo – I wanted to say Calgary-Fort. That was his former constituency. He has shifted over to Calgary-Buffalo. He talked about balance, and the word “balance” is one that has come up quite a bit during this legislative session. It's been the topic of conversation on a number of bills: on this bill, on Bill 8. It's been a topic of conversation when we talk about Bill 3 and the corporate tax cut.

Indeed, Madam Chair, that's probably one of the biggest jobs of government, to seek to find balance for the people it serves, and the job of government is to weigh a lot of different interests, to take a look and see what the different interests are. Who are the people that are asking for different policies? What are the rules and regulations in other jurisdictions? What has the history been? It is the job of a government to keep current. When there are rulings or other legal opinions or other things that come forward that expand the rights of individuals or recognize rights that perhaps had been overlooked before, it is the job of a government to keep abreast and to update things on a regular basis. That is a government that is best

serving its citizens, and in so doing, it is the job of that government to determine: what is the best balance to bring into play between competing interests?

Now, as my colleagues have noted before me, the history of labour relations, the history of employment standards and rights of workers in the province of Alberta, is unfortunately not a story of balance. Indeed, previous Conservative governments were very out of balance in many respects. The challenge in finding balance, Madam Chair, is sometimes having to weigh, I guess, the interests and the needs or the wants of a particular group with whom you may feel more affinity against another group with whom you perhaps don't quite relate. It's going to be affected perhaps by your world view or – another word that gets tossed around in this Assembly quite a bit – ideology.

But we recognize, Madam Chair – I don't think anybody can argue – that in a province where we went nearly 30 years before some aspects of our employment standards or labour regulations were updated, we had governments that had a very poor sense of balance, so poor in some respects that it's a wonder they managed to stay on their feet.

That was one of the biggest jobs our government had in many respects. Actually, our government had a lot of big jobs. As I've said before in this House, Madam Chair, a number of times I had conversations with people about a wide variety of issues, and people came to me with particular concerns and said: “Why is something this way? Why is it like this? It wasn't like this when I was living in Ontario or when I lived in B.C. or in other places.” I had to tell them, “Well, Alberta is still the only jurisdiction in Canada that . . .” and very often these were not good things. So our government had a lot of work to do, frankly, to catch up on years of Conservative governments that chose to rag the puck on a number of things that they felt were too controversial or might cost them too much with some of their supporters.

We brought forward a bill that made a number of amendments to employment standards in the province of Alberta in seeking to bring Alberta back into balance, as had been demonstrated in other jurisdictions. I think it's fair to say, Madam Chair, that if something is the standard in every other jurisdiction in Canada, a balanced perspective would say: well, that should probably be the standard here, too, unless someone can present a very compelling argument why that balance would somehow be injurious.

Let's take, for example, the question of banked overtime. Alberta was the only jurisdiction in Canada that did not provide for workers when they worked an hour of overtime and would be paid an hour and a half for that overtime to also, then, if they banked that hour of overtime, bank an hour and a half, the actual value of the work they performed. Indeed, I just did a quick survey, Madam Chair, while sitting here awaiting my chance to speak. In B.C. it states: if an employee makes a written request, an employer can create a time bank and credit overtime wages for future time off; however, the time banked must be equal to the wage the employee would have been entitled to in working overtime. In other words, they must bank an hour and a half.

In Saskatchewan for every hour of overtime worked, one and a half hours must be banked.

Moving east to Manitoba, for every hour of overtime worked, one and a half hours of time is banked, which is paid at the regular wage when the employee takes the time off. Again, if the employee earned it at an hour and a half, they bank it at an hour and a half. If they take it as pay, they would be paid at the regular wage rate for overtime, that being an hour and a half.

In Ontario, if an employee has agreed to bank overtime hours, he or she must be given one and a half hours of paid time off for each hour of overtime worked.

In Quebec the employer may, at the request of the employee or in cases provided for by a collective agreement or decree, replace the payment of overtime by paid leave equivalent to the overtime worked plus 50 per cent.

In Nova Scotia: instead of overtime pay, an employee may receive one and a half hours of paid time off work for each hour of overtime worked when an employee and employer agree to do so.

In New Brunswick: banking of hours is actually not permitted in New Brunswick, interestingly. Employers must compensate employees for all overtime hours worked at the minimum overtime wage rate, that being time and a half.

In Prince Edward Island, if the employee requests it in writing and the employer agrees to that request, that employee, under the written agreement, must receive one and a half hours of paid time off for each hour of overtime they have accumulated.

In Newfoundland and Labrador instead of overtime pay an employee must receive one and a half hours of paid time off work for each hour of overtime worked when an employee and employer agree to do so.

4:00

Finally, in the Yukon the time off must be calculated by multiplying the hours of overtime worked by the employee by time and one half and be paid at his or her regular rate of pay at the time it was worked.

In every jurisdiction in Canada, Madam Chair – every single jurisdiction – if an employee works an hour of overtime, they either get paid an hour and a half or they bank an hour and a half. Alberta was the only province in Canada that said that employees' time was worth less. We corrected that. Now we have this new government who's coming into power. They've come into power, and their first thing to do is to roll this back. Apparently the Alberta advantage does not apply to workers in this province.

Now, I appreciate what members have shared about the need for some employees to have some flexibility in how they work with their employers. Indeed, that is why, like other provinces in Canada, there were provisions for employment averaging, where an employer and their employee could sit down, they'd come up with an agreement, it's approved, and they have different ways of approaching how they spread out those hours. But this government seems to feel that an hour worked in overtime is somehow worth less to an employee because they choose to bank that time as opposed to taking that as actual pay.

While we recognize that there is the need for there to be an agreement between an employee and an employer, we also recognize that not every workplace necessarily makes it easy for an employee to turn it down if that's what their employer tells them they are going to do. If I'm in a position where I desperately need that job and I'm told that the only way I can have that job is if I agree to the employer's imposition of that agreement and I sign my name to it, it is difficult if you're in that kind of vulnerable position to resist that kind of pressure. I don't think that's a door we should be opening as a government, to offer that opportunity for abuse.

And I am not, in saying that, suggesting that all or even a majority of employers are abusive. Indeed, I can count very few in my own career that I would say would take that kind of action: a very small number, but that number, Madam Chair, is not zero. Often that is going to be people who are in the most vulnerable positions. Governments should not be reopening loopholes to allow for people to pick the pockets of workers in this province, to allow people to take away what is their due right to earn, what is a right that they would enjoy in any other province in Canada.

That brings me back to what we were discussing, Madam Chair, that being balance. Now, it seems to be the view of this government

that balance must be tilted to the side of employers. Depending on one's perspective, you can decide how big that tilt is, whether it's a slight grade or whether, after all the changes that this government wants to bring in, it's a steeper hill. The fact is that that has been the history of Conservative governments in this province for many, many years. We see it even now with the legislation that this government wants to bring forward to break collective agreements, a view, again, that we as employers, as the government of Alberta, should have the right to override the duly negotiated rights of our employees, that somehow our quest to address the bottom line, which indeed is an important one, that that end justifies seemingly almost any means. In this bill we see that this government seems to be of the view that they must take the balance we created in bringing Alberta into line with every other jurisdiction in the country, that that balance must somehow be tipped back or there is no way we will ever see economic prosperity in this province again.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

That is not what I'm hearing from businesspeople in my constituency, Mr. Chair. That is not what I'm hearing from young entrepreneurs who are building neighbourhood businesses, who have indeed built franchises, suites of multiple businesses that are thriving within the Edmonton downtown core, who pay their employees above minimum wage and who treat them with the due dignity and respect that an employee, I believe, deserves and indeed that we have codified in law and that this government now wishes to roll back. This is not balance. This is tipping the balance. It betrays, I think, in many respects the disrespect in some ways – I don't know if that's quite the correct word; the lack of regard maybe – that some members of this Legislature seem to have for working people.

By all means, Mr. Chair, we should have respect for entrepreneurs. I respect people that start a business and operate a business. I recognize the risks that are involved. In my time as a customer service agent and a facilitator for the Canada Revenue Agency at the business inquiries call centre I talked with many business owners and I heard from them the challenges they faced. I talked with them about payroll. I talked with them about GST. I respect the challenge that comes with that.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

But to support and empower entrepreneurs, we do not have to roll back the rights of workers. Alberta workers do not have to be less than workers in any other province in Canada in order for entrepreneurs in our province to succeed. In some respects I would say that that is an insult to entrepreneurs in Alberta, to suggest that they are unable to thrive under the same conditions that entrepreneurs in other provinces can.

I recognize that we have come through a difficult time as a province, and indeed we are still emerging from that. I recognize that with that, there have been challenges for many people that operate businesses. Folks that operated restaurants and bars and other service industries in downtown Calgary indeed would have felt an impact from the world-wide drop in the price of oil and the impact that it had there. There are many things that you could point to and say were the issue there. There are many things that you could point to that indeed lie at the feet of many governments successively in this province, in the decisions on how they were going to structure the economy, how they were going to make investments, and how dependent they were going to be on oil and gas royalties to fund government services. There are a number of decisions that cascade up to this point, but frankly, Madam Chair, I do not believe that the culmination of those decisions should be borne by Alberta workers.

Our work over our four years in government was to try to find that balance. Were we successful in every front? Probably not. Nobody has a one thousand batting record in government. These are complex, difficult decisions to make. But the simplistic narrative that is being brought forward by this government, that by picking the pockets of Alberta workers they will somehow restore prosperity, it's a flimsy illusion.

4:10

The problems that we have, the difficulties that we need to face are for more complex than simply giving 4 and a half billion dollars back to wealthy corporations which may or may not choose to invest that back in the province and create jobs. It is not telling employees that the work that they are doing is worth less in Alberta than it is worth in any other province in Canada. It does not lie in telling young people that because they are under the age of 18, regardless of what experience or skill or whatever they have, they are worth \$2 less an hour. We do not help get other people ahead by handicapping workers.

I recognize that this is a point of philosophical disagreement, ideological disagreement, even, Madam Chair, between ourselves and this government. They will have the power to pass this legislation and move ahead, and I hope that they will be able to demonstrate that what they say this is going to do, it actually does. If not, this is clearly going to hurt Alberta workers. This going to create an imbalance between our province and every other province in Canada. It has the potential to exacerbate poverty for vulnerable individuals.

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any comments, questions, or amendments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise again to speak against Bill 2, a pick-your-pockets bill. As members of Her Majesty's Official Opposition, you've heard over and over how we are against this bill and that on this side of the House we are standing up for hard-working Albertans. We made sure that Albertans had modern workplace laws that respected working people. We set modern standards and ensured that Albertans were treated fairly. After decades of inaction hard-working Albertans finally had the same rights and benefits as every other Canadian. We followed through on our promise to phase in a \$15 minimum wage so people didn't have to go from work to the food bank. We made workplaces more family friendly. We introduced job-protecting leaves and improved maternity leave and compassionate care standards.

We put a lot of time and effort into studying the impacts of minimum wage. We know that it put more dollars into the pockets of hard-working Albertans, who live, work, and spend their money here. We pored over studies, finding positive effects of raising minimum wage, effects like increased consumer spending, lower wage inequality, and better health outcomes with little negative impact on overall employment levels, Madam Chair. The opposition can study and release data, but it had better include the impacts on women, consumer spending, health, poverty, and so much more.

You've heard me speak in this House about the pride I take in being a social worker. I saw firsthand the impacts of poverty on all aspects of people's lives. Unfortunately, Madam Chair, most of the people impacted were women and children. These families had higher rates of illness, lower education, limited housing ability, and the list goes on. On this side of the House we believe that Albertans, young or old, deserve equal pay for equal work. Rolling back the minimum wage for young people demonstrates a lack of

compassion and a lack of respect for young workers. The value of your work should depend on the effort and the skill that you put in, not what year you were born.

The UCP is also proposing to implement \$2 an hour wage cuts to students between the ages of 13 and 17. The \$13 an hour minimum wage applies for the first 28 hours worked in a week while school is in session. If they work more than 28 hours in a week, they must be paid the general minimum wage for every hour beyond the first 28. During breaks and summer holidays the youth rate will apply to all hours worked. This could lead vulnerable youth to choose to drop out of school in order to earn a higher wage, which is very concerning to members on this side of the House, Madam Chair.

I would like to again talk briefly about some of these vulnerable youth, specifically young parents. I shared my personal story in this House about being a young single mother myself. Having worked with young parents for several years, I can speak first-hand to the negative impacts that this harmful legislation will have on these young people and their families, that depend on them. For young parents to be able to continue with their schooling is absolutely essential not only to their future but to the future of their children, that rely on them. Being able to support these families is so important. Proposing legislation that creates a dilemma between furthering their education or dropping out of school in order to increase the minimum wage differential is very concerning. Many young parents want to continue with their education. However, many face barriers such as access to affordable child care, access to transportation, access to affordable housing, and access to good-paying jobs.

Many of these young parents work in the service industry as they are putting themselves through school. The UCP is also proposing a liquor server differential wage. We believe that the minimum wage needs to be guaranteed for hard-working Albertans regardless of what place of business they work in. The government should not be creating different tiers of workers. We know that tips are not a stable form of income. Tips vary shift by shift, night by night, and business by business. A nightclub in Edmonton is different than a restaurant in Vegreville. You can't rely on an unstable source of income. When the UCP says that all servers make up the difference in tips, Madam Chair, how can they guarantee that?

Their pick-your-pockets bill will take your overtime, steal your holiday pay, and cut your holiday pay to pay for their big tax gift to corporations. This pick-your-pocket bill will impact roughly 400,000 Albertans working overtime to care for themselves and their families. Albertans in oil and gas, construction, and the skilled trades will be hit hard. These are Albertans working to a project deadline, who often put in the extra hours to get the job done and then take the paid time off later. If you're an oil and gas worker making average pay, putting in 10 overtime hours per week on a 12-week project, that's 120 hours in paid time off. The difference between banking that pay at time and a half pay versus straight time is over \$2,500, Madam Chair. That's a huge difference for working people. We're talking hundreds to thousands of dollars for people going above and beyond in the workplace, day in and day out.

What happens when the worker accumulated overtime with the understanding that they were going to receive 1.5 hours for each overtime hour? It's not taught to students or non-unionized workers to negotiate their rights as an employee. Who is to sit down with workers and explain that they have the right to request their overtime to be paid out? How will employers respond to that negotiating process, if they even allow the discussion to take place to begin with? There is absolutely a power dynamic at play in these discussions no matter how you frame this.

Employers' bottom-line profits are affected if they pay out overtime. Will they be open to doing so when they know that paying

out overtime will be at 1.5 hours for each hour worked versus time in lieu, which is hour for hour? The workers' time is not valued as it was in our legislation. Workers are at the mercy of employers' discretion to honour their important work, that generates those profits for the employers. How can members sit across there, vote this through, look Albertans in the eyes, and say, "Your work is not valued"?

Many of my constituents work in the trades, and their overtime is what has helped the families of Edmonton-Castle Downs get through economic downturns. When I was on the doors, I heard loud and clear from all constituents that overtime was the most important issue that crossed all demographics. I heard many times that the previous election reflected Alberta's wishes for the future of Alberta. Well, Edmonton-Castle Downs voted overwhelmingly against losing their overtime hours, losing their value.

4:20

I now have constituents coming to my office with fears that: "Now that this has been introduced, what will this mean for me? What will this mean for my family?" One constituent came in so upset that there is an expectation on workers to know how to negotiate to have their overtime paid out at time and a half instead of time in lieu at hour for hour. He's never had to do this before, Madam Chair. His concerns are that if he opposes the employer, he is at risk of losing his job. Therein lies the rub, the power dynamic at play that we worked to eliminate for workers' rights. He is speaking with his co-workers about how to have these discussions.

A working Alberta does not pit workers against employers. That is what this bill does. We both have a large stake in the outcome, workers needing their hours to be honoured for what they have earned versus the business bottom line. Workers take on overtime to help pay for a roof over their head. Workers take on overtime to help pay for braces. Workers take on overtime to help pay for their children's tuition costs. Because of this overtime, Madam Chair, workers miss out on major life moments by taking on overtime for the benefits of finishing the job and for earning additional money for their family to succeed in Alberta. Business bottom lines do not hug your child at night and tuck them in. Business bottom lines do not pay for formula and diapers. Business bottom lines cannot pay for missing a first step or a first word or a first "I love you."

What morale will this leave for the workforce? How will this play out for the economy if Alberta doesn't have that minimum of 2,500 additional dollars in their pocket? To hear the UCP repeat over and over that the \$1,000 of the carbon tax deserves to be in the hands of Albertans: what is the difference when they are taking over \$2,500 from Albertans? This is a prime example that they were concerned not with the amount of money in the hands of Alberta but with where the money from Albertans was going. Instead of having that money back in Alberta circulation, they would rather it be back in the hands of employers like large corporations, where their profits aren't reflected in the Alberta economy. For a party that shouts to the rooftops that they are about jobs and the economy of Alberta, this does not sound like they are at all concerned about Alberta's economy. The voters in Alberta voted for more jobs and an improved economy, but they did not vote for losing money out of the Alberta economy, and that is what this bill does.

I'd like to talk a little bit more about some of the things that we did with the minimum wage increase and some of the information that it has provided. We know that on October 1 our government increased the minimum wage to \$15 an hour to help hard-working families. More than a quarter million Albertans earn less than \$15 an hour. They represent over 11 per cent of all workers: 24 per cent are age 15 to 19, over 40 per cent are age 20 to 34, and over 12 per cent are age 55-plus. Alberta's overall employment increased

almost 2 per cent from October 2015 to August 2018. Alberta's employment in the three lowest paying occupations – sales support, service support, and salespersons – increased, Madam Chair, by about 6 per cent during that time. Employment in retail trade, the largest minimum wage sector, increased 4.8 per cent from August 2017 to August 2018.

We introduced Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, in 2017. We know and we heard all throughout that time that Alberta had some of the oldest workplace legislation in Canada. Prior to our government's change, both the Employment Standards Code and Labour Relations Code had not been significantly updated in almost 30 years. I'm proud of the work that our government did to update those codes. While reviews of the code were done by previous governments in 2007 and 2014, no action was taken, Madam Chair.

Following a focused review of existing laws and over 7,300 submissions from businesses, industry, organized labour, academics, municipalities, nonprofits, and the general public we passed a series of changes as part of Bill 17. I'm curious, Madam Chair, who this government has consulted with when they introduced this piece of legislation. I feel that it's not as robust as what was done before because some of this simply would not have been introduced as part of the legislation.

Some of the Employment Standards Code changes that we made were that we repealed the ability for employers to pay employees with disabilities less than minimum wage.

We created job protection extended to 27 weeks from eight weeks to better align with federal employment insurance benefits around compassionate care leave, and caregiver status was expanded to include nonprimary caregivers, Madam Chair.

The long-term illness and injury leave: a new unpaid leave that provides up to 16 weeks of job protection per year for long-term personal sickness and injury. It also aligned with the federal employment insurance program.

Personal and family responsibility leave was an unpaid new leave that provided up to five days of job protection per year for personal sickness or short-term care of an immediate family member, including attending to personal emergencies and caregiver responsibilities related to the education of a child.

The bereavement leave was a new unpaid leave that provides up to three days of job protection per year for bereavement of an immediate family member.

One that I'm very proud of, Madam Chair, was a domestic violence leave, a new unpaid leave that provides up to 10 days of job protection per year for employees addressing a situation of domestic violence. This, I think, was essential in the legislation because we know that people fleeing domestic violence don't often identify to their employer why they're away. They may be sick. They may be dealing with other excuses that they're trying to create to keep their job. By introducing this piece of legislation, it gives permission for people to be honest with their employer about what's really happening at home and not fear losing their job because of that. So I'm very proud of that piece that we had added.

We also created citizenship ceremony leave, which is a new unpaid leave that provides up to half a day of job protection for employees attending a citizenship ceremony, Madam Chair. I know that in my role as an MLA I have had the incredible pleasure to be able to speak and preside at several community citizenship ceremonies. It is an absolutely heartwarming experience having people becoming Canadians, saying the oath, and seeing their family, their supporters, their loved ones coming to support them in that process. Several times I have taken the oath at the same time with them, and it's just, like I mentioned, an absolute honour. To be able to know that we provided an unpaid leave so that they could

attend that ceremony with job protection is something that I'm very proud of because it's an important part of being engaged in your community and being able to participate in that without the fear of losing your job. I think it's a very important process.

One that is upsetting that it was needed but I am very happy that it was included was the critical illness of a child, a new unpaid leave that provides up to 36 weeks of job protection for parents of critically ill or injured children. It aligned with the federal employment insurance program.

We included a new unpaid leave for the death or disappearance of a child, 52 weeks of job protection for employees whose child disappeared as the result of a crime or up to 104 weeks if a child died as a result of a crime. Again, this aligned with the federal employment insurance program.

4:30

Leave eligibility: the period for current and new leave set as 90 days rather than one year.

The maternity and parental leave: job protection for parental leave extended from 37 to 52 weeks to better align with proposed federal employment insurance benefits.

Legislation for the following, modified such that an employee may be terminated during the notice entitlement period only for situations where the business is closed or suspended: an employee whose pregnancy terminates within 16 weeks of the due date would still be eligible for maternity leave. I think that's a really important piece, Madam Chair, because for someone who has experienced a pregnancy termination, it can be devastating, and it has a huge impact on your life. Being able to take the time to grieve and to process that loss is huge. To not have to worry about your job being at risk, I think, is something that we are very proud of on this side of the House.

Rest periods: employees require a minimum of a 30-minute break, paid or unpaid, for every five hours of consecutive employment.

Overtime, Madam Chair: overtime agreements allow time to be banked for six months rather than the current three months. Like every other jurisdiction in Canada, overtime banking is calculated at 1.5 for all hours worked rather than hour for hour. Now, this was something that I heard, over and over, all across the province, workers were very, very appreciative of because Alberta was the only place in Canada that didn't acknowledge that. Now Bill 2 is taking this backwards.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to be in this House today and speak to important disagreements about legislation being brought into the House. I always welcome that opportunity because I think it is a true reflection of that which we all value, which is democracy and a chance to have some reasoned arguments about the differences we have in terms of approaching the well-being of Albertans, an opportunity to speak to the concerns I have about how this legislation shifts some of the well-being of some individuals within the province for the benefit of others and the concern I have when you're taking a side of that nature and who you're picking to support and who you're not picking to support. I think that's the underlying concern that I have here.

As I've addressed in the House before, I think that one of the responsibilities of the government is to do some assessment of society and have some sense that some people in society are more vulnerable than others and therefore are going to require some kind

of structural support in order to do well and be well in society, will need the rules to be set up in such a way that they will be protected and supported when they can't themselves achieve that kind of protection, because they're a single individual against a larger institution or against a larger majority of people or perhaps because they have some personal vulnerability which prevents them from achieving and seeking out the things that would be good for them in society.

We know that people are gifted differently. Some people will do well in any circumstance, will rise to the occasion, will face very serious challenges, and will be able to find ways to move through those challenges and find success and, in doing so, will create benefits not only for themselves but often for other people, their family members or even the community around them. Those people we celebrate. Those people we are quite happy to see succeed. We get behind them and cheer them on and try to pave the way for them when we can.

But we know that other people will just not be able to do that in quite the same way, that other people simply don't have the type of background, whatever it is – I wish we knew what it was – that allows them to succeed against all odds. As a result, it's often important that government understand that there's going to be that differential and to try, as much as possible, to ensure that people do not suffer as a result of not having whatever it is that allows that success to be possible for others.

That's part of my concern about all of this legislation here, that we do have people in society who need us to ensure that they have a set of rights and that those rights are protected and that those rights are encouraged and that, within those rights, they are given the best opportunity to succeed, just the chance to do the best that they can. Sometimes we have to worry that the balance of power in our society is not evenly distributed. That means that government, which has power, can help to share their power with the people who are more powerless in order to create that balanced and even playing field.

That was largely what was behind our decision to bring in the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act in the previous Legislature. It was a chance for us to look at: how do we create the best opportunity for people who are employees of businesses so that they can become successful and they can derive benefit from the well-being that Alberta so richly creates for so many people?

You know, I'm concerned here at this point that this government has come in and very quickly after being elected, without having an opportunity – of course, it simply didn't have the opportunity – not taking the opportunity to go out and to consult more widely and to begin to assess those concerns we have about who's going to benefit from these changes and who's going to suffer from these changes, to do a consultation but, more than a consultation, to do an assessment of: where is the vulnerability, where is the disproportionate amount of power, and how do we work as a society in order to create a more equal and balanced playing field so that one person does not have advantage over another?

On this particular legislation – I've had a chance to speak to it in the past, and I've addressed some of the concerns that I have – I want to speak about one particular thing that I haven't had a chance to address until this day. That is that for many people we have to worry that they have what we refer to as precarious work; that is, it's not dependable. It's not like many of us, like those of us in this Legislature. We know that at the end of every month we will receive a paycheque, and that paycheque will be exactly the same from month to month. We can do our budget, and we can schedule our lives around that, and we can derive great benefit from the satisfaction it gives us that we have that kind of stability and

security from fear of finding yourself in a very difficult financial spot, because you can plan for it.

Now, a very high number of workers in any province, of course, don't have that kind of work. Their work depends on the jobs that happen to come along, on the number of hours they're able to acquire from employers, and that goes up and down. It's really very much out of their control. It's not like they can simply choose for a new building to be built, for a new industry to be initiated. They have to wait. They have to wait to see what the world has to offer.

The world, you know, is not that settled and consistent a place. Things happen. The price of oil goes up and goes down. I know that it's often commented that in the time that we were in government, a lot of jobs were lost in this province as a result of changes in oil prices. Now, the government likes to blame that on policy that we have, but I just want to remind government members and, of course, everyone in the House that if you actually look at when the job losses began to occur, it was actually six months before we got elected. The most dramatic drop in job losses was actually not in our government but prior to our government. Between November 2014 and June 2015: that's when the vast majority of jobs were actually lost.

4:40

Now, unfortunately, we were hoping that there would be a quick recovery and that a lot of those jobs would come back, but they didn't. That's very unfortunate, but it didn't have to do with government policy. It had to do with world events. It had to do with things that happened not here in Alberta and not even in Canada but in the United States and other countries of the world that caused there to be this precarious set of circumstances that, of course, led to businesses being worried and businesses making decisions to contract in order to be able to kind of weather the storm. That makes sense. Nobody here would be against businesses making decisions to weather the storm, to get through this difficult time so that they can succeed in the new time that comes along when the weather changes and things are better.

But we would also want that for workers. We would also want workers to be able to weather the storm, to be able to have ways of getting themselves through those bad moments when the jobs just aren't coming, when they have to wait it out a little bit, when they have to wait their turn because there are only so many positions available and there are more people looking for those pieces of work. That's the time that I'm most worried about here.

The reason why I'm bringing that up is because I think overtime pay is one of those strategies that was available to workers for a long time. You could bank your overtime pay at one and a half times your regular salary and keep that as banked overtime until the day arrived when your precarious work took a negative turn and suddenly you found yourself, for perhaps weeks and sometimes perhaps months, without proper employment and therefore a proper income. People were able to make that decision, but they would put this money aside, and then when life got rough, when the vagaries of employment occurred in your world, you were able to know that you had this nest egg that you could draw on.

Now, of course, that still exists to some degree because it can still be banked at a 1 to 1 ratio. But what was happening before, of course, is that people were able to bank it at a higher ratio. Let's talk about why that higher ratio was even created in the first place because I think that's important. In many ways there is a disbalance between employers and employees. All the employee has to offer is their labour. That's it. That's all they can bring to the situation. They can work hard. They can do their best to help the company get better. They can be, you know, hard-working, thoughtful people who

contribute above and beyond. But that's it. They can just be good employees.

Employers have a variety of other things that they're able to do. They can make decisions that have extremely serious effects on workers. Having the opportunity for workers to be able to negotiate wages with their employer is a very important thing to occur because it allowed them to come to the table with something, to be able to say: look, I want to be able to work on your behalf so that your company grows, you gain profits, but I need to have some power at that table, not just take whatever comes my way.

One of the things that came from many years of union negotiations in Canada and, of course, around the world was the fact that we needed to find a way to create a win-win. An employer is in a good situation. They've got more work to be done. They've got things they want to have happen, so they go to the employees, and they ask them to put in more time. It's a win for them if the employee puts in more time because they can do more of whatever it is that they do well. If they're selling the product, if they're selling a service, they can do more of that. They can drive the benefits of that, particularly profits, of course, and that's a win on the employer's side.

What the old system had was a win also for the employee. It wasn't just a demand for more work. It wasn't just someone with power telling you: if you want to keep your job, you're going to give me more hours. It was a negotiation. It was an agreement. "Look, if you're going to get this win of being able to make more profits because I'm putting in more hours, then give me a win back. Give me a win back so I can take care of my life when life is precarious, when the work isn't there, so that I can bank hours so I can draw it out later. We both get a win out of this. You get more profits, and I get more profits. Kind of the same thing." That's a nice deal. It's nice because it brings everybody to the table. It gives everybody a win to go home with and helps to reduce the precariousness of income for people who don't know whether or not they're always going to have the work.

Now, this turns out to be a fairly significant amount of money for many people. In the oil and gas industry, for example, a lot of people work overtime consistently. They work overtime every day for weeks at a time. I notice that some of the stats indicate that if you put in about 10 hours extra a week over a period of three months, a little more than 120 hours for that three-month period, that can have the difference of \$2,500 to \$2,600 in terms of your household income. That's a lot of money to put aside. If you were able to put that money aside over a period of years, then you would have enough money to pay your rent and your groceries sometimes for months at a time.

I know a number of people who work in areas like carpentry, plumbing, and other kinds of technical trades that have really taken advantage of that when times got tough, when they knew it was going to be three, six months between the job that they have now and the next job that came down the road. Having that amount of money taken away from them just puts them more into that precarious world. You know, we can't stop all the vagaries of life – I understand that – but it's always incumbent upon us to try to find ways to create structures in society that provide that kind of stability when we can. It's a possibility, and it's a nice one because it's a win-win kind of possibility. It allows both the employer and the employee to get some extra benefit.

Now, I know employers may be concerned. "Well, then I'm paying out more money, and that's something of a loss in terms of my profit margin." Of course, if they're going to make more money, they have to do that calculation. Is it worth the extra time and a half? If it is, well, great. Good for them. We don't have a problem then. If it's not, then they do have another choice. That other choice is

that they simply hire more people to do the job so that overtime isn't required. They can reduce the amount of overtime they're paying out by making decisions to employ more people, which is, again, a win-win for us here in the province of Alberta. If we have employers making the decision to hire more people, that's a satisfactory outcome as well.

What I'm just arguing for is that there has been a good balance up till now in terms of people being able to negotiate their lives, to take care of the bad moments, and to move on in a positive, satisfactory kind of way. I would really like to see that continue, and I'm very concerned that we are moving away from that position in terms of the decisions that we're making right now. That is going to have an effect on somewhere around 400,000 Albertans who are included in this particular scenario that we're talking about, so it really has a huge effect on a large number of people.

I know I heard about this quite often on the doorstep because, of course, many people living in Edmonton were people whose partners would fly up to places like Fort McMurray or other places typically in northern Alberta and come back. You know, while the employee who is moving up to Fort McMurray is up there, they might as well work overtime. They're not at home with their family anyway, so it's a great way to put in some extra hours, get some extra money, and then come home and be able to live the life that we all desire with our families, with the benefits that they were able to accrue and the contribution that they're able to make to the GDP in the province of Alberta and to the local economy.

When they come home and they have that extra money, I can tell you that most employees spend that money in the local community, and that's one of the really nice things about employees, that that's where their dollars are spent. Their dollars are spent on things that the family needs. It allows them to buy a vehicle for the family. It allows them to perhaps go out to a restaurant every once in a while. It allows them to live a good life. Most of that is spent here, in the province of Alberta, which, again, turns over and increases the GDP here in the province of Alberta. So it's a really positive thing when we have that happening.

4:50

I want to take a moment to move on and speak a little bit more about the decision to lower student wages, from \$15 an hour to \$13 an hour. Again, I'm worried about the nature of the outcome of this, the unintended consequences that this will have for many young people, particularly with regard to the concern of precariousness in terms of employment. Now there is a complex set of rules here. There is red tape involved in the strategy that has been established for how people will be paid, how much, so much up to 28 hours, so much if you're in school or if you're not in school. Again, I've spoken to the fact that I'm very concerned that now people are not only not being paid for the work that they're doing, but they're also being paid based on some externality such as whether or not they're in school or whether they happen to be 18 or they happen to be 17. These are things that are very disconcerting for us here.

I'm also concerned that it sets up this competition between people who are in school and the people who are out of school, that it sets up a competition between people who are under 18 and people who are over 18, and that it makes their life precarious. The employers naturally will be in the position of wanting to maximize their profits and will start to make decisions that are difficult for employees, decisions that will pit them against their co-workers so that if you're 17, you might have an advantage over an 18-year-old because you can be paid less. Then suddenly you turn 18, and your work becomes precarious again because there's someone else who will be working for less.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any other members wishing to speak or offer amendments to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and discuss Bill 2. I have a couple of concerns and a couple of comments that I'd like to make in regard to the bill, but before I do that, for the sake of the House, I have an amendment. I will just take one copy. Would you like me to read it into the record or wait till you have a copy?

The Chair: Just wait till I have a copy, please.

This amendment will be known as amendment A1.

Member for Edmonton-Manning, please proceed.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will read it into the record. I move that Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, be amended in section 1(2)(a) in the proposed section 23(2)(a) by adding "at least" after "overtime pay will be provided, taken and paid at."

Now, the reason for this amendment is that when we look at the legislation and the way that it reads as of right now, there is a concern around the fact that without the words "at least" this creates a loophole. The reason for what we would perceive as being a loophole to this legislation would be that there are existing contracts that private-sector employers have signed with their employees that already guarantee time-and-a-half pay. With the changes to this legislation, without adding "at least," an employer could interpret this by saying: well, the legislation says that I no longer have to honour that contract at time and a half, and I'm only now required to have to pay you straight time. What will happen is that we might see contracts in the private sector and, let's say, potentially, looking at some bills that are coming forward such as Bill 9, that maybe the public-sector employer would also like to look at this as an option, to not have to pay time and a half even though there's contracted language in regard to it.

This is another way for this government to create policy that actually allows the employer to say, "Well, the legislation now says that I can't pay you time and a half," even though the government has repeatedly said: well, it's a negotiation between the employer and the employee. We know how well negotiations go between this particular employer and their employees. So I would question the relevancy of whether or not that argument is valid. Again, it's just an opportunity to pick the pockets of our workers.

I would like to have the belief that the majority of the employers in our province wouldn't look at this and take it as an opportunity to not have to pay time and a half to workers that are currently working and have contracts that exist at time and a half. However, if there is a loophole and there is an opportunity, some may decide that it makes sense to be able to renege on a contract or to renege on paying workers time and a half when they don't necessarily have to.

I feel like this amendment is very important to this piece of legislation because it clarifies, and it's a little bit of a housekeeping tool to say that "at least" exists within this legislation instead of the way that it reads currently to be paid, which is at a "rate at a time that the employee could have worked and received wages from the employer." Again, we recognize that there are 400,000 Albertans that are going to be impacted by this piece of legislation. I would put out there that there might be an additional 180,000 workers that are impacted by Bill 9, that could potentially be impacted by this as well, for a total of 580,000 Albertans.

You know, again, I'm not trying to imply that employers are going to break their contracts. I mean, we would never want to do

that. We would never like to think that any employer in this province would ever want to break a contract because that could potentially be illegal, depending on the contract that's signed. But if there's an opportunity and there's a loophole that exists within pieces of legislation that could allow breaching of contracts, some might decide to try to take that route and see what happens.

I would encourage all members of the House to consider this amendment. It's a pretty reasonable amendment, I think. It's only two words. It's not substantial by any means, no. You know, be fair to the workers that are already working time and a half, that deserve to get paid out with their existing contracts, let's honour the contracts in Alberta. Let's ensure that employers understand that they don't have to pay employees at straight time, as this could be potentially interpreted. Let's just clean it up a little bit and make sure that employers understand that they have the opportunity to still pay at one and a half times versus it having to be at straight time because I think that's a substantial change for employees. I think it's important that employers understand that they can negotiate and make it time and a half and that they can pay their employees whatever they feel is a fair wage and fair compensation for their overtime, and the only way that we can do that is by making sure that this language is clear so that they don't feel like this government is now telling them that the only salary they can pay and the only compensation they can pay is straight time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Member for Edmonton-Manning, for bringing forward this amendment, that would certainly clarify that the minimum required for the employer is the wage rate, but there is no restriction as such in the legislation should they want it to be at a higher rate. I think the reason that this amendment is important is that we have heard many times from that side of the House that this bill will leave open the opportunity for employers and employees to negotiate the overtime. At least that intent will be reflected if we pass this amendment. It's a very common-sense, practical amendment brought forward by my colleague. I don't see any issue with it such that the government side won't support this amendment.

5:00

We know that ever since the UCP got the mandate, including this act, many other pieces of legislation, Bill 9, they're all designed to attack Alberta workers' rights. This piece of legislation, pick-your-pockets legislation, is essentially reversing all the changes that were brought forward by the previous government making workplaces more family friendly, introducing job-protected leaves, improving maternity leaves, compassionate care standards, and all those things. Where there is an opportunity to make this bill a bit more clear, I think that's the one, and we should certainly support this amendment.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

In general, I guess, this piece of legislation – I think the name says An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business. I think their idea of making Alberta open for business attacks workers, takes their rights away. That's exactly what this piece of legislation is doing. It's picking pockets by cutting overtime, by taking away holiday pay, by cutting holiday pay, and by reducing youth minimum wage and all that to give a gift to corporations, multinational corporations.

It makes changes to employment standards and labour relations that will take Alberta backwards and not forward. When we were

in government, I think we conducted a review. We consulted with workers. We consulted with those representing our workers, those organizations. We consulted with businesses, and the changes we brought forward were common-sense changes, and they were not the radical, ideological changes as sometimes the other side would want to describe them. They were merely changes that will bring Alberta at par with other Canadian jurisdictions.

When we look at other Canadian jurisdictions, time and a half pay for overtime work, that's pretty much the norm, but here in Alberta we are seeing that they're after reversing that change that was brought forward after years and years of struggle from the labour movement, Albertans asking for those changes, and the previous Conservative government not paying any attention. Finally, when we became government, we brought forward those changes.

Similarly, when we became government, Alberta was towards the lower end of minimum wage. We increased the minimum wage to make sure that Albertans who go to work, full-time work, are able to put food on the table, are able to meet their basic needs. What we are seeing here is that they are reducing minimum wage as well from \$15 to \$13 for kids age 16 to 18. I think, as has been said by my colleagues here, a former minister and the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods, that work should never depend on your age. It should depend on your skill. It should depend on what you have to offer, but here we are seeing an arbitrary kind of two-tier wage system that only depends on how old you are. I think that discriminates against young workers in this province just because they are young, just because of their age. I don't think that in any way, shape, or manner that kind of policy will help us create jobs.

When Albertans elected this government, they were promised jobs, they were promised a pipeline, they were promised prosperity. So far, when we look at their legislative agenda, what we are seeing here is that, on one hand, they are trying to do their best to benefit their donors, benefit the wealthiest in this province, but at the expense of an attack on workers. Bill 2 does the same thing. Bill 9 does the same thing. Bill 3 does the same thing.

This piece of legislation is reversing the progress that was made under the previous government, under our government. It's repealing minimum wage, and I don't think that we heard during the campaign that they will be reversing minimum wage. Similarly, I don't think Albertans voted for their compassionate care leave, that was adjusted after a long wait, to be taken away. They didn't vote for their long-term illness and injury leave to be abolished. They didn't vote for their personal family responsibility leave to be taken away. They didn't vote for their bereavement leave to be taken away. They didn't vote for their domestic violence leave to be taken away. In fact, if they voted for anything, they voted for jobs, they voted for the economy, they voted for pipelines.

So far what we see from this government, I think, the evidence is that despite their repeal of the carbon tax, despite their big tax corporate giveaway of 4-plus billion dollars, what we are seeing in Calgary is that there is more job loss. There is more unemployment in Calgary. Certainly, those things that they did in the name of the economy, in the name of job creation didn't have the intended impact on the economy.

As was mentioned earlier today, just in the last week Repsol is laying off workers in Calgary. They're laying off workers from their field offices across Alberta, two different places in Alberta. Similarly, Nexen is also laying off people in Calgary. If their policy was to have any positive impact, if their policy – they were describing that the reason for job losses is that there is a carbon tax. The reason for job losses: maybe the taxes are high. Both those things, I guess, are in the UCP's legislative agenda. One has already been passed. If that was the reason, I don't think we will see more

job loss in Calgary. We won't see companies shutting down their field offices, companies restructuring them. So certainly that's not the issue. That's not the way you create jobs, by pitting businesses against Alberta workers.

This piece of legislation is an important one and will impact more than half a million Albertans. That's pretty much half of what you claimed your mandate to be. So that's half of your mandate that will be impacted by this piece of legislation.

The overtime pay plays a very critical role. Those who work at minimum wage jobs, those who work at low-paying jobs, and even those who are working in oil and gas, construction, skilled trades, they work hard. They work overtime so that they can meet their needs, and this change will affect them somewhere around \$2,500. It's a huge, huge amount of money for those who work hard to earn this overtime, and now with this law they will see that \$2,500 taken away from them. Their hard work is not valued.

At the same time they will see that this government would rather give \$4.5 billion in tax breaks for the corporations, for the wealthiest, for multinational corporations but not to hard-working Albertans, who work hard each and every day in the oil and gas sector, who work hard each and every day in the construction sector, who work hard in our health care system, in our education system. All those Albertans are getting impacted by this only so that the UCP government can pursue their ideological agenda of providing \$4.5 billion in tax breaks so they can follow the policies of the past, trickle-down economics, supply-side economic policies that have failed all across the globe and also here in Alberta many, many times before.

5:10

If they really want to create jobs, if they really want to help the economy, I think one way of doing that would be to create more takeaway capacity for our energy sector. There were oil-by-rail contracts signed by the previous government, which would have helped the Alberta economy to take another 120,000 barrels to market. That would have created jobs; that would have attracted investment. But what we are seeing here is that those contracts are being threatened. There's no answer. We were told that the private sector will take on that capacity and will create that capacity. When asked during question period how many barrels of capacity were added, there is absolutely zero evidence that any barrels, no capacity, was created through the private sector. When we brought those agreements, I think we looked into the market capacity, we looked into the existing capacity, and it was a well-thought-out decision that was based on sound advice from the Department of Energy and public service, but here we are. We will cut overtime, but we will not do anything to create jobs or attract investments.

They're cutting, through this, not only overtime pay but also young workers' wages. They're cutting it just based on their age. It should never depend on someone's age; rather it should be fair, and it should be based on equal pay for equal work and based on the effort and skill you put into any work. Instead, we are told that this cut somehow magically will also increase jobs for youth. There is no evidence that cutting existing workers' pay will create more jobs because businesses have a background in economics and businesses will only hire the amount of labour that they need, whether it's at \$15 or \$13. Somehow if the wage drops, they will not create additional positions that they don't need. There will only be positions that they need. They will only employ labour that they can accommodate and that they need. There is no economic theory whatsoever that I am aware of – if they can point to some, I would be happy to listen and look it up. Throughout my education, up until my master's in economics, I never heard of an economic theory that says that cutting youth wages will somehow create more youth jobs,

because businesses will only hire as much labour as they need, regardless of what the cost of that labour is. That's a critical factor in production that will account for that, whether it's higher or lower, but that will not create jobs.

This piece of legislation, again, is attacking youth. Somehow they think that that will magically create jobs. All of that is done in the name of making Alberta open for business. There is not a hint of that in this piece of legislation. What really is there is that they're taking overtime pay away, they're attacking their leaves, they're attacking their wages, and somehow that opens Alberta for business. I think a fair Alberta, an Alberta that looks out for businesses, looks out for workers, looks out for all Albertans, doesn't have to pit workers and businesses against each other. It doesn't have to pit the economy and the environment against each other. It doesn't have to hide these attacks in the name of business. It doesn't have to name the bill in such a way that no Albertan would ever guess that in Alberta, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business will have everything that amounts to an attack on Alberta workers.

At least this amendment put forth by my colleague from Edmonton-Manning will ensure what we heard from the other side, that their intention is that employer and employee can negotiate overtime. That's another thing, whether these negotiations are possible or not, but it leaves room there that the employer at least has to pay the employee at the wage rate. Should they choose to pay more, at least the legislation is open to that idea.

I think it's a common-sense amendment that will help clarify their intention as described by them. Although I believe that no amount of amendments, no amount of tweaks to this legislation will make this bill acceptable to Alberta workers, will make this bill acceptable to those who are working, those who are earning minimum wage. No amount of amendments will make this bill acceptable to those whose overtime is taken away in the amount of \$2,500, those whose leaves are taken away. No amount of amendments will kind of strike a balance where we can say that it's a fair piece of legislation and that it strikes a fair balance between employers and employees.

It's clearly tilted towards businesses along with their other acts, for instance, Bill 9, Bill 3, everything. I think the only people who stand to lose in these pieces of legislation are working Albertans, those who provide essential and important services every day, those who are there and who are needed to run hospitals, run schools, run these businesses. They're on the receiving end of this attack, and they're the ones who are losing their benefits.

At least this amendment will clarify their intention, make a little bit of a difference, and I hope that members on both sides of the House can support this amendment. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Are there others? I see the hon. Minister of Transportation rising to speak to this amendment.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise on this amendment made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, I think, if I have it correctly. Let me just say that our legal folks looked at this and they have determined that this will not be an improvement. It's essentially somewhat repetitive with the intention of the bill. The government side over here, we've been very clear about the intention of the bill. The bill is to provide the flexibility for employees and employers to work together in those cases where they could trade hours worked and bank them, to take them at a one-to-one basis when it works. Of course, if they get paid out, they will still get paid out at the one and a half rate.

The fact is that we've heard a lot in the last little while from the opposition, and they are doing their best to roll out every negative

scenario possible, and I suppose that's their job, so I'll give them a pass on that, at least to some degree. But if they looked at it in a more realistic way and talked to some more small businesses about how this works, they might actually be saying things differently than what we've heard in the House today.

A scenario that a member from the opposition the other day rolled out, that if somebody banked 40 hours' worth of work under the current legislation, they could take off a week and a half's holidays, and if they banked 40 hours' worth of work under the new legislation, they would only get a week's holidays. Let me say, if you look at it as the most negative scenario possible, that is one scenario.

But let me tell you about another scenario of how this could roll out, too. If an employer needed someone to work an extra 40 hours' work, after this legislation that we hope will pass comes forward, here are the possibilities. One possibility is what the NDP says. That's potentially a possibility, but the other possibility is that that worker might not get any overtime. The employer might either work themselves, or the employer might bring in a second employee at regular time. That employee, instead of having the benefit of those extra hours and getting some extra time off with his or her family, wouldn't get any overtime at all and wouldn't get that opportunity from their employer to have that extra benefit. That's actually a more realistic scenario. That's actually a more realistic example of what could possibly happen out in the world.

5:20

The opposition likes to talk about these examples, too. They always loved the expression "wealthy, greedy corporations," but the fact is, Mr. Chair, in many cases the organizations that will benefit the most from the banked-time provision are charities and nonprofits. They often will use the one-to-one banked time as a big part of fundraising, when you see galas, for example, special events that charities put on, whatever it happens to be, some gala with a theme where everybody goes and has dinner, and they try to talk them into spending money for the charity outside of the ticket price.

What happens, then, within the charities and the nonprofits is that their staff end up working sometimes 12, 16 hours a day for two, three days because it's a lot of work to get in, move decorations in, decorate the hall, host the event, work overtime, the next day clean up, undecorate the event, and move out. If the nonprofit or the charity had to pay one and a half times pay for all of that, it might actually not be worth doing it. Then, of course, you lose the benefit of that charitable work and the nonprofit work that they do out in the world.

Right now, in fact, many employees that work in these scenarios actually look forward to the events so that they can work the extra hours, and then they can, at a mutually agreed upon schedule with their employer, take a Friday off or a couple of Fridays off or a couple of Mondays off or they can take a day off to take a child or a spouse to a doctor's appointment or, heck, they can sleep in. They can ride their bicycle some day when it's sunny. There are all these scenarios, and there are a thousand more scenarios like that, that the opposition wants to ignore, than the things that don't really happen.

The other thing that exists is that there is lots of seasonal work. If you just think about agriculture, where in farm labour the fact is – well, it's not universal across all farms and ranches – anybody that grows a crop that has farmhands knows that during the spring when seeding is going on the work goes 12, 16, sometimes 24 hours a day. The farmhands know that part of the deal is that you've got to – the old-time expression is you've got to make hay when the sun is shining.

The same thing holds true in the fall in harvest when you make hay when the sun is shining, where you go from maybe a normal

workday to having people working on the combines and other pieces of equipment morning, noon, and night because they have a limited amount of time between when the crop is ripe and when the snow falls, and if they don't get it off the field, then the farmer or the rancher doesn't make anything unless they do. It's been going on for years with their employees in many cases. Those employees work – let's face it – really long, really tough hours during seeding and harvesting, and they get paid for working lesser days where they will maybe get a few weeks off when the crops are in the field and growing in the middle of June and there's a lot less daily work to be done.

Let's talk about February. There's not a lot of seeding or harvesting going on in February in Alberta, and there are lots of arrangements with the employers and the employees where they continue to get paid during the off-season. They and their families benefit more during the pay period but probably will have less tax taken off during the pay period. But let's be clear. At the end of the year when you file your taxes, that all evens out based on your total annual income. But the fact is that these arrangements are commonplace, and a lot of nonprofits suffered when the NDP changed the ability for employers and employees to come to these mutually beneficial arrangements.

A lot of small businesses suffered when this happened, and a lot of their employees, instead of getting time and a half, got nothing extra. A lot of them actually like being able to work hard. It makes them feel part of the team. They surely earn their money, but they get to have, perhaps, a day off in the summer or whenever they want. Maybe in the winter they get a day off to go skiing; maybe in the summer they get a day off to ride their bike or do something. But the fact is that the NDP's legislation has taken away this mutually agreed upon flexibility and quality of life improvement that has been going on for years.

They somehow just can't seem to get it through their minds that before they showed up and did their best to mess up the Alberta where almost everybody that wanted to be working was working – they are small-minded, in my view, in the way they look at these things. They don't consider both sides of the argument, Mr. Chair. Sure, the other side will jump up and say: well, what if an employer is bad? Well, you know what? That happens. There are bad employers and there are rules to deal with that, but in this particular case this is a mutually agreed upon arrangement that benefits the employee and the employer. Many times it's the difference between getting some overtime and getting days off when they really want it or not, and getting those days off and still being able to pay their monthly bills.

The other side always likes to talk about people that don't make a lot of money, and that's one of the things that I'll say I agree with them on. You've got to think more about people that don't make a lot of money in this world because they need us thinking about them more. But those are the ones that, because they don't make a lot of money, may not be able to afford to take a vacation. One of the things that helps them to be able to take a vacation is the one trade-off so that they can get the overtime, so they can take the vacation without missing the paycheque. In many cases they won't get any opportunity for the overtime because the employer will just hire somebody else, a second employee at straight time. They won't ever get any extra pay or any extra time off, and in some cases they won't get a Friday off. They won't get a vacation.

That's what the other side refuses to acknowledge. They know it's true. Some of them might even have received that benefit along the way. I don't know. I don't know whether they have or not. But the fact is that they refuse to acknowledge it. Why? Because they'd rather think of job creators as being bad instead of being good. On this side of the House we actually think job creators are part of the

solution. The other side of the House thinks job creators are the problem. We think job creators are the solution.

And it's the same. They talk about taking \$2 an hour away from young students. Again, I suppose if you want to look at it in the most negative way possible as the NDP does, because they think of job creators as being the problem rather than the solution, that's one way to look at it. The other way, the other legitimate way to look at it is that making \$13 an hour is \$13 an hour better than making zero dollars an hour if there is no job for them at all because the employer can't make a profit still or keep the doors open at the higher rate. That's a fact.

The other side doesn't like to acknowledge that businesses are under pressure, too, when they've got skilled or hard work. You can't get people to do some jobs at \$15 an hour, Chair. That's just an experience that lots of businesses have, and if they can't get them to do the jobs at \$15 an hour, they can't get them to do them at \$13 either. But more to the point, in many cases employers are giving their employees fewer hours. The employee starts off thinking: "Great; I got a \$2 an hour raise, beautiful. Multiply that by the 20 hours a week or the 12 hours a week I'm working while I'm in school." Then they find out that their hours are cut in half, and then they're not very happy at all.

I acknowledge it can cut both ways. In some cases some people will end up making a little bit less money. I acknowledge that. I wish the other side – we don't mind acknowledging that, but they refuse to acknowledge the other side of the argument that some people will be making zero, and it's better to make \$13 an hour than zero if you need the money. It's better to keep a business open and employing people rather than make the business close because they can't afford to stay open because they can't afford wages to keep their doors open.

5:30

The other side refuses to acknowledge that side of it. On this side of the House we're prepared to acknowledge both possibilities and allow for the job creators to do the magic they do. The magic is sometimes the risk that they take, many times putting a mortgage on their house to finance their business or taking out a personal line of credit to run their business and to pay the salaries on a Friday, whether the business made money at all that week or not. Some weeks businesses don't make money, but they pay their employees on Friday anyway so that they can still be open next week and hope that more people come through the door and spend money so they can maybe make the money back next week. We understand that. We acknowledge that.

The other side just thinks that they're bad people that take advantage of their employees. We think job creators are the solution; they think they're the problem. That's the real difference here. The real difference is that when we were in government, businesses felt like they were welcome here, and they wanted to be here. When they were in government, they made businesses feel like the government felt they were criminals, that they were taking advantage of people, and that their government didn't want them here. You know what? Businesses got the message. Eighty-billion dollars worth of investment left this province under the NDP.

Now we are left to clean up the mess, to do business-friendly things to bring businesses back and jobs back so that families will get those jobs and will have, hopefully, two jobs instead of one in the household or three instead of two because we're making the environment more business friendly. That is what the other side refuses to acknowledge. That is what this side understands a lot better than the other side does. That's why we are going ahead with An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business.

Mr. Chair, this amendment doesn't help, which is why we won't be supporting it.

The Deputy Chair: I saw the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows standing a couple times to speak, so he has the call.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak in favour of this amendment to Bill 2, moved by my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. The amendment says: that Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, be amended in section 1(2)(a) in the proposed section 23(2)(a) by adding "at least" after "overtime pay will be provided, taken and paid at." Looking at the bill and the changes this bill is proposing, I think the hon. member has moved a very reasonable and common-sense amendment, and that's why I feel honoured to rise and speak in favour of this amendment.

I just want to say something else. It was a pleasure to listen to the hon. member from the other side. Not only that, but a few weeks back, when the hon. member from Red Deer was addressing the bill giving \$4.5 billion to the largest corporations, he referred a lot to his professional experience dealing with businesses. He referred to the businesses when talking about the \$4.5 billion tax cut to the corporations, and he kept stressing the small-scale businesses, the mom-and-pop shops and hair salons, that have nothing to do, you know, with that bill that has to do with the tax cuts to the largest corporations in this province.

Having 16 years of experience operating a small-scale business, I am hearing lots of presumptions about small-scale business. Small-scale businesses are much different than those people who do not even know who their employees are or where they're working. Large corporations may employ people and they'll never see them or might not even be sitting in the same province, might not be sitting in the same country. When it comes to small-scale business, it's like we have kind of a family environment, people working together. In a small-scale business I'm sure the people are not worried about a dollar or two in salaries; rather, they're more concerned about the good, committed, retainable workers that they can rely on. That's the biggest challenge they're facing in industry. They don't want to turn their businesses into just, you know, training centres, where they hire a person today and then look for someone next week. That will actually create chaos for a small-scale business.

If we want to help small-scale business, grow small-scale business – yeah – I will be happy to see something coming forward. Look at the rising cost of their lease that they're struggling with and do something to address that. The rising cost of commodities, equipment, machinery: that is their biggest burden, and I haven't heard a single word regarding this. I know the members on the other side of the House somehow feel and want to claim that they are the only ones representing small-scale business in this House. Looking at the changes being proposed in this bill, it doesn't do any better for small-scale business or to attract investment or to create more jobs. It just creates more of a burden on average working Albertans.

I will call it a step backward as we are living in the 21st century. Instead of, you know, coming together and thinking about their welfare and how we can protect their basic rights, we see that the changes being proposed are going a step backward and removing their basic guarantees. As the hon. member from the government side was saying, this is a mutually agreed contract. Then why do we want to remove the basic guarantees? Why are we so afraid of the unions providing basic protections to the workers for their chance at fair-based negotiations for their contracts? I also see that it's not only workers, youth workers, the unions, but everything being

proposed is not even doing anything better to help the average Albertan.

If this bill is passed, what does it do? It addresses the general holiday pay. Does it do any better for the average worker? No. It proposes that the employee must work 30 days in the last 12 months before even being entitled to general holiday pay, and an employee who has to regularly work on a general holiday will be entitled to receive the holiday pay. If the holiday falls on a day that is not normally a workday for the employee and they work the holiday, then they're entitled to 1.5 times their regular wages. This is how it is right now. They can, you know, choose to get the pay, or they can just bank their overtime.

5:40

I don't see this as a burden on the employer in any way. If this is a help for the employee to choose to bank their holiday, to choose to get the time off later on, similarly this is a help for the employer as well. If the employer has, you know, a commitment to get work done in a timely manner and he gets help from the employee to complete that work in a timely manner, the employer also has the option to defer the payment. He doesn't have to come up right away with those, you know, extra monies. So I don't know where it's trying to resolve a dispute. It is just, I will say, an attack on the average worker's rights.

Now if the employee goes on holidays, he will be paid for three weeks if he has earned the overtime equal to the extra week, but if he chooses to bank the overtime, he will not be able to receive the wages for the third week. If he chooses to take, you know, the wages for the overtime, yes, he is entitled to it, but it might not be to the benefit of the small-scale employer. On the other hand, the people working in the biggest industries – oil sands, construction – they're going to have a big hit. A little bit fewer than half a million people will be, you know, affected by these changes. That's why I think this amendment is a very reasonable and common-sense amendment.

Also, with the changes being proposed to the labour laws, if this bill is passed, it will be mandatory for the unions to, you know, return to the secret ballot. It will restore the mandatory secret ballot for all unions seeking certification votes. They will need to establish a program to provide support and assistance to employees who are seeking information on – sorry. Just wanted to refer to the 90-day period for unions. They will need to provide evidence that employees support certification. It's tightening the requirements for the unions. The unions, I will say, are providing the minimum protection to the workers in industries like the oil sands and construction.

This is kind of, you know, tightening the rules on unions. It will be much harder for them to represent the average worker, and it will, I would say, infringe more on the average worker.

Reducing the minimum wage on youth workers is not, like, coming with any kind of – how would I say it? – description. It's just based on their age. It's not as if they are going to do something different, if they are not working on the same job as the person who is entitled to earn \$15. It's just simply because of their age difference. That's clearly discrimination based on someone's age, I think, especially for the innocent and vulnerable people, that did not even have the right to vote. They did not even give us their mandate. They are the most vulnerable people. They're going through an age and a time where they spare the time. You know, they go to school, full-time school, and they're under the pressure of keeping up with their education. At the same time, their needs are growing. They probably want to buy a computer, or they probably want to make some money to buy lunch, or they probably want to save money for their higher education. I don't know why this government wants to penalize those youth workers.

The claim this government is making, as it says in the title of the bill, is An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business. We have a clear example in our neighbouring province. They did not address the issue of the minimum wage. They did not increase the minimum wage in Saskatchewan, but the youth unemployment rate is no less than ours. It's probably higher than ours. So the reason the government is giving for this bill does not really make sense. It's in no way going to help. The facts are clearly showing that it will not help in creating more jobs. But it will definitely make, you know, youth workers do the same thing and earn much less than they are entitled to under the current rule.

As I have already recorded on this, my predecessor, a former Speaker of this House, the hon. Gene Zwozdesky, stood up against any kind of, you know, discrimination. When it was pointed out by one of the candidates during a debate, "Oh, he's over 60; he has done enough; he should step aside; he should let someone else run," he stood up and said: "Focus on the issue, man. You want to just discriminate against me because of my age instead of looking at my experience and what I can contribute based on that?"

5:50

I think this is a totally wrong precedent. We are going in the wrong direction. There's no evidence that this is going to help anyone, that this is going to help our economy, that this is going to help small-scale industry, or that this is going to help create more jobs. That's why I rose to speak in favour of this amendment.

If the government is very serious, they can come up with some other programs. If they are really serious about helping small-scale industry grow and create more jobs, you know, they can come up with some more programs. Like, the government already has programs. I'm just trying to find what the name was. I don't exactly remember the term. Is it the STEP program?

Ms Sigurdson: Yeah, there's the STEP program.

Mr. Deol: The STEP program, yeah.

Ms Sigurdson: We brought it back.

Mr. Deol: Just look at that. Why roll back wages? How much are you going to save? I'm very sure as a former small-scale business owner for 16 years, where we were working six, seven, eight employees together, that we know how to understand each other's challenges. The wages, within a dollar or two, were never the issue. It's more of a commitment. It's a family environment of how we can help each other. It's more of how we can have someone for a long-term commitment. That is how we can retain an employee that we can depend on in the long term. That is what supports small-scale industry. That is what . . .

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members? I believe that the hon. Member for Calgary-South East caught my eye.

Mr. Jones: Thank you. The members opposite continue to vilify and assume the worst of our business owners and entrepreneurs. I've spent the last 10 years working with these people, and I find this offensive. Let me tell you what I saw while working directly with these villains over the last four years. I saw business owners taking on unprofitable or break-even work just to keep their employees working. I saw business owners taking out loans against their homes or loading up their credit cards to pay employees. I saw business owners reducing their own salary to zero to keep employees. I saw business owners cry after describing their inability to keep their employees, knowing that after laying them off, they

would be unable to find work. Do you know why they did this? Because they know that their employees are their greatest asset.

Throughout the economic downturn businesses in Alberta have faced margin compression and reduced profitability. They have faced increased taxation and burdensome regulation from a government that also chased away their customers. The result of this has been that many businesses, particularly those engaged in labour-intensive industries, could not afford to provide a service at time and a half, but they could at straight time. Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, enables employers and employees to agree to bank overtime at straight time, enabling a business to take on work that would otherwise be unprofitable. Thus, an employee can do work that they would not otherwise have been able to do. That employee and that employee's family need that money.

This amendment, like most of the policy from members opposite related to business, adds no value, and I will not be supporting it.

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to put a motion to rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul rising.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So ordered.
I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader standing.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 3(1.2) I wish to advise the Assembly that there shall be no morning sitting on Tuesday, June 25, 2019.

Further, Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence, I thank all hon. members for their work today and move to adjourn the Assembly until this evening at 7:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]

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