



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, July 2, 2019

Day 22

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

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

First Session

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Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UCP)
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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
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Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UCP)
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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)
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Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, July 2, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, the prayer. Lord, God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of 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 improve the condition of all. Amen.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Jinting Zhao. I invite you all to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a stirring rendition. Perhaps you were practising yesterday. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon we are joined by former Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar Mr. David Dorward and Mr. Ian Murray. Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, today in the gallery are seated guests of the MLA from Calgary-Falconridge: Komalpreet Sandhu and Gobinder Singh Khara. I invite you to rise, if you are present, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also joining us in the Speaker's gallery today are some folks who are very near and dear to my heart. I see my son Porter, my daughter Paxton, my daughter Peyton, and they are accompanied by their nana and papa, Mr. Harold and Mary Cooper.

Statement by the Speaker

Page Recognition

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed to the Routine today, I have a very important presentation to make this afternoon. Before we continue the usual business, I'd like to call forward all of the pages who are here. If they could join me at the dais.

Go ahead, members, be seated. We'll all have a quick seat while the pages join us.

Awesome. Thank you. Some of the pages were unable to join us today, but it is a pleasure. As some of you who've been around the House will know, the retiring pages have the opportunity to address the House, if you will, through the Speaker. It comes to you unedited, I might add. It always makes the Speaker a little uncomfortable, but I'm sure they've done a fine job. Here it is.

Dear Mr. Speaker:

What can be said about an experience as enriching and unique as that of being a Page of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta? Pages often struggle to explain the intricacies of their work to those who've never seen us in action [before], so it seems only natural now that when we seek words to commemorate our time here, we find ourselves speechless. For many this session, the Chamber is a new and exciting place, full of the promise of things to come. For the retiring Pages, however, coming to work each day is a warming and familiar experience – a building filled with memories of new and old friends, happy moments, and the conquering of all sorts of challenges. Simply put, coming in to work each day is much like coming home.

While we may rejoice in our successes we understand that they are not ours alone, instead, stemming from a complex web of our supportive colleagues. You, Mr. Speaker, have demonstrated for us determination and tenacity, complemented by your impartiality that represents a steady source of justice in an ever-changing world. The Sergeant-At-Arms has many a time offered us his wisdom and helped us learn from our mistakes, allowing each of us to flourish. The Clerk and Table Officers have always been ready to offer an encouraging remark or assistance should we ever need it. And who better to keep us company as we hold the doors for divisions than the L.A.S.S., upon whose protection and service we are all dependent. Finally, we would like to extend our biggest thank you to the staff of the Office of the Sergeant-At-Arms, who have supported each one of us with an unrivalled level of care. Without these dedicated, gracious employees, the Page Programme would be unable to function as efficiently and effectively as it does.

It has truly been an honour to serve the Members of this Assembly and the staff of the LAO in our Page role and as members of the greater LAO community. With heavy hearts we will hand in our cravats and our cufflinks, holding dear our memories of this building and the wonderful people in it. We will be forever appreciative of the lessons we learned while employed by the LAO, the friendships we made, and the growth we experienced. We, the retiring Pages of 2019, extend our biggest "hear, hear" to all who have supported and encouraged us during our time walking these marbled halls.

Yours Truly,

Mary Frank (Speaker's Page), Rebecca Hicks (Page Peer Mentor), Angel Choga, Carolyn Huang, Jessica Hermay, Jordan Cowan, Kiki Reed, Kyra Larison, Nicolas Makarian... and Summer Smyth.

29th and 30th Legislatures.

I would like to ask the Deputy Speaker if she might come forward and congratulate our page peer mentor Rebecca Hicks and Angel Choga and Jessica Hermay.

Hon. members, please join me in expressing our deepest gratitude to this exemplary group of young Albertans for their patience, determination, and incredibly hard work they offer us each and every day. [Standing ovation]

Thank you so much, guys. We so, so much appreciate it. We do have a token of our appreciation for all the retiring pages, which will be presented at a later date.

Thank you so much.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has a statement to make.

Lethbridge

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm always proud to stand in this House and speak to my colleagues about my home, the city

of Lethbridge, but what I'm prouder of still is my privilege to stand in the House today and address the over 100,000 fellow Lethbridgeans who have chosen to call my city and my riding home. The 2019 census results have been released, and Lethbridge is officially 101,482 residents strong. We like a bit of healthy competition on this side of the House, so I hope the hon. Member for Red Deer-South and the hon. minister from Red Deer-North don't mind that Lethbridge has reclaimed the title of Alberta's third-largest city from their community.

1:40

In all fairness, I am humbled to represent this community, that has grown to become a vibrant city of amazing diversity and market stability. That number, 101,482, represents neighbours, family, friends, business owners, university and college students, and so many others who have chosen to believe in our community and make it their home. The slow and steady growth Lethbridge has experienced over the recent past demonstrates the hopes, dreams, and leaps of faith Albertans and families from around the world are taking in making Lethbridge their home. Their belief in our community and their willingness to take a chance and hope for the best is the story of many who moved from across our province and our country to the city of Lethbridge, and that tenacity, that pioneering spirit, which leads to the work ethic that makes us proud to be Albertan, Mr. Speaker, is what brings us all closer together. I believe that our government's common-sense policies will strengthen the spirit and will only continue to aid our community's successful growth.

If you'll lend me a little indulgence today as I share the spotlight with the hon. member across the aisle the MLA for Lethbridge-West, the pride we have in our community and our gratitude for being able to represent the people who make our city a great place to call home: here's to a community with a rich history, a strong foundation, and a bright future, Lethbridge, Alberta's third-largest city, at least until next year's census.

Provincial Fiscal Position

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about the responsibility we have to ensure that all Albertans have a clear sense of the economic stability of this province. Ever since the Premier waded back into provincial politics, he has held strong to his talking points that the NDP has been a poor fiscal steward. In reality, under the leadership of the Leader of the Official Opposition and the NDP, Alberta now has the largest GDP per capita in the country.

The Premier waxes on about how the NDP causes investment to flee the province, yet in reality Alberta continues to lead the country in per capita business investment.

The Premier confidently tells Albertans that the NDP spending was out of control. However, during the worst recession in a generation the NDP refused to make it worse by cutting and instead made sure that spending was increased to cover inflation and population growth, and that's it, certainly not the spending spree this government likes to talk about.

Similarly, when the Premier gets on his soapbox, he routinely fails to mention that under the NDP leadership Alberta now has the lowest per capita debt in the country. Even the annual report that was released late last week shows that under the Leader of the Official Opposition, Alberta saw a \$2.1 billion reduction in the deficit. Our path to balance was working faster than expected.

It is clear from this side of the House that the Premier is presenting this fiscal fairy tale to Albertans in order to justify cuts to education and health care to pay for a \$4.5 billion corporate tax giveaway.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that they don't have a path to balance, and they don't have a plan for our economy. Albertans deserve the truth, and the UCP needs to be held accountable for the cuts they will impose on Albertans in order to pay off their wealthy friends and donors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Southern Alberta Summer Games

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to recognize the 50th anniversary of the Southern Alberta Summer Games. The Southern Alberta Summer Games is an annual sporting and cultural event held yearly in the south of the province. It was launched in 1970. The games rotate through communities each year, and I'm happy to say that this year they will be hosted in Pincher Creek, a town in Livingstone-Macleod.

Beginning tomorrow, through July 6 over 2,000 athletes will compete in Alberta's longest running annual sporting event. The events are open to all ages, with competitions like minisoccer being open to young kids and sports like archery having dedicated age groups for all participants.

I mentioned earlier that there are cultural events that are highlighted by the games. This year Pincher Creek is proud to showcase its artistic community, its pioneer history, its agricultural background, and even its local microbrewery.

I'm proud to see the summer games being hosted in Livingstone-Macleod this year. This is a special event for southern Albertans as it brings us together for fun, some healthy competition, and time in the great outdoors of our province's most beautiful region.

I know that the 50th games will be as successful as the previous 49 and would like to thank all the counties and MDs that form the backbone of the games, from the Crowsnest Pass and Pincher Creek in the west, Warner and Cardston in the south, Newell and Vulcan in the north, to Cypress county and Medicine Hat in the east, and of course I would be remiss if I did not mention the multitude of volunteers that make the games a great success.

Finally, I would like to wish all competitors good luck, and to those who will be watching, have fun. I know I will. Enjoy your time in Pincher Creek and enjoy the games.

Minister of Education

Ms Hoffman: I can't help but notice that the Education minister has taken to wearing the Children First pin, and who could argue with that? Surely, the best interests of children should come first for everyone in this place.

This minister could have acted to fund students with special needs and hire new teachers for students. Instead, last week our largest school districts passed budgets based on guesswork because this minister wasn't competent enough to write her own budget before kids return to school in September. She sat idle while children across Alberta lost their teachers and educational assistants and even tried to deny that it was happening. For this minister those children don't come first.

When a certain kind of student steals lunch money from other children, there's a name for that, Mr. Speaker. We tell kids to ask an adult to intervene, and when someone threatens to take lunch money from 33,000 students, you bet I'll intervene and stand up for those kids. Here's the clincher: it's being done to pay for a \$4.5 billion gift to the Premier's donors.

Did the minister speak up in cabinet and say: "Hey. How about we only give them \$4.47 billion instead and keep \$30 million for

the school nutrition program?” Obviously not, because for this minister those children don’t come first. I honestly don’t know why feeding hungry children is a partisan issue, Mr. Speaker. Surely, if there was ever a single thing we could all agree on, it’s that feeding hungry children is a good thing. But apparently not.

I think all of the members opposite should be reminded that they will have to answer for this decision, too. To the minister those children don’t come first. So she can wear her golden pin on her lapel, Mr. Speaker, but I hope in the moments of contemplation as she pins it on, she thinks about the harm that she’s actually causing children in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Women in the Skilled Trades

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to acknowledge the important contributions that women can and do make with the trade industries. Women make valuable contributions to our economy every day as tradespeople. As I have previously mentioned while speaking in this House, there are many trades that are often overlooked when the word “trades” is mentioned. Some of these trades that are less often thought of are driving professionals, glaziers, bakers, locksmiths, cooks, communication technicians, beauticians, to name a few. Women have worked in many of these professions for years. Today I recognize these women and say thank you for your hard work.

I’m sure there are many in this room that remember a time where it seemed inappropriate for women to be in the more commonly acknowledged construction trades. In recent years women have been encouraged to train in and join these honourable professions. Women Building Futures has done amazing work in advocating for women who work in trades and for those looking to begin their careers.

Amazing work has been done to encourage women to participate in construction trades. In 2017 it was reported that only 4.5 per cent of skilled workers in Canada were women. However, in Alberta in 2017 that number was 15 per cent, with up to 30 per cent of those women working in on-site construction occupations.

As the chair of the newly formed Skilled Trades Caucus, I will work with my colleagues to continue to find ways to further increase the participation of women in these important professions. We must ensure that not only do women have the opportunities to become tradespeople, but we must ensure that women feel comfortable in joining an industry of which they have not historically been part of but of which they are most welcome.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Inclusion

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Inclusion Alberta is a family-based nonprofit that has a long and proud history of advocating for people with developmental disabilities and their families. Their work has made a huge and lasting impact in our province and has helped thousands of people achieve their goals and be fully included in their communities.

Unfortunately, Inclusion Alberta’s vision of a better life for people with disabilities is not supported by this UCP government. Health care for persons with disabilities has been called a giveaway by a UCP minister. Individuals with disabilities and families have been told there is no money in the PDD budget for critical services.

Young people with disabilities have been turned away from school due to looming budget cuts, and now this UCP government is backtracking on its promise to continue our government’s investment in inclusive postsecondary education. Advocates in the disability community are hearing that the money they were promised for inclusive postsecondary in the UCP platform – I’m not sure if it was platform 1 or 2 – will now be redirected to segregated employment programs. Many of these segregated employment programs come with an expectation of unpaid work at a local business or institution, which is in keeping with the world view of members opposite, who served under the Progressive Conservatives and allowed people with disabilities to be paid less than a minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very concerning move by this government as many people with disabilities want to attend postsecondary studies and pursue their passions. Eighty per cent of students with disabilities that go on to postsecondary education enter into the workforce and begin to contribute not only to our economy but in all aspects of life, enriching Alberta’s diversity.

1:50

Our government understood that and was proud to make strong investments in inclusive postsecondary, increasing funding for PDD by \$150 million and launching a PDD review to find further improvements. Mr. Speaker, we believe that Albertans with disabilities deserve respect, dignity, and most of all, inclusion, and they deserve a government that will keep their promises.

I call on this government to do what is right and ensure every dollar of the \$2 million that was promised goes to inclusive postsecondary to make life better for people with disabilities in our province.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty’s Official Opposition.

Provincial Debt and Fiscal Policy

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They lied to Albertans about the economy and the revenues: that was this Premier on April 30 running his own fear-and-smear campaign to his favourite scribe about Alberta’s finances. Fast forward to last Friday, and the Q4 update shows we cut the deficit by \$2 billion more than projected, ever so slightly better than what we reported to Albertans on the eve of the election. To the Premier: will he now abandon his pre-election fear and smear and admit that the numbers we reported to Albertans were the truth?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, they didn’t shrink the deficit. They created the deficit. The NDP ran on a 2015 platform to add just a few billion dollars to the provincial debt then to start running surpluses. Instead, they took a \$13 billion debt; they drove it up to \$60 billion on a track to \$100 billion dollar debt. They ran the largest per capita deficit in Canada for four straight years. They presided over five major credit downgrades. One of the reasons they were fired by Albertans in April is because they had one of the worst fiscal records in Alberta history.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, about 90 per cent of that was not true.

Nonetheless, our fiscal plan preserved important front-line services for Albertans. We incented economic growth with strategic capital investment. We led the country in economic growth two years in a row. Now, first the Premier panned that, claiming our finances were false. Now that he’s been proven wrong, he wants to claim that our future plans are off. But here’s the thing. That’s under

his watch, Mr. Speaker. Why won't the Premier admit that it's his \$4.5 billion corporate tax giveaway to friends and insiders that is actually unsustainable and irresponsible?

Mr. Kenney: Because it's simply untrue, Mr. Speaker. Now, here I have the 2015 NDP platform in which they committed to Albertans to run a surplus last year of \$600 million. Instead of a \$600 million surplus they gave us nearly a \$7 billion deficit. They broke their promises, and that was on top of the hidden agenda of the carbon tax, the largest tax increase in Alberta history, and the higher corporate taxes that reduced revenues from corporations.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can read platform promises from the Conservative Party when oil was at a hundred dollars a barrel, too, but that is not the answer. It's no wonder the Premier is searching for a scapegoat. Going forward, the projections will be off because you've given away \$4.5 billion in corporate tax cuts, cancelled the carbon levy but still claim to be funding several of the projects – that's another \$7 billion hole – and cancelled crude by rail for another \$2 billion loss. So, yeah, the Premier has got a fiscal problem, but why won't he admit it? It's his.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, when the NDP committed to run a \$600 million surplus last year, when they made that commitment, we'd already been through nine months of lower oil prices. They made a commitment that they had no intention of keeping. It's true; the Leader of the Opposition is correct in saying that this government has a huge fiscal challenge, one that we inherited from the NDP, with orders from Albertans to clean up the huge fiscal disaster, the fiscal train wreck created by the NDP.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Corporate Taxation and Job Creation

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would appear that we have seen that all this government has to offer this spring is billions handed over to wealthy corporations, possible wage rollbacks for 180,000 public servants, definite wage rollbacks for young workers, significant cuts to overtime pay, layoffs in schools, cancelled private-sector investment in renewables, and in May we saw the loss of 3,000 jobs. To the Premier: where are all the jobs that you promised in the last campaign?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Leader of the Opposition is categorically wrong in her assessment of the purported revenue loss through the job-creation tax cut. Professor Bev Dahlby, one of the most highly recognized tax economists in the country, estimates that over four years, through additional economic growth of some \$13 billion, it will actually raise the per capita GDP by 6 per cent and increase government revenues by \$1.2 billion. Professor Mintz estimates it will create 55,000 jobs. But the NDP, by trying to sock it to job creators, ended up reducing revenues from Alberta businesses.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, corporate tax revenues are higher in the last year than they ever have been. How did that happen, I wonder?

Anyway, we already learned last month that Spanish oil giant Repsol plans to cut its staff by 30 per cent, and figures from Petroleum Labour Market Information report that nearly 3,000 oil and gas workers left this province just in May. To the Premier. Now, I can list the jobs that have been lost since you've come into

power, excluding the lawyers who've been given a new lease on life by your government. Can you provide us with a list of the jobs that have been created?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Leader of the Opposition is categorically false when she said that corporate income tax revenues increased under the NDP. Corporate tax revenues for the year just ended were below where they were in 2014. After the NDP raised the rates by 20 per cent, they chased away investment, they killed jobs, and the revenues went down for four years. That's socialist economics. Oddly enough, the same thing happened with personal income taxes. They raised the highest marginal rates by 50 per cent and generated less revenue. We, instead, have a plan to actually create revenues and jobs in this province.

Ms Notley: This Premier's insistence on trying to ignore that the price of oil went from \$120 a barrel to \$25 a barrel makes him look silly when he makes these kinds of statements, Mr. Speaker.

Nonetheless, the fact is that his predictions are that oil and gas jobs are going to go down in part due to the impact of curtailment, you know, the plan this Premier just extended by backing out of the crude-by-rail plan. You're jeopardizing good jobs by cancelling crude by rail, renewables investment, high-tech support, and new education seats. Now the Premier is forcing Albertans to bankroll the risky tax giveaway and wait somewhere between years and forever for the . . .

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, while the NDP created a jobs crisis, while they presided over and helped to deepen one of the longest and deepest recessions in our history, while the NDP drove our debt from \$13 billion to \$60 billion, while the NDP shrunk personal and corporate tax revenues by raising the rates, while they did all of that, I am pleased to announce that effective yesterday, as a result of our job-creation tax cut, Alberta has begun to regain the Alberta advantage, with the lowest taxes for job creators in Canada, and we're going to create tens of thousands of jobs as a result.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Technology Industry Programs

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is stalling on programs that would have created jobs and diversified the economy. It appears that he is doing this for petty political reasons. The media reports today that the government hasn't committed to 3,000 high-tech jobs that our NDP government was creating through our artificial intelligence strategy. That commitment had attracted interest from 200 companies, including some major multinationals. Will the Premier confirm that he is going to cancel the artificial intelligence strategy?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that there was no intelligence behind the NDP's economic policy. That's why we ended up with nearly 200,000 unemployed Albertans. [interjections]

The worst Finance minister in Alberta history is heckling me right now, and I understand why. It's because he presided over five credit downgrades, a jobs crisis, one of the longest recessions in our history. We are going to make investments, where they make sense for taxpayers, that will help to continue diversifying our economy. [interjections] But the main thing is to get the economic fundamentals right, and that's why we've delivered the job-creation tax cut.

2:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would love to hear the answers. Whether or not we all like them is for every member to determine, but I would like to hear them.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appears that you won't confirm that our artificial intelligence strategy will be funded.

The jobs funded by the AI strategy were to work in lockstep with our creation of 3,000 more high-tech postsecondary seats in Alberta postsecondary institutions. This was about setting us up for the future. This Premier has shown that he's determined to drag us back in time. Once again I will ask the Premier to confirm: if he's cancelling the AI strategy, can we also assume that the postsecondary technology seats are gone, too?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we are reviewing the NDP election commitments that were made. We are going to make investments that help to create the right environment for Alberta to once again become the job-creation engine of Canada after the worst jobs record of any major modern Alberta administration, but that starts with getting the fundamentals right. That's why we've delivered the job-creation tax cut, that will, once fully implemented, give us the lowest taxes on job creators in Canada. By an order of magnitude it will be the lowest in North America, with the exception of four U.S. states. Alberta will once again have the advantage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans now know that this Premier will cut artificial intelligence and other technology investments because they weren't his idea. That is how arrogant he is.

Will the Premier now commit that he is also cancelling the value-added petrochemical diversification initiatives, slamming the door on \$75 billion worth of new oil and gas upgrading investments and 70,000 new jobs because he just doesn't care about jobs for ordinary people?

Mr. Kenney: Not caring about jobs for ordinary people: you know, Mr. Speaker, I can't think of a better description of the NDP's four-year economic and fiscal train wreck, a government that in the midst of an historic recession poured fuel on the flames by raising taxes on everything that moves – on heating homes, on filling up gas tanks, on hiring employees, on working – higher income taxes, higher business taxes, higher property taxes. They supported their ally Mr. Trudeau's higher payroll taxes. [interjections] We're going to do just the opposite by creating jobs in this province.

Ms Notley: We're waiting.

The Speaker: Hon. members, including the Leader of the Opposition, we will have order.

I might just provide some commentary. It might be parliamentary to say "That's how arrogant a member is," but to say "That's how arrogant he is" certainly would not be considered parliamentary, and I would consider you – choose your words wisely.

Renewable Energy Procurement

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, it came as zero surprise to any electricity executive I spoke to last week that this Minister of Energy doesn't actually understand contract for difference, competitive procurement. They were not surprised that the minister waved her

hand during a puffball last week and cancelled the fourth round of the renewable energy procurement, likely subsequent rounds of procurement, sending \$7 billion of new private-sector investment and power that reduces overall prices for consumers looking for a home elsewhere. Minister, it does not appear that you consulted with anyone prior to issuing this decision. Why not?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, one would have thought that after their historic election trouncing the NDP might take a step back and reflect on why Albertans repudiated their entire record. Instead, all that we get is heckling and personal insults. Let me tell you that it's time for the NDP to stand up and apologize for the 200,000 unemployed Albertans, to those people who lost their homes, to those who lost their businesses, to those who had to pay more for everything in this province. It's time to hear a bit of humility from the NDP.

Ms Phillips: It also came as zero surprise to indigenous people with whom I spoke last week that this minister didn't acknowledge the tremendous loss of equity participation opportunities that she caused by cancelling the competitive option for renewables procurement. Unlike a backbench puffball, indigenous people won't be mollified with a stale talking point. When will the minister meet with indigenous leaders, look them in the eye, and level with them that she just cancelled hundreds of millions of new dollars of economic opportunities for them? Face the music, Minister.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP faced the music on April 16, and it didn't turn out so well for them. I can tell you that at the cabinet meeting with our 46 treaty chiefs, a meeting that the NDP refused to have for four years, we discussed exactly this issue. I explained to our partners in the indigenous leadership that we've eliminated the carbon tax to reduce costs on all Albertans, including indigenous Albertans. I didn't get any rebuttal. I'll tell you what we did get: tremendous interest in being partners in major projects, in part through the indigenous opportunities corporation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This minister doesn't answer her own questions. She appears to have a loose grasp of her files and is as articulate on electricity policy as she is respectful of companies who want to do business here, which is to say, not very. Why won't the minister commit to engaging relevant stakeholders on the phase-in of new renewables and natural gas generation to replace the coal that is being phased out by decisions taken by her own Premier and Prime Minister Harper?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this is going from the sublime to the ridiculous, to have a former NDP minister stand up and actually raise electricity policy. That minister was in part responsible for one of the biggest boondoggles and fiscal scandals in Alberta history. She and her government cost Alberta taxpayers and ratepayers at least \$2 billion through their complete mismanagement of the power purchasing agreements, but she has an opportunity to stand up right now and apologize for the \$2 billion that she cost us.

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

Fair Registration Practices Act

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Member for Calgary-West I am proud to represent many hard-working immigrants who chose this province as their home. Their stories of

courage and resilience are a true embodiment of the Alberta spirit. Now, sadly, many of our highly trained immigrants, professionals, have faced an uphill battle to get their skills recognized. Can the Minister of Labour and Immigration please update this House on the feedback he received on this issue at his recent panel with newcomers?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-West for the question. The Premier and I were very fortunate to sit down with a group of newcomers and hear their stories, their personal struggles trying to get their credentials recognized here in Alberta. We heard about the unnecessary stress it caused them and their families. We heard about the barriers they faced and their time spent in survival jobs. We also heard about newcomers giving up their pursuit to get their credentials recognized, and that is why this government is proud of Bill 11, the Fair Registration Practices Act, and what it will do for newcomers in our province.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the vast majority of immigrants enter Canada through a point system which encourages highly skilled and highly educated individuals to apply and given that many of these professionals are then underemployed and unable to use those very skills because of complex and ambiguous processes, can the minister please tell this Assembly the impact that Bill 11, the Fair Registration Practices Act, will make?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member. Bill 11, which was passed in this House last week, introduces measures to ensure that the regulated professions and individuals applying for registration by regulated professions are governed by practices that are transparent, objective, impartial, and fair. It includes a fair practices code, fair registration practices office, and a requirement that an interim decision be made within six months. Our goal is to maintain high professional standards while speeding up and improving foreign credential recognition so that newcomers can fully integrate and support their families and contribute to the Alberta economy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many newcomers have to make a difficult choice between feeding their families and pursuing reaccreditation and given that the full and fair integration of highly qualified immigrants into the workforce is both a moral imperative and an unequivocal benefit for the Alberta economy, can the minister please inform this Assembly and Albertans just how much we stand to gain from this new legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. Newcomers are so important to our province. Underemployment can cause unnecessary stress for immigrant families whose education and skills are not being used to their full potential. Not only is this a moral issue – we need to help these families fully integrate – but it also represents a significant loss of economic productivity for the Alberta economy. All Albertans will benefit from maximizing the productivity and innovation that newcomers have to offer. Remember that Bill 11 applies to all

Albertans applying for licensure and accreditation, not just newcomers.

2:10

Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, another day, another headline that makes it clear that the Education minister isn't doing her job. Parents of children with severe learning disabilities are rightfully stressed about the \$40 million in cuts that the Calgary board of education is bringing forward. This means less educational assistance to ensure that students with severe special needs thrive. All it would take to make these problems go away is for the minister to fund enrolment, the classroom improvement fund, at the current formula. To the minister: will you please just tell us what you're funding this fall? It is your job.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Again, I stand to say that we are continuing to fund education. We will continue to build schools. Also, it's standard procedure that funding information is communicated to school boards following approval by the Legislature. All of these things I've said numerous times, over and over again. The hon. opposition needs to stop with their scare tactics. It's not working. People know that we are funding education for all students.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the minister herself claimed on Thursday to have "refreshing and unprecedented" collaboration with boards and given that apparently that collaboration doesn't involve telling them how much money they'll have this fall and given that parents quoted in today's *Calgary Herald* worry that no budget will make the situation worse for their children with severe learning disabilities, to the minister: will you at least pick up the phone and make sure these parents who came forward have their concerns addressed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. My office is always open. I'm hearing from numerous parents on various issues. I can assure you that in Alberta we spend amongst the most per capita on education, but the outcomes just aren't there, so we're going to continue to make improvements and work towards doing the best for each and every child. My heart is with children, and I will spend my time focused on doing the absolute best for every single child that is under our care.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the parents at the Calgary board of education are far from alone in their concerns and given that we are expecting 15,000 new students this fall yet the minister has not committed a single new dollar formally to assist those students, to the minister. School is out for the summer. Are you going to make anxious parents wait until October, November, or December to find out how terrible classroom conditions will be under your leadership?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I believe I've answered this numerous times over. Again, we are working on improving those outcomes, and we're going to do what the NDP failed to do.

Thank you.

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

2017 UCP Leadership Campaign Investigation

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A member of the government caucus is the focus of a criminal investigation. Two cabinet ministers have been questioned by the police in relation to this matter, including the Attorney General, yet it remains unclear if Alberta Justice has appointed a special prosecutor to oversee the investigation. Let's put aside the evasive "the matter has been referred to Ontario" language and ask a very simple question: has Alberta appointed a special prosecutor? Yes or no?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, as the member has been aware since early May of the process on this, the ADM of the Alberta Crown prosecution service made the decision to appoint a special prosecutor. They've gone and retained Ontario justice to provide legal advice that may be required by the RCMP. This is done independent of elected officials. I'd refer the hon. member to the RCMP for further questions about this matter. That is all I know. I don't know what questions the RCMP may be asking, who they are going to be asking, if they are asking. Refer them to the RCMP.

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we took the Attorney General's advice and called the RCMP, who were not aware of any special prosecutor and referred us to the Crown prosecution service, who in turn referred us to the Attorney General's office, who had no answer either, can the minister quit this embarrassing runaround and say if there's a special prosecutor? Yes or no?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, public servants have made a clear statement regarding the fact that they are retaining special prosecutors to handle this matter. I'm advised that they have prosecutors from Ontario justice handling this matter should the RCMP require further advice regarding this.

Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Given, Mr. Speaker, that we continue to wait for the Attorney General to actually name the human being who will perform this work and given that he continues to pass the buck to the police, who cannot name this person, will the Attorney General tell this House if there's a special prosecutor, a secret prosecutor, or no prosecutor at all?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, this line of questioning is ridiculous. The public servants have made a clear statement, the same public servants that were representing when that person was the Minister of Justice. They've made a clear statement that they've retained a special prosecutor to provide legal advice regarding this from Ontario justice. This is independent of elected officials. This is the proper protocol for handling matters like this. They just don't like the answer. We keep providing it. I'll keep providing it again.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Rural Crime Prevention

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock constituency is a vast rural constituency, covering an area of 24,000 square kilometres. Over the last four years I continually heard from constituents concerned about their safety and the increased hostility and combative nature of rural crime. To the Minister of Justice: with many of the rural crimes being committed by repeat offenders travelling from one jurisdiction to another, what steps are being taken to improve the communication and information sharing of policing departments?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, on a regular basis I'm talking to officials with ALERT, the RCMP, the Calgary Police Service, the Edmonton Police Service, and stakeholders in other provinces regarding ways that we can make sure that information flows in an efficient way. We've had successes with project elder, which led to many arrests and taking drugs off the street. In addition to that, I plan on listening to Albertans. This is something that the previous government did not do. We're going to be making sure that we go out to rural communities, listen to people that are on the ground to make sure that we can help facilitate this and make sure we respond to Albertans.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that the province of Alberta has seen an increase in rural crime under the previous NDP government and given that many of these crimes are being committed by repeat offenders and given that my constituents as well as local law enforcement agencies are becoming increasingly frustrated with a system that appears to be failing them, to the minister: what is this government doing to address the repeat offender problem within our justice system?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, we're going to be making sure that we provide our law enforcement officials with the tools and resources that they need, making sure that prosecutors are focusing on making sure they prosecute the important cases that are before the court. In addition to that, we're going to be providing funding for electronic monitoring technology. We're going to be making sure we listen to, basically, the concerns of Albertans. All Albertans deserve to feel safe in their community. Not a day goes by when I don't talk to one of our members here bringing me a new story about how people are concerned in rural Alberta. We're going to make sure we listen to Albertans and fulfill our campaign commitments.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that many rural Albertans continue to feel unsafe in their homes even though they deserve to feel safe and given that law enforcement response times to help protect many of my constituents in remote locations can be over an hour, to the minister: what are you doing to help rural Albertans feel like the justice system is there to protect them, their loved ones, and their property?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, one of our campaign commitments was to make sure that we advocated for Criminal Code amendments, to make sure that they reflected the reality of the challenges facing so many Albertans in rural Alberta. Just recently I wrote a letter of support for Blaine Calkins' amendment to the Criminal Code that did just that. He tried to amend the Criminal Code. I hope that amendment gets the support it needs in our House of Commons and that changes happen through our Criminal Code. We won't stop fighting to make sure the Criminal Code reflects the reality so many Albertans are facing in rural Alberta. In addition to that, we're going to make sure that police and prosecutors have the resources they need to do their jobs well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has a question.

Opioid-related Deaths and Supervised Drug Consumption Sites

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A report released last week shows a decline in the number of opioid-related deaths although there is still more work to do. The associate minister hasn't said a word about this since the report came out on Friday. In fact,

advocates are now calling him out for downplaying the report and accusing him of doing so because it doesn't fit this UC government's plan to defund safe consumption sites. To the associate minister: will you admit that these sites may be playing a role in the decline in opioid-related deaths?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're aware of the update of the current stats. Let me tell you that when the number goes down, we're very pleased to see that. But we've been given the very cautious notion that because it's early in the day of having the data, we cannot be in any way less sort of conscious about the crisis that's still here. We're working diligently to address that.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister's press secretary told the CBC that he expects the numbers in the quarterly report to rise and given that a drug policy researcher with the University of Calgary said that the lack of positive communication by this associate minister about the decline in deaths was because, quote, it's going against this current government's mandate to stall and review services, to the associate minister: were you really trying to downplay these figures because they run counter to the government philosophy around harm reduction and you know that by cancelling these sites, the rates will increase?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government happens to believe that the solution for this community crisis requires all communities working together. We're not here to judge whether one contribution is bigger than the other. We're working very hard to do a comprehensive mental health and addictions strategy. We hope, through that, that we'll find multiple ways to work with all Albertans to make a difference.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that this government is only reviewing safe consumption sites and I'm curious as to how that answer makes any sense and given that after the quarterly report was released, Dr. Virani said that there's no excuse for not continuing to support and expand harm reduction and given that we have barely heard a word from this associate minister about the progress of his so-called review, to the minister. It's time to be open and transparent. Who's involved in the review, what is the status of the review, and will Albertans know what you really plan to do about the safe consumption sites that you've frozen funding for?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Luan: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to challenge my colleague on the other side. I understand that she's a social worker, too. When we talk about complex issues like this one, it requires comprehensive services. A system of care is what we're promoting here. We're not going to be just talking about one way of intervention as if that's the only way to solve the problem. We'll continue to work on this side of the House to develop the continuum of care with the recovery covered system of care to serve Albertans when they are ready to get help.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is rising.

Affordable Daycare in Rural Communities

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This side of the House understands that it's integral for new mothers to gain access back into the workforce when they see fit. However, access to affordable child care proves to be a continual barrier for working moms, especially in rural Alberta. In our platform we committed to expanding \$25-per-day child care all across Alberta, including family day homes, making it easier for rural parents to get back to work, yet we continue to hear nothing from this government on any plans for affordable child care options. To the Premier: why is your government neglecting this important issue and ignoring the needs of rural working Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services has risen.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, we heard over the last four years that Albertans were struggling. Opportunity to find work and provide for their families is something that Albertans were looking for. We also know that a strong economy is what allows us to take care of those who need it the most. The \$25-a-day care program is a pilot. We are reviewing the results of the pilot, and I'm happy to see what that brings forward.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I received an e-mail from a farmer in Fairview whose wife is a public health nurse who is now debating whether they can afford to have another child because it is just too expensive to find reliable child care in rural Alberta and given that this family is contemplating that the mother drop out of the workforce, letting her skills atrophy and losing a valued public health nurse from the community, can the Minister of Children's Services outline how she will be addressing the lack of child care options in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a working parent myself, I do understand first-hand the challenges that parents face when trying to find child care that works for their children. I also want to recognize that what works for one family may not work for another and that what works for one child may not work for another. What we do have is a number of resources that can help parents to make the best decisions as they find child care for their families.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Albertans are needing some more concrete answers than that.

Given that this family from Fairview has gone to their local Economic Development Committee and discovered there are many other families in the same situation and given that this family raised this issue with the Member for Central Peace-Notley during the campaign but did not feel that the UCP had any plans to address the problem and given that this family appropriately sees this issue as critical to the economic health of this province, to the minister of economic development and trade: how will you be helping these families, or do you believe that ensuring women's participation in the workforce and the economy is just not your problem?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our party ran on 375 commitments that focus on getting Albertans back to work and growing our economy so that we can provide the supports needed for families. I understand that finding child care can be a difficult decision for many families, but what we want to make sure is that parents have the resources they need to make informed decisions that suit the needs and circumstances of each individual child and their family.

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

Agricultural Concerns

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the previous administration our family farms in Alberta were put through tough times dealing with skyrocketing costs just simply trying to make a living. Alberta's agricultural payrolls have plummeted in unacceptable ways. Agricultural employment has dropped 19 per cent in four years. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: how will this government maintain this important driver of Alberta's employment and economy?

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first, I'd like to congratulate the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka on a very successful Ponoka Stampede.

But on that very important question, the past four years have been very difficult for Alberta farmers. First, Alberta farmers had increased input costs through the retail carbon tax from the NDP. Second, Alberta farmers had increased regulatory burden through unnecessary red tape and impractical compliance rules such as the disastrous NDP Bill 6. But this summer I will be touring around Alberta, actually, consulting with and talking to farmers on how we can make improvements.

Mr. Orr: Given that employment insurance premiums are rising, costing more money annually for employers, and given that the previous government made it mandatory for farmers to have WCB coverage for their employees, to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: how will this government address the safety concerns of employees and employers' obligation to provide safe workplaces while balancing these with the costs of mandatory insurance coverage farmers now must pay?

Mr. Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago I consulted with over 30 commodity groups, over a hundred farmers and industry people, and one of the biggest things that did come up was the mandatory WCB insurance. From that consultation that we had, over 142 recommendations came to correct the NDP's failed Bill 6, and a survey after that consultation found that 97 per cent of the participants felt that the questions that we were asking were on the right track. Although 97 per cent isn't perfect, we're striving for it.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, given that small farms especially do not have the same capabilities in terms of manpower or monetary funds as other businesses and given that farms have long been the backbone of our province's economy, to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: how will this government ensure that small farms are able to survive and be viable participants in Alberta's economy going forward?

Mr. Dreeshen: I'd like to thank the member again for that very important question. Our consultations that we'll be doing this summer are going to have all different types of farms and all different sizes of farms because Albertans know that Alberta farmers grow high-quality food that feeds a global population. Mr.

Speaker, I would like to extend an invitation to you personally and to government members and also to members of the opposition to a barbecue tomorrow that we're having to show solidarity for our farmers that are having difficulty through market access and some trade issues. It's something where we'll be able to show the solidarity of this House to our farmers here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has a question.

Métis Harvesting Policy

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March our government signed historic agreements with the Metis Settlements General Council and the Métis Nation of Alberta that expanded Métis harvesting areas and recognized the rights of Métis people to hunt for subsistence, as is their time-honoured tradition. Has the Minister of Indigenous Relations reviewed these new agreements, and will he honour and protect them against outside pressures from nonindigenous hunters?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. The Métis people of Alberta have shaped Alberta's rich cultural history, society, and economy even before Alberta became a province, and we will continue to work with the Métis communities in ways that respect both their culture and the conservation of wildlife. To that end, under our stewardship this government commits itself to the path of reconciliation with the Métis people's right to hunt, fish, and trap for food where their ancestors have harvested game, and we support Environment and Parks in their Métis harvesting policy.

2:30

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Métis harvesters told us that these new agreements were a good step forward, and given that fish and wildlife officers do their job to the best of their ability according to the existing laws and given that under the previous policy Métis harvesters were routinely being charged and the old harvesting regions did not recognize the historic harvesting patterns of Métis people and given that the new policy ensures provisions for conservation and population management for fish and game, to the same minister: do you agree that these new agreements signed by our government strike the right balance between conservation and the rights of Métis harvesters?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government will take the necessary steps to monitor and implement the Métis harvesting in Alberta policy and evaluate opportunities for improvement. The updated policy will take effect in September of this year. We look forward to hearing how the policy is working, and we continue to engage with the Métis people of this province to ensure the traditional way of life.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that under these new agreements Métis harvesters are expecting to apply for the harvesting identification stickers in September and given that the Métis harvesters who hunt for subsistence contribute to the culture and identity of the communities and given that limiting those rights would represent a substantial step backwards in reconciliation, will

the minister ensure that Métis harvesters will be able to enjoy their rights to practise traditional subsistence hunting this September, as planned, with stickers on their Métis cards?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The revised policy embodies a change to identify new and expanded harvesting areas and supports the preferred means of fishing for Métis harvesters. These new regional areas are more reflective of traditional territories and use areas. This government is open to any feedback and changes that will need to be made in the spirit of open and honest dialogue, reflecting our commitment to reconciliation.

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

Edmonton Courthouse

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent rain forced staff upholding justice in Edmonton law courts to work their way through a maze of two dozen or more buckets to collect water leaking from the ceiling to get to work. Given that this Minister of Infrastructure's response left much to be desired – his spokesperson said they had, quote, mitigated the major sources of water – we need a longer term solution. To the Minister of Infrastructure: have you fixed the roof permanently, or should the law courts staff keep their buckets at the ready?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, yes, there was a leak, and that particular facility required some repair. The source of the leak has been located and permanently sealed. The general contractor, Bird Construction, confirmed it was a test hole that was drilled at some point during the construction exploration for the new galleria, and the problem has been rectified.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's good to hear, but given that the presence of buckets in the lobby is still a common one and given that the building is in need of major repairs due to the presence of asbestos, cramped conditions, and inadequate insulation and air circulation and given that this ongoing water damage will only make the situation worse, to the same minister: will you commit to a plan for a major overhaul or replacement of the building? Clearly, the weather shouldn't dictate whether justice can be served in this province.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the problem has been addressed, and the room has thoroughly dried and has been cleared of any mould or environmental concerns. The department is finishing cleaning and will be putting the area back into service in the coming days.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That doesn't address the inadequate insulation, the asbestos, or any of the cramped conditions that were asked about in that second question.

Given that they want a robust justice system to address rural crime, I can't figure out what the priorities of this government are. The members on this side know that investing in justice is important, unlike the members opposite, who voted against the funding. Now, to the Minister of Justice: are you aware that while your Premier gives a 4 and a half billion dollar tax giveaway on one hand to wealthy donors, your colleague the Infrastructure minister is letting your justice system literally fall apart?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South will ask his questions without a preamble following question 4.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I really wonder. I mean, if this member, when he was in government, had put that much energy into asking his Finance minister, his Justice minister to fix the financial issues we got into the fiscal mess, \$100 billion debt, if they had fixed that, today we wouldn't need the buckets to collect the water remaining.

Investment in Alberta and Fiscal Policies

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, under the previous NDP government we saw a mass exodus of capital and investment out of Alberta. While Albertans were stuck dealing with the recession and tough economic times, the NDP's policies only made matters worse. The carbon tax, unnecessary red tape, and other ideological bills made it even harder for everyday Albertans simply to just get by. Minister, can you please tell this House: what is the government doing to right the wrongs of the previous NDP government and help get Albertans back to work?

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

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. The previous NDP government left this province in a fiscal mess. It left this province with a very uncompetitive business environment. We saw the flight of capital by the billions from this province and with it jobs and opportunities. Our government has taken very quick action to materially improve the business environment by repealing the carbon tax, introducing the job-creation corporate tax cut, working on reducing red tape, and modernizing our regulatory regime.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that under the previous government we saw investment decrease in almost every industry – a 61 per cent decrease in the mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction sector, a 27 per cent decrease in the finance, insurance, and real estate sector, and a 21 per cent decrease in investment in the construction sector – can the minister please update us all on what the government's plan is to bring investment back to Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member lays out the challenge, I think, very well this afternoon. Again, our government has moved very quickly to create a much more competitive, in fact the most competitive, business environment in all of Canada and one of the most competitive business environments in North America by introducing the job-creation tax cut, which will move our corporate tax rate from 12 per cent to 8 per cent. We've repealed the carbon tax, which will provide relief to not only every business but every Albertan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you to the minister for the answer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that during this economic downturn everyday Albertans were tightening their belts and trying desperately to spend within their means and given that the NDP's spending addiction put Alberta on a path for 100 or more billion dollars in debt in just a few short years, will the minister please let this House know: how is the government dealing with the financial

mess left behind by the NDP, and what is the path forward to finally ensure that Alberta's books are balanced?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans elected our government to bring fiscal balance to this province, to make decisions that are in the best interests of Albertans. The MacKinnon panel will be providing a report to this government ahead of our budget deliberations. We look forward to that report. The annual report, which was just released, demonstrated a \$40 billion loss in equity in this province's balance sheet over the last five years. This government will do better.

The Speaker: The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has the call.

Tourism Promotion

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is a beautiful province that offers so much to see and do. People come from all over the province, all over the country, and indeed all over the world to experience the many sights and attractions we have to offer. The beauty of the west country is one such example in my constituency, that I am proud to represent. A strong tourism sector will create jobs and growth in Alberta, and our government supports innovative approaches to sustaining funding for tourism, promotion, and marketing through partnerships with the private sector. Will the minister explain how Travel Alberta's mandate will be reoriented to support this endeavour?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The tourism sector contributes more than \$8.5 billion towards our economy each year and employs more than 130,000 full-time employees. We are currently working on developing a 10-year tourism strategy that will reorient Travel Alberta's mandate to more effectively work with the private sector and the creation of public-private partnerships.

2:40

The Speaker: The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in the last two months I've had many conversations with the towns of Breton, Thorsby, and Drayton Valley, among other centres, about increasing tourism in my constituency and given that cutting red tape is an important objective of this government and given that we have heard from many in the tourism industry of the intrusive laws, rules, and regulations, will the minister please advise what our government is planning to do to remove unnecessary hurdles for our tourism operators?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for the question. We have already taken action to remove unnecessary red tape for our tourism operators. My colleague the Minister of Environment and Parks has increased the lease lengths on public lands from 25 to 60 years. This move came at the request of the tourism sector and will allow operators to secure long-term financing, attract investment, and expand to showcase Alberta in new and innovative ways.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the private sector delivers the services that support the tourism industry in Alberta and given that the private sector has a role to play in assisting government in promoting Alberta as a tourism destination and given that tourism cannot grow in Alberta if government and the private sector do not work together and given that our platform calls for a reprofile of existing government funding for tourism into a tourism partnership incentive fund, will the minister please advise how it will manage this fund to attract and identify sources of private sector support within my constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The tourism partnership investment fund will be a combination of several existing funds and programs and will be a formative part of our 10-year tourism strategy, which will engage tourism stakeholders from across our province to grow the sector. Travel Alberta will use this fund to identify effective private-sector operators that can be partners with our government in growing the tourism sector, particularly in the wake of our changes to public land leases.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will move to the rest of the daily Routine. If you have other commitments outside of the Chamber, please get to those quickly and move expediently.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to provide oral notice of Government Motion 27.

Be it resolved that the 2017 annual report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate office be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future for review. The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued. In accordance with section 5(5) of the Property Rights Advocate Act the committee shall report back to the Assembly within 60 days of the report being referred to it if the Assembly is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has a tabling.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the copies of an article in *The Guardian* by Mark Rice-Oxley, and it's titled *Austerity and Inequality Fuelling Mental Illness, Says Top UN Envoy*.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? Well done.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act the government of Alberta 2018-19 annual report. On behalf of hon.

Mr. Madu, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Municipal Government Act Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board 2018-2019 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order, points of privilege. The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Privilege Threatening a Member

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, Standing Order 15(5) says that

a Member may always raise a question of privilege in the Assembly immediately after the words are uttered or the events occur that give rise to the question, in which case the written notice required under suborder (2) is not required.

As you are aware, a question of privilege was raised by the Minister of Transportation on Thursday, June 27, during the course of debate regarding threatening comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. In the course of an exchange in question period last Thursday the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud clearly stated, on page 1283 of *Hansard*, "I don't need the House leader, by the way; we're coming for you."

Now, Mr. Speaker, as an experienced law enforcement officer I can tell you that outside of this Assembly this is a clear investigation if a complaint was made to the police. Then we would be investigating the complaint under section 264.1(1)(a) of the Criminal Code. The mens rea in the case can only lead a reasonable person to conclude that the words uttered by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud were meant to convey a threat and even imply violence. In other words, they were meant to intimidate.

In *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* by Maingot it states that:

Members are entitled to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed. The assaulting, menacing, or insulting of any Member on the floor of the House or while he is coming or going to or from the House, or on account of his behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament, is a violation of the rights of Parliament.

Now, Mr. Speaker, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, the third edition, states on page 107 and 108:

In order to fulfill their parliamentary duties, Members should be able to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed. Assaulting, threatening, or insulting a Member during a proceeding of Parliament, or while the Member is circulating within the Parliamentary Precinct, is a violation of the rights of Parliament. Any form of intimidation of a Member with respect to the Member's actions during a proceeding in Parliament could amount to contempt.

Now, *Erskine May Parliamentary Practice* discusses intimidation on page 146, and it states:

To attempt to intimidate a Member in his parliamentary conduct by threats is also a contempt, cognate to those mentioned above. Actions of this character which have been proceeded against include impugning the conduct of Members and threatening them with further exposure if they took part in debates.

There are also a few examples, Mr. Speaker:

threatening to communicate with Members' constituents to the effect that, if they did not reply to a questionnaire, they should be considered as not objecting to certain sports; publishing posters containing a threat regarding the voting of Members in a forthcoming debate; informing Members that to vote for a particular bill would be regarded as treasonable by a future administration; summoning a Member to a disciplinary hearing of his trade union in consequence of a vote given in the House; and threatening to end investment by a public corporation in a Member's constituency, if the Member persisted in making speeches along the lines of those in a preceding debate.

Mr. Speaker, which one of these examples that I previously mentioned was the member talking about, or is there another example that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud meant when she said "by the way; we're coming for you"? If these actions or comments were made outside of this Chamber and a complaint was made by the Government House Leader, then the police would have reasonable suspicion to begin an investigation for uttering threats. With video evidence, with witness testimony I would argue that the evidence is sufficient on reasonable and probable grounds to possibly lay a charge of uttering threats. However, these comments were made inside this Chamber, and therefore the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud enjoys freedom of speech and therefore immunity from criminal or civil action, but that doesn't mean that there aren't some limits on that freedom inside the Chamber.

2:50

House of Commons Procedure and Practice on page 97 states under the heading Misuse of Freedom of Speech:

The privilege of freedom of speech is an extremely powerful immunity and on occasion Speakers have had to caution Members about its misuse.

It goes on to say:

Speaker Parent also emphasized the need for Members to use great care in exercising their right to speak freely in the House:

... paramount to our political and parliamentary systems is the principle of freedom of speech, a member's right to stand in this House unhindered to speak his or her mind. However when debate in the House centres on sensitive issues, as it often does, I would expect that members would always bear in mind the possible effects of their statements and hence be prudent in their tone and choice of words.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would further argue that the words of the member were directed at the Government House Leader and were done in a way that was meant to silence him and therefore deny both his right to freedom of speech in this Assembly and the rights of his constituents to be represented. In fact, this wasn't the first time that the NDP Official Opposition have tried to silence the Government House Leader. You may remember the distasteful remarks made on June 26, 2019, by the Member for Lethbridge-West when she said, "To the minister, who shouldn't need a guard dog, so the House leader can stay on his leash."

I would also draw your attention to a similar situation on December 5, 2017, Mr. Speaker, made by the Government House Leader of the day, Mr. Brian Mason, when there was an alleged threatening gesture. He felt that there was a prima facie breach of privilege due to how the government viewed the threatening gesture made by a member of the opposition.

Now, I will conclude, Mr. Speaker, that this is not a matter of debate, that this is not a matter of opinion or a difference as to the facts. This was clearly meant by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to threaten and attempt to intimidate the Government House Leader in the performance and execution of his parliamentary duties. Therefore, this is a prima facie question of privilege.

Thank you.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise and respond to the government. I just would like to start off by saying that this is not a point of privilege, however would have been better suited through the point of order at the time. If we reference *Beauchesne*, section 26, page 12:

A question of order concerns the interpretation to be put upon the rules of procedure and is a matter for the Speaker or, in a committee, for the Chairman to determine.

(2) A question of privilege, on the other hand, is a question partly of fact and partly of law – the law of contempt of Parliament.

While the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud could have been more careful in her choice of phrasing, in context she clearly intended to communicate that the minister would be called on to answer a question later in the day if we refer to *Hansard* of 1281 and 1289 for that day. Using unparliamentary language does not constitute a prima facie breach of privilege. While the language may have been unparliamentary, it does not rise to level of breaching the member's privileges.

Our member, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, is prepared to apologize and withdraw her remarks, but this is not a breach of privilege. I hardly think that calling on a minister to wait his turn and let his colleagues answer a question directed at them constitutes a breach.

In *Beauchesne*, section 420, on page 123, “the Chair will allow a question to be put to a certain Minister; but it cannot insist that that Minister rather than another should answer it.”

Also in section 31 of *Beauchesne* on page 13, “A dispute arising between two Members, as to the allegation of facts, does not fulfill the conditions of parliamentary privilege.” The minister was not in fact obstructed. He continued to participate robustly in question period. He rose three times to address questions after the alleged incident occurred.

If you refer to *Hansard* on 1283 to 1289, the *House of Commons* on page 109,

In order to find a prima facie breach of privilege, the Speaker must be satisfied that there is evidence to support the Member's claim that he or she has been impeded in the performance of his or her parliamentary functions and that the matter is directly related to a proceeding [of this House].

Again, I think it's important to acknowledge that the Government House Leader did rise again repeatedly after that incident, responding to the questions at hand, which directly demonstrates that he at that time did not feel like he was being intimidated, nor did it impede his ability to continue to do his job. Again I would point out that this is not a point of privilege in concerning the rights of members, and it did not impede the work of the member in his capacity.

Again, if we look at the precedents on page 18, March 6, 2017, Speaker Wanner ruled that the language used was unparliamentary and that it did cause disorder, which would have been the subject of a point of order, but uttering words that are unparliamentary does not constitute a question of privilege.

The Speaker: Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to offer my apologies for the statement I made last week. It was a misstatement. I misspoke. I meant to say: we are coming to you next. I said: coming for you next. I acknowledge that that was an inappropriate comment and it was a misstatement. I retract the statement if you permit, and through you to the Government House Leader I offer my apologies for any fear or intimidation he might have felt. Certainly, it was a misstatement on my part. I accept your judgment on this, and I apologize for it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am uncertain as to what the best path forward is.

As many will know, it is customary for this Assembly and many Assemblies that with respect to a question of privilege if a member withdraws their comments and apologizes, that would traditionally

conclude the matter. However, the Deputy Government House Leader for the Official Opposition chose to spend a good portion of time speaking directly to how this, in fact, wasn't a point of privilege. As such, I am inclined to take some time to consider whether or not she, in fact, was correct. The difficult position that we are all in is that I must take the member at her word when she apologizes and withdraws.

What I will do is that I will say this. I will accept the withdrawal and apology of this very serious matter with respect to uttering threats and a point of privilege inside the Assembly. However, I wish to make some additional comments considering the remarks from last week. I'd like to remind members of the Official Opposition that they alone are responsible for the tone of the words that they use and that they should ensure that these remarks do not inflame the debate or lead to disorder or a lack of decorum inside the Assembly.

Now, I recognize that we are all moving into the seventh consecutive week of sitting, but we bear the responsibility of ensuring that the words that we use are chosen carefully and that the words we use are in accordance with the parliamentary traditions that this Assembly and the Westminster parliamentary system deserves. I implore upon this hon. member that they do a much better job in the future when a question of privilege could arise with respect to uttering threats directed at the government.

As such, I will accept the apology. This matter is concluded, and I consider it dealt with.

We are at ordres du jour.

3:00

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 2 An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business

The Deputy Chair: Are there any questions or comments? As a reminder, we are on amendment A2, where the substance had to do with possibly changing the title. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods standing.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 2 during this Committee of the Whole debate. I hope that everyone had a really happy Canada Day long weekend. I hope that all members had the opportunity to visit their constituents in their ridings, take in the many celebrations as Canadians came together to celebrate living in the greatest country in this world, and I hope that members of the government caucus had the opportunity to talk to their constituents about what Bill 2 would mean, which is that this past Canada Day was the last statutory holiday, should Bill 2 pass with no amendments, where all Albertans would receive maybe some time off, maybe a day's wage so that they can spend time with their family and celebrate something that we all hold very dear.

With Canada Day in mind, I would like to raise my concerns with Bill 2, the pick-your-pockets bill, because it is going to roll back protections for statutory holiday pay, essentially taking money away from workers who depend on it. Now, often when I speak to Bill 2, Mr. Chair, I like to remind this Assembly that the changes we are making are to the minimum employment standards. Those who rely on the minimum employment standards are often our more

vulnerable workers, perhaps our newest entrants into the workforce, perhaps those who are working in precarious jobs. That tends to be where minimum employment standards are truly relied upon.

The people who will be deprived through the changes in Bill 2 of general holiday pay on important holidays like Canada Day are going to be those who likely need that money the most, where that little bit of a day's wage means more time spent with family. So in honour of Canada Day, which just happened to fall on a Monday this year but is one of those holidays that lands on different days of the week any given year – when Canada Day falls on a Saturday, office workers and those who tend to work Monday to Friday, 9 to 5, could be the ones who receive no benefit for that statutory holiday.

I appreciate the opportunity to stand to speak once again on Bill 2 but to really put that very recent memory of a joyous Canada Day celebration into the minds of the members. It is the workers who were there celebrating on Canada Day that would not receive general holiday pay if it was a nonstandard workday for them, reintroducing a rule that will be unique to Alberta. No other jurisdiction has this rule, Mr. Chair. Alberta was the outlier before we came along and updated it for the first time in 30 years – employment standards hadn't been updated in that long – to review all other jurisdictions and make changes to put Alberta on a similar playing field, to make sure that Canadian citizens no matter which province they live in all get to celebrate Canada Day and all get that statutory holiday benefit of maybe another day off, maybe a little bit of pay. This change in Bill 2 is going to put us out of step again with every other province because Alberta will become the only place where, perhaps, someone would not receive any benefit.

As an example, in 2022, Mr. Chair, Christmas will fall on a weekend, and New Year's Day will fall on a weekend. That means many families may not receive any additional time off, may not receive wages for those statutory holidays. I object strongly to this change because I believe that Albertans, just like every other Canadian, deserve to have the same basic protections that are the Canadian standard and that we brought into the employment standards changes in what I would call the Canadian mainstream.

Bill 2 rolls back the general holidays, could impact and will impact workers when it comes to Canada Day, and adds back in eligibility requirements such that someone needs to have worked 30 days in the last 12 months in order to apply, which can be difficult sometimes when someone starts as part-time, when somebody works irregular hours. Reintroducing that eligibility period, I would suggest, doesn't put us wildly out of line. There are other provinces with eligibility periods, but I do think it's a little bit of, to use a Christmas analogy, a Grinch move.

I would like to see changes to employment standards work to address the challenges that we currently have in the system, the fact that so many of our precarious workers are not necessarily covered by those minimum employment standards. When somebody works in a contractlike position, if somebody is driving for Uber, minimum wages and hours of work and such can be very, very difficultly applied to them. So a lot of our precarious workers are lacking basic protections.

Bill 2 doesn't address some of those more complicated issues. It simply rolls back the rights of workers when it comes to holiday pay, when it comes to making sure that our workers get what is owed to them when they do, for example, overtime. That's another aspect of this act that I have spoken about, but it bears a little bit of repeating. Under these changes banked overtime in Alberta only, no other jurisdiction in Canada, will be banked at straight time rather than time and a half, essentially ignoring the fact that overtime, time spent away from family, time spent beyond eight

hours per day or 44 hours per week, should be done at a premium that recognizes the extra work that that employee is doing.

I even heard on a CBC radio interview, Mr. Chair, an employer talking about when the previous government first implemented the time-and-a-half change. Their concern was that it was going to be too onerous a cost. But on this CBC lunch-hour call-in show this business owner said that as soon as they began paying time and a half for overtime, they actually saw the efficiency of their workers. The workers' interest in making sure they were hitting their deadlines, by giving those few extra hours of overtime, went way up, and it increased profitability for the company because when you pay workers that fair wage, when you treat workers with respect, that is good for business.

This bill, which is predicated on removing the banking of overtime at time and a half, moving it down to straight time, which is predicated on taking away stat holidays when every other Canadian worker – I will say that this government has done a very poor job of communicating on this bill, first, around the overtime piece with misleading information, confusing banked overtime and paid overtime. To be clear to you, Mr. Chair, I understand that paid overtime is not changing. I still have strong concerns around the banked overtime rate being paid at straight time rather than time and a half specifically because it still is less money for those workers, it is less time with family, and it is less value for those workers.

3:10

Also, when it comes to the stat holiday piece, the true impact of this change to workers is that in 2022 a worker working Monday to Friday from 9 to 5, unlike every other Canadian, would not receive any benefit. Where this government, I think, could do a better job of communicating this is: why? Why do Albertans deserve less when it comes to a stat holiday than every other Canadian? Why does Alberta deserve to have lower minimum standards than every other jurisdiction in Canada?

These are very important questions and strong concerns that I have regarding this piece of legislation. The general holiday pay change and the banked overtime change put us completely out of line with the rest of our country. We've just all spent Canada Day celebrating how great our country is, celebrating all of the things that we value about the country of Canada, our diversity and the opportunity for people to work hard, to make something of themselves. These changes, which change the minimum standards, impact the most vulnerable among us. That is who will lose out on the wages. That is who is going to lose out on stat holiday pay, who is going to lose out on banked overtime.

We know because of the Alberta government's past experiences, because of the consultation that I had the honour of doing when we were introducing Bill 17, those first changes to employment standards. There were many, many workers in our province who felt intimidated by employers, who felt powerless when it came to banked overtime agreements. When you're talking about an employer-employee relationship, especially when you're dealing with our most vulnerable workers, it is not always as easy as just walking into your boss's office and negotiating a better salary or asking for a better overtime banking agreement. That's not realistic. It ignores the reality of hundreds of thousands of our workers. When they are working to put food on the table and are dependent on that job, they're not always in a position of power where they're able to go in and demand changes.

While I was out talking to people throughout Canada Day – I ended up at eight different events, Mr. Chair; it was a really busy day – throughout the day it really struck me that there were people at Canada Day celebrations yesterday who would be getting stat

holiday pay, as they should, but it would maybe be the last time that that would happen if Canada Day should ever fall on a Monday again. That's done deliberately on the part of this government to bow to the lobbyists who have asked for these changes, putting Alberta out of line with the rest of Canada.

I'm going to go back to the comment I had earlier, Mr. Chair, which is simply that this government has not explained why Alberta workers deserve less than every other Canadian worker in our country, why they would not all deserve statutory holiday pay, why Alberta would be the only place where someone could receive no benefit for Christmas Day or Canada Day, why in Alberta banked overtime would be at straight time rather than time and a half. They've titled this bill An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, but I do not believe that there is a company that will move here and start their business because they won't have to pay for Christmas anymore. I don't think that's what we want for our citizens, and I'm very concerned about the changes in this bill.

Having just come from Canada Day celebrations, having had the opportunity to enjoy barbecue and cake, the fact that that was a stat holiday that some workers were receiving a benefit for but may not receive that benefit again really struck me. I was certainly curious whether members of the government caucus were having similar thoughts as they talked to joyous people on Canada Day or whether the connection between Bill 2, the legislation they're passing in this House, and the people they represent, the voters that they were talking to at those barbecues, has been drawn clearly enough, because that is who we're talking about. We're talking about the people who keep this province running, the workers, hard-working Albertans, and they deserve to have modern workplace laws. They deserve to be treated fairly, as other Canadians, across this province.

Making sure that Albertans have the same rights and benefits as other Canadians was something that I was most proud of that came from the work that I was able to do as minister of labour in my time in that office. To see that immediately attacked, and in a way that puts us out of line with the rest of Canada, strikes me as very disappointing. I think that working towards more family-friendly workplaces, making sure that there are adequate protections for vulnerable workers and that we're tackling some of the modern challenges in our workplaces, like precarious work, is very important work, that I would encourage the government to turn their attention to.

But picking the pockets, stealing holiday pay, and cutting banked overtime: these are rolling back things for Alberta workers. I just don't believe that the government is getting it right with these changes to Bill 2. I really appreciate the opportunity to stand and to speak to these concerns once more, Mr. Chair, especially given Canada Day having just finished.

It was quite the celebration. I want to say thank you to all the volunteers who put on the amazing events all around the province. I saw lots of photos from different corners of the province and amazing, amazing celebrations taking place. I would wish everyone: I hope you had a great Canada Day.

I hope you will not accept what's currently drafted in Bill 2 to take away stat holiday pay for our most vulnerable workers. It's not something that we need. We haven't clearly articulated why Albertans deserve less than other Canadians. I strongly object to this part of Bill 2; as well, of course, the changing to banked overtime.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I will also take this opportunity to just remind the House that we are discussing amendment A2. I took the opportunity at the very

start to say that, but that's okay. Obviously, members have as many opportunities to speak in Committee of the Whole as they would like, so I didn't think that there was any issue with that at the time.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West rising.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You're most telepathic in your ability to see that I wanted to speak even before. I was just thinking about speaking, and you read that. That's a skill. Well, thank you. I take the opportunity to speak on amendment A2 with some interest, and I certainly think that we are trying to be very reasonable here as the Official Opposition, looking for practical ways by which we can collaborate to make this sort of raw clay of Bill 2 into something positive.

I was thinking about Bill 2 over the weekend, actually, not in a dissimilar way to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, because, of course, we did have one of our big statutory holidays yesterday. You can see that people were anxious, after the pretty rough weather during the day, to get out and enjoy themselves with the fireworks and families and tens of thousands of people, really, out and about. Again, it makes you think about the importance of statutory holidays but the importance of enshrining them with coherent legislation and regulation that allows the time off for people to enjoy events like that and to be compensated properly, too.

You know, when we start to send messages that would compromise the integrity of our labour laws in regard to regulation and overtime pay and so forth, then things start to break apart. I just got a message from a constituent on Saturday talking about an overtime issue – yesterday, actually; it would have been yesterday, yeah, on the actual holiday – where their employer was taking some liberty around working on the statutory holiday and kind of changed the rules on the fly, which was, of course, against the law, and this employer will have to retract and pay compensation properly. But I thought to myself: you know, once you start opening up fissures or cracks or weak points here at the legislative level, the message trickles down to employers: hey, things are on the change, or things are loose, and I can perhaps make changes myself – right? – around overtime pay. That just further causes confusion, and we don't need that, I think, Mr. Chair.

3:20

Another thing I was thinking about on the weekend as well is that it's important for this Chamber to look across the country to make sure that the laws we make generally are in keeping with the standard that is set across Canada and specifically that we have labour law that's coherent and matches or is some facsimile of laws and regulations in other jurisdictions and provinces across the country. If we are doing these things in regard to holiday pay, for example, we will be out of sync, synchronization, with places like British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec – right? – all of the big populations, the big provinces. You know, when you are out of step with your provincial cousins, then you start to create some asymmetrical behaviour across the country.

I know from our experience in making the laws and regulations over the last four years that this is a very important consideration, that we'd always take into account: what are the other jurisdictions doing? It was funny, almost, in a way because it became this pattern where we were, like, the 10th province to put in some regulation that would make things safer or more streamlined or more efficient. It was so often that Alberta's regulations and laws were so out of keeping, out of step, with the rest of the provinces. It's like we missed the boat on so many things.

That is just a useful way to remind yourself – right? – that if we make these holiday pay changes, we will be out of sync with most

of the other provinces in the country. In regard to the banked overtime changes we would be out of sync with all of the other provinces and territories in the country of Canada. You know, again, that's really not the best message to send, right? It clearly demonstrates that this is a regressive law that we are debating here and that it needs and deserves careful, second consideration at the very least.

Yeah, Mr. Chair, I just wanted to kind of bring up those things that I was thinking about on the weekend in regard to labour law generally and Bill 2 specifically. I think it's eminently reasonable that we do move forward on amendment A2, and I encourage all members to vote with us here as soon as we can.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, anyone to speak to A2? I saw the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud standing.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to amendment A2, which I, again, think is a very reasonable amendment with respect to the title of this bill. As you know, the members on this side of the House had been suggesting that a more appropriate title for the bill might be the pick-your-pockets bill, and we still maintain that. However, I think that we wouldn't anticipate that the government would necessarily agree with such a change in the name of the title of the bill. But what's being put forward here in amendment A2, I think, is actually an accurate reflection, at least, that the government can get behind.

You know, we've been standing up on this side of the House on every bill that the government has brought forward. Of course, our responsibility as the Official Opposition is to do just that and to make sure that all bills that are brought forward by government do get proper debate and discussion in this Assembly. Sometimes it appears as though the members on the other side are shocked or quite disappointed that we continue to debate this legislation, but of course – and many of the members on the other side will recall that – that is the job of the Official Opposition. More importantly, I would just point out that with respect to many of these bills, if we were not to stand up here and give them a fulsome discussion and fulsome debate, I think we would find that these bills would not be discussed at all because there's very little coming from the members on the government side to actually explain their rationale and their thinking around this bill, around many of the bills. Therefore, we are going to keep standing up.

One of the reasons why we continue to debate Bill 2 and to propose amendments to that bill is because we believe, on this side of the House, that this is not what Albertans voted for. Now, we know that the members on the other side continually stand up and say that they won the election and they won 63 seats in the election. That is accurate, of course. But not everything that was part of their platform was fully endorsed by Albertans. I think we're going to find that those will peter out as this government's term continues on.

With respect to what's being proposed in Bill 2 and with respect to overtime, that was certainly not part of what was put forward by the government as part of their mandate. No. In fact, I see that the hon. minister of labour is nodding his head. However, with respect to overtime, unfortunately, I've got, actually, a tweet here from the Premier from April 3, 2019, in which he actually says, if I may:

The latest NDP lie is a ridiculous claim that the UCP is going to somehow jeopardize or weaken overtime pay for Alberta workers.

That is complete rubbish. Of course we will continue with the legal obligation for overtime. Period. That's not up for debate.

That was during the election campaign. That was the Premier standing up and saying that, no, overtime pay was not going to be messed with, was not going to be altered by the government.

Then we see, a couple of weeks into their legislative session, that, yes, in fact, they are bringing forward legislation to change overtime. At the very least I think the minister of labour and I can agree that there is some room for dispute, given the Premier's comments. It is not straightforward to say that it was very clear to all workers in Alberta that their overtime pay would be reduced. Certainly, the Premier gave some assurances during the campaign that that would not take place, yet here we are.

On that matter, we do believe it is our obligation as the Official Opposition to stand up on behalf of our constituents, particularly those workers who were affected by the drop in oil prices. For particularly the oil and gas workers to then be told that their overtime pay is also going to be cut: I'm quite shocked by that. I think it is our obligation to stand up in this House and speak to that because I don't believe that voters voted to have their pay cut. That's not what they agreed to. So we will stand up and continue to debate that.

My colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West did an excellent job talking about how we should be considering what other provinces do in the country. One of the things I've mentioned before in this House; I'll continue to mention it: as just a citizen watching what was going on and somebody who practises in labour and employment, I saw the previous government, the NDP government, do a lot of work just to bring our labour and employment code up to the national standards. A lot of the changes that were made were not going above and beyond what was happening in other provinces. It was simply time in this province to have the legislation brought up to the standards that workers all across this country get to enjoy. That's significant.

There was significant work that was done around compassionate leave and sick leave and all those kinds of things, but some of those included bringing up our overtime pay, our banked overtime pay requirements, to just simply match what other provinces were doing. The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West went through and talked about what happened in other provinces. You know, I'll list them, the other provinces that provide overtime banked pay at time and a half. British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut all do that. They all provide overtime pay at time and a half, not at straight time.

3:30

It's one thing, I think, for a government to say: we've got a different agenda; we're going to implement a different ideology, a different principle. Of course, that's what happens when you have a change in government. However, what is being proposed by the government right now is actually just regressive. It's actually moving us backwards in time to a time when Alberta was the black sheep of the legislative labour and employment codes. We were so far behind on so many things. I don't see how this government sees that it serves Alberta workers to continue to do that again.

I think there were a lot of oil and gas workers, construction workers – a lot of those people live in my riding – that were very concerned about this. I heard that at the doors. They couldn't actually believe that a government that claimed that their platform is based on, you know, economy, jobs, pipeline would actually cut the pay of those workers, who had worked so hard and had fought to maintain their employment in many situations over the last four years, during the recession, with the drop in oil prices. Now they're being hurt and punished. I don't think that that was what they were expecting. They couldn't believe that this government was doing it. We continue to not believe that they're doing it, and that's why we're here today.

The same is true with respect to the crossjurisdictional comparison of what's happened with the general holiday pay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West did a great job talking about, again, what we're talking about doing here, maintaining Alberta at the same level as other provinces in this country. Again, I believe that this approach of rolling back general holiday pay eligibility for people who do not work on that day is really just going to simply hurt workers.

The government has made a lot of promises as to how they're going to bring back jobs in this province. They're gambling on a lot of big things like the 4.5 billion dollar tax cut to corporations, and they're gambling on some little things. At the end of the day, those little things to them, cutting general holiday pay, are actually making an impact on average families. I simply don't know why in this province, when it comes to basic protections for employees and for workers, we want to be the furthest behind. When the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods was the minister of labour, what she was doing was not taking Alberta so far ahead of all the other provinces that it was outrageous for employers. I worked on behalf of employers, and certainly a lot of them did take some time to adjust to the new changes, but it was not going to be so hurtful to them to simply maintain what was going on across the country. It was maintaining a minimum national standard, and it was simply Alberta catching up – catching up – with what was going on across this country.

Now, this government seems dead set on rolling back on the pockets, on the backs of average workers. I think that in this House we've already gone through the numbers about the impact that this has on the average worker: oil and gas workers, \$350 a week; construction workers, \$200 a week. I know that the government and the minister of labour will speak about how these are averaging agreements that the employees enter into. But let's be honest. We sit here and we talk a lot about how tough it has been economically in this province since the drop in oil prices. Those employees are not in a great bargaining position to talk about what they want and don't want in those averaging agreements.

If they've got a job, a steady job, with an employer or are starting a new job with an employer who says, "I want to enter into an agreement," there's not a lot of bargaining power. It's not accurate or fair to describe the relationship between employees and employers when it comes to negotiating these agreements as balanced; it's not. For any employee who's being approached by an employer saying, "I want to enter into a flexible averaging agreement; you don't have to do it, but, you know, I'm sure there'll be an employee who would," they're going to do it. I don't think it's a fair assessment of the situation to simply say, "Well, employees, it's an agreement; it's a mutual agreement between the parties," because, really, as is often the case, the bargaining power is off, particularly at a time when workers are feeling most vulnerable.

In that situation I think we have to be honest about what we're doing here, which is that we're really rolling back the employment and labour standards in this province to be, again, the weakest across the country. I simply don't know and I don't think that it's going to have the impact that this government or the minister of labour would suggest it's going to have on the economy, on building jobs. This, to me, seems like a petty way to put a little bit more money back into employers' pockets, taking it away from workers. I simply don't think that that's something we should be proud of in this province, to say that we've got the weakest labour and employment standards for workers. I'm not proud of that.

I think we want to at least meet the national standard, and then can't we see if we can be even better? Employees, workers, once

again, are Albertans. They are the people who we want to be spending their money in the economy, investing. They've got mortgages to pay; they've got rent to pay. It benefits us all as well. There seems to be a focus from this government of focusing on making sure there's money in the pockets of employers and corporations to invest, but we also need to make sure that there's money in the pockets of workers and employees so that they can spend that money, so that they can pay their mortgages, so that they can take their kids on vacation, so that they can buy their kids the things they need, basic supplies often.

I do believe that if we're not going to be amending the name of the bill to the pick-your-pockets bill, I think what's being proposed in amendment A2 is a reasonable amendment, and I hope that the members will support that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Any other members looking to speak? I see the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Copping: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to this item. I just want to correct a couple of issues raised by the other side. I've spoken twice already to this, so I will be short and brief. You know, just a couple of items. Again, you know, thank you to all hon. members.

As indicated in my previous remarks, we will probably agree to disagree on this because we have a very different view of what the impacts will be, but the question being asked by the other side in terms of the changes is: why are we doing this? This is about creating jobs. This is what we ran on, and this is what we put in our platform. In particular, I'd like to comment. You know, one of the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud: this wasn't in your platform. I would like to refer you to page 21 of the platform in terms of both banked overtime and general holidays. This was very clearly in our platform, that we would reverse the change in 2018 that eliminated the option for workers and employers to develop a straight-time banked hours arrangement, and this has no impact on overtime pay.

This is exactly what we're doing. The legislative change that we're making in Bill 2 is going back to banked overtime. It does not impact payment of overtime. If individuals are going to get paid overtime, it will still be done at time and a half. I just want to point out to the hon. member across the way that we did run on this and, in fact, got elected on this item.

The other point I'd like to make is on general holidays, changing the rules about general holidays. We ran on this. Again, it's clearly stated on page 21 as part of Bill 2:

- Return to a regular/irregular workday distinction for calculating holiday pay
- Return to a holiday pay qualifying period of 30 ... days in the 12 months preceding a general holiday.

The reason for actually making these changes, Mr. Chair, is about creating jobs. We heard from employers that the increase in the minimum wage and the change to general holiday rules resulted, particularly in the restaurant industry but in other industries as well, in these higher costs, resulting in reduction of hours and fewer staff. So this is about creating jobs. Now, the members opposite don't believe that, but they also don't believe that their increase in the minimum wage impacted jobs in spite of the evidence. That is what we're doing here. We're addressing an issue, created by the previous government policies, to get Albertans back to work, and that's what we're doing here with Bill 2.

The last item I just want to point out – and I find it interesting. There are arguments on the other side, you know, to look at general holiday and banked overtime and that we are different than

everybody else – right? – and that we shouldn't be doing that. Well, we're doing that to actually provide more flexibility, Mr. Chair, and to create jobs. But I note that that argument wasn't part of their lexicon when they raced to a \$15-an-hour minimum wage in this country, the highest in this country and still far above the average in this country. They didn't actually talk about what the average is when they actually made those changes.

Again, as I indicated previously, you know, these changes are about getting Albertans back to work and providing greater flexibility. It is about signalling that we're open for business, Mr. Chair. That's why I urge everyone to vote against this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore standing to speak.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it. I know there has been a flood of members from the government caucus side jumping up to try to speak, but you managed to somehow pick me out. I'm very appreciative of that opportunity to get my two cents in, I guess, as they say.

An Hon. Member: He's got a keen eye.

Mr. Nielsen: It's a very keen eye, yes, and I'm appreciative of that.

Obviously, we're speaking to Bill 2 right now and, more directly, to the amendment to the bill to change the title. What we're looking at here is that we're talking about changes to labour standards, to the way things are done, and it really isn't about making Alberta open for business. That would indicate to me that we're trying to force something here. We're trying to just make it happen.

3:40

You know, that isn't always necessarily the case. I know, in speaking to another bill previously, that in my experience playing basketball over the years at the college level and whatnot, every time a player wants to force a play, it usually doesn't end up working out so well. You end up throwing the ball away to the other team and probably letting them score.

Obviously, the reason I think we should be changing the name of the bill, hence the amendment that was brought forward, is because of some of the changes that are occurring. First, I'd like to talk a little bit about the youth minimum wage here that's coming in, where we're going to have somebody who because of their age is now going to get paid \$2 an hour less, all under the guise of creating more jobs. The funny thing is that the more students that I get a chance to speak to – of course, I have 26 schools in Edmonton-Decore. The kids have certainly figured this out.

I did have a chance to speak with some of my employers. As I've said before, if you have five people on a shift at a time and two or even three of them happen to be 17 years old, because you pay them each \$2 an hour less does not mean you magically need a sixth person on that shift to do the job. You still only require the five people on shift. Employers know this. I've heard them say: just because I'm going to pay them a few dollars less isn't going to prompt me to go hire another person that I know I don't need to get the job done during that period of time.

In my opinion, this is targeting youth that did not get to vote for you in the election. They weren't able to vote. Maybe you should bring forward some legislation around letting the youth vote. Let's see what happens then.

I think what this also is creating is some red tape, Mr. Chair. I think we're going to create a whole lot of extra work now for the associate minister of red tape, trying to find other things to eliminate. There has been this rush of red tape being brought

forward here by the government. We need to start eliminating it to balance it because, you know, we committed to eliminating red tape by one-third, a one in, one out kind of thing. There have been a whole lot of one-ins, but I'm concerned about the one-outs that will be coming up trying to catch up to some of this.

For employers to have to try to keep track of what birthday that youth worker has at the time or if they are in school, quite frankly, I think this potentially sets up kids to start actually making a choice of, "Well, I could be making more money if I – I don't know – say that I'm not in school" or, even worse, maybe just outright drop out. Because of family needs, they need to try to help support their families. We have cultures here in Canada, Mr. Chair, where family is absolutely everything. Youngsters go out – bless their hearts – and help the family, and here we are, you know, taking away their means to be able to do that effectively. Of course, we do have students that have found that conditions at home just aren't the best and end up moving out. Sometimes it's mostly our LGBTQ2S-plus youth that move out. This will very disproportionately hurt them in terms of being able to allow them to be able to pay their bills.

I think that with this youth minimum wage, which, quite frankly, doesn't exist pretty much anywhere – they've all determined that it's a bad idea – why we want to force the play here to try to think, "Oh, well, we'll just put this in, and we'll just make it work" – it's not going to happen. We're going to be back in here, we're going to be undoing this, and we'll have created a whole bunch of problems and red tape that we didn't need to create.

Obviously, I think we need to change the name of the bill because now we're also talking about things around holiday pay. You know, Mr. Chair, in my experience in the labour world, I have seen unionized employers play games around scheduling. You start setting up all kinds of criteria around: well, if you've only worked this before and this after, then you might get paid.

I'm telling you that there will be bad actors out there that will take advantage of this. I've even seen this in my very own workplace where I used to work. I remember the language, Mr. Chair, where if an employee worked 13 consecutive weeks at full-time hours, a full-time position was deemed to have existed, but it was funny that every time it was, "Well, I'm sorry; we had this person away sick" or, "I'm sorry; this person was away on leave" or, "Oh, wait. Well, no. This person was on disability, so that didn't quite count there." Of course, the very simplest one that they used to do, Madam Chair, was cut their hours in that 13th week so that they just didn't quite make it to the finish line, and then they'd say: "Well, see? There's no full-time position here."

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

What this is inadvertently going to start to create, Madam Chair, is conditions where the bad actors that will take advantage of this end up putting pressure on the good employers, the ones that are really trying hard to do it right, to create good work environments, because they have to somehow figure out how to compete with these bad actors. It starts to tempt them, possibly, to start going down this route just simply to compete.

I don't think that's quite the message that we want to be sending to our employers here in Alberta, who are working so very hard and so very diligently to create good working environments, to pay their workers fairly, to give them some benefits so that they, you know, reduce the amount of turnover because you have employees that are sticking around. I've always said that Costco is a fantastic example of that; their turnover rate of staff is less than 2 per cent. I mean, that is just incredibly, incredibly low. But when you look at it, they're paying them decently, they're getting benefits, they've got

good working conditions. Surprise, surprise: they don't have much employee turnaround because they're sticking around.

You know, I've probably said this with a lot of others things: history can teach us a lot. What I've seen is that when you start doing these kinds of changes, you get a race to the bottom. I don't understand why we're constantly trying to think that racing to the bottom is the best solution. You want to race to the top. You want everybody to flourish because when everybody is prosperous, they're spending their money in the local economy.

I've always said that a very significant portion of the residents of Edmonton-Decore aren't squirreling their money away in a Cayman Islands account to go invest one day in something. They spend it in the local economy not only on the things that they need but also on the things that they want. Maybe they want to buy that big-screen TV. Maybe they want to upgrade that vehicle. Maybe they want to go on that nice vacation that one year and book it through one of their local travel agents. Maybe they just don't feel like cooking dinner for the family this evening, so they head out to the local restaurant, and rather than just going somewhere that's the cheapest that they could possibly afford, sometimes they'll even go to the really nice restaurant because they want to treat themselves and have a really nice night out with the family. Picking their pockets is just not the way to do that, and you're potentially setting that up with the rules around the paid holidays.

That segues me right into the overtime issue here. What this, again, is setting up is that employers who are bad actors will start imposing these types of conditions on their employees: "You have to bank your overtime hours at straight time if you want to work here. You don't want that? Well, that's okay. I'm sure you can find a job down the street, maybe, somewhere that might do that." Again, what we've seen is that it'll start to create the conditions which may pressure the good employers, in order to compete, to start having to bring in these same sorts of things, okay?

Again, I've seen these situations where, you know, they bank their overtime even at time and a half, and then hopefully they get to take the time off when it's mutually agreeable. But that mutually agreeable time never seems to happen. It's always: "Well, it's busy right now" or "So-and-so has been hurt and is off" or "Well, somebody is on vacation this week, so we just can't let you go. Tell you what. If you really want, we can pay out that money, but we'll pay it out at straight time."

3:50

The bottom line is that when you work overtime, the reward for working overtime is time and a half. That's the reward for taking your time away from your family, from your friends, or like I say, just plain old free time. This, again, is another component that's going to create a race to the bottom, but it's not going to make Alberta open for business.

You know, I can't help but circle back around here a little bit with the title itself, which is probably why we think on this side that there needs to be a change. It suggests that Alberta was closed for business to begin with. I know that we heard even just today in question period some interesting stats about all this money that fled.

You know, I can't help but look back at Seven Generations Energy getting ready to put in \$1.2 billion in a processing facility and probably moving their head office here. I know that the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, both of us, are very familiar with that company and what they do. Amazon is investing \$120 million in a warehouse here in the province, and CN Rail is looking to strengthen and expand its network to the tune of \$370 million. I have a feeling that companies don't plan to invest \$370 million if they think that Alberta is closed for business. They think it's already open and that things are moving, and they want to be a part of it and

capture some of that. Pembina petrochemical plant: \$4.5 billion investment. I'm sure that companies around here don't invest that kind of change thinking that the province is closed for business. Inter Pipeline: 2.1 billion. I mean, just in that short list, Madam Chair, there's \$8.2 billion worth of investment in the province. That would suggest to me that it was never closed to begin with.

I think we need to appropriately change this name. I guess that, at the end of the day, like I said, Madam Chair, history teaches us a lot. We've seen that the race to the bottom doesn't work. Disadvantaging our youth simply because of their age is not a way to promote open business because youth spend their money in the economy, too. Trying to claim that it's going to create jobs – as I said, five people on shift: just because you pay two or three of them less, heck, if you pay all five of them less, it doesn't magically create a sixth position when only five are needed to get the job done.

Again, I'm also concerned about the red tape that's being created throughout this bill. I'm a little concerned that the associate minister of red tape is going to feel pressured and rushed to need to start catching up. I mean, I was grateful to finally see the list of 17 that have been promoted. I've already heard of a whole bunch of others that have been added. I haven't seen those come out yet. My hopes are that those will get posted, too, but maybe again it could be because the minister is very rushed and pressed to get things done here to catch up.

As I said, Madam Chair, I was thankful that I got a chance to speak here. I know that there's been a rush from the government members' side to get up and speak to this bill. Thankfully, I managed to get my two cents in. I'm hoping that members throughout this House will accept this amendment for what it is because that's what we're doing. We are changing the labour relations laws and how they work and providing regulations for that. That does not indicate that it makes Alberta open for business; it makes labour law changes.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise today and speak to this amendment put forward by the Member for Lethbridge-West, which I'm very happy to stand in support of. Of course, the piece of legislation that we have before us in Bill 2, titled An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, is very concerning to me. For one, I think that the last speaker, my colleague from Edmonton-Decore, put it quite well in the fact that Alberta was never closed for business.

Of course, over the last four or five years, even before the NDP was elected in 2015, we saw a recession hit our province and the price of oil fall by 50 per cent in some cases, so that put a lot of strain on local businesses. People, workers in our province had less spending power, which meant that less money was being spent. People were putting it away where they could to ensure that if they found themselves looking for work over the next four years of the recession, they would be able to pay as good as they could pay for the things that were important to them.

You know, we've heard a few good names that I would support over An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business. We saw the pick-your-pockets bill. I think An Act to Weaken Workers' Rights in Alberta would also have been a better name and even maybe, to the point, Make Alberta Open for Exploitation because, really, that's what we're seeing here.

When we were elected, we were elected on a platform of raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, and we were elected on strengthening labour and employment standards. Here we are four years later with a government who's looking for any excuse to take

away the rights of workers in our province. Once again I would ask this government – they're very concerned for large multinational corporations, not so concerned about the workers who make their living here, who keep their taxes in the province. That's very concerning for me.

Just to touch on the \$15 minimum wage piece once more here, you know, I raised the story of my own family and my own living situation. My mother was 14 years old when I was born, and she made the decision to stay in school, which this government is now actually discouraging people like her from doing. This government is telling people like my mother that if they are to have a child under the age of 18, they can actually drop out of school and get a raise. That's very concerning for me, considering that she finished high school without missing a beat. She was lucky enough to be able to get a student loan and go off to university without missing a beat.

This government is saying: "Ah, don't worry about postsecondary. You know, we'll give you a raise if you just drop out when you're 15, 16 years old." That's very concerning for me, especially when we look at high school completion rates and the responsibility of the Minister of Education and the minister of postsecondary education in some cases. It's their responsibility to encourage people to continue their studies, yet here we are with a bill in front of us that actually weakens their ability to do so. That's very concerning for me.

Now, when we look at the name, *An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business* – again, I mean, we've seen the direction of this government when they're giving away \$4.5 billion of hard-earned taxpayer dollars to large multinational corporations, and I wonder what the conversations were like when they made these decisions.

When we look at programs that the NDP had brought in like subsidized child care and tax credits for local businesses, which had very strong criteria about how the money can be spent, what it's invested in, and in some instances the type of people that are being hired, there was a 5 per cent tax credit labour piece within one of our bills that we brought forward, where it would actually offer a 5 per cent, I believe, higher tax credit if you were to hire somebody that had a disability or from other minority sectors. I think that's an important piece that we need to look at when we talk about the intersectionality of things.

What we have here is a government that's just willing to give all of this money away, with really little research that shows that this is the best way to actually invest taxpayer dollars to get a good return on investment, yet here we are. I would be very interested to see how those conversations came about because I doubt that they really had deep consultations with the companies that are actually benefiting from these tax credits that we brought forward. It sounds like we're going to see those tax credits disappear, which is very concerning for many of the companies and workers of those companies that were able to receive employment and create employment because of those tax credits.

Now, we continue to hear the minister of labour talk about this legislation not affecting overtime pay, but I really beg to differ, Madam Chair. I'm very concerned. Once again, I shared my own story about working for a company, one of those bad actors – of course, maybe it was an outlier – a corporation that was willing to really hold not only overtime pay but general holiday pay, really hold it hostage above my head. We've heard several stories from members on this side where corporations and constituents of theirs came and told them about corporations that were doing this, you know, changing the rules mid-game to take away their holiday pay, changing the rules around overtime pay as well.

4:00

I worked at a corporation, and I would work my, you know, eight hours a day or 44 hours a week depending on how they were feeling,

and they would come to me and they would say, "Thank you for working overtime. We'll give you a day off to cover that time that you just worked," where it would have been considered straight-time banked overtime, which is what this minister is proposing.

I'm very concerned with that because if I'm working overtime, I should be fairly compensated for that. This minister is saying: "Well, you're not losing any money. You're just not getting the same amount of time off. We're taking away the amount of time off you're getting." But that is compensation, Madam Chair. You are taking away the amount of time I'm getting for working above and beyond what my regular scheduled routine would have been. The minister keeps dancing around this point. I'm very concerned because it's really not doing justice to the point. If they are moving these pieces of legislation forward, then they should be proud to stand up and say: "Yes. You know, we think it's too burdensome for businesses. We're taking away overtime compensation." That is what is happening in this bill. Once again, this isn't about opening Alberta for business. That has always been the case. Once again, the Member for Edmonton-Decore shared some very important investments that have been made over the last three years or are being made currently without these changes that are being proposed by this government.

Now, I really want to know why this Premier and this labour minister are so intent on putting Alberta at the back of the pack when it comes to labour and employment standards across Canada. We saw the discussions about us becoming an outlier when we talked about general holiday pay and even the minimum wage piece as well, moving towards lowering the minimum wage for youth, very concerning, and even further about lowering the minimum wage for people that are servers. I mean, there are people in small towns who are compensated quite differently than, say, somebody that works in downtown Edmonton or on Whyte Avenue on a Saturday night. Yes, they often will be fairly compensated above and beyond what their regular minimum wage is. But somebody working in Vegreville or somebody working in a smaller municipality is not going to get the same amount of tip out that somebody in downtown Edmonton makes. Now we are taking money out of the pockets of regular workers and trying to say that it will create more jobs, which truly has not been laid out very well by this government. I don't tend to believe their talking points on that piece.

Once again, there were many opportunities to look at things like subsidized child care, grants, tax credits, all much better than just handing away our money without any kind of stipulation about whether that money stays here or not.

You know, I think this government should go back to the drawing board. I don't think *An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business* makes sense for this piece of legislation at all. We continue to have no PST. Our province has no payroll taxes. We have wonderful public health care, something that American corporations, of course, do not have the opportunity to offer their workers.

When we look at the direction of this government in terms of looking at renewable investments, well, we surely aren't open for business for renewable companies and for renewable investments. We see this government doing a drastic one-eighty in their willingness to support renewable energy in our province and renewable business owners. It's surely not open for business when we talk about artificial intelligence. Of course, the University of Alberta is world renowned for their artificial intelligence, but once again we have a government that's playing, you know, fast and loose – I messed that term up. Anyway, they're really not willing to come forward with any details about what their plans are for artificial intelligence investments in the future, so that's also very concerning. We actually have a government that is closing doors on certain

industries, industries that are going to lead us into the next generation and going back to the same old ways. Unfortunately, Madam Chair, the world is changing, whether this government likes it or not. The things, the products, and the industries that will be invested in are going to change whether this government likes it or not, and I think that they should start paying attention to those trends before we get disrupted out of business.

Madam Chair, once again, I am supporting this amendment to change the name of this legislation. I think it's much better suited to talk about the fact that we're changing employment standards and labour relations statutes, makes much more sense than what the government has put forward for the name of this bill.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to this amendment to the name of Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business. While I was going through the act, the only time in this entire act that the word "business" comes up is only in its name. I guess that goes to show as well that it has nothing to do with what this name suggests, an act to open businesses. Rather, we know that it's changing workplaces, the rules and regulations around workplaces. It changes job-protected leaves, it changes compassionate care leaves, and it changes the minimum wage for youth and all those things that are contained in the Employment Standards Code or the Labour Relations Code. The amendment proposed by my colleague essentially names the bill exactly what it does, employment standards and labour relations statutes amendment act, 2019. That's exactly what this piece of legislation is doing.

While every one of us was in our constituency over the weekend, I had the opportunity to meet many of my constituents. When they ask about the session, government's legislative agenda, a few bills come up. Bill 2 and the other one dealing with credentials certainly come up time and again. When I was talking to them, I think that they were concerned because many in my riding do work in minimum wage jobs. Actually, my riding consists of three neighbourhoods, which are among those neighbourhoods that have lower than average median income in Calgary.

For instance, the individual median income for 15-year-olds and older is \$43,251 to be exact. In Saddle Ridge that median income is \$30,493, so there's a huge income gap there. You can also say that clearly people in these neighbourhoods, those 15 years and older, are not working in the highest paying jobs. That's the reason why their income is well, well below, almost 33 per cent below, the average compared to \$43,000 for Calgary and \$30,000 for the neighbourhood. Another concerning thing is that in these neighbourhoods 30 per cent of the people are using more than 30 per cent of their income just on their shelter. Similarly in Taradale, that median income is even lower. It's \$28,800 for those who are working, 15 years and up. Again, compared to Calgary's average, it's a huge difference. On average they are making \$17,000 less than what everybody else makes in Calgary. In Martindale it's also lower, \$29,500, compared to \$43,000 for Calgary.

4:10

The reason I am giving these numbers is that clearly this data shows that people, my constituents, are in jobs that are not as high paying, and they are already making less than what the average person 15 years and older makes in Calgary. This bill is particularly concerning to my constituents and to all those who are working on minimum wage, who are working at low-paying jobs, and who often work more than one job or who often work overtime to make

ends meet. Clearly, this bill is attacking the livelihoods of those who are living in my riding and working in those low-paying jobs, minimum wage jobs and all those across this province who are working at low-paying and minimum wage jobs. Clearly, this act has nothing to do with what it's suggesting, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business. It is, clearly, changing the rules and regulations. It's attacking the rights and privileges of those who are in minimum wage jobs, and it tinkers with the Employment Standards Code and the Labour Relations Code.

That's why this amendment is important. It exactly names what this bill is doing. But the government just wants us to believe that by naming their pieces of legislation something "business," somehow jobs will be created. But what we are seeing, practically, in our province: the latest reports were that 3,000 jobs were lost in May alone. There were many other companies like Repsol and Nexen who are also laying off workers, so it's not opening Alberta for business. Their policy, their legislative agenda, is not in the right direction. Rather, it's just attacking workers' rights based on their ideological belief that trickle-down economics, the supply-side economics, that never worked before in Canada, U.S., and United Kingdom, somehow this time will yield some different results and magically create the jobs they promised during the campaign.

Also, earlier my colleague was talking about how they're saying it's about job creation. I completely fail to understand how cutting the youth wage by \$2 per hour will create more jobs. As I have said before here, businesses only employ the labour that they need. If you need two people and if you somehow cut wages by \$2, you won't have another person working there; you will only employ as many people as you need. There is no link between these claims that somehow cutting youth wages will impact the youth unemployment, which is somewhere at 21 per cent, which certainly is concerning. If we really want to create youth employment, we need to start a program that can help us create that.

For instance, when we became government, we brought back the STEP program that was cut by the previous Conservative government. There is clear evidence that by investing around \$10 million in that program, there were many youth across this province who benefited from that program, and there was youth employment created in the economy. But cutting their wages will not create any employment, and clearly we are seeing the job numbers from the private sector forecasters that actually Alberta is losing jobs. That should serve as a caution for this government that their policies are not helping us create more jobs. Their policies are not helping us attract businesses. Their tax breaks are not helping us with anything.

Before Albertans were told that somehow they were in a fiscal mess, and we didn't get them the number right. But their year-end report for 2018-19 clearly shows that our path to balance was intact, our economy was improving, and there was considerable, I guess, progress made under our watch. But they are taking this opportunity, they are taking this made-up fiscal story to attack workers' rights, to attack the labour standards and things that everywhere else in Canada Canadians enjoy. The changes we made were nothing so radical. They were only there to help us catch up with the rest of the jurisdictions in Canada. There are other jurisdictions that do pay overtime by 1.5. Alberta will be the only province that will pay it in straight time if we pass this piece of legislation. That's just taking us backward. We shouldn't be supporting, we will not be supporting, and I urge all members to not support this piece of legislation.

To bring it back to the amendment, I will ask all members of this House. Since this piece of legislation is changing things in employment standards, it's making changes to labour relations, this amendment properly captures the essence of changes contained in

this legislation, and all members should be supporting this amendment.

A couple of other things that I also want to highlight. As I said earlier, the only time the word “business” appears in this bill is in its name. There’s nowhere else, as far as I can tell, that the word “business” is even mentioned. The reason for that is that it’s primarily dealing with workers’ rights. It’s picking their pockets, it’s taking money from youth, and it’s taking the rights that in every other jurisdiction Canadians enjoy. It’s reversing the changes that we made to catch up to other jurisdictions in Canada.

So the name given by the government is not the appropriate name for it. Instead, what we are suggesting is very common sense. It will clearly tell what this piece of legislation is doing, and it will help Albertans understand what this piece of legislation is about. Again, it’s about making changes to employment standards. It’s, again, making changes to the Labour Relations Code. It’s changing their banked overtime. It’s changing the criteria around banked overtime. It’s changing the youth minimum wage and all those things that are contained in the pieces of legislation that I mentioned.

Alberta was never closed for business, and this bill in no way, shape, or manner is helping us attract investment, create more jobs, or build pipelines that this government was promising. This amendment will clearly reflect what this piece of legislation is doing, so I urge all my colleagues to support this amendment.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in favour of the amendment, a very reasonable amendment, in my view, that simply proposes that the name of the bill be drained of its political statements and simply reflect the reality that it is amending certain portions of existing statutes, employment standards and the labour code. Certainly, we proposed this amendment because, you know, the term “misnomer” means misnamed. And we certainly believe that these proposals within these amendments to employment standards and the labour code will not in fact accomplish the stated goal, which is why we have proposed this amendment, but instead, in many cases, work against this notion of being open for business, a term that has been borrowed, I suppose, copied and pasted from our friends in Ontario.

4:20

We’re seeing how well rhetorical flourishes and other similar policies to what we’re seeing proposed in this province – it doesn’t matter what they’re named; open for business – they are rendering that particular government in Ontario deeply unpopular. Certainly, some of these approaches are being borrowed from the quote, unquote, open-for-business approach of Doug Ford and his various friends and family members that are running the government in Ontario, and family members of friends, and so on, and so forth. It seems that the trail of friends and insiders never ends in Ontario.

Anyway, you know, this government has already, despite their affection for renaming bills, in 2015, during the 29th Legislature, if you will, had great affection for renaming bills, whatever they were, while in opposition. Our view is that in this case we ought to revert to the standard convention in parliamentary democracies of simply calling something what it is. In this case we are making certain amendments to employment standards, in particular, and that’s probably where I will focus my comments, Madam Chair.

I think it’s reasonable to point out ways in which this act is not – in fact, it closes business depending on which businesses and which people’s business we are discussing. For example, if you are a person who works in a restaurant that is normally closed on

Mondays, and many are – like, hairstylists and others oftentimes will close on Mondays and Tuesdays and kind of take the weekend then or, at least, Mondays as downtime for staff or owners or others. If one normally does not work Mondays, but Canada Day, for example, falls on a Monday, as it did yesterday, and the business chooses to be open, obviously, because there are more people in the streets, more people out and about – it’s a holiday for people so, obviously, they are going to be bringing their dollars to various eating and drinking establishments, as is conventional in Canada – what ends up happening, then, is that a person who is a server in an establishment such as that will not benefit from statutory pay for working that statutory holiday.

That makes things confusing oftentimes for people who have not worked so many Mondays in the last month. Those kinds of calculations which are sometimes quite difficult, particularly for young people – obviously, people do get paid the overtime if they normally work a Monday, but not if they don’t. Certainly, when it comes time to be open for the business of expanding consumer opportunities and ability to pay one’s bills, for people working in the service industry this act is not appropriately named. It doesn’t open up service industry people in such a situation as to be able to get ahead when they are working away at jobs like that.

Similarly, a proposed liquor server differential does nothing for people working in that industry to be able to get ahead. Certainly, there are some other provisions here – hourly workers in the oil and gas sector, for example, not being able to benefit from time and a half, being paid out on their banked overtime is certainly not something that is going to allow them to get ahead or potentially open their own business eventually, to have the capital to be able to do so through savings, which a lot of people do with their overtime pay, use it to further other initiatives that they might be undertaking, whether that’s fixing their own roof or starting their own business or meeting the needs of their families.

You know, this bill is a gift for certain people but not others. Certainly, in using that catchphrase, in Ontario we’re seeing that a year and a half on now or about a year on. It would be regrettable, indeed, if this government was going down that same road of sloganeering at the expense of ordinary, working-class people.

Other ways that this bill is not particularly open for business, so therefore it would be wise to rename it, is that a number of other things remain untouched; for example, the question of paid or unpaid internships, tips, mandatory fees for things like uniforms. Those are the kinds of things, when you talk to ordinary people about employment standards, that they’re really, actually, quite concerned about. And that’s where, if we wanted to actually take some action on fairness, there would’ve been some opportunities, I think, for this government to really engage with the service industry, if they wanted to actually put their mark on this and stand up for some of our lowest paid workers, minimum wage workers, who are often disadvantaged by these types of policies.

You know, I think what’s interesting here is the overall context of calling something open for business when you actually talk to people. I know that when I talk to small-business owners and medium-sized enterprises as well, certainly in southern Alberta, and when we talk to larger enterprises, we’re looking at large investments of private capital in Alberta. What do we see that actually makes us open for business, and what do we hear? Well, we hear things like investors of various kinds, from small and up to big, are looking for a highly educated population, which indeed Alberta has. We are still, as far as I know – I’d be happy to correct the record on this – the youngest and best educated population in Canada, or at least it was the case. I haven’t seen any policies in Ontario recently that would cause them to overtake us, but who knows if there are updated numbers on that matter. Employers and

large investors look for a good health care system. It's a tremendous expense for those doing business south of the border when they have to cover those costs on their own. That's what makes Alberta open for business.

A well-functioning, integrated postsecondary education system that values both the research side, commercialization of intellectual property on the higher education side, as well as appropriate investments in skilled trades and playing to where the puck is going and not where it is: that's what makes Alberta open for business. So when we have a labour market development and training approach that turns a blind eye to emerging industries such as artificial intelligence, we have to wonder just how open for business we really are, Madam Chair.

Certainly, one of the things that one hears from large investors is the question of infrastructure. Given that so much of our foreign direct investment, in particular, is focused in heavy industry, investors are looking for jurisdictions where the bridges, the roads are in good shape and can handle some of the larger investments and transportation of heavy equipment and so on that define a large part of our economic activity here in Alberta. So, you know, simply taking a pass on investing in infrastructure because of some debt-aversion ideology that doesn't recognize that that's how you pay for capital investments doesn't make us open for business. That's, again, another way in which the government's approach and sort of desire to build a certain story or narrative is incorrect and off the mark given that they are now, with every available opportunity, engaging in a number of different stories around Alberta's relative debt position and the need to invest in infrastructure, tilling the soil and softening up the electorate for a large rethink on our infrastructure investments, which, I'm sure, will come as a great surprise to municipalities and others who were just starting to catch up on their infrastructure needs. Certainly, that is coming. Those are the sorts of things, Madam Chair, that make a jurisdiction open for business, if you will, on the business side.

4:30

Another point I want to make in discussing this bill as being quote, unquote, open for business is to look at what happened. It is reversing a number of changes that were made in Bill 17. The act itself was brought in in 2017 and came into force January 1, 2018, so let's have a look at what happened in 2018. Was Alberta all of a sudden closed for business and that necessitated some of the changes that we see in this bill? The answer is no.

If one is interested in an evidence-based analysis of what happened in the Alberta economy in 2018, if one is interested in looking at the facts of the economic record in 2018, we had the fastest growing economy in Canada at that point. We led the country in a number of different important indicators, including manufacturing, exports, some indicators of employment growth, and continued to lead the country in average weekly earnings and, I believe, in private capital investment per capita as well. Generally speaking, Alberta is far and away a leader this year. Even with the slowing of the economy in April and May, we still tend to lead the country in per capita business investment simply given, first of all, the size of our economy and the kinds of investments that the private sector is making in this province.

Certainly, the evidence doesn't show at all that the reasonable changes that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods brought in, the changes that indeed placed Alberta squarely within the mainstream of employment standards statutory guidance to employers – no doors were closed. In fact, in the context of these changes Alberta was a leader, an economic leader in the country, and 2018 was really when we saw the recovery that was built to last

begin to take shape and actually have a material impact for ordinary people in this province.

If the changes that were focused on ordinary people and making life just that little bit better in terms of minimum wage standards, leaves, you know, holiday pay distinctions – those kinds of changes certainly reduced red tape as well for small employers. There's no question about that. If those changes were accompanied by relatively positive economic indicators across the board and didn't close anyone to business – in fact, the biggest drops in our economic activity came prior to this act coming into force, that is to say between about August 2014 and about January 2016, when we saw a precipitous slide in the price of oil, both of WTI and WCS, and then the recovery began in 2017. New employment standards and so on came into effect in 2018. The province continued to lead the country in a number of indicators.

If it wasn't this bill that closed us for business, then what is this bill for? It is to amend sections of the labour code and the employment standards by taking things away from ordinary people whose lives were made just that little bit better, just that little bit easier. Now we're just giving those gifts back to employers. Certainly, we are not open for business for all segments of Alberta's society and are, in fact, closing off opportunities for many people.

You know, one of the other things that makes us open for business, I believe, and is not in this act is that back when employment standards were reviewed in '07 and certainly in 2014, there were a number of submissions at that time – I was involved in some of this in my previous life – around people with disabilities and better integration into the workforce. One of the things that we did in 2018 was that we abolished the differential wage, or the minimum wage exemption, if you will, for people with disabilities. You know, again, if the minister and others in the government wanted to amend employment standards to beef some of that up, they had the opportunity to do so, to make sure that we had broadly inclusive workplaces, that we had appropriate work, and all of those kinds of things. Some of that could have been captured within the Employment Standards Code, for sure. I mean, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is a superhero, in my view, on her reconsideration of employment standards and the labour code, but I'm sure that upon consultation there was probably more to do there around inclusive workplaces and so on.

What really alarmed me today was in learning that some of the redirection of inclusive postsecondary education funds would be redirected into trades or other training away from postsecondaries. Now, I'm going to double-check whether, in fact, that is the case. I certainly heard that today during I think it was a member's statement. You know, that would be unfortunate indeed because, actually, what makes us open for business is that we have opportunities for everyone. The slogan of the city of Lethbridge is opportunity for all, not opportunity for some people who have certain abilities and find themselves differently abled in other ways.

You know, certainly, there's work to be done there around inclusion because that's actually what makes us stronger. That's actually what makes the business climate in better shape in this province, to be broadly inclusive and to ensure that all work is valued by all people. So I think there was a missed opportunity there, and there may even be more to say on this matter if we are reprofiling funds out of inclusive postsecondary education into other trades or vocational initiatives. We wouldn't want to see instances where employment standards directors were finding ways to somehow circumvent the minimum wage requirements or other requirements for people with disabilities. That would be very alarming and certainly, I think, contrary to the intent of how this government and how this minister wants to proceed relative to people with disabilities. I believe them when they say that they want

broadly inclusive workplaces in societies. I think we share those values on both sides of the House, and I certainly wouldn't want to see any backslide on that.

I think I have mostly covered here, Madam Chair, why I support this amendment. You know, this amendment is pretty common sense. It's pretty simple. Let's just call this bill what it is. You know, with the trajectory of the government of Doug Ford, I'm not sure anybody is going to want to name anything after any slogan that he's been using given how deeply unpopular he is and how he just can't seem to help himself in terms of hiring his buddies and his buddies' family members and using the government of Ontario in ways that are maybe not consistent with . . .

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

4:40

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I, too, am going to be supporting the amendment before us. Of course, I believe it to be a more strategic and clear name than An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business.

You know, you might say that, well, the NDP government, Edmonton-Mill Woods and the NDP government at the time, of course, named ours the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act in 2017. We did that particularly because the prior Employment Standards Code and the Labour Relations Code had not been significantly improved, updated for almost 30 years. There needed to be a massive communication effort for workers in this province that the kinds of things that were being done would make our employment standards and labour relations far more friendly to the people in those workplaces, and it was far more fair.

A number of important changes took place under the Employment Standards Code changes, namely minimum wage changes, which this government has chosen to roll back for young people. Leaves were also significantly improved after being far too long out of the mainstream with regard to changes to leaves across the country, leaving Alberta far less desirable from a perspective of a worker's point of view on their family lives in particular.

The other kinds of important changes under the Employment Standards Code changes that took place were with regard to rest periods and overtime, termination and temporary layoffs, and vacation pay deductions, general holiday and general holiday pay. Those were all under the Employment Standards Code changes for what we thought was a fair title for Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, at the time. Madam Chair, that was something that was received well by workers across this province.

The other part of the work that we did was with regard to the Labour Relations Code changes. Again, you've heard where those hadn't changed for a significant period of time, leaving our workers out of step with the rest of the country.

You know, the government probably believes that An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business is not a bad title as well, but I can tell you that, as my colleague from Lethbridge-West was just talking about with regard to the annual report that was just tabled, I believe, on Friday of last week, business in Alberta, as reported in this annual report, was doing better – well, the amount of corporate income tax was \$4.9 billion, Madam Chair, \$1.4 billion more than 2017-18 and \$320 million greater than budget. So if we just look at that, we can understand that businesses were doing better coming out of the recession, and they had posted greater corporate income tax revenue, greater profits, and then greater revenue to the government of Alberta. The forecast in that Budget 2018 was based on the corporate profits continuing to improve, and early in 2018-19 this was supported by elevated oil prices.

I was just taking a look back at the history provided on the back of this executive summary. I can tell you, Madam Chair, that the only two years in the last 10 that corporate income tax revenue was higher was when – I was just trying to identify the price of WTI and WCS in those years, and I can tell you that they were significant. I think it was '08. No. It was '13-14, '14-15. In '13-14 the oil price per WTI barrel on average was \$99.05; call it a hundred dollars. In '14-15 it was \$80.48; call it \$81. A hundred dollars per WTI barrel on average in that fiscal year and the corporate income tax revenue was \$5.488 billion. In '14-15, when it was \$81 a barrel, it was \$5.796 billion.

If we look at what this NDP government had to deal with in regard to the oil barrel, when we came in, it was \$45 a barrel. The next year it was \$48 a barrel, call it. The next year, in '17-18, it was \$54 a barrel, call it. Then in the '18-19 year, which this annual report is based on, it was \$63 a barrel. WCS basically followed that as well.

The previous PC government had the benefit of \$100 a barrel in '13-14 and \$81 a barrel in '14-15. We had significantly less at \$45. I think our leader: that was her first question off the top earlier today. She was talking about the previous PC government: you couldn't balance the budget. You can see that where there are deficits in all of those years when the PC government was in power. You couldn't balance the budget at \$100 a barrel: that's what she was talking about.

Madam Chair, I think the point that you can see that I'm making is that Alberta was open for business. The work we were doing was seeing more corporate income tax come in in 2018-19 than was anticipated in our budget, and that was because businesses were coming out of the recession. We had a corporate tax amount that was in the middle of all of the provinces, and we were not giving up corporate income tax, as this government wishes to do, which will cause a significant hole going forward in the revenues of this province. That's the first point I wanted to make.

I also wanted to say that the amendment that we're talking about here makes a great deal more sense in terms of what is actually being identified. Though we called ours something different when we were in power and had the opportunity to label it, we did it because there was a great need to communicate the fact that the workplaces were more family friendly as a result of introducing job-protected leaves and improving maternity leave and compassionate care standards for Albertans, something that hadn't been significantly updated in 30 years in this province, which is an abrogation of responsibility of a government, Madam Chair. To throw trial balloons up and then to quash them because portions of the business community or electorate don't like them is really not a way to govern and more of a way to go sideways for about 30 years than should have happened.

Madam Chair, the other thing that we need to recognize is that the work we were doing was to ensure that, as I said, the workplaces were more friendly for workers, but we were also looking to support low-wage working people in this province. If we could have kept that in place with the new government, that would have been a kind of a stellar thing in Alberta, where it is more expensive to live, we know, because the private sector, being so successful for so many years here, has driven up the hourly wages across our province. We were behind significantly in terms of vulnerable low-wage workers, who are more vulnerable to switches, changes in the economy: they would be the first out the door. What we did was put those low-wage workers on a step where they could use those monies to reinvest into the economy significantly and to improve the quality of life for them and their children. That has now been taken away.

4:50

I know the government says that, you know, this is a minimum in terms of what youth can be paid, but we know that people from the western Canada Restaurants Canada actually believe that paying young workers less will cause many more of them to get first-time job opportunities. I think what it'll actually cause – and this has been identified by many of my colleagues previously – is those young workers to be not exploited but hired over people with greater experience, who will be put out as a result of the \$13 minimum wage being put forward by this government.

Madam Chair, we in Alberta hold many things to be truths about this province. One of them in particular is that we're self-starters. We've always kind of worked hard, we don't look for any kind of handouts from any people or any other individuals, and we care deeply about each other and family. I would submit that those same sorts of beliefs are held by every elected official in every province and territory in this country, so we're not that different. We're not that different from people on the east coast or west coast or, indeed, northern Canada. We all just want to make sure that we take care of our families, we support good communities, and we all live by the rule of law.

An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, as I've said previously, Madam Chair, is too far balanced on the side of business interests only, and we're not just businesses. For sure, there are job creators who do a great yeoman service for this province. I can tell you, by looking at the annual report, that those same job creators paid more in corporate income tax last year than they did the year before and the year before, and the only times when they paid more corporate income tax is when oil was out of this world in terms of stratospheric prices for an oil barrel. Those times, as we all know, are not coming back any time soon.

The right thing to do is to continue to support the incredible improvements that were made in 2017. The right thing to do would be to support the amendment that's before us, that gives greater clarity to what this bill is actually about. The right thing to do is to continue to support young workers with a \$15-an-hour minimum wage in this province. The right thing to do is to get back to balance in a way that is measured, a way that doesn't unduly harm or burden segments of our society; namely, low-wage workers, who are in jobs that can change at any moment as a result of the economy.

Madam Chair, we were going down that road, and I think that if you look at the executive summary or the full report, you can see that there were significant improvements made by the previous government in terms of the reductions in the deficit. We would have got to where we said we were going to get, which is balancing by 2023-2024, taking this measured approach and ensuring that we continue to support those at the lower end of society, fairly deal with those who are job creators, like every other province is dealing with them, and that we continue to invest in capital infrastructure and keep Albertans working. Now, that's what our Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act endeavoured to do.

The struggle I'm having is that this Bill 2, which we have from time to time called the pick-your-pockets bill, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, is speaking only to one segment of our population, and that's those in the corporate world. I guess it relies on the great work that the NDP government did in the past around the fair and family workplaces act, but it takes out too many of the improvements that for too long had been significantly not addressed by the previous PC governments in this province.

Madam Chair, I do think the amendment makes a great deal of sense. I believe that it's clear in An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, and I do think we need to make things clear for not only the electorate but Albertans in general. One of the things we can

clear up is that corporate profits were going up and corporate income taxes were going up in this province far more than we had anticipated with Budget 2018 in the first place.

With that, Madam Chair, I'm going to sit down and give way. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for his thoughtful interventions on this matter. Of course, he has a long track record of working on behalf of poor and vulnerable people in the city of Calgary throughout his life, and I think he has a lot of valuable things to say in this debate.

I want to build on some of the comments that were made by my colleague and friend from Lethbridge-West, who was talking about the impact of a lot of these employment standards and Labour Relations Code changes on postsecondary education. Of course, this is all in the context of the amendment which we're speaking to, which suggests that we should stop talking about the measures in this bill making this province open for business but, in fact, be a little bit more forthcoming with the actual reality of what the bill does and just call it the Changes to the Employment Standards and Labour Relations Act.

One of the things that concerned me about the exchange that we had in question period, with relation to potential clawbacks of funding to the Alberta machine-learning institute and the refusal of the UCP members to commit to continuing to fund tech education programs in the advanced education sector, is the fact that in order for Alberta to be open for business, we need to be open to all businesses and that by removing government support in these nascent industries, we really threaten to make Alberta closed to businesses that haven't traditionally made their homes here. Certainly, in my time as Minister of Advanced Education we heard from a number of tech employers who were interested in coming to Alberta but refused to do so because they simply couldn't hire the skilled professionals to fill the jobs that would become available if those companies set up shop here. One of the reasons that our government undertook a \$50 million, five-year initiative to expand the number of tech-related education seats in postsecondary institutions all across the province was to meet that demand.

It's interesting, Madam Chair, that even today, when I go to look at the Alberta provincial government Economic Dashboard website, though we have an unemployment rate of just under 7 per cent, there are more than 37,000 vacant jobs available today in the province of Alberta. A lot of those job vacancies exist because we don't have people with the education that's required to fill those jobs.

5:00

Now, my friend from Lethbridge-West in her comments remarked that Alberta has the youngest and most educated professional workforce in the country, and that's true, but we really have a tale of two provinces when it comes to advanced education. We have a significant number of people who move to Alberta because of the opportunities that exist here, and they are very highly educated and motivated to go to work in their sector of choice. They bring with them their skills and their education, and that's what inflates our education statistics here in the province of Alberta.

If a student, though, is born and raised and completes their education here in Alberta, they're less likely to move on to advanced education than students in any other part of the country except for Manitoba, Madam Chair, and I would humbly suggest that perhaps

Manitoba is not the measure of success when it comes to educating our workforce.

You know, if we were truly open for business, we would be looking to fill those job vacancies that tech employers are telling us they need to fill and continue to invest in the education of the workforce here in Alberta. I certainly hope that the members opposite take their own aspirations to heart and implement some concrete action that will actually increase Alberta's business activity in sectors that we haven't traditionally been focused on developing and spend that money developing a high-tech workforce.

With that, Madam Chair, I know that my friends here on this side have a number of things that we'd like to contribute to debate, but I think that at this time I would move that we adjourn debate on this matter.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Schmidt: Would we rise and report progress, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Milliken: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. 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 Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

Government Motions

Voting Rights of Members

9. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly recognize the right of members to vote freely on all matters of conscience.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of Motion 9, which is before the Assembly. This should not be a motion of the slightest contention but, rather, a reaffirmation of an ancient parliamentary and democratic principle and one that is, nevertheless, important to restate, I believe, in our time and in this place.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when the members of the government caucus were sworn into this place, I quoted at length from one of the great statesmen of Parliament, the great Edmund Burke, who helped, really, to define the modern concept of parliamentary government, particularly the responsibility of parliamentarians to their constituents.

Edmund Burke, in one of the most famous political speeches of the modern era, said to his electors in Bristol:

Certainly... it ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents. Their wishes ought to have great weight with him; their opinion, high respect; their business, unremitted attention. It is his duty to sacrifice his repose, his pleasures, his

satisfactions, to theirs [to his constituents]; and above all, ever, and in all cases, to prefer their interest to his own.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The only caveat that Burke placed on this duty in his famous speech was on matters of conscience, on which he said:

But his unbiassed opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living.

Mr. Speaker, this is the principle that we seek to reaffirm in Motion 9.

Now, I note with pleasure that the House earlier adopted Motion 11, which changed the standing orders to deliver on another of our platform commitments, which was to more narrowly define matters of confidence in order to allow more free votes on all matters in the Legislature, not just matters of conscience. Allow me, therefore, to quote at length from Alberta Strong & Free, the blueprint for government offered by members of the government caucus in the recent election, which was, I believe, the most detailed and comprehensive election platform ever published, with 375 specific commitments, over 117 pages, including a very robust section on democratic reform, including reform of the practices in this place.

Albertans want to know that their MLAs are truly representing them in the Legislature. While party cohesion is an important element of our Parliamentary democracy – especially on budget matters and election platform commitments – there is a widespread view that MLAs do not have enough flexibility to vote according to their best judgement, or to represent a clear local consensus.

The 1985 Special Committee on the Reform of the House of Commons...

It was known as the McGrath committee.

...noted that "strict party discipline had developed into an article of faith, despite the fact that very few votes actually involve true questions of confidence," and recommended that "only explicit motions of confidence, or matters central to the government's platform, be treated as such," with the expectation that this would lead to more free votes.

By the way, all parties were represented on this committee. My good friend the former federal and long-standing House leader of the New Democrats in the House of Commons, Bill Blaikie, was, I know, in strong concurrence with these recommendations.

While this proposed reform has never been fully [and formally] adopted in Canadian legislatures, it has become both the convention and [indeed] the law in [our Mother Parliament] Westminster... where a government must lose an explicit confidence motion to cause a potential election. This gives much greater latitude to MPs to vote freely, as not every vote is automatically considered a potential matter of confidence.

I carry on quoting from our platform:

A United Conservative Government would make it clear on the first day of the next legislative session that only explicit matters of confidence, or matters central to its platform, will be treated as confidence measures. This will give government MLAs much greater scope to vote freely. All matters of conscience will be subject to free votes, consistent with centuries of Parliamentary convention.

It was upon that basis that my friend the hon. Government House Leader introduced Motion 11, which passed through this place last month. Motion 11 constituted an amendment to the standing orders, now to read:

31.1 The confidence of the Assembly in the Government may be raised by means of a vote on

- (a) a motion explicitly worded to declare that the Assembly has, or has not, confidence in the Government,

- (b) a motion by the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, "That the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the Government,"
- (c) a motion for the passage of an Appropriation Bill as defined in Standing Order 64,
- (d) a motion for an address in reply to the Lieutenant Governor's speech, or
- (e) any other motion that the Government has expressly declared a question of confidence.

Mr. Speaker, that was, I'm pleased to say, adopted by this place.

5:10

I should also emphasize that this is not only now the convention but indeed the law in our Mother Parliament at Westminster. In fact, the U.K. House of Commons has enumerated criteria very similar to those I just cited as the basis for confidence votes in the Mother Parliament. The reason they have done so is because over time there was sort of a broadening of the confidence convention to include votes on virtually everything, which circumscribed the prerogative of members to apply their own judgment and to represent their constituents and in some cases perhaps to vote in accordance with their duly formed conscience.

I know that not only my New Democrat friend Bill Blaikie, not only the nonpartisan McGrath commission but also Preston Manning, the son of Alberta's longest ever serving Premier – Preston himself was a very close student of this place. I mean, he did his homework in a room off the side of the Premier's office all through school and university and followed the debates of this place very closely. Mr. Manning has long been a critic of this problem with misinterpretation of the confidence convention in the Canadian Legislatures and has long argued that if the House of Commons, for example, or other Legislatures were to more clearly circumscribe what constitutes a confidence convention, it would expand the ambit for regular parliamentarians to vote freely when the confidence of the House is not at question.

In adopting Standing Order 31.1, we have essentially adopted the relatively new convention of the Westminster Parliament in this respect, but we thought it was meritorious for this Assembly to focus specifically on the prerogative of members to vote freely on matters of conscience. That should apply broadly, Mr. Speaker, in my judgment, even when it might touch on, for example, a major platform commitment, because there is nothing more important than conscience.

It is no coincidence that the first fundamental freedom enumerated in the Canadian 1960 Bill of Rights and the 1982 Charter of Rights is the freedom of conscience and religion, freedoms that are also enumerated in the universal declaration of human rights and, I believe, in every major human rights instrument around the world, freedoms that are deeply ingrained in our own tradition of parliamentary government.

I quoted earlier from Edmund Burke, and I could also quote, as I did on the day of our swearing in as MLAs, from William Pitt the Younger, one of the great Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and who was also head of government for the Canadian colonies at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries. Pitt was a conservative reformer who was distressed with the abuse of the so-called rotten boroughs, which allowed for a growing disconnection between parliamentarians and their constituents. In response to this, in his great Reform Act Pitt said the following:

That beautiful frame of government, which has made us the envy and admiration of mankind, in which the people were entitled to hold so distinguished a share, was so far dwindled and departed from its original purity, as that the representatives ceased, in a great degree, to be connected with the people. It was the essence

of the constitution, that the people had a share in the government by the means of representation; and its excellence and permanency was calculated to consist in this representation, having been designed to be equal, easy, practicable, and complete. When it ceased to be so; when the representative ceased to have connection with the constituent . . . there was a defect in the frame of representation, and it was not innovation, but recovery of constitution, to repair it.

That, again, I think, is the sentiment, the constitutional sentiment, which informed the government motion which adopted 31.1 of the standing orders.

Mr. Speaker, essentially what we are saying through this very modest motion is a recommitment of this place to not just the freedom but, I believe, the responsibility of legislators to vote in accordance with their conscience.

Let me go one step further and say, Mr. Speaker, that in acknowledging the freedom of conscience, we also touch on one of the principles which parliamentary government is dependent upon, and that is the principle of civility. I would in this context define civility as a basic posture of mutual respect, respect for the views and the most deeply held convictions of others. In a lack of civility, in an incivil political culture, which arguably is what we see in many parts of the democratic world today – where there is a lack of civility, there is a deep lack for the basic views or convictions of others, even the most deeply felt convictions. With that lack of mutual respect, with that lack of civility can come the tendency to demonize one's opponents, and that demonization I believe can coarsen public discourse to a point where working together across partisan, philosophical, ideological lines can become very difficult indeed. I believe this is what we see, tragically, in some political systems around the world. We may even see it in this place from time to time. I hope that does not become a habit.

I believe it is incumbent upon all of us – none of us are perfect in this respect, Mr. Speaker – as custodians of this parliamentary institution to be as mindful as we can about the need for that civility which is predicated on mutual respect for one another, for the views of those that we do not share.

Now, thank goodness that in our parliamentary democracy we resolve those differences peacefully through elections – we've just been through such an election – and then we come to this place and continue to debate those differences. But the whole premise of this institution is that the foundation of that never-ending organic or democratic debate is, at the core, some degree of mutual respect of civility so that we can clash, disagree with each other strongly, passionately, pointedly from time to time, but hopefully that clash does not descend into a kind of coarse and sometimes even vulgar demonization of one's political adversaries.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Really, at the heart of that mutual respect must lie the freedom of conscience, I submit, Madam Deputy Speaker, the responsibility to acknowledge that people come to their own most deeply held convictions on matters of moral conscience, for example, through introspection, through different lived experiences, operating from different first principles. I believe that freedom of conscience is particularly important in a pluralistic society such as ours.

I look around this Assembly, and I see colleagues of mine, either here or who may not be present but who are members, from many different faiths and philosophical traditions. I see a friend of mine, the Minister of Infrastructure, who grew up in India, who was raised in the Hindu tradition and is an observant practitioner of that ancient religious tradition. I see my friend the Member for Calgary-North, who was raised in Pakistan, who is devoted to his Islamic faith and who holds the values of that faith dearly. I see members of this place

who have no explicit religious conviction but nevertheless come into this Assembly with their own first principles, with a kind of natural faith in how the world works, in what matters most in life. I see friends of the Christian tradition, of, I know, many different – the Buddhist tradition in this caucus as well.

5:20

All of them, each and every one of them, Madam Deputy Speaker, arrive with the responsibility, in this place, to exercise their very best judgment. Often that judgment is formed in part by their conscience, which is informed by their most deeply held values. I submit that at this sometimes tense and difficult time in our public discourse it is important for us to reinforce the mutual respect amongst one another for those convictions rooted in conscience.

Madam Speaker, I believe it's very important for us to reaffirm that principle, which we seek to do in this motion, and I commend it to all members of the Assembly.

I adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Caucus Affiliation

10. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly express its opposition to the practice of members changing their caucus affiliation unless that member is to sit as an independent or has resigned and been returned to the Assembly after being re-elected in a by-election under the new affiliation.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of Government Motion 10, as just quoted by my colleague the hon. Government House Leader. I quoted moments ago from the United Conservative platform with respect to democratic reform and free votes, confidence votes on matters of conscience. To clarify, I'm actually quoting from the backgrounders that were issued in support of the UCP platform. Believe it or not, the 117 pages. If we were to actually include all of the background materials, which include many of the more specific and detailed commitments, it would run in the hundreds of pages.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Now, that's a mandate.

Mr. Kenney: It's a very deep mandate.

I'd like to quote from some of the background material that was published in support of Alberta Strong & Free, our election platform. Under the headline Ban Floor Crossing it reads:

Albertans are frustrated with MLAs who disregard their electoral mandate by "crossing the floor," i.e. joining a political party other than the one for which they were elected. In particular, the notorious mass floor crossing of 2014 damaged the confidence that Albertans have in the value of their vote.

There is now a strong convention in the Westminster . . . Parliament that any MP seeking to join another party must first resign, and run under that new party's banner in a byelection.

A United Conservative Government would introduce a motion at the beginning of the next legislative session calling for this practice to be observed by any Member before they can cross the floor to join another party.

The United Conservative Caucus will not accept an MLA from another party seeking to join its caucus, unless that MLA first resigns and is elected under the UCP banner in a byelection.

Madam Speaker, I would allude back to some of the most important historic citations of the nature of parliament by Burke and Pitt in my earlier speech to reinforce the importance of the connection of trust between parliamentarians and their constituents. In the way that the Westminster system has evolved, the vast majority of parliamentarians – in fact, in this instance, in this Assembly, all of us – were elected as representatives, as members, as candidates for a particular political party. As we know, political parties are essentially coalitions of people with common values and interests who express those values and interests in platforms for which they seek a mandate. When a member is elected according to such a platform, there is, I believe, an implicit expectation on the part of that MLA's constituents that they will, during the subsequent term, conduct themselves in supporting that platform, in supporting those specific policy commitments and the values that undergird them.

At the same time, this is a bit of a complex issue because I certainly recognize, as would Burke, that a parliamentarian owes his or her constituents their best judgment and that there must be in this place a great latitude for members to act in accordance with that judgment. Madam Deputy Speaker, I for one can certainly conceive of legitimate circumstances where an MLA would conclude that they are no longer able to keep trust with their voters by sitting in a particular party caucus. Often when people leave a party caucus, they say, "My party left me," and sometimes that's true. We can certainly think of times in Canadian parliamentary history where there have been significant changes in the makeup, the leadership, the policy direction of a party, where an MLA, an MP could, I think, legitimately conclude that they are best served outside of that caucus.

Sometimes major issues arise where an MLA might be on the losing side of an internal caucus debate on a really centrally important issue for themselves or their constituents and they feel that they can no longer support the direction of that caucus or its leadership. I respect that, and that is why I believe that it is both undesirable and impracticable for the Assembly to seek to prevent a member from leaving their caucus. I understand that there could be reasons why a member decides to go and sit as an independent, for example.

However – however, Madam Deputy Speaker – if a member chooses to not just leave their caucus but to, in the parlance of the parliamentary tradition, cross the floor and join another party whose values and policy commitments are substantially different from the one for which they were elected, then that, I think, raises a deep concern about violating the trust between the representative and their electors. We've seen many cases of that. Well, in the last Legislature we saw a member elected for the Progressive Conservative party on a particular mandate cross the floor to the NDP party. There were very few issues on which those two parties agreed.

I can think of another case back in the 1990s, when I think it was Stan Woloshyn left. He was elected as a New Democrat MLA for Stony Plain, left that party and joined the Progressive Conservative caucus of Ralph Klein. In fact, I think a couple of Liberal MLAs did as well at that time. Those are parties who in that context had substantially different policy visions, Madam Speaker, which means that these MLAs were elected to pursue one set of policies – that was their de facto contract with their electors – and then they decided midstream to completely jettison the program which they were elected to implement and represent to cross the floor for various reasons and pursue an entirely different policy agenda.

You know, this reached kind of an apogee in December of 2014, with the notorious mass floor crossings that occurred in this place. I think one could argue, Madam Speaker, that there were not

profound policy differences between the then Wildrose and Progressive Conservative parties, but certainly the public concluded – overwhelmingly, the public concluded – that there was no defensible rationale for that mass floor crossing, that it represented a kind of cynical backroom deal-making done without any degree of transparency or consultation or democratic consent. I would argue, I think without much contention, that that decision led in part to the downfall of the Progressive Conservative government after some four and a half decades. Voters sent that party and, I believe, all of us a very strong message, which was a rejection of the cynicism of that kind of large-scale backroom deal-making and floor crossing.

That is one of the reasons why we committed in our platform to address the problem of unprincipled floor crossings, and that is why we are proposing this motion, Madam Deputy Speaker. I'll read from it again:

... that the Legislative Assembly express its opposition to the practice of members changing their caucus affiliation unless that member is to sit as an independent or has resigned and been returned to the Assembly after being re-elected in a by-election under the new affiliation.

5:30

Now, let me say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that this is not an amendment to the standing orders. It is not a bill. It is merely what I would characterize as a sense-of-the-House motion. The former New Democrat government of former Premier Gary Doer in Manitoba, in fact, did bring forward a bill, which is now an act of the Manitoba Legislature which makes it ostensibly illegal for a member to cross the floor. Now, I have my doubts about the enforceability of that statute or, for that matter, its constitutionality, but no one has challenged it.

We are not proposing to go as far as the New Democrat government of Manitoba did a decade ago in creating a legal prohibition against the practice of floor crossing. Instead, what we seek to do in this motion is to put members on the record, because we're all going to have to vote on this. We're asking members to go on the record in voting for or against this principle.

And then should some member subsequent to that decide that they're going to up and cross the floor – I think in this Legislature there's a fairly low probability of that happening, but you can never discount it. I'm sure my NDP friends couldn't imagine, even begin to conceive the possibility of this happening. They should refer to – there were CCF MPs who became Tory MPs back in the day, like, for example, the great Douglas Fisher. Oh, my goodness, we're missing that the – I'm sorry. I shouldn't comment on anybody's absence. I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. I'll take that back.

We have in this Assembly the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, whose uncle, I believe, crossed the floor from being a Conservative to a member of the Trudeau Liberal cabinet, and I think that there are still people – unfortunately, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler still lost votes on that 35 years later.

Mr. Jason Nixon: It stopped him from breaking even.

Mr. Kenney: That stopped him at 78 per cent.

As I mentioned, there was Stan Woloshyn, who crossed the floor from the NDP caucus to the Progressive Conservative caucus of Ralph Klein, the man whose memory is much derided by the NDP. So anything is possible.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Karen McPherson, in the last Legislature, to the Alberta Party.

Mr. Kenney: Indeed.

For those reasons, Madam Deputy Speaker, I submit that it's valuable for us to put ourselves on the record so if one of us suddenly decides that we're no longer comfortable in a particular party and decides to adopt midstream another political agenda without consulting with our voters, at least the voters can then say: "Just a minute. You voted on this. You said that you wouldn't do this without resigning and calling a by-election."

Now, some people might say: oh, this is some weird innovation, and there's no justifiable expense for a by-election. Madam Deputy Speaker, I would point those skeptics to the new convention that has developed in our Mother Parliament in Westminster. I don't know when exactly it began, but certainly in the last – I mean, this is something that would have happened back in the 18th century, the 19th century but is now once again the strong convention in the Mother Parliament. For example, in the last parliament, two Conservative members of the British House of Commons left their caucus to go and sit as members of the United Kingdom Independence Party, UKIP. They both resigned their seats and ran an immediate by-election. They both regained their mandates to serve with fresh, renewed mandates as UKIP members. This has happened in a number of cases of members coming and going between parties in the House of Commons at Westminster in the past 15 years or so. That has become – I think that is an entirely reasonable expectation, I submit, Madam Deputy Speaker.

All we're trying to do here is offer a sense-of-the-House motion, an expectation that if members leave their caucus to join another caucus, they should refresh their mandate from their voters in a by-election. Now, I note that in this motion we are not proposing that members should be required to do so in order to sit as an independent because, again, I don't think that's the same as adopting an entirely different political agenda.

Finally, as I quoted from our platform, the United Conservative Party will give this more practical expression by adopting voluntarily as an internal policy that we will not accept an MLA from another party seeking to join our caucus unless that MLA first resigns and is elected under the UCP banner in a by-election. I believe that's a position supported by the vast majority of Albertans. I believe that this more strongly reinforces our individual accountability to our voters to respect the electoral mandates that we have received.

With that, I encourage members to vote in favour of Motion 10, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole (continued)

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 2 An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business (continued)

The Chair: Again, we are on amendment A2. Are there any comments, questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate you recognizing me. Like I said, I know there have been members from the opposite side just jumping up in droves, but somehow you managed to pick me out of the crowd, so I appreciate that very

much. We're back talking about the amendment to change the title of Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, which I think should be more appropriately renamed the Employment Standards and Labour Relations Statutes Amendment Act, 2019.

Of course, I have gone on at a little bit of length about why we need to rename this because what's been proposed in Bill 2, which has fondly become known as the Act to Pick Albertans' Pockets, really is not setting up Alberta to be open for business. Of course, it would be suggested that it would have to be closed to begin with, which it wasn't, because as I've mentioned before, you know, we have seen billions of dollars being invested in this province. We have seen billions of dollars setting up to invest in this province, including in places like the renewable energy market, the digital media market.

I had mentioned a fantastic company called Improbable, that had moved their head office here. I have to admit, Madam Chair, that I was quite surprised. I did at the time lobby the former minister of economic development and trade on trying to balance out what was going on between British Columbia and Quebec in that industry, which eventually came out as the digital media tax credit. Wow. The response? Boom: Improbable was here the next day practically, so that was very, very encouraging to see. I've always believed that the digital media industry is something that Alberta was missing the boat on, quite honestly. We have postsecondary institutions of very high calibre training potential employees, and whereas these industries would have to recruit these people from Alberta, to have them be able to set up right here – because we've levelled the playing field between two industries that are very robust both in B.C. and Quebec, we've now been able to attract that business and that industry.

I think there's a lot more to be had in that industry, but it means that we need to invest more in it. That was growing. Again, since it was growing, to suggest that Bill 2 will make Alberta open for business – I would surmise that it's already been open for business. Otherwise, none of these companies would have been investing this money or have planned to invest this money.

The renewable energy market: we saw a lot of companies out in Ontario that were eyeing Alberta very, very seriously because Ontario had made moves to close business in that sector there. They thought: "Wow. Alberta is the place. It's going to be happening, so maybe it might be time to pull up stakes and move to Alberta. There's a lot more business going on there."

Certainly, when I look in my own riding of Edmonton-Decore, I mentioned that in 2015 I had a very, very difficult time just trying to find a campaign office and ultimately didn't. In 2019 I was lucky to find one almost at the last minute, so the great news was that business was booming in Edmonton-Decore, and there was no room.

5:40

Again, to suggest that we're going to make Alberta open for business I think is a little bit misleading, and this amendment will correct that. What we're talking about here are more amendments to the labour relations statutes, where these changes are actually being made.

You know, again, when I look at some of these changes being proposed, I cannot really figure out how lowering the youth rate from \$15 an hour to \$13 an hour simply because you're not 18 – I'm not too sure how that opens Alberta for business. What I think it does do is take our youth and put them at a great disadvantage, quite honestly.

I was speaking a bit earlier around our youth, for instance, from our LGBTQ2S-plus community who find themselves in situations where they can no longer stay at home. So they strike out on their

own, which means they have bills to pay, rent, food, maybe car payments, things like that. This may very disproportionately affect them. Of course, in talking to some of these kids and, more broadly, with the three high schools that I have in Edmonton-Decore – I have all three of the high schools in north Edmonton – the students there have figured it out. They even said to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora when she was visiting and ran into some of her students at Westmount mall: look, if we've got five people on shift, just because you pay a couple of us or even all five of us \$2 an hour less, our employer will not hire a sixth person because it only takes five to do the job. So to try to claim that lowering youth by \$2 an hour because they happen to be one year younger certainly doesn't create jobs.

My concerns around the holiday pay, again, are in my own experience through the labour movement, you know, not only seeing bad actors that take advantage of workers – and my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday described his own personal experience over that and being taken advantage of in terms of his holiday pay, his overtime pay. I've seen this even within union contracts, where employers will start to play games. Unfortunately, I even saw those games in my own workplace, where it was unionized. We had great contract language in there that said that after 13 consecutive weeks of working full time, a full-time position was deemed to exist. There was always an excuse, whether it was that somebody was sick, somebody was on vacation, somebody was on disability, and they would say: "Well, sorry. You know, they were actually replacing them." Then, when we would actually get a period where there wasn't anybody off or sick or on vacation, which did actually happen from time to time, it was a case of: well, we're just going to cut your hours in that 13th week. Then you didn't qualify for that full-time position.

I'm very, very concerned that the language in here around the holiday pay may be abused as well. It just seems like it's too easy for those bad actors to start playing around, to create the situations where employees won't get their holiday pay that, you know, they've worked so hard for their employer to do.

The overtime issue I've been very, very clear about. Again, I've seen this in my own experience, where bad actors will set the conditions up so that employers are: if you want to get a job here, well, you're going to have to agree to banking your overtime at straight time, okay? But if you're going to take away your time from your family, from your friends, your plain old free time, that is taking money out of your pocket. I've heard plenty of times from members opposite, you know: well, time is money. Well, time is money here, folks. You've got to stay consistent around this.

So by changing the name, I think it more accurately reflects what Bill 2 is trying to achieve, which – I must be very clear – I don't agree with. I think this is a bad bill. It goes after hard-working Albertans right in their pocketbook.

Of course, you know, if we want to actually make Alberta open for business, we have to make sure that Albertans have the ability to participate in the marketplace and make that business go around because, as I've stated time and time again, a good portion of my constituents in Edmonton-Decore do not squirrel their money away in a Cayman Islands account waiting for that next big stock tip to come by so they can invest thousands of dollars into that; they're buying their food, their shelter, their clothing, their transportation. But wouldn't it be nice if they could also go out and get the things that they want, not only the things they need to survive, be it that big-screen TV, an upgraded vehicle that's more fuel efficient, or booking a nice vacation with their local travel agent, and spend that money locally in the economy?

With that, I find myself just having to really ask members of the government side to really reconsider this because we're not making

Alberta open for business. We're changing labour relations, we're changing standards, and I think the title of this is a little bit misleading and not really true.

I heard members opposite in the 29th Legislature. They used to always chastise the government for its creative names. Here I am again saying: well, if you're going to claim to do this a better way, then you actually have to step up and do this. I think this amendment would achieve that. So I'm urging all members to support this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to ask that we rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Milliken: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. 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 Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried.

Mrs. Savage: Looking at the clock and seeing it is approaching 6 o'clock, not quite 6, I move to adjourn the proceedings till 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:49 p.m.]

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