



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, October 16, 2019

Day 28

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, October 16, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my esteemed pleasure today to introduce to you a group of visiting parliamentarians from Hokkaido, Japan. Hokkaido and Alberta share a very special and long-standing, 39-year friendship agreement. I invite all members to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, if you might indulge me for just one brief moment. If all members could rise and just take a very brief moment of silence in recognition of the many who have lost their lives in the typhoon in Japan, I know that I and many others would be greatly appreciative of your co-operation.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, the galleries have many distinguished guests today, including guests of the Minister of Indigenous Relations: Elder Marggo Pariseau, Elder Jackie Bromley, Josie Nepinak, Emily Taylor, Victoria Sedgwick, Muriel Stanley Venne, Rachelle Venne, Marlene Poitras, Lisa Higgerty, and Chevi Rabbit. Please rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Guest of the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland: Mr. Denis Meier.

Guests of the Minister of Ag and Forestry: a Premier's 4-H award recipient, Ms Amanda Hardman; her family, Barb and Keith; as well as Pamela Fald and Stacy Murray.

Guests of the Minister of Community and Social Services: Andrea Silverstone, executive director of Sagesse violence prevention society.

Joining us from Drumheller-Stettler: Holli Smith and Lindsay Bond of the Prairie Land school division.

Guests of the Member for St. Albert: Patti Fair, Chris Joseph, Andrea Joseph, Laurel Patter, Pam Cameron, Shauna Nordstrom, Peter Snaterse, Shaylyn Hunter, and Shelby Hunter.

Please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations is rising to make a statement.

Prior to him rising, I would just like to point out to the members of the Assembly that the minister has sought special permission to display a red dress in the Assembly.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for your consideration on this important matter. On October 4 Canadians from coast to coast gathered at community events and vigils to honour and commemorate the lives of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. In 2004 the Native Women's Association of Canada launched the sisters in spirit initiative. Why? Indigenous women and girls represent 4 per cent of the Canadian population but make up 25 per cent of all female homicides in this country. According to a 2015 report by the RCMP indigenous women are more likely than nonindigenous women in the Canadian provinces to experience violent victimization. The same study also shows that our province's homicide rate for indigenous women was more than seven times that of nonindigenous women between 2001 and 2015.

Mr. Speaker, those are unacceptable and horrific numbers. Too many families have had to bury their loved ones, and many still don't have the answers. I cannot fathom the pain that comes from losing a loved one in this manner.

I attended vigils in Calgary and Edmonton on October 4, and as we gathered in support of one another and paid our respects through song and prayer, I was overwhelmed by the strength and resilience of the families of the missing and murdered loved ones. On our way to the march on Stephen Avenue Mall I met one young mother whose best friend's body was found in the North Saskatchewan River just last year. Her young friend had travelled to the vigil with her young child all the way from Saddle Lake to honour her friend Lindsay Marie Jackson and to tell her that she's not forgotten and still very much loved.

The high numbers of indigenous females who have been victimized by violent crime is a tragedy that we must all recognize and address if we're truly on the path to reconciliation. We must acknowledge the injustices that have been committed against indigenous people.

In June I attended the national inquiry's closing ceremony in Ottawa, where I received the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. It was there that I connected with several families who had the courage and strength to appear in person, and I became acquainted with one mother who sat near me. I told her that Alberta would take the report, all 1,200 pages of it, and our government would work to address the calls for justice. That's why I'm honoured to be part of the government that is committed to renewing its partnership with indigenous people in the pursuit of reconciliation and to address gender-based violence. We recognize that this is no small feat, and we must approach reconciliation with humility and understanding. I call on all Albertans to stand against violence towards indigenous women, girls, 2SLGBTQQIA people.

In that spirit, I present this beautiful handcrafted red dress, which honours those loved ones who no longer walk among us but whose energy and spirit come to guide us. Emily Taylor, if you could please rise. She's the artist who made this dress for us here today. Let's welcome her. Thank you, Emily.

I'm pleased to tell her and all the honoured guests that the public will be able to view this dress and read about the meaning behind it in a display at the Federal Building, just north of here on the grounds of the Legislature. The countless indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people who have been lost will never be forgotten. Their memories will be honoured and help drive us as we work towards creating an Alberta where all indigenous lives are valued and safe.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, fellow ministers, esteemed colleagues, and all our honoured guests for allowing me to do this today and to rise in the Chamber on this very important topic.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the minister for his words and for accepting the gift of a red dress from the Awo Taan Healing Lodge in Calgary, the creation of artist Emily Taylor. I know all members of this House support the arrival and display of a red dress at the Alberta Legislature. It's a powerful symbol of the indigenous women and girls who have been murdered or gone missing across this country. The original REDress Project began as an art project by Métis artist Jaime Black, a remembrance of the murdered and missing. But soon the symbol turned to protest. Organically, indigenous people across the country adopted the red dress as a cry for justice and a call for a national inquiry.

A major element of this tragedy has been the indifference and inaction of Canadian and provincial governments, even as evidence of an unfolding genocide mounted. Indeed, the federal government that our current Premier was a member of displayed no interest in pursuing the truth of this national tragedy. But here we are today, and I'm grateful that we have come such a distance as to display a red dress in our Legislature.

1:40

In my time as Minister of Indigenous Relations I was graced with the opportunity to meet many family members of murdered and missing women and girls and, indeed, of missing men and boys as well. The pain and trauma that has been experienced by these families is unbearable and impossible to fully imagine. What we can only do is stand with these families and ensure that this genocide stops now, today, ensure that words turn to action. The threat to these families now is that they will not be listened to. I've often seen women wearing the red dress also apply a red hand to their face to symbolize the silence that indigenous women heard as their sisters and mothers and daughters and nieces and cousins and friends died violently or simply vanished.

Today is a milestone. It's a time to remember the thousands of people who were lost in this genocide. It's a moment to remember that it is still happening and there's a great deal of work ahead and a great number of painful truths to confront.

Members' Statements

The Chair: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis is rising to make a statement.

Advocacy for Alberta's Energy Industry

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are pleased to welcome anyone to our province. My riding of Banff-Kananaskis welcomes over 4 million tourists every year who come to see our breathtaking landscapes. For those folks that travel around the world to visit, we are happy to showcase our beauty and introduce them to our world-class energy industry, but oftentimes there seems to be some miscommunication.

Alberta produces its energy to the highest global standards of labour rights and environmental oversight while investing huge sums of money into technology that will help reduce the 1.6 per cent of global carbon emissions that Canada is responsible for. LNG produced by the Canadian energy sector will help developing nations such as India and China reduce their dependencies on coal and replace it with cleaner energy, which will help the world meet the Paris targets. Alberta is achieving all of this real progress while

working alongside our indigenous partners and creating new opportunities for their communities to create lasting jobs.

Albertans welcome all of those who are passionate about our future, but we ask that they look at the whole picture and approach us with an open mind. Alberta is not part of the problem, but it is one of the only energy-producing jurisdictions that is part of the solution. We must recognize that as long as the world demands energy, it will be supplied. Alberta is second to none on the responsibility of our energy production. We must displace energy produced by other nations who have deplorable environmental and human rights records with responsible energy from Alberta. The Iranian, Saudi, and Venezuelan petrostates will continue to supply the global energy network if we do not get our oil to market. With the right leadership, Albertan can and will continue to meet the needs of the global economy while utilizing environmental standards that will make a real difference on the global stage, and we're proud to do it.

As we continue to welcome all people to our province with open arms and the hospitality that we are known for, we must also be proud to tell our story. We will do so with respect, and we will speak with one voice to condemn anyone who descends into harassment or threats of violence as this is never acceptable. But I hope that today we can all stand together to tell the story of Alberta's innovative, responsible, and world-leading energy.

Commercial Driver Training and Testing Standards

Ms Renaud: The tragedy of the Humboldt Broncos bus crash continues to be felt across Canada, and it hits especially close to home in St. Albert. Four young men who lost their lives in that crash grew up and played hockey in our community. Their names were Logan Hunter, Jaxon Joseph, Conner Lukan, and Stephen Wack. In the wake of tragedy, St. Albert came together to support their families and honour their memories. St. Albert has raised over \$450,000 to set up scholarships in the names of these four players.

That's why I and many of my constituents were profoundly disappointed to learn about the UCP's deliberate decision to exempt thousands of semi-truck and bus drivers from long-overdue safety standards introduced by the province in the wake of this crash. Because of the UCP's choice to cater to special interests rather than enforce the measures needed to prevent another tragedy like Humboldt, up to 6,800 truck and bus drivers could dodge these safety requirements. This decision places Albertans at risk and is disrespectful to families who lost their loved ones in that crash.

I've been contacted by the St. Albert families of the Humboldt players regarding this decision, and I'll share some of their words in this House.

I never thought he would die on a rural road in Saskatchewan, on a safe bus with his brothers . . . [The] reason for [this] exemption is about the money! . . . the road is the road . . . no one should be entitled to exemptions.

I am writing to [ask you to ensure] that the provincial government DOES NOT relax any rules for Class 1 Drivers . . . Please don't let our son, and many others die for nothing.

Mr. Speaker, I know that consultation is not top of mind for this government, but I ask my UCP colleagues to please listen to the St. Albert families and immediately reverse their decision to roll back safety standards. Some red tape exists for good reasons.

Thank you.

Eddie Maurice and Rural Crime

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's a stretch to say that when you mention the words "rural crime," in many cases the name Eddie Maurice immediately comes up in the same conversation.

On Saturday, February 24, 2018, at around 5 o'clock in the morning two criminals trespassed onto Eddie's farm and were in the process of burglarizing his property. As any father and husband would reasonably do, Eddie stood his ground to protect his property and his family. He shouted for the men to leave, but ultimately it took not one but two warning shots fired into the ground to force them to flee his property. Subsequently, after waiting for two hours for the RCMP to respond, the first thing that happened when they arrived: Eddie was arrested and charged with multiple firearms-related charges. Eventually he was acquitted, but the fact that he was charged at all has had major consequences.

I will explain why I feel this is so important. The reality of the situation in rural Alberta is that people have lost faith in the system and they're now stopping and not phoning 911. So when the members opposite want to talk about statistics that suggest a decrease in rural crime, I'll be quite clear. Rural crime is still on the rise. Our rural residents need more support. Now, to make matters even worse, Eddie Maurice is now being sued for \$100,000 by the criminal who burglarized his property. It's absurd to think that this innocent, honest, hard-working, tax-paying resident is now being revictimized by the same criminal. But Eddie has made it clear that he will not back down to criminals on his property or in the courtroom.

It's time for everyone in this House to realize that rural crime is at a critical point. We need to provide real support to our rural communities so that we can gain back the confidence necessary. So while the members opposite want to waste time spreading misinformation about this government's plan to provide more support for our rural communities, I'll be on this side of the House working with my colleagues to support rural Alberta, Eddie Maurice, and his family.

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

Logan Boulet, Organ Donation, and Traffic Safety

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say a few words about two great Albertans, the Boulet family. Toby and Bernadine Boulet are constituents of Lethbridge-West. They are decent, honest, plain-spoken Albertans who have endured a heartbreaking tragedy. Their son Logan was a fine young man. As many Albertans know, Logan was catastrophically injured in the Humboldt Broncos bus disaster.

The Boulets were following the bus that night in their car, and they searched through the wreckage at the crash site before learning that their son had been rushed to hospital, where he would later pass away. Logan had filled out his donor card. Six people benefited from Logan's understanding, even as a young man, of the life-changing, positive effects he could have on his fellow Canadians. Logan's sense of individual responsibility for our collective well-being prompted what's been called the Logan Boulet effect, with more than 100,000 Canadians signing up to be organ donors. I know that not a day passes without Toby and Bernadine feeling Logan's absence. The Boulets have worked incredibly hard to create hope in the midst of their loss. Many Albertans now recognize April 7 as Green Shirt Day to honour organ donation. I was honoured to take some time away from the spring election campaign to wear my green shirt and salute the Boulet family.

Mr. Speaker, I have seen the powerful effect of organ donation, even in people very close to me. My own partner was a living donor to his brother, and I saw someone's life change for the better literally overnight as a result of an organ transplant. The Boulet family has set an extraordinary example in advocating for organ

donation. But now, unfortunately, they have to advocate for trucking safety standards and stand up to a government that seems more interested in powerful lobbyists and people who want to turn a buck off lax safety standards. So I have to say this to the Premier and his Minister of Transportation: the Boulet family of Lethbridge and Logan Boulet's memory deserve better.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Commercial Driver Training and Testing Standards

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, all Albertans and, indeed, Canadians from coast to coast were devastated by the Humboldt Broncos crash. Kids who had their whole lives ahead of them, families turned upside down in a flash. When we learned that the driver of the truck had no business being behind the wheel, Albertans were angry, so we made the highest standard safety training mandatory to make sure this could never happen again. These families are here today. To the Premier: can he explain why his government doesn't think every single truck driver or bus driver on our roads should be safe?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, of course with all Albertans and Canadians we grieve the loss of those young men and those who were injured in that terrible, tragic accident. Of course this government and all Albertans believe that anybody driving a truck on our roads should be properly qualified according to the highest standards, which is why our government will continue with the implementation of the mandatory entry-level training for class 1 and 2 drivers. However, unfortunately the previous government cut in half the number of driver examiners available, creating an enormous backlog. That's why they provided an extension for farmers and school bus drivers, which we'll hopefully be able to close as soon as the backlog . . .

Ms Notley: Well, in fact, this Premier's government has said that it will not require 6,800 drivers who obtained their licence in the period between October and March to complete the new MELT test; 6,800, and it only takes one to destroy a family. Right now this government is allowing 6,800 new truck drivers on the roads with no enhanced safety training or testing at all. Please, through you, Mr. Speaker, will the Premier reconsider his decision and direct his minister to ensure all drivers have MELT training or testing?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, in point of fact, the previous government exempted from the MELT requirement over 150,000 class 1 and class 2 truck drivers on our roads. Is she proposing that we retroactively apply that new standard to drivers who have been driving for decades with a perfect safety record, including the 150,000 that they exempted?

I'll tell you what we are also taking action on. I've asked the minister of immigration to investigate the troubling revelations from last week's *Globe and Mail* story about the apparent abuse of the temporary foreign worker program with respect to class 1 drivers. We intend to crack down on any such abuse, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Notley: Well, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the Premier is not being appropriately briefed because those 6,800 truck drivers I referred to don't have the experience that he referenced.

In addition, this government is also planning to fully exempt heavy-load farm truck drivers and, if you can believe it, Mr. Speaker, school bus drivers. Somehow the safety of schoolchildren is too expensive to ensure. To the Premier: will you commit to supporting an emergency debate today on all aspects of this issue

so we can ensure the best plans are in place to ensure public safety and to prevent another tragedy like the one in Humboldt?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it's regrettable to continue to see a pattern of misrepresentation from the other side of the House. I have today a letter from several mayors objecting to the Leader of the Opposition's "dishonest and unbecoming," misleading comments about their position on a different matter.

Mr. Bilous: Point of order.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what the leader of the NDP just said is completely false. In fact, as I've said, the mandatory entry-level training requirement will be mandatory going forward. The NDP decided to exempt over 150,000 drivers from that, but we're also going to deal with something they didn't, which is the apparent abuse of the temporary foreign worker program that has put unsafe drivers on our roads.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

School Bus Driver Training and Testing Standards

Ms Hoffman: When parents put their kids on the bus in the morning, they shouldn't have to worry if their kids will be safe when they get to school or not. Nothing is more important than the safety of our children, yet the UCP government rushes to roll back safety standards for school buses. Did the Premier know and approve of his minister's decision?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member, I believe, knows, the previous government had given an extended period of time for school bus drivers to get their MELT requirements so that the school boards could get the kids to school, because they wouldn't have been able to get school bus drivers hired and in place on time. Now, the NDP government actually gave an extension. We extended that extension, too, at the request of the school boards, and many of them were happy. I'm not sure how the kids would have got to school in September had we not done that.

Ms Hoffman: I remember where I was when the Humboldt crash happened, and I know that the parents in the gallery remember where they were, too. I attended the funeral in the Humboldt arena alongside families across the country. Our country lost its breath. We don't want this to happen again, and we must take steps to ensure that. Why won't the Premier take steps to make sure that our kids are safe on the bus?

Mr. McIver: You know what, Mr. Speaker? I've never thought of safety as a partisan issue, and I still don't think of it as that today. Everybody in this country cares about the families and victims of the Humboldt tragedy. That has not changed. It will never change. We all care about safety. The previous government, rather than throwing stones, should perhaps think about being a little bit helpful in this endeavour. On this side we will move forward to try to make the roads as safe as possible because that's what really matters.

Ms Hoffman: The UCP government originally said that they'd pay for the necessary school bus driver training, but now they won't, so inexperienced and unqualified operators can take a bus full of children on the highway. To the Premier: what is the value to you of a bus filled with children and their driver?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, there's nothing more valuable than a life, whether it's a child or an adult or anybody else, and certainly the lives lost and injured in the Broncos tragedy are no exception.

We take safety very seriously. The previous government had school buses in 61 divisions, with the same training, taking kids to school for four years in a row, and that was the right thing to do because they were trained for the licences they had. That hasn't changed. Over time the MELT standard will be put in place and kept in place because we care about safety as well.

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

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. Mr. Premier, when you were in Ottawa, multiple requests were made for your government to initiate an inquiry into murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. The response from your Prime Minister on behalf of your government was, quote, um, it isn't really on our radar, to be honest, unquote. Consequently, it waited until your government was fired by Canadians before an inquiry was instituted, after calls from the Alberta NDP and others. Mr. Premier, can you please explain to the House why you failed to respond with an inquiry for so long?

Mr. Wilson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to have the ladies from Awo Taan here today, showing that we are working hard on this very important subject. Our government is committed to moving towards true reconciliation, that will empower indigenous Albertans to take charge of their own destiny. Part of those calls for justice is the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the call for self-determination in the pursuit of economic and social development, and that is exactly what we're pursuing. I presented Bill 14 – and the House has approved third reading – the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation Act, through which indigenous communities are able to purchase an equity stake in natural resource projects.

Mr. Feehan: Mr. Premier, I wouldn't stand to defend my record if mine was the same as yours.

Tanya Kappo, a leader of the Idle No More movement and a member of the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, said about the Premier's past government, quote, the Conservative government does not believe First Nations people have rights and make their profound lack of respect painfully clear. End quote. To the Premier. There's a lot of mistrust with how you have handled these important matters in the past. How can our First Nations people really trust you at this point?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations has the call.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, this is a very important issue to us. You can see that today. I've personally spent time meeting with the organizations from Alberta that had standing in the final report, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women and the Awo Taan healing society. I've also sat down with the hon. minister of status of women to read the report in its entirety and discuss our plan to begin to focus on the calls for justice that will have the greatest impact on ensuring that indigenous women are treated with dignity, humanity, and respect, that may be taken for granted by others. Our government has been very active in reviewing this report and creating plans for real action on protecting indigenous ...

2:00

Mr. Feehan: I think the Premier's silence on this is deafening.

The Conservative federal government failed hard, but there is a chance for this Premier to make it right. There are 231 recommendations in the final report on the National Inquiry into Missing

and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. These are to be followed through on by provincial and federal governments. To the Premier: have you read the entire report, and if so, can you please detail which recommendations you will follow through on first and when that work will be completed? Please be specific.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Myself and the minister of status of women have thoroughly read the report, thoroughly read every page, and are working hard on this to come up with a plan. I can tell you that that's why the ladies are here today. I took action on this plan. I said that I would. On page 199, if you look at sections 15.1 through 15.8, you will see that part of it is just making recognition and standing up for murdered and missing indigenous women, and that's what we're doing.

Thank you.

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

Electric Power System

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Price spikes and rolling blackouts: that's the legacy of Conservative governments in this province when it comes to our electricity system. We know that this Premier is moving to kill the capacity market introduced by our government and supported by the Alberta Electric System Operator. This decision will create uncertainty for consumers and put them at risk of further price spikes. To the Premier: why are people's power bills the latest casualty in your bid to make friends with big corporations?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, we announced earlier in the summer that we are staying with the energy-only market after extensive consultation with numerous stakeholders, including the renewables stakeholders, who unanimously supported our desire to stay with the energy-only market. That will ensure the most reliable, the most stable, and the most affordable electricity in the province.

Mr. Sabir: We know that this Premier rushed to give a \$4.5 billion handout to corporations, and they are not creating jobs. They have stalled on all other efforts to support working Albertans and their families. To the Premier: will you stand in this House right now and pledge that power bills will not go up as a result of your actions?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, that side of the House, that government, drove the electricity policy into a situation where we had a \$1.4 billion boondoggle with the return of power purchase agreements. That boondoggle is going to be paid for for a very long time by consumers and taxpayers in Alberta. If anything is driving up the cost of electricity, it's the actions of the previous government.

Mr. Sabir: I'm also hearing that hundreds of people are being laid off at the Alberta Electric System Operator as this government rushes to kill the capacity market and abolish any attempts to move to renewable sources of energy. To the Premier: how many people are being fired at Alberta Electric System Operator, and is the only justification you have found to fire them that they don't agree with your government's policies?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, that's a completely ridiculous statement. That's a completely ridiculous statement. We have stayed with the energy-only market after extensive consultation with stakeholders across the province who have said that the capacity market was not going to attract investment, was not going to produce reliable and affordable electricity. We have taken steps to keep electricity rates

down for consumers in the province and to keep taxpayer rates down, too.

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

Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The southwest Calgary ring road is a significant project for my constituents in Calgary-West. The Calgary ring road is part of a larger east-west trade passage that will enhance access to markets, of course, out of Alberta. Now, given that the previous government committed to financing 60 per cent of the construction, can the Minister of Transportation please update the House on whether the project will remain on budget?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My officials tell me that we are currently on budget with this project. An agreement was signed with Mountain View Partners, who will finance 45 per cent, or approximately \$625 million; 55 per cent will be funded through a P3, or about \$725 million. I believe we're on track.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the construction of the southwest Calgary ring road involved the transfer of land from Tsuut'ina Nation and given that the agreement requires construction to be completed by next year or the land will be transferred back to the First Nation, can the minister please update the House on the current status of the ring road and if it will be completed on schedule?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, my staff tells me that we are on schedule. We will have the road open on time. Of course, those listening might want to know that the part of the project not on the Tsuut'ina land is scheduled to be completed for a full ring road in May 2022, and so far so good.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the project is a significant investment for the province, involving the negotiation of land transfer and several public-private partnerships, can the minister please update the House on how the Calgary ring road fits into the broader goal of economic development for the province?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The project currently supports more than 3,700 jobs. There are 49 bridges, 14 interchanges. It will create 101 kilometres of free-flow traffic when it's done and help provide market access in and out of the Calgary area to the world, essentially. It's part of our commitment during the election to support jobs, the economy, pipelines and to make life better for Albertans, and we intend to deliver on all of those promises.

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

Postsecondary Tuition and Scholarships

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recommendation 8 of the Premier's blue-ribbon panel report calls for the Minister of

Advanced Education to “achieve a revenue mix comparable to that in British Columbia and Ontario” for Alberta’s postsecondary schools. Alberta’s schools currently get about 18 per cent of their revenue from tuition, so I have a simple question for the minister. Can you please tell the House what share of their budget postsecondary institutions in B.C. and Ontario get from tuition?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of postsecondary education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, over the last few months I’ve spent a lot of time engaging with students and speaking to students when it comes to their needs and priorities regarding tuition, and it’s clear that the one thing that students are really looking for, which has been lacking over the last several years, is predictability. The NDP’s policy provided no predictability. Their ad hoc approach, a fly-by-night approach, deciding to freeze tuition on one day and then making decisions about what to do the next day didn’t provide that predictability, and we’ve heard that loud and clear from our students. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will have order during the answering of questions.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, wrong answer, right? The correct answer is almost double the tuition, twice as much.

Given that the blue-ribbon panel specifically says “less reliance on government grants, more funding from tuition” and given that we all know that the tuition hike is being planned by this government to help cover off this Premier’s \$4.5 billion corporate handout, to the minister: just how close to double are you going to hike tuition to force our postsecondary students to pay for your big fat corporate giveaway?

The Speaker: I might caution the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West on the use of preambles. I think we can all agree that was an example of one.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, the claim that there’ll be a doubling of tuition is just more of the same from that side of the House, as we’ve seen time and time again over the last few months. No surprise. More fearmongering. We’ve been spending our time and I’ve been spending my time speaking with students and talking to students about what their priorities are. When it comes to the tuition freeze that the former government imposed, you know what students told me? They told me they didn’t want the tuition freeze and they didn’t ask for it, so I don’t know where the NDP decided to get the ideas for their . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. We will have order.

The hon. member.

2:10

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that students often turn to scholarships as well to pay for their education and given that this minister attempted to scuttle programs like the Rutherford scholarship and only changed his mind when he got caught, to the minister. There are still many scholarships stuck in limbo right now because of you. Will you admit that there are more cuts coming to scholarships in this budget this year, or can you fix the problem?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, let’s be absolutely clear. The problem that we inherited with scholarships was because of that side of the House. Under their watch they began a scholarship transformation project that was mismanaged, extensive time periods of delay, no decisions being given to the department as to what to do. We inherited a broken system. We fixed it. Furthermore, we’re

committed to providing opportunities for our students to access postsecondary education, which is why I was proud in September to announce a new scholarship for high school students to enter the trades. That’s our record.

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

Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier’s so-called blue-ribbon panel report recommends that the Ministry of Infrastructure should, quote, make better use of the investing in Canada infrastructure program, or ICIP. Apparently, the decision of the Infrastructure minister is to make no use of ICIP, and he sent a letter to municipalities to that effect on September 24. Many of these local projects have their cost share in place, they are ready to proceed, and they would actually create badly needed jobs, unlike this government’s 4 and a half billion dollar corporate handout, but the Infrastructure minister sits idle. My question is simple. To the minister: why?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure is rising to answer.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. The Member for Edmonton-South: what he said was incorrect. Actually, there are many ICIP projects we have already approved, which were shovel ready and which would create economic activity and help the local municipalities. We approved those projects, and we’ll continue to work with the federal government. When the new government is in place, we will work with them.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the minister, that’s not what his own letter said.

Given that ICIP is a bilateral legal agreement signed between Alberta and Canada and is used to fund critical infrastructure projects and given that while this government has rushed to give billions away in corporate handouts, they seem completely willing to let ICIP wait, to the minister: can you please inform this House of which critical infrastructure projects are being shelved or completely abandoned as a result of his poor management?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the intake for ICIP applications was closed as of July 31, and it was oversubscribed. We had about 712 expressions of interest. We’re going to review all of them in due course and approve the projects based on the merit, not based on the ideology like the previous government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m sure municipalities will be glad to hear they have to wait in due course.

Now, given that former Bank of Canada governor David Dodge reminds us that the government should build infrastructure when economic demand is weak, both to create jobs and get good value for tax dollars, and given that the government’s 4 and a half billion dollar corporate giveaway hasn’t boosted economic demand at all, is it the intention of the minister to go back to the old PC ways of waiting to build when demand is strong and repeat their legacy of delayed and overpriced projects?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, in our campaign commitment platform we clearly stated that we’re going to build key infrastructure

projects that will deliver prosperity for all Albertans, and our government is on track to do that.

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

Vaping

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are raising concerns over the health risks of vaping. It's been identified in short-term respiratory difficulties and complications in a few cases, actually growing numbers of cases, leading to death in the United States, and it's unknown what the long-term effects of vaping really are. To the Minister of Health: given the reports of people getting seriously sick from vaping and some even dying from it, do we need to act more urgently and ban vaping?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, to date we have had no identified cases in Alberta, but we are monitoring the situation closely. If the chief medical officer of health of Alberta identifies an urgent risk, I will support her in taking any action which is required. That could be a public health advisory. It could be a product recall. It could be working with law enforcement to address illicit products. But I emphasize that as of today we do not know what is causing the cases. We simply have no basis to intervene today.

The Speaker: The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that other provinces are actively monitoring and continuously discovering cases of serious vaping-related lung injury and disease and given that youth seem to be the largest demographic beginning to vape so youth may be most at risk of vaping-induced respiratory health risks, Minister, what is this government doing to reduce the number of vaping products sold to youth?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question was: what are we doing to reduce the number of products? We've started a review of what's known as the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act. The Member for Calgary-Klein is leading that review. We're very happy to have that member engage with interest groups to be able to get information on what gaps we have in the current legislation and what can be done going forward to fill in those gaps. We're looking forward to that engagement being completed.

The Speaker: The hon. member for his second supplemental.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer and for having recently announced a review of the tobacco legislation. That's what I want to ask about next, in a way. Given that Alberta is one of the last provinces in the country to introduce legislation on vaping and given that other provinces have taken measures to do so, for example banning flavoured nicotine products, can the Minister of Health commit to enacting similar measures here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. Actually, those are already taking place here in Alberta. On September 5 . . .

Ms Hoffman: You're welcome.

Mr. Shandro: I believe that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was not the minister on September 5.

On September 5 Alberta's chief medical officer of health, Dr. Hinshaw, made suspected, serious, vaping-related illness a notifiable condition, as it's known under the Public Health Act, Mr. Speaker. That means that any physician who sees a patient who meets that definition must report the case.

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

Early Learning and Child Care Centres

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked the Minister of Children's Services why her government won't commit support for the affordable child care pilot program. Given the minister's response I can now see why the Member for Highwood doesn't understand that our \$25 per day child care pilot program isn't about picking winners and losers. In fact, his own government is picking winners and losers by refusing to expand the program to all providers and all Albertans. To the Minister of Children's Services: access to quality, affordable child care shouldn't be a lottery. It should be something that families in Alberta can depend on. Will you commit to expanding this important program?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can understand that it must be frustrating, when you ran on a platform focused on \$25 a day child care, that Albertans chose to prioritize jobs, getting our economy back on track, making sure people could provide for their families and that our economy was strong enough to support those who need it most. We will review the pilot project, and I will continue to listen to Albertans' priorities when it comes to quality child care.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister might need to be reminded about what her responsibility as the Minister of Children's Services is.

Given that quality and affordable child care is a win-win situation for children, working Albertans, and our economy and that the Conference Board of Canada has said that every dollar invested in child care earns at least a \$2 return, again to the same minister: have you considered the data in your review of the program? I can provide a copy if you want to learn about the responsibilities of your ministry.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said a number of times in this House, we are awaiting the report on the pilot project, but Albertans told me this summer that their concerns with the pilot are that it did not track income, it did not track need, it did not track employment, and it did not track wait-lists. What we are going to focus on is quality child care, affordable child care for those who need it, and accessibility to child care across Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for her second supplemental with no preamble.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the evidence is clear and that parents are pleading with the minister to provide certainty for the program so they know if they need to quit their jobs to care for their child and given the research shows that this program not only helps parents, improves child development, and is the key to unlocking Alberta's economic potential, again to the minister:

are you aware that by failing to support affordable child care for all Albertans, the only people losing here are Alberta families? Are you happy that while corporations are raking in your government's handouts, families are struggling to pay the bills?

2:20

Ms Schulz: Speaking of working families, Mr. Speaker, the NDP legacy is 170,000 people impacted by job loss and \$100 billion in debt that isn't going to support the families who need it. The member opposite has also been fearmongering and telling the public that the \$25 a day centres are closing, so I want to be clear because I know that no one in this House would want to mislead the public. The vast majority of these centres were providing high-quality child care long before the pilot began. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member . . . [interjections] Order, hon. members. The Leader of the Official Opposition will come to order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows would like to ask a question.

School Head Covering Policies

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week we learned that an 11-year-old boy, Emmelle, was told by his teachers at Christ the King elementary school in Edmonton to remove his do-rag. This piece of clothing is culturally significant to Emmelle and his family. When Emmelle's mother raised her concerns in the principal's office, she was banned from the school for the rest of the year. Is the Minister of Education aware of this incident, and has she reached out to Emmelle's family to make this situation right?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education has risen.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Anyone feeling discriminated against based on their race: it is absolutely unacceptable, and I have asked for a full report from Edmonton Catholic schools on this issue.

Mr. Deol: Given that Emmelle's mother, Una, was told that her 11-year-old boy's headgear was gang-related and given that she was told that we don't wear anything on our heads in this school, does the Minister of Education support this school's assertion that no head coverings should be worn in classrooms regardless of their cultural or religious significance?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I have to reiterate that any discrimination based on race is totally unacceptable. I'm asking for a full report, and I await that report.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Una believes that she and her son were the victims of racial profiling and given this minister's terrible record of support for minorities in Alberta schools, will this minister launch an investigation into what exactly occurred at Christ the King elementary and report the findings back to the House?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer would be yes, I will be asking for a full report. I have said so three times now, and I will be happy to share the results when I get them.

Thank you.

Natural Gas Industry Concerns

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, for decades Medicine Hat, or the Gas City, as it was so aptly termed, has extracted and produced natural gas, amassing over \$600 million in revenue straight to the city. Our city has built a community around resource production. However, last month it was announced that 2,000 natural gas wells will begin the process of shutting down. To the Associate Minister of Natural Gas: what is this government doing to ensure that the city of Medicine Hat will not have to shutter its remaining 500 to 700 natural gas wells?

An Hon. Member: Order MSI.

Mr. Dang: Corporate giveaways.

The Speaker: Order. Members, including the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, will come to order.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah, South West. Take that.

The Speaker: Or Edmonton-South.

The Associate Minister of Natural Gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are aware of the city of Medicine Hat's decision to shut some of their wells. This is one more nail in the coffin on the previous government's mishandling of this critical file. Now, as you know, on April 16 we were elected on an overwhelming mandate to stand up and fight for the energy industry. That's what we're doing.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that the city of Medicine Hat cited extremely low prices as a reason for the 2,000 of its natural gas wells being deemed uneconomic and given that Alberta has had consistent price volatility over recent years with minimal relief and, incredibly, the spot price of natural gas has actually been negative at times, again to the associate minister: could the recent changes to gas storage on the NGTL system help alleviate some of these issues felt by the good people in Medicine Hat?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Natural Gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't be more pleased to announce that the changes to TC's protocol to storage has in fact started to alleviate some of the pressure being felt by our natural gas producers. In fact, since this was implemented on October 1, natural gas has been trading above \$2, which is something that hasn't happened in a long time. We committed to reducing price volatility. That's exactly what we're going to do.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many young families residing in Medicine Hat rely heavily on the jobs and the income created through its historic natural gas sector and given that Medicine Hat has access to resources and over a century of experience and given that this government was elected on an overwhelming mandate to bring investment back to the province, again to the associate minister: what else is your government doing to attract and assure investors that Alberta's natural gas sector is the best place to invest?

The Speaker: I recognize the Associate Minister of Natural Gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is an energy-driven province. Quite frankly, it's nothing short of embarrassing how much investment has left our province thanks to the members

across the aisle. Now, in the six months since forming government, our office has taken action on 26 of the 48 recommendations of the Kvisle report. Our government has done more in six months on this file than the previous administration did in four years.

Canadian Energy Centre

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, did the Minister of Finance or any of his officials, prior to establishing the energy war room, talk with the Auditor General about his role with respect to oversight of this corporation, and did anyone consult with the Ethics Commissioner on how conflicts of interest must be managed in this highly unusual instance when ministers are directors of government corporations?

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

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can certainly declare to this House that I have declared all of my interests with the Ethics Commissioner, and I've been cleared to serve in the role that I do today. The opposition would like to distract us from their record of failing Albertans, creating a business environment where investment has fled this province by the billions, racking up a debt that's over \$60 billion, and leaving us in a situation where tens of thousands of Albertans are looking for work.

Ms Phillips: Given that conflict of interest legislation exists to ensure that ministers do not exercise inappropriate influence to line their own pockets, will the minister state for the record that all contracts executed by this corporation, including sole-source contracts, will be disclosed, and if not, should Albertans assume that this is because these contracts will be given to the friends of the UCP or to firms gathering data and using government resources for partisan gain?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, there are multiple, multiple measures to ensure full financial transparency in the Canadian Energy Centre. For instance, the centre is a provincial corporation; it will be funded by provincial grants. Under the terms of those grants, a budget to the ministry is required in 30 days, a business plan in 60 days, and there will be monthly – monthly – expenditure reports. All of those will be subject to public knowledge.

Ms Phillips: Given that the stated aim of this corporation is to make war on political enemies, can we assume that part of the reason that it has been so difficult to get answers to the questions about transparency and disclosure is that the ministers don't want to tell Albertans who they are giving \$30 million to because the plan they are hiding from Albertans involves giving taxpayer money to Russian troll farms, far-right meme factories, and offspring of Cambridge Analytica?

2:30

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what is shocking is that the Official Opposition continues to play these games. Even after mayors have sent in letters asking them – and I quote the mayors, not myself, calling them “dishonest.” It's ridiculous.

The Minister of Energy has been very, very clear in answering the transparency questions. The member has asked about the Conflicts of Interest Act, which is overseen by an independent officer of this Legislature, the Ethics Commissioner. As the Finance minister has said and as the Energy minister has said and as I am telling you now, Mr. Speaker, and this House, this was cleared by the Ethics Commissioner, who is in charge of the Conflicts of Interest Act, not who the current member is referring to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Coal Workforce Transition Program

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been recently reported that workers who should be eligible for the coal workforce transition program are experiencing endless delays and runarounds while trying to access these important benefits. Some workers impacted by Stephen Harper's coal phase-out first applied in April, and many suspect that these delays mean the government is planning to cut these programs. To the minister of labour: can you explain why processing times for this vital initiative have skyrocketed, and will you promise that this critical program won't be cut as you work to pay for your \$4.5 billion handout to big corporations?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I answer the specific question, I have to call out the members on the other side about their continued misrepresentation on the \$4.5 billion claim. Respected University of Calgary economist Trevor Tombe has said that this claim is “not accurate.” In fact, when the previous government was in power, they increased corporate taxes by 20 per cent, and revenues went down. On this issue this claim, the \$4.5 billion, is not accurate, and the NDP have no credibility on this issue.

Ms Gray: Given that coal workers will be reading these answers in *Hansard* and watching this government and given that the point of the coal workforce transition program is to avoid unfairly burdening Alberta's hard-working energy workers, who have tirelessly provided our province with vital energy, can the minister explain why he's okay with his government rushing to hand billions to corporations but is sitting on his hands when it comes to providing coal workers with the financial supports they need to keep the heat running and the lights on in their own homes?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to clarify that the coal worker transition program applications continue to be processed. Anyone who has been approved for support will continue to receive it. I'd also like to point out that this program was established as a result of the disastrous policies of the previous government phasing out coal despite the industry moving to natural gas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this Premier was a minister in Stephen Harper's federal cabinet, which was known for increasingly opaque and inscrutable budgets and for hiding important financial details and transparency from the people of Canada, can the minister assure us that when the government's budget is released on October 24, the full fate of the coal workforce transition program will be made clear, or will the UCP continue to delay providing services and information to Albertans?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as indicated, we continue to process applications under the coal worker transition program. Everything will be made clear when the budget is presented. But I need to focus on what our government was elected here to do. It was to create jobs. On the other side, when they were in government, they oversaw over 170,000 job losses. We are focused on putting policies in place

to attract investment back into this province and create jobs for Albertans. That's what we were elected to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Affordable Housing for Seniors

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Meridian foundation is a large third-party organization in my riding that provides funding for housing for seniors all over Spruce Grove and Stony Plain. Before leaving power, the NDP announced a \$6 million grant to build this new facility, called 17 Folkstone Place. Now, this was to be in co-ordination with funding from both communities in the tri region as well as the federal government. However, at the same time, the Meridian foundation was forced to pay a large part of this cost out of their own pocket. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: will this project continue to be funded?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for the question. The Folkstone manor project will continue to be funded. I'm very pleased to share that the groundbreaking is taking place this Friday in Stony Plain. This project will support more modern, affordable housing for seniors with low incomes living in and around the Stony Plain area.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for the answer. Given that in the last 13 years of its operation the Meridian foundation has never had a vacancy and given that the executive director of the Meridian foundation has stated that there is a large and growing need for housing for those aged 50 or older, can the Minister of Seniors and Housing commit to the people of Stony Plain to a firm timeline for this project, and if so, will new residents of the housing unit be able to move in in 2020?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member. The operator of Folkstone manor would determine the timeline in which the residents are able to move in. Our government is proud to support this new affordable housing project. The groundbreaking at Folkstone manor is a step in providing safe and affordable housing for Albertans, especially for those who live in the area of Stony Plain and Spruce Grove. It will enable them to continue to live safely and independently.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that organizations like the Meridian foundation continue to do incredible work in ensuring that seniors' housing is widely available and given that seniors' housing organizations are often major employers in their ridings and given that tax and regulatory changes deeply affect these organizations, can the minister speak to what kind of assistance private organizations can expect from this government as they seek to provide sustainable and affordable care options for seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Pon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Folkstone manor is an excellent example of a partnership, the provincial government and the local civil society organization working together on behalf of

Albertans. This kind of partnership makes life better for Albertans and makes our province a better place to live, to work, and to retire. Our government will continue to explore the expanded use of a P3 partnership that enables individuals and families, including seniors, to reside in their chosen communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has a question.

Skilled Trades Labour Supply

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are over 3,000 skilled workers in the trades and related occupations retiring each year. These are highly rewarding, high-tech, in-demand occupations that can provide endless opportunities. The UCP made many promises in the campaign that aimed at increasing the number of students entering the trades in an effort to curb this decline. To the Minister of Advanced Education. You recently announced \$10 million in funding for Women Building Futures. How will this investment help curb the decline in skilled trades workers in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of postsecondary education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. She is indeed correct. We made a number of very specific and detailed commitments to Albertans during the course of the last election, and we are intent on delivering on those commitments. The member is correct that we are facing the challenge right now in our province – the dual challenge, I should say – of a retiring and aging skilled workforce and the highest youth unemployment rate in decades. We recognize that it's important for us to be ahead of these trends and to be proactive, which is why our government has a very robust skills for jobs agenda.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Our current education system does not place enough value on the trades as it prioritizes university or college degrees. Given that this overemphasis on university education results in racking up tens of thousands of dollars of student debt and given that most students do not learn about the potential of a job in the trades from schools but, rather, from family and friends, how does the minister plan on spreading awareness about the value of a career in the trades and the lifestyle that this career path can provide?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of postsecondary education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the member is correct. There's a challenge in terms of spreading awareness about the value of a career in the skilled trades, which is why I was proud a few weeks back to announce the creation of a Skills for Jobs Task Force that will help to inform government priorities about next steps and about helping to develop strategies to increase awareness regarding careers in the skilled trades.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Canada skilled trades credentials do not always transfer from province to province. Given that Alberta has historically seen a great number of working professionals move in from out of province and given that Alberta is currently losing 3,000 tradespeople a year to retirement and given that with the pro-business policies being implemented,

we will see an increase in investments and therefore need a larger labour force, how does the minister plan to harmonize the mobility of skilled tradespeople into our province and to fill the increasing need for skilled trades workers?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed, it's quite a challenge. You know, there's no reason why an individual from British Columbia or another province can't come to Alberta and continue to work in the same skilled trade, which is why Alberta is a full participant in the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship, who are responsible for training and certification. To date we have aligned with the council's harmonization priorities in 21 red seal trades. Labour mobility is a key priority of mine and of this government, and we'll continue to work with our provincial and federal counterparts to scrap barriers to mobility and make it easier for people to get back to work.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will move to Members' Statements. Please exit the Chamber expeditiously if you have other engagements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Underground Infrastructure Disturbances

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here in Alberta we have a great deal of underground infrastructure, most in use and some abandoned. Our underground infrastructure distributes services such as electricity, oil, natural gas, clean drinking water, stormwater, waste water, communications via fibre optics and still some old copper. In March of this year the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship recommended that Bill 211, the Alberta Underground Infrastructure Notification System Consultation Act, proceed to the next stages. Unfortunately, this bill was not able to finish its legislative journey. The direction of this bill would have forced the exploration of requirements to reduce damages to underground infrastructure. This work must continue.

When a line strike or an infrastructure strike occurs, the impact is huge. It can lead to property damage, project delays, traffic congestion, extensive repairs, mitigation, and remediation. These incidents needlessly cause a strain on emergency services and often require home and business evacuations, but most importantly, Mr. Speaker, these incidents can cause loss of life. The estimated societal cost of a single ground disturbance strike to underground lines or infrastructure is \$80,000, with an annual cost totalling at least \$350 million. In a time when we're trying to bring costs down and to address rural Internet and bandwidth issues, now is the time to act. If we are serious about attracting increased commerce to this province, we must pick up where this bill left off and press forward.

With the information at our disposal of where buried infrastructure is located, it will provide us a clear footprint of where existing structures are and how we can avoid them or capitalize on those assets in a measured plan for future builds. We need to know where these lines are so that they can be safely worked on without costing so much money and causing delay in projects in future years. Further still, in my opinion, we must make it mandatory for those undertaking construction work with underground ground disturbance to request the location of underground infrastructure before they excavate, with stiff penalties attached for ignoring that responsibility that at least will equal the damage and costs

associated with remediating lines that are hit. We must move quickly to ensure the safety of workers, homeowners, businesses, and the infrastructure itself.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Commercial Driver Training and Testing Standards

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I sat down with Laurel Patter and her son Derek in my office in Mill Woods. Derek was one of the 13 players injured in the Humboldt Broncos bus crash, that also killed 16 others. Laurel and Derek had reached out to my office because they have serious concerns that this government may be creating loopholes when it comes to safety on our roads and highways. Laurel and Derek were very clear during our conversation. They want to make sure our roads are safe for everyone. They feel strongly that improved training and safety measures should be mandated Canada-wide. But until that happens, Alberta needs to implement improved standards and protect the families that travel our province's roads and highways.

Laurel shared that after delivering their victim impact statements, as they travelled from Saskatoon to Melfort, they were cut off by a semi-truck driving dangerously. It's hard to imagine the terror that must have gone through their minds and the bitter irony of that timing. Many of us experience bad driving on the highways, but few appreciate the potential danger that exists.

Laurel and Derek asked me if anyone had calculated the total cost of the Humboldt tragedy. How much did Saskatchewan spend on the first responders, the air ambulance, the medical staff, and all of the other services that were needed in the aftermath? They can't help but think that funding adequate standards and proper enforcement would be considerably cheaper than having another horrific accident such as the one they lived through. We can save lives, avoid trauma, and do so while also avoiding the heavy cost that such an incident involves.

Laurel and Derek are not interested in the partisan bickering that has crept into this issue. They didn't come to see me because of my political party; they came to see me because I am their local MLA. They expect all 87 MLAs in this place to listen to them, to recognize the tremendous impact that the Humboldt tragedy had on them, and for all of us to ensure that the proper rules are immediately put in place. I hope each member in here will take the time to speak with Laurel and the families impacted and do the right thing.

Brock Blaszczyk

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I want to formally recognize an incredible individual who recently visited our Legislature, Brock Blaszczyk. While not born there, Brock was raised in the most beautiful constituency in the province, West Yellowhead, in the hidden gem of Grande Cache. A couple of years ago Brock found himself with the opportunity to ask Prime Minister Trudeau some very pointed questions about his military service benefits while Mr. Trudeau toured Alberta. His questions garnered national attention, brought to light critical issues currently facing veteran service members, and highlighted that the Prime Minister wasn't living up to his campaign promises for our military personnel.

Brock served in Afghanistan, returning to Canada only after he encountered an improvised explosive device, an IED, losing one leg and majorly injuring his other. Not only is Brock a decorated veteran, he has committed his efforts since returning to Alberta to helping other veterans overcome traumatic experiences of their past and seek the treatment they require. Brock has a vision to see our province lead the way in how we ensure that first responders,

corrections employees, and veterans are able to properly function after their years of dedicated service. He wants to ensure that we do away with the stigma associated with posttraumatic stress disorder so we can save lives and families moving forward.

People like Brock and our service personnel exemplify true heroism in that they are not only willing to lay down their lives for a friend; they will lay down their lives for complete strangers in the name of justice. Today, in light of this past Thanksgiving Monday and with Remembrance Day on the horizon, I want to remember Brock for his sacrifice and thank him for standing up to injustice far from home and right here in Canada. I also want to acknowledge his continued advocacy to ensure that our military personnel and our first responders and their well-being are never forgotten.

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

Calgary LRT Green Line

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The green line in Calgary is a vital transit project that will support jobs and economic activity in the city. Stage 1 of the green line will create more than 12,000 direct jobs and over 8,000 additional jobs in supporting industries during construction. Once completed, it is expected to create hundreds of long-term transit operations and maintenance jobs. The first stage will transport 60,000 Calgarians daily, and once the full line is completed, there will be an estimated quarter million trips per day.

Calgarians support this project because they understand the importance of it, and they want all levels of government to support it as well. According to a recent survey 83 per cent of Calgarians think the federal government should provide funding for future stages of the green line. In the city of Calgary's YYC Matters election survey every federal party except the Conservatives promised additional funding to expand the green line, and just this fall the Premier and his caucus have been campaigning for the federal Conservatives. Why is this Premier campaigning against such an important project that supports jobs and a modern diversified economy? The Premier needs to finally explain where he stands on this project. Either he supports it or he doesn't. Because I have news for him. This project will be built whether he likes it or not, so he needs to get behind it or get out of the way of the moving train.

2:50

Investment in Alberta

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, today I want to talk about something that has been at the core of our government's mandate since we were elected into office, bringing job-creating investment back to Alberta. Not only did the previous government implement policies that hurt our economy, the former government also raised taxes during one of the most challenging economic times in our province's history. Now, these job-killing policies and higher taxes made Alberta less competitive nationally and globally. Our investors have told us that they want nothing more than a free market, and our government fully supports the implementation of policies which bring investors back into Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, our plan is working. Suncor recently announced a \$1.4 billion investment that will create 600 jobs to build a gas cogen facility. This announcement demonstrates increased investor confidence in Alberta. Suncor is not the only organization to demonstrate their confidence in our economy. Telus recently announced a \$16 billion investment in technology and operations. This investment promises to create 5,000 jobs over the next five years.

Now, our government is working tirelessly to bring investment back into Alberta, and, Mr. Speaker, these recent announcements are proof that our efforts are indeed paying off. Our government is determined to show our investors that we can dream big and that we can get big things done. We will continue to work and restore investor confidence in Alberta and to show the world that Alberta is indeed open for business.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, first, pursuant to Standing Order 7(8) I would let the House know that I will extend daily Routine.

I also have a notice of motion, if I could do it now, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to provide oral notice of Government Motion 34.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly denounce all federal political parties that would enable a provincial government to unilaterally prevent the construction of interprovincial infrastructure projects of national importance, including natural resource pipelines.

The Speaker: Are there other notices of motions? The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At the appropriate time the Member for St. Albert will move the following motion pursuant to Standing Order 42.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to maintain safety requirements for newly licensed commercial vehicle drivers, including school bus and agricultural drivers, to ensure rigorous training and testing standards implemented by the previous government continue to protect the safety of all drivers throughout the province and prevent incidents such as the Humboldt Broncos tragedy from occurring again.

The Speaker: Hon. Official Opposition House Leader, I trust that you have copies for all members, that you can provide them for us now. Appreciate that.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 17

Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce and move first reading of Bill 17, Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act.

Mr. Speaker, domestic violence endangers the survival, security, and well-being of another person. This legislation, if passed, could help save the lives of those at risk of domestic violence. It would allow people at risk in defined circumstances to find out if their romantic partners have a violent or abusive past. This legislation is a tool that could help prevent domestic violence in Alberta. This legislation is also a significant campaign promise and will empower those at risk of domestic violence so that they can make informed decisions about potentially harmful relationships.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has caught my eye.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table requisite number of copies of three articles from the *Globe and Mail*. The first is entitled How an Immigration Scheme Steers Newcomers into Canadian Trucking Jobs – and Puts Lives at Risk. The second is titled Western Canada: Why the Trucking Industry Has Come under the Spotlight. The third is titled Alberta Eases Safety Rules Issued in the Wake of Humboldt Bus Crash.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling an article from the *Atlantic*. It's entitled No Climate Event in 2,000 Years Compares to What's Happening Now.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings of returns and reports?

Hon. members, we are at points of order. The Official Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h),(i),(j). At approximately 1:55 today the Premier was responding to a question by the Leader of the Official Opposition where he accused her of misleading Albertans. Now, I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I am pretty confident that in a moment the Government House Leader will rise and try to defend the Premier's words because he was reading a letter. I'll direct your attention to the fact that on numerous occasions in this House you, yourself, have ruled that there is, in fact, a point of order, and members opposite have had to apologize and withdraw when there is an accusation made against a member, as is this case. The Premier was accusing the Leader of the Official Opposition of misleading Albertans.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as you're well aware, a similar instance, if a member rises to read a letter or an official document that contains the name of the member in the House, that is out of order. Reading a document or quoting an external source does not give a member carte blanche to be able to make accusations, to use unparliamentary language. In your own words: accusing another member in this House of misleading anyone, whether it's Albertans or others, is unparliamentary. For those reasons, I ask that the Premier or someone on his behalf apologize and withdraw those comments.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader is rising to add to the debate.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you for the opportunity to rise on this point of order, Mr. Speaker. First, I'd refer to *Beauchesne's* 491, which makes it clear that context is important. Former Speaker Wanner would often talk about context – you would know yourself in your time as Opposition House Leader of this Chamber – while he was the Speaker.

First off, to be clear, I don't have the benefit of the Blues, like the Official Opposition House Leader. I do not believe the Premier said misrepresent. In fact, Mr. Speaker, what I believe he referred to was the direct quote in a letter, which is what the Official Opposition House Leader has referred to, in which several mayors say to the Leader of the Official Opposition in this letter complaining about her

misrepresenting [their] views for political theatre is dishonest and unbecoming for any member of the provincial legislative assembly.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly do agree that if a member of the Legislative Assembly is misrepresenting mayors' views in this Chamber, that is unbecoming of any member of the Chamber. I'm not saying that's what the Leader of the Official Opposition was doing, nor did the Premier. The Premier referred to a letter in regard to the context of a question that he had received and the Leader of the Official Opposition had received from many mayors, including some mayors that I represent in this Chamber, that made it clear that things the Official Opposition has been saying inside question period, they felt, misrepresented what they said and were dishonest. That would be a matter of debate on whether they're right or wrong, but the word "dishonest" is not unparliamentary, which the Official Opposition House Leader seems to be indicating. That is not the case, from my understanding.

Calling a member dishonest, basically saying that a member is a liar, we all would agree is unparliamentary and not appropriate for this place, but the Premier did not do that. The Premier referred, again, to the context of this letter, Mr. Speaker, that said that the Leader of the Official Opposition was misrepresenting the views of these mayors for political theatre, that it was dishonest when she did that, and it was unbecoming of a member of the provincial Legislature. If that is true, I would agree with those members, but I'm not saying it's true one way or another. What I am saying is that context matters. The Premier was not calling any member of this place dishonest and referred very specifically to the letter in his answer to the question.

3:00

The Speaker: Well, thank you for your submissions, hon. members. I might just add some brief comments. Holy cannoli. I hope that you have something new to add, but I look forward to hearing your comments.

Ms Notley: I will merely say that on the matter of context, which is, indeed, something that former Speakers have spoken to, the context was a set of questions about traffic safety in relation to the concerns raised by several families who are still in this Legislature hoping to see and hear a debate on this issue. The Premier was referring to a letter that was sent about an entirely different matter, so if we want to talk context, I think that is the context which should govern this particular decision on your part.

The Speaker: Are there others that would like to add to the debate?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to rule. Hon. members, I know that you have all polished up on your *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, when it comes to members trying to do indirectly what they can't do directly.

Now, I do have the benefit of the Blues, and the hon. Premier said:

It's regrettable to continue to see a pattern of misrepresentation from the other side of the House. I have today a letter from several mayors objecting to the Leader of the Opposition's, quote, dishonest and unbecoming, misleading comments about their position on a different matter.

The Official Opposition House Leader called a point of order at that time.

I think it's fairly clear to see that the Premier was referring to the other side of the House and not specifically one member. We have a long-standing tradition – and by long-standing I mean over the past number of months – around this issue of a specific member or groups of members. I have cautioned at some length about the use of the word "misleading" or doing things indirectly which you can't

do directly. I will specifically say from page 614 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*:

Generally, the reading of articles from newspapers, books or other documents by a Member during debate has become an accepted practice and is not ruled out of order provided that such quotations do not reflect on past proceedings in the House, do not refer to, comment on or deny anything said by a Member, and do not use language which would [otherwise] be out of order if spoken by a Member.

Now, I recognize that the Official Opposition feels like this should be a point of order, but I have clearly stated that the Premier referred to a group of individuals. In this case I will not find a point of order, but I will remind all members that, from *Procedure and Practice*, we cannot do indirectly what we cannot do directly.

I consider this matter dealt with. We are proceeding to the oral motion under Standing Order 42.

Motions under Standing Order 42

Commercial Driver Training and Testing Standards

Ms Renaud:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to maintain safety requirements for newly licensed commercial vehicle drivers, including school bus and agricultural drivers, to ensure rigorous training and testing standards implemented by the previous government continue to protect the safety of all drivers throughout the province and prevent incidents such as the Humboldt Broncos tragedy from occurring again.

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

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to read it again, and then I'll chat further about it: be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to reverse the decision to relax safety requirements for newly licensed semi-truck drivers and bus operators, a move that will allow hundreds of drivers to bypass rigorous training and testing standards that were implemented by the previous government to increase the safety of all drivers throughout the province and the country and prevent incidents such as the Humboldt tragedy in the future.

Mr. Speaker, again, I would like to thank all of the family members that stayed through question period and points of order. I know it's stimulating. I really do appreciate them being here, and I'm sad that this is the reason that they're here.

As you know, this is a serious matter. As my colleagues have also said, the entire nation was shaken by the events of April 2018, the Humboldt bus crash, that took 16 lives, many of them young hockey players really just starting out their lives, at the cusp of their future, full of dreams and hopes. I can't even imagine the loss that these families experienced.

However, we later found out that the driver responsible was lacking adequate training, so the previous government took steps to fix it. As my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods said, this really isn't a partisan issue. This is something that all 87 of us should be really concerned about, that if there's anything at all that we can do to prevent the loss of life or the tragedy that we had to all witness and that these families had to endure in 2018, then we should take those steps instead of, as my colleague so eloquently said, the partisan bickering about, "You did this; you did that," you know, for the Transportation minister and the Premier to just stand up and say: "You know what? Maybe we made an incorrect decision. Let's fix this. Let's make sure no other life is lost or cut short."

What I've heard in this place has been difficult to follow over the last few days. We've asked a number of really good questions. There's been quite a bit of reporting on this, and it has been quite

difficult to follow, but here's what I know. This government currently believes that some people should be exempt from critical training, training that teaches them how to check and secure loads, how to properly brake for heavy loads, how to handle the responsibility they have to both themselves and those they share the road with.

To my colleagues in the House: this is deserving of a debate of the House, and it's urgent. It is very urgent. I can recall that when the government sat on this side, a number of times they made compelling cases for us to stop what we were doing and to have important debates about what they felt was important, and we indulged that. We may not always have agreed a hundred per cent, but we listened, we participated, and we allowed that debate to happen. I would encourage all of my colleagues on the other side and on this side as well to do the same.

The Minister of Transportation tells us that he's comfortable – this is a direct quote – with the change, stated . . .

Speaker's Ruling Speaking to Urgency

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you for your intervention. Just to provide some context of how a Standing Order 42 works, with all due respect to all members in the gallery and otherwise I am merely a humble servant of the rules that are applied before us. The only opportunity that you have to speak to the motion under Standing Order 42 is to express your desire around urgency. You cannot, unfortunately, debate the motion that is before the Assembly. So if you can do your very best to ensure that you are discussing the urgency of the matter and not what members may or may not have said during the past, I think that would be a much more useful use of our time.

Debate Continued

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely. Why is this urgent? Because we could have an accident tomorrow or later today. I think back to seat belts, how important it was to pass those rules, regulations, legislation, anything that we can do to prevent this horrific tragedy from ever happening again. Put partisan thoughts aside, put allegiances aside, and just listen to these families, who stood together and said: this is unacceptable. We need to do this today to prevent anything from happening tomorrow or later today.

I encourage all of my colleagues to allow us to go forward with this. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 42(1):

A motion may, in case of urgent and pressing necessity previously explained by the mover, be made by unanimous consent of the Assembly without notice having been given under Standing Order 39.

As such, unanimous consent is required for this Standing Order 42 to proceed.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for St. Albert, prior to proceeding with the motion, the words that you read into the record were slightly different than the words that were distributed on the paper. So I want to confirm that the motion that we are now debating is as such:

Urge the government to maintain safety requirements for newly licensed commercial vehicle drivers, including school bus and agricultural drivers, to ensure rigorous training and testing standards implemented by the previous government continue to protect the safety of all drivers throughout the province and prevent incidents such as the Humboldt Broncos tragedy from occurring again.

The hon. Member for St. Albert has the call on debate. There are 20 minutes allotted to you.

3:10

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sincerely, I'm very thankful to all of my colleagues for allowing this debate to go forward. Once again thank you to all of the families that have stayed to witness this.

Why is it important to do this? I think I was fairly clear earlier that of anything we can do in this place as legislators to represent our communities, to do what's right, the most important thing is to protect and preserve the lives of the people in this province. This is one way that we can do that. Sadly, I think that we all had to see what happens when there are gaps in safety standards or the safety standards don't meet the requirements of the job.

I started to say a little earlier – I got a little bit off track, but I wanted to go back. We've had a fair amount of debate just in the form of questions and answers over the last few days, but I did want to say a couple of things. One of the things is that the Minister of Transportation has told us that he is comfortable with the change, stating – and this is a direct quote – that they had been operating mostly safely for the last 30 or 40 years. Now, I think it's easy sometimes to get wrapped up in the issue of the day and to allow things to continue, but this is really unacceptable. I think that now we've arrived at a place – we arrived at the place in 2018 – where we saw that there was a gap. There was a need to close a loophole, to do more stringent training, to have better requirements for drivers, for bus drivers, for semi-truck drivers. What was good 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 30, 40 years ago is not good enough today. Whether a short distance or a long distance, safety minimums exist for a reason.

Bus drivers carry our children. They are our most precious cargo. As our leader said earlier today: who hasn't been on those roads driving our kids to tournaments or to games or to practices? I'm sure most of us have, and if you haven't, I'm sure you will in the near future. They are our most precious cargo. It should never be about that it's inconvenient for the company or that it costs too much or that there are too many hours of training or there's too much red tape. That's unacceptable. This is our most precious cargo, so this is an investment.

In the not-too-distant past, as I referred to a little bit earlier, seat belts were not mandatory. It's hard to believe that there was a time when that was the case, but I think I'm old enough to remember even some arguments against seat belt safety. We won't even get into seat belts on buses. I'm sure that is coming. But the government of the day, and to their credit, made their use mandatory for the good of the people of the province. Years later we know exactly how many lives have been saved.

The government of the day stood by their decision, and the members of this Assembly should look at that. It's hard to believe that at the time that wasn't a popular decision, that that was something that people were actually arguing against as – I don't know – limiting their freedom to put on a seat belt. But it's a really good example for this House. When you look back, it seems like it's pretty easy. It's a no-brainer, right? Why wouldn't you demand a seat belt in a vehicle? This makes sense. Why would you not put in the safety standards that we talked about? Whether it's training, whether it's hours on the road supervised, whatever it is, why would you not put those things into place if you knew that there was a potential for it to save lives? We owe it to Albertans, all of us. It's our job to do this. It's our job to ensure that the vehicles on the road are as safe as possible.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Again, I just want to say that it's horrible that it took the enormity of the tragedy that occurred in Saskatchewan. It's sad that it took that for us to have made the changes then and now to be having this discussion again. As my colleague so eloquently said, this isn't a partisan issue. Let's make the changes that we need to make to ensure that this never happens again and we know that we have done everything possible to prevent this from happening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has the call.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so glad that we have unanimous consent in order to discuss this very important issue, and I want to thank the families of those who tragically lost their lives in the Humboldt bus crash and that are here today advocating. Unfortunately, it's too late for their loved ones, but as was expressed to many and they have been expressing to so many people, they do not want this to happen again on our highways, on our roads. That's what this issue is really about. They've emphatically expressed that they do not want exemptions for anybody here in Alberta when it comes to this issue, when it comes the safety of people on our highways. This is what these family members are here to communicate specifically to each and every one of us.

Now, as a representative it is my job to communicate what people are advocating for. I'm so happy to be able to get up in this House and be able to speak that truth here to all of my colleagues. I think that it's important we recognize that here in Alberta our regulations were so out of date when compared to other jurisdictions across this land, and the previous government simply was trying to get us on par with other jurisdictions here in Canada. This is about the safety on our highways.

When the Minister of Transportation comes into this House and says that they're going to be rolling back on these particular regulations and not only that, Mr. Speaker, but then the exemptions – and it's true that the previous government was providing exemptions for class 1 drivers so that they could all get rolled into the program and the same for class 2, those bus drivers. They were going to be able to get an exemption until the next school year. But now we're finding out from this minister, not in this House but through the media, when this minister is speaking to the media, that at first the exemption was going to go on even longer. Now the exemption is probably going to be indefinite. I would like to hear from the minister if that indeed is the case, and he should put it on the record inside of this House and not just simply state what he's thinking to the media. He should be expressing it here so that it is on the record.

I want to highlight the fact that according to the Tantus report there were so many problems with the system here in the province of Alberta, so many upgrades that had to be made to the regulations to make sure that our highways could be safe. It's sad that it took the Humboldt bus tragedy for us to really get focused on this and make the changes that had to be done in order to put us, bare minimum, on par with other jurisdictions.

3:20

I really want to appeal to the Minister of Transportation and to all the colleagues in this House so that they really think about what it is that they're doing when they're rolling back these regulations. What is it that is calling you to do so? Is it a special-interest group? Is that who you're here to govern for, or are you here to govern for all Albertans and specifically for the safety of all Albertans?

You know, we just passed Read In Week, and whenever I have the opportunity to go to schools and read to the children, of course,

we always do a preface on what my job is as an MLA. I explain to them that it's basically, in a nutshell, to come up with the rules of the province along with all 86 other members of this House. I always ask them: what do you think are the most important factors that we need to consider when we're coming up with the law and the rules for the province? These children always get the hammer right on the head of the nail, and they say: fairness and safety. If children can understand that safety is such an important part of coming up with new legislation, then why does the Minister of Transportation not understand that? Instead of making it safer on Alberta highways, he's rolling back on these regulations to make it less safe.

Mr. Speaker, I want to call on all the members of this House to really think about what it is that we're doing here today or what's happening with the rolling back of the regulations. As I stated, the minister has already said that these exemptions are going to go on indefinitely, so I hope that we can hear from the minister on specifically if that is going to be the case.

I don't want to get into a he said, she said kind of scenario, but it breaks my heart that the minister is reaching out to the Humboldt families – he gets up in this House and he says that he's reached out – but then he's not completely transparent about what those conversations were about. If anybody is interested, I've specifically asked the minister about this in question period, about his conversations with Mr. Boulet and what Mr. Boulet actually thinks about the conversation that the minister had with him. I hope that he can address that as well because I think it's unfair to the members of this House for the hon. minister to get up in this House and say things that are perhaps not the most accurate. I'll put it that way.

So again, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all the colleagues of the House for permitting this debate to go on today. Again I want to respectfully thank all of the members of the families that are here of the Humboldt bus tragedy. Thank you for advocating and continuing to work hard on this issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and speak on this motion. Let me just say this. This is another opportunity for the Official Opposition to take yes for an answer. They've been getting yes for an answer for several days now, and they just don't seem to want to accept yes for an answer. We agree with them. Safety is the most important thing. It always has been the most important thing. It always will be the most important thing. It is.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also take time to thank the families and loved ones from the Humboldt tragedy for being here and for the respectful conversation that we had earlier today, where they, I thought, were very gracious in giving me their time and very helpful in laying out what they thought was important.

Mr. Speaker, while we're having this talk, let's talk a little bit. The hon. member across I think just suggested, if he didn't outright state it, that the former NDP government came up with MELT as a result of the terrible Humboldt tragedy. No one could deny that it was a terrible, terrible tragedy. But the truth is that MELT came from the United States. It didn't come from somebody in Canada. It didn't come from an NDP. It didn't come from a Conservative. It didn't come from a Liberal. It didn't come from Canada. It came from the United States of America. The fact is that as of February of next year somebody driving with a class 1 or 2 licence and driving a vehicle in that category won't be able to take that vehicle across into the United States without MELT qualifications. That's

where this came from. But what's really important is that it gives us an opportunity to increase the driving qualifications and the safety standards, and that importance is magnified 1,000-fold at least, maybe more, because of the tragedy that happened with the Humboldt families. Let's clear the record on that. That's where MELT came from, the United States of America. But that's not to diminish how important it is. Safety always was, is, and always will be the most important thing.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the motion put on the table. Though we have said yes before and I expect we will say yes again today, the fact is that where the opposition – in my opinion, we're going to go further than what's in here because what it says in the motion is “standards implemented by the previous government” when, in fact, MELT was not implemented by the previous government. Sure, it was announced and then they said it was the rule of the land, but the same day that they said that it was the rule of the land, March 1, was also the day they actually crippled the government to deliver that policy by essentially firing all of the past driver examiners, at which time, by my understanding, there were 151, and then we ended up with 73 driver examiners. As I say, with half as many people to give tests on class 4, 5, 1, 2, MELT at the busiest part of the year, it essentially set the government way behind on the traditional road tests, let alone the more stringent MELT tests.

The government said that they implemented it, but I say they did not. I say they announced it, and then they called an election and left the government. Had they won the election, they would have been having the same problem that we're having now, having to correct the terrible mistake they made on March 1 by cutting the driver examiners in half.

Now, I don't have a problem with how the government reacted to the Tantis report, but they might have missed a line or two. Here's a piece out of the Tantis report. At some point it says in the Tantis report that summer is the busiest season of the year for road tests. Now, they've gone on at length about how they read the Tantis report and how important it is, but they didn't read it carefully enough because if they had read it carefully enough, they would not have cut the number of driver examiners in half at the beginning of the busiest part of the year while trying to implement a new and important safety standard. Perhaps they need to go back and read it again and pick up the parts that they missed the first time because clearly, if they read it, they ignored it. Mr. Speaker, on October 11 last year they said that MELT was coming, and on March 1 this year they said that MELT was here, which was, I will repeat, the same day that they cut the number of driver examiners in half or less.

Again, I agree with them that they thought that MELT was a good standard, and it is. MELT is here to stay. Again, MELT was not invented by the NDP; it was invented in the United States of America and imposed upon us. So we were left with a situation of having to impose these higher standards while falling behind severely with road tests every single month because of the mess that the previous government created by putting us way behind on the number of driver examiners here. But we set about to complete the task, and we're still working on it now.

3:30

Frankly, I wish we were further ahead than we are. I would be happier if we were because we're somewhere north of 30,000 tests behind. I don't have the most recent numbers, but it's high. That's because we're falling behind probably 6,000 to 8,000 tests per month from March 1, essentially, until the end of August or maybe even the end of September because of the decision of the previous government.

In the meantime, I would like people to know that we've been working hard to catch up. We hired a lot more drivers. You know what? That took a while because, as I think the opposition would agree, you shouldn't take shortcuts on safety. So we didn't put driver examiners out there to give these road tests that we're behind on until they had what we thought was proper and full training to do so.

We also announced that we've added licensed people to do drivers' exams to try to catch up. We announced that, I think, three or four weeks ago, and we're adding 20 more. I think there are four up and running now, and the other ones are in training. We're fortunate enough to have four previously experienced driver examiners, which is why we were able to get them on the road a little bit faster. They'd already had some of the training that was required, and the other ones we're busy putting through the training. We made a decision not to limit it to 20 licensees to deliver driver exams because we know how important it is to deliver the drivers' licences, including the MELT certification, which is a higher standard. We get that.

I find it a little bit insincere when the opposition complains that we give an extended period of time for some agricultural drivers and school bus drivers to get their drivers' licences when they indeed caused the problem and, further, when they indeed themselves, when they were government, gave an extension to those same groups of people. Yet today they would have you believe that it's a terrible crime though they did exactly that when they were in government. Frankly, I agree with their decision because school boards across the province told us that they needed to get the kids to school and they couldn't do it unless they could train drivers to do that. Agricultural people told us that they wouldn't be able to get their crops out of the field.

The fact is that the day of reckoning has to come when MELT has to be put in place, and the day has come. I agree with what the opposition has said here recently, that too many hours of training is not an excuse, too much red tape is not an excuse, too much expense is not an excuse. I agree with all of those things because we agree with safety. Again, this shouldn't be a partisan issue. I sense that the other side says in one breath that it's not a partisan issue; on the other side, they're sure working hard to make it one. Mr. Speaker, we agree with these things. It's interesting also that they complained about the regs being out of date, but they didn't change them themselves until MELT came along from the United States. For their government to say that they're adopting MELT: I agree with them. We need it. They're not wrong. Somehow when we say it, we're wrong, but I'm going to say it out loud. The opposition was right when they did that because safety matters.

Now, I will tell you about the one thing that we did. There were about 6,500 to 6,800 people that had their driver exams between October 11 last year, when the NDP announced that they were going to do this, and March 1 of this year, when they said it was the rule. These are transition drivers that passed the same class 1 or class 2 test as the other 150,000 or more drivers around Alberta driving class 1 or class 2 vehicles. I don't mind telling you that we would have preferred to say, "You've got to have the MELT requirement," except, again, we were kind of crippled in our ability to deliver that with not enough driver examiners available to us because of the decision the previous government made on March 1 of this year. But we set about to get it done.

Yes, we did say that these people with a good driving record would have their full class 1 or 2. We did say that, and I've pretty much confirmed this in the House, though the member who just spoke said I hadn't. I've said this before. This is well known.

I have to tell you that the good, good people from the Humboldt families told me that they're not happy about that. They made that

very clear to me. I didn't promise them what I would do differently other than I told them that because they asked, we will consider what we have decided, because no one that I can think of has paid a bigger price for a lack of safety in this province than the families of the victims of the Humboldt tragedy. Because of them we will consider that. I'm not sure what we're going to do, and I'm not making a promise or announcement right now, but I'm telling the House what I told them: we're going to look at it. I know that they want a hard promise today. I'm sorry; we can't give them that today, but we're going to look at it. If they're not happy with me, not happy with us, I understand that, but they've convinced me to take a second look.

Let me just say this. Again, it's funny that the opposite side talked about school boards getting kids to schools as a special-interest group. Yeah, maybe, but it's a pretty darn important special-interest group. I received a bunch of letters from different school boards thanking us for the extensions on those drivers getting their MELT standard because they tell me, not my words but theirs, that they wouldn't have gotten the kids to school, that they wouldn't have had the bus drivers to get the kids to school. They did. Mr. Speaker, I agree with the opposition doing that, and I agree with us extending it. I think that it was the right thing to do when they did it, and I think it was the right thing to do when we did it.

Similarly, some of our agricultural friends expressed that because they have a high turnover in their drivers some years, they weren't sure they could get the crops out of the fields without a time extension. The NDP gave them a time extension, and we extended that a little bit more. Frankly, I think that they were right, and I think that we were right, too. There are probably people who disagree with us. However, it comes down to: we have to make the roads as safe as we can, we have to make the drivers as safe as we can, and we have to make the vehicles as safe as we can.

The Premier announced today that we are making efforts to look at some of the cases that may and probably do exist where people are bringing in people from other countries and putting them on the road without being fully qualified and trained. That has happened, I believe. That may be happening today. I certainly hope not, but if it is, we are going to make a big effort to put a stop to it. Again I agree with the opposition on that. If they say that that's a problem, I agree with them because safety is not a partisan issue; safety is a human issue. It's an Albertan issue. It's one that I'd like to think every member of this House cares about as much as I do, and I'd like to think that I care about as much as all other members of this House do. I don't really see an exception in this room of people that care about that.

So here we are, Mr. Speaker. I'm asking the opposition to take yes for an answer. We do believe that safety is needed for all drivers throughout the province to prevent incidents like the Humboldt Broncos tragedy and all other tragedies, and we need to stop those from occurring again. Yes. The answer is yes.

Again I want to thank the Humboldt families for being here. They have agreed to advise the Ministry of Transportation on safety issues going forward, and we're going to listen to their advice. We didn't promise them that we were going to do every single thing that they said, but we promised them that we were going to consider it all carefully because we know it comes from an honest, sincere, and, unfortunately, in a very negative way, educated place, educated by tragedy.

So that's where we are. I'm in favour of what's in front of us. I would say to the opposition, and it's not the first time I've said it: take yes for an answer. We've essentially been saying yes in this House for weeks, days at least. Hopefully, this time they will actually hear the yes that we're saying loud and, I surely hope, clear.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen to speak.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak in favour of this motion that is before us as MLAs. I want to first start by recognizing the families in the gallery, and I also want to read into the record the note that I got from Toby Boulet, who could not be with us here in the gallery. Toby and Bernie Boulet are constituents of Lethbridge-West, and here's what they wrote:

Please apologize on both Bernadine's and my behalf for not being in attendance as we are presenting at the Canadian Transplant Summit in Banff on Wednesday. Please use this quote on my behalf. I am continually shocked that some in Canadian society are placing the value of a truck full of grain over my son's or any life.

Let's talk a little bit about how we got here. The minister has given a certain interpretation of events. I'm pleased to fill in some of the details for members assembled in the House this afternoon. Certainly, the previous government made several commitments and changes, including reviewing training for truck drivers, requirements for new commercial carriers, and intersectional safety on Alberta highways. There were previously no regulations around training requirements before obtaining the licences, and I might note that the current Minister of Transportation also served in the Redford government as Minister of Transportation, in which there were no training requirements before obtaining these licences.

So, yes, we did introduce a mandatory entry-level training program for class 1, which are semi-trucks, and class 2, bus drivers' licences. There was also a pre-entry requirement for new commercial carriers to ensure that their trucks met safety standards and that all of the drivers had received MELT training. Also, in order to clean up some of the shadiness that had prevailed in previous years, we made it more difficult for carriers that were suspended to resume operations as a chameleon company using a new company and safety fitness certificate. Previously truck companies shut down for noncompliance would simply migrate to a new company brand and restart operations. Again, this was a system that was in place prior to our government and certainly under this minister's watch.

Now, the current minister has taken issue with some of the actions taken around driver examiners, so let's talk about why those decisions were made. I think it's important for the Humboldt families, for the folks watching, and for the whole House to understand just what this Minister of Transportation has called a terrible mistake on behalf of the previous government. This minister has said that half of the driver examiners were no longer able to conduct driver testing and that this was, quote, a terrible mistake. That is what he just said.

There was an internal review of the driver examination model and 40 investigations of impropriety in just three years. Here's what it found: road tests were conducted without proper permits, there were incorrectly scored road tests, examiners had more than seven demerits on their licences, examiners offering a pass on a road test in exchange for money, and inappropriate touching during a road test. Now, I don't think that anyone in this House thinks that those folks should be put back to work. It was not a terrible mistake to take away their ability to do driver exams. That was the right thing to do for decency, for the rule of law.

Of course, we are now finding ourselves in this position where there is a review of bringing driver testing in-house as well as the MELT program, and now we have indefinite extensions for some of the exemptions. Now, the exemptions are going to be, we think –

and this is why we're having this emergency debate. We don't have clarity on whether those exemptions are going to be indefinite for drivers wanting a class 1 licence for the operation of a heavy-load farm vehicle or for class 2 licences for those operating school buses. We don't know, and we deserve to know, and the families deserve to know.

Are these exemptions going to be there or not? Are we going to bring our standards up in the face of all of this evidence that we need to or not? It's actually a pretty simple answer for the minister to give. There are, in fact, some pretty easy fixes here if he wants to manage this issue appropriately and also do the right thing. You know, the easy fix isn't: we're making efforts to look at our options. That's what the minister just committed to, making efforts to look. That's pretty cold comfort for something that is essentially a yes or no answer. Will there be exemptions or not?

Let's just give the minister a five-step program to make this issue so that we can move on, so that we can do the right thing, so that we can look those Humboldt families in the eye and say that we did the right thing for Albertans and for Canadians. Here it is. One, establish a timeline of no exemptions. Work with the Alberta Motor Transport Association and others who are interested stakeholders in this file. The AMTA has already said that they fully support the new regulations and the new system. Work with those stakeholders, the good actors in the trucking industry, who don't want to see bad actors unfairly subsidizing their operations. Just work with them and establish that timeline. Commit to it right now.

Two, stop making excuses for a broken system that was in part his responsibility as minister. That's an easy one.

Three, fund the training for school boards. How hard is this? Kids deserve to drive to school in a safe environment with a bus driver that has the appropriate training. If it's expensive, fund it. Just do it. Stand up in the House right now and commit to it.

Four, stand up to the hard-core lobbying, and send a clear message that it won't work here, that this is too important for Albertans. We know that those lobbyists were the first ones in the door when this government was sworn in. Just stand up to them. Make a public statement right now: "Not going to work. Safety is first."

Five, this minister and this government could take this opportunity to take national leadership on this file, to establish common cause with other provinces for road safety. We know that folks cross borders. These families' kids crossed a border. We know that these standards should be in place for the entire country, so go to the next federal-provincial-territorial meeting and put it on the agenda that everyone is going to have the same standards, that there won't be any exemptions. Take national leadership, and just get it done. Don't cave to lobbying, and put pressure on the feds if you need to with respect to seat belts on school buses and all the rest of the things that the families have been asking for.

Take some leadership on this. At the end of the day, we are all Canadians, and we all deserve to be safe on the roads. We all deserve to know that the people behind the wheel of whatever large vehicle have had an exam that is within the public interest, that was not bought and paid for, that was not the result of some shady transaction, money changing hands inappropriately. We all deserve that. We deserve to know that the school bus drivers that are picking up our kids have the appropriate training and that the government has taken responsibility for that training and the safety of those kids and that the Education minister and the transport minister and every other minister of Executive Council have taken responsibility for that safety. They can easily make that commitment. Do a prebudget announcement. Make it right this afternoon. No problem. It's not that much money. Just get 'er done.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, we are standing in this House because we have a lack of clarity. We have a minister who has committed only to make efforts to look at the situation, and we have Albertans and people across Canada who are saying that that is not good enough. Let's do better as Albertans and as Canadians. Let's be clear with our constituents – mine, the Member for St. Albert's, the Member for Edmonton-Mill-Woods', and everyone else's – those grieving families, and give them some clear answers and some clear assurances. Let's let them get back to the business of rebuilding their lives instead of having to advocate for trucking safety standards.

Toby Boulet is trying to get ready for the opening of the Logan Boulet Arena in Lethbridge. He's trying to focus his life. Toby and Bernadine are trying to move on, yet they have to engage in strategic planning and government relations and lobbying to make this government do the right thing? That's not right. That's not respectful, especially when I just outlined that it would actually be pretty straightforward to fix this problem.

Mr. Speaker, that is why we are having this emergency debate this afternoon. I believe that I have made my views in favour of this motion clear, and I want to urge all members of the Assembly to do the right thing this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise this afternoon and speak on what's a fairly important topic that's been discussed in this Chamber at length over the last few weeks. I'd like to start off by reiterating the comments of the hon. the Transportation minister earlier in his discussion and make it, first off, clear that all Canadians share the pain of the families whose young people lost their lives in the tragedy that was the Humboldt Broncos bus crash and that safety on our roads is the number one priority of our government. The hon. Transportation minister has been clear about that today. I thank him for that. He's also been clear about it repeatedly in question period for the last week and a half.

He's been clear on this fact: the new training requirements, MELT, introduced for new heavy-truck drivers and bus drivers, class 1 and 2 licences, as I understand it, Mr. Speaker, are here to stay. He's been clear about that today. He's been clear about that in question period. He's been clear about that. As he said to the hon. members, "Take yes for an answer."

He's also been clear that the previous NDP government exempted over 150,000 existing drivers while also providing an extension for the requirement for farmers and school bus drivers, which is a fact, as I understand it. That was under the previous government. He's also been clear that we regret that at the same time that that government was imposing those new requirements, the previous NDP government made compliance practically impossible by cutting the number of driver examiners in half at the very same time that they were bringing in the new rules. The hon. Minister of Transportation has also been clear that he on behalf of our government is moving quickly to fix the problem by hiring more examiners. He was talking about that before this was even raised in question period, in fact before this sitting of the Legislature started.

In addition, today the Premier has been clear about the facts that I just presented but also that he's instructed his Minister of Labour and Immigration to begin to reach out to his federal colleagues regarding possible exploitation in regard to temporary foreign workers' programs in regard to heavy trucking and particularly around the context that was reported in the *Globe and Mail* recently.

Mr. Speaker, those facts have been made clear. It's important that they're made clear, and I thank the hon. Transportation minister for making those facts clear. I am proud to call the hon. Transportation minister my friend. I'm proud to have served with him in this Chamber side by side for many years. In fact, I even had a lot of fun when we served in opposite parties for a little bit of time. He's always been approachable. He's always answered questions fairly, both in his time as a minister now and his time before. He's been easy to work with when he was in opposition, and he has been clear on that.

While the tragedy that was the Humboldt bus crash is a tragedy, it's important to recognize what the Official Opposition continues to do in this Chamber, not just on this issue but on many issues, Mr. Speaker. It's shocking. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West spoke at length about what Albertans and Canadians want. I certainly agree that Albertans and Canadians want to make sure that truck safety is handled right, that the lessons that have been learned from the Humboldt bus crash are acted upon so that a tragedy like that can never occur again, and hopefully no other family will ever have to experience that tragedy. None of us in this Chamber can even understand what that tragedy has done to the families. That's important.

But what's important also is to recognize the track record, Mr. Speaker, that the Official Opposition continues to use in this place, and I would submit to you that it's why they're the Official Opposition. It's why they were the only one-term government in the history of this province. It's why they have been sent to that side of the House. [interjections] They think that coming here and acting like this and misrepresenting facts benefits Albertans. It doesn't.

The hon. Transportation minister has been clear on this for a very long time. It's why . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but I actually think that this is a good opportunity for me to just mention that all members do have under Standing Order 42, if they should so choose, 20 minutes. There's no 29(2)(a). So if there are other comments and arguments that are potentially going to be made, I invite all members, perhaps after we hear from a member, to then stand and be recognized.

Thank you.

Please continue. There are still 15 minutes and 37 seconds.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that. I do hope hon. members take the opportunity to participate in debate, not to spend their time heckling but to actually talk about this important issue.

Why I refer to the opposition's behaviour in the context of this motion is that it's important for Albertans to understand what continues to take place in this Chamber. It's appalling for most Albertans that see how the NDP continue to go about their business as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition inside this Chamber, and today is another example. When you have the hon. Transportation minister, who has been clear for weeks on his position and then continues to see the opposition rise in this place and say the exact opposite of what he has said, that does not serve Albertans, Mr. Speaker. It does nothing to benefit Albertans nor the debate on what is an important issue.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition has done this several times. They did this often when they were in government, and it was disappointing to Albertans at the time, which is why I suspect that they were voted out in record numbers. But it's even more disappointing now to watch as they've done it in opposition, as they've continued to rise over and over and over and misrepresent facts inside this very Chamber. They've done it on rural crime, and that is a great example

that is very similar to this situation. They repeatedly for several weeks have stood in this Chamber, misrepresented the facts on where the Solicitor General was going to on rural crime, repeatedly misrepresented the facts at the very same time as the Minister of Justice has gotten up over and over and over and said that those are not the facts.

Mr. Speaker, of late they've taken to then standing up in this Chamber and quoting town councils or county councils, mayors, and saying that they are expressing their views and that the mayors are concerned, to the point that we see a letter now come from the mayor of Brooks, the mayor of Wetaskiwin, the mayor of Lacombe – I can tell you that I suspect there will be more of these letters in the coming days – addressed to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that say: “We read with dismay the *Hansard* of October 15, 2019, in which you said in the legislature,” and I quote: ‘He can deny it all he wants but the communities of Brooks, Wetaskiwin, Barrhead, Sundre, Foothills and Lacombe [will] oppose his plan . . .’ when, in fact” – this is the mayors now; we're out of the quote – “that is not the case.”

The mayors go on to say:

The position of the cities of Lacombe, Wetaskiwin and Brooks has been, and continues to be, that all municipalities (including municipal districts and counties) should bear a portion of the cost for police services they receive. We also support the principles that any new models should include . . .

Then they list some of the principles.

Then they close with this:

Misrepresenting our views for political theatre is dishonest and unbecoming for any member of the provincial legislative assembly.

We respectfully ask you to correct your statement for the record immediately.

Mr. Speaker, I note that that still has not happened on behalf of the mayors of those three communities. I note it hasn't happened on behalf of several of the other communities that have been listed within that context, and I know those letters are coming shortly. Many of those communities I have the privilege of representing, and I can assure you they are quite disheartened to continue to watch the NDP misrepresent facts inside this Chamber for their own political gain. That is not the role of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. It's not the role.

4:00

I was proud to serve as a Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in this Chamber with many of the members that are still on the benches with me now, who sat on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker. It was not the role when we were there, and it's still not the role now that they are there. They can do better than this. They should do better than this. Albertans deserve better than this. This Chamber is a place for open and truthful debate, not where you come and misrepresent facts.

Ms Ganley: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize that a point of order has been called. I can deal with that right now.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hesitate to rise for fear of setting this off all over again, but we're here discussing an incredibly serious matter. We're talking about families who lost their children, and we're talking about the safety of all road users. To see the hon. Government House Leader get up and sort of take us on a wander through a number of collateral attacks I think is a bit inappropriate. If he wishes to disagree with us on this matter and have a conversation about this issue, I'm happy to hear from him. I

think it's important to hear from all members of the House regardless of whether they disagree, but I think that out of respect for the families, we ought to contain our debate to this subject. If we disagree with each other on other matters, we ought to disagree about those other matters at other times.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: On the point of order or just moving on?

The Acting Speaker: On the point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Clearly a matter of debate, Mr. Speaker. While I do understand that the Official Opposition does not want to have pointed out the political and partisan games that they play with these issues, it is clearly relevant to the motion that we are talking about. The fact that they brought it forward made it very clear in the context of the motion. Again, I should be allowed to continue with my speech.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. In this specific case, I will take the opportunity to say, first off, that I do not find a point of order specifically or at least in part because there was no mention of any standing order that was broken. Secondly, though, I will also take this opportunity to just remind the whole House that we are debating a specific motion at this time, so if all members could just continually move towards ensuring that they discuss the topic at hand, that would be very appreciated.

The hon. Government House Leader, with 11 minutes and 29 seconds left.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for recognizing me again. Why I bring this up is that it's important for Albertans to understand what is going on inside this Chamber and what their Official Opposition is up to.

Now, with that, I will go back to the motion that is at hand, Mr. Speaker, and make it clear again on behalf of the government, as the hon. the Transportation minister already has repeatedly, that MELT is here to stay. That is a fact, a fact that has been made clear in this Chamber. The hon. Transportation minister is working through one heck of a mess that, unfortunately, the NDP have left them. Sadly, it's not the only mess that the government has to work through, as you know, that the NDP have left, but he is working through it. He's committed to the direction that he is headed in.

It is not helpful for the NDP to continue to stand inside this place and misrepresent facts, Mr. Speaker, and, through you to them, I encourage them to stop that behaviour because that is not becoming of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. They're better than that. If they're not, they should certainly act better than that. They've received a great privilege to be a member in this place, and repeatedly coming here every day misrepresenting facts . . . [interjection] I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall heckling away about speaking to the motion. This is about the motion because it's related to why the NDP are playing these games. It's not appropriate.

This is a very important issue, Mr. Speaker, and I'll be excited to vote for this motion shortly if the NDP send it to a vote, but we will continue to call them out on their behaviour. It's why they're in the spot that they're in, and Albertans do not like what the NDP continue to do here. Their job is not to fear and smear people. Their job is not to come here and misrepresent facts. Their job is to come here and debate, to make sure that we end up with good legislation, not to continually listen to a minister stand up and make it clear about very clear, specific facts and then stand up and misrepresent the facts not only in this Chamber but then across the province. It's shameful, it's not appropriate, and I do hope they stop.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen to speak.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Member for St. Albert for moving this important motion this afternoon and for giving an opportunity to all members to support unanimously and to debate this motion. It's unfortunate that the Government House Leader has spent so much of his time not focused on the matter at hand.

I have to say that better safety standards – I'm going to agree with something that the Infrastructure minister said. MELT was absolutely invented south of the border. Sometimes things that are invented south of the border can have benefits here. Sometimes things that are invented even across the ocean can have benefits here; for example, the three-point seat belt, that was mentioned by the Member for St. Albert. That wasn't invented in Alberta. It wasn't invented by one political party or another. It was invented in Sweden. But when a good safety device was invented in Sweden in 1958, it was about 30 years later that we adopted the same practice here in Alberta because it had saved about 50 per cent of the lives from those accidents. The research was clear. I wish it wouldn't have taken 30 years, Mr. Speaker. I really hope that the government acts far more quickly than the Infrastructure minister has been hinting at through recent public interviews, because MELT absolutely wasn't invented here, but it has the opportunity to save lives.

For that, I think our kids on school buses, our teams travelling around the province, individual families or individuals on the highway, our agricultural workers, and our transport workers deserve to have a government pay due attention and give due consideration, and that was done, Mr. Speaker. That was done previously. The decision was made that we were going to move forward by having enhanced safety training. I can tell you that there was an accident in Lamont when my mom – I think she was a first-year teacher at the time. There was a school bus that was hit by a train, and every time we drive by Lamont or go to Lamont for a family function, my mom tells me about that accident. She wasn't on the bus, but she knew some of the kids who were, and she definitely knew all the families, and it has had a lasting impact on somebody who was, you know, not directly impacted. But it impacted the community. It impacted our province. I know that the same is true for Humboldt.

I have to say how disheartened I was to have learned recently through media reports about the government's intention to delay and dismiss important measures that can act to heighten safety. I think that 6,800 trucks and bus drivers having less than what I would say is appropriate safety training is not in the public interest, and it shouldn't be in the government's interest either. I know that's been confirmed, that there is potentially an indefinite delay. That's been confirmed with the Alberta Motor Transport Association. That is deeply concerning. I think a delay in acting to save lives is an injustice in this place.

I'm going to mention two other things: the intersection of highways 35 and 335. That is an intersection where there is constant agricultural traffic. Of course, when we saw the footage, it wasn't an agricultural vehicle. It was another vehicle that was involved in striking the bus, but if it would have been a load of grain, I don't think anyone would have felt any better about it. Delaying safety standards for folks who are driving those vehicles puts them at risk as well as those on the road who aren't driving those vehicles.

The minister absolutely has the opportunity to stick with what he said in June. In June he said that they were going to be funding this important initiative to make sure that there was this heightened

safety. Definitely, it appears through other media reports that funding is not going to be a priority for this government, something that could have been committed to – it was committed to in June – and could have been followed through on.

I want to say that I've been in your shoes. I've been sitting on the front bench where somebody made a decision before me, and it was up to me to make a decision whether or not we wanted to follow through on a decision that was made previously. This decision I'm speaking specifically to was when I was Minister of Health, and a former minister of seniors had announced that they were going to put sprinklers in seniors' homes, but there wasn't money in the budget. There was no money put aside for it, but the announcement had been made by the previous government, and I was in a position where I had to make a decision about what we were going to do. I wasn't going to live with the risk that seniors were going to be in seniors' lodges that weren't safe. I wasn't willing, knowing how many seniors use walkers, use wheelchairs, and aren't able to flee from a burning building, to take that risk for those seniors.

4:10

So I went to my Premier, and I said, "I'm going to make this announcement, and it's not yet in the budget, so I need you to have my back and say that we're going to make sure that we put this funding forward," and my Premier had my back because she cared about those seniors and about the families who were worried about their well-being. This minister can do the same. This minister absolutely can go to his Premier and say: this is the right thing to do.

I've talked to the families. The families have demonstrated that they feel this is important, and certainly a significant number of Albertans and Canadians feel that this is important. Yes, it will cost some money, but it's not worth the risk. Please don't make other families go through the devastation that they have already experienced. Please don't make other community members, every time they drive by that intersection or the next intersection, have that same knot in their stomach when they tell their families the story about what happened.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I know that it takes some courage, and I know that sometimes it can be challenging when you don't feel that you've got the money in your budget, but these kids' lives and all of our lives are worth the investment in increasing our safety on our roads. I don't just want to hear, "Yes, I'm going to look at it; I'm going to consider it down the road." I want to hear, "Yes, this is a priority; yes, it will be funded; and, yes, we will act to make our roads safer." I know that sometimes it can be challenging, but I think that today is the day.

We all ran, I hope, to make this province a better place and to make our communities safer and more successful for all, and this is an opportunity to do that today. That seniors' lodge example, I hope, is something for folks to reflect on. I definitely see the parallels myself.

With that, I'll cede my time. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to begin my remarks, of course, by acknowledging and thanking the family members of not only the Humboldt tragedy but the tragedy that occurred in B.C. for being here and for advocating so hard and so thoughtfully and so earnestly for a change in law that would take the otherwise meaninglessness of their tragedy and mitigate it ever

so slightly by saving the lives of many other Albertans and, ultimately, Canadians through your efforts. I want to thank you so much for your courageous presence here because I can't imagine that it is easy at the best of times, and I can't imagine that it's easy sometimes to watch the back and forth in this Legislature and feel tremendous faith, necessarily, in our ability to focus on the matter at hand. So I want to thank you for that.

I do also want to thank most of the members opposite for agreeing with us to have this debate and certainly the minister, who has indicated that he is willing to give this a little bit more consideration. I think, at the end of the day, that's what this House should do when it works the way it is intended, which is something that, you know, happens about once every 365 days, but maybe today will be that day.

What I really want to focus on, then, is to talk about the matter that we are hoping to achieve through this conversation today, to talk about the goal that the families and probably hundreds of thousands of other families across Alberta want to see us achieve, which is simply to make our roads safer, to make the people who travel on our roads safer, to make our kids who travel from point A to point B with school, with soccer, with hockey, with dance, with whatever safer, to make the people who work for us safer, the people that drive those vehicles safer. That's what we are here to talk about today.

And how do we do that? That is, really, the focus that I want to try to maintain and to back away as much as possible from the "he said, she said; he's worse, she's worse" kind of conversation that we can be tempted to fall into.

Thus far in this conversation the concerns that have been expressed are that we are unsure of what is happening with respect to the roughly 6,800 new drivers – and that's a number that we got from the government, we think, through reports in the media – who would have been licensed between October '18 and March of 2019. That's one group of people that we want to talk about for a minute.

The other group of people we want to talk about are those folks who work in the agriculture sector who drive heavy-load vehicles and who we believe may not be currently meeting the standards through MELT, either the training or the testing, and for whom there has been an extension and for whom there has been another extension for quite a bit longer and for whom there is now some concern that there might be an indefinite extension. Through that concern with that group we are also worried that if that extension were allowed to continue for any length of time, whether that will become a loophole through which other companies will travel in order to extract drivers who otherwise will not have to take the testing and earn the associated costs but will otherwise be able to be on the road doing a much broader form of driving of semis and moving other products.

Then the third group we are concerned about, of course, is school bus drivers and the training that they would be expected to follow.

Those are the things that we are worried about. If there is confusion, it's because there's been confusion in how it's been communicated. Different people in different settings have suggested that there are different outcomes. If there is confusion, it is not contrary to what the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre would suggest. It's not some big conspiracy; it is simply that there is confusion. At the same time there is confusion about an issue about which many, many Albertans are concerned. But I think those are the three areas that we're mostly addressing, dealing with right now.

Now, one of the things that the Minister of Transportation has suggested is that, "Well, we had to, you know, write off these 6,800 people, and we had to extend for at least two years and maybe indefinitely for these other folks because there are half the number

of driver examiners available" because our government took steps to change the way people in Alberta had their licence issued. So let me just talk about that for a moment. I was actually around the table, contrary to some of the assertions that have been made that this was all something that was brought on by something that was going to happen in the U.S. two years from now. That's not what happened. We were around the table when this happened.

The reason the change was made to the examiners and how they were paid and how they were overseen and who employed them and whether they were independent contractors or not was primarily related to a number of the concerns that were delineated, I think, by the Member for Lethbridge-West but generally speaking, concerns that, in some cases, there was abuse by those private operators, certainly not all. Some of them were great people doing a great job and working very hard. By no means are we suggesting that that wasn't the majority, but there was a large enough minority of that group that it was incumbent upon us to step in, not only because consumers were having their rights jeopardized, not only because in some cases people were overpaying through the nose for these services in certain parts of the province but also because, at the end of the day, it came down to the issue of safety. If you couldn't trust the people that were giving people licences to be on the road, then, obviously, that becomes a matter of safety.

So that's why we stepped in. But, of course, it was happening at the same time that we were also trying to improve significantly the level of training that these drivers would receive before they went onto the road with these very big vehicles that could be dangerous if people didn't know how to drive them. That was a problem, no question.

What needs to be understood, though, is that when the members opposite say, "Oh, they were down to half the number of examiners, and therefore we had to blow up the whole situation," most of those examiners worked part-time. When we hired a whole bunch of new ones, they were working full-time. In fact, our sources tell us that certainly not by March 1 – that's absolutely true – but by the end of April our capacity with respect to the ability to train and to examine was almost back to where it was at the outset. Now, even if it wasn't quite there, the question is: is it delayed by another month or two? I don't know. Maybe. But is it delayed by two years or indefinitely or to never? No.

4:20

I don't think that it is a fair characterization of this debate or that it is the most straightforward way to engage in this debate by trying to say that we had to exempt the 6,800 and exempt the school drivers and exempt the farm people because of the change in the way drivers' examiners were paid and employed. I think it was a problem, for sure. I take full responsibility. It was a problem, but it's also a fixable problem, and it was well on the way to being fixed, so let's focus on fixing the problem. Let's move away from who was in charge for how long and didn't do this and who tried to fix it and maybe it wasn't fixed the right way or whether it was fixed before or after the election. Let's move away from that. This is a process that was in transition that we can fix or we cannot fix. Let's just focus on fixing it because safety is really what's at the heart of the issue. If we move beyond that and imagine that we should have, if we haven't already, gotten ourselves back up to and beyond capacity when it comes to training and examining, we should be able to, and there should be no barrier to that because we were awfully close as of April. That's the first thing.

So then what do we do about these other three groups? There are these 6,800 folks. We announced it in October, and then we brought it into effect in March. Now, we delayed it until March because we were told by ministry officials that we wouldn't have the capacity

to start the work until then. As it turned out, it was a bit later, but that's what we were told. We also announced that it was going to happen because we wanted to give those in the industry time to adjust and to seek out other forms of training if it was possible and to start the work of being safer.

The concern we had, though, was that if we didn't make everybody between October and March subject to these rules, some of the not good players in the industry – and let me be clear. There are many good players in the industry, great, responsible players within the trucking industry, but there were some who were trying to slip underneath and who were making shortcuts, and that's where they saw that they were making money. They were the ones – the bad actors, we'll call them. We were worried that those folks were going to try to get thousands and thousands of people licensed in that window in order to game the system and get there before the new rules were in place. That's why we said: "No. You won't take the training until March, but you need to know that you're going to be compelled to take the training even if you get your licence in December, so don't rush it. Don't think you can game the situation because we're closing that loophole." That was the point of creating that.

But then what's happened now, by saying that 6,800 are exempt, is that we've essentially rewarded those bad actors, and I don't know why we would do that. If it takes a bit more time to get those folks trained, to get them examined, why don't we just do it? You know, we don't have to just say willy-nilly that those 6,800 brand new drivers are okely-dokely to drive on the highway. We can still compel them to be trained. We can still compel them to take the test as they would have in March if we'd had enough people, as they would have in April because we probably had enough people at that point. There's no need to just let them stay out there driving and earning their experience at the expense of our safety. That's not the right way to go, and that's what these families are fighting very hard against.

Now, the next group that we need to talk about, of course, is heavy-load truckers in the agriculture industry. Again, we know and the member opposite, I think, acknowledged that there are some small sectors within that industry where this is an area that could be abused and has been abused. It's a relatively small area of the agricultural industry, but if that exemption remains in place, whether it be one year, two years, or indefinitely, then that will become a pipeline, if you will, for a huge swath of drivers who work their way through that, don't incur the cost of training and licensing, and then suddenly are able to use that experience there to get themselves onto the road driving these big rigs, which was exactly the problem that led to the Humboldt tragedy in the first place, having people that were not properly trained.

I would urge the government to shut that down, to say no to the rather compelling, pervasive, loud-voiced lobbyists to whom they have been exposed. We know who they are. We met with them. We know what you're hearing, and we know what you can say no to. It can be done. Say no to them on that and just insist that everybody be subject to the training. If the issue is funding for particularly precarious operators within the agriculture industry, well, then fine. Consider whether there might be an opportunity to set up grants or whatever so those folks can get the support they need to ensure the safety that we all need on our roads. That's a different way of fixing the problem without generating the kinds of safety risks that not fixing the problem generates.

The final thing I want to talk about is the school buses. You're right; for years and years and years the school bus drivers were not properly trained. I rode on a school bus. There are days when I am shocked that I'm still here. You know, it was quite the operation: no seat belts, overcrowded with kids, sliding all over the icy roads.

Yes, we had some times in the ditch, lovely times when it was minus 40 out and we went into the ditch and waited for two hours for somebody to come and drag us out. Good times. Not safe. Therefore, the fact that we did it before is not an argument for why we should continue to do it. When we were told that we should be raising the standards, we said: yes, we should be raising the standards.

Now, the minister is correct. In both of those examples we did give an extension. Because the thing came into force in March, we said, "You know what? Right on the eve of seeding, maybe that's too fast. They won't have time to get these folks up to speed" if it was the farming sector. For schooling we said: "You know what? The boards will not necessarily have the money. They won't have the time to get all these folks up to speed that quickly, and many of them struggle to find bus drivers in certain areas, so what we'll do is that we will delay it until September and let both of those groups take the summer to get the training done." That was the only reason we delayed it. We didn't delay it because of any expected shortfall of trainers or licensors. We didn't delay it for money reasons. We didn't delay it for lobbying. We simply delayed it to ensure that it did not disrupt the services that they were providing. We thought: "No. We'll give them lots of notice, and they can get it done in the summer and be ready for September 1." That was the only extension, so I don't understand now why we would be extending for a year or two years or three years.

With the schools I suspect the reason that we're extending is because it is costly to school boards to train all their school bus drivers, but I say: who cares? I honestly can't imagine that a single one of the members opposite or at least the rural members opposite would want to look at their constituents and say: we don't have enough money to make sure that school bus drivers are adequately trained to keep your kids safe. You know what? Give them a grant so they get the training.

Ms Hoffman: Pay for it.

Ms Notley: Pay for it. Get your school boards to pay for it. Don't say: "Well, it's all up to the school boards. School boards can make their own decisions. They're really superindependent." You're not independent if you don't have your own revenue-generating option. It has to be a question of ensuring everybody has safety and everybody can afford safety. So yeah, pay for it. Safety is worth it. I would argue that safety is worth it.

In the overall scheme of things the cost is not by any means undoable. We're talking about, you know, I think, at most 100 hours of training. It's a two-week course or a two and a half week course. It's probably less than that for school bus drivers. I absolutely believe that this is an investment that we should be making in our kids, in our workers, in our citizens who are on the roads, whether they're on the roads as passengers or drivers. Whether they're on the roads as residents or business leaders, doing economic travelling or vacation travelling or schooling travelling, it doesn't matter. The reality is that we know it's not as safe as it should be. We can fix this.

The solution is not that expensive, it's not that complicated, and there is no need to be considering extensions of one year, two years, or indefinite. There is no need to be allowing those 6,800 people to remain on the road right now. You need to draw a line in the sand somewhere. That's exactly what we did in October. By not following that, you run the risk of having even more poorly trained people than normal because those folks rushed in after the announcement was made, before the training started, so you cannot let them get away with that gaming.

4:30

They're simple solutions. I would urge the minister to ask his officials to be significantly more transparent and clear on what is happening. I would urge them to set up a website and show who is being trained, when the training is available, how many people have been trained, how much it's costing, you know, what the criteria are. The best way to avoid confusion is to be clear and consistent on what exactly is going on. Be clear and consistent about what is going on, and then raise your standards. Take it back to where it was, because we were on the path to being the safest jurisdiction as opposed to a destination jurisdiction for bad actors, which we were before. We should get back to that, and then we should keep our minds open to anything else we need to do to promote safety.

We can do all that to honour the memories of the victims of the Humboldt tragedy and to honour the memories of many, many, many other victims of a failure to keep our roads safe that has been created over many, many, many years in the past. We can do better, and this government can do better. I think that our debate should be focused solely on those issues, not about who caused what and, you know, who did what well and who said what in a completely different conversation on a different topic that's completely unrelated but, rather, about how we just get to a pragmatic, practical solution that keeps our people safe. That's what these folks up in the gallery are asking for, and that is, I think, what this government has to deliver.

I look forward to hearing and seeing the kind of transparency and clarity that I believe the families and all Albertans are looking for in terms of safety standards in this province. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, shall I call the question?

[Motion carried]

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 16

Public Lands Modernization (Grazing Leases and Obsolete Provisions) Amendment Act, 2019

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me this evening. I rise today to introduce for second reading the Public Lands Modernization (Grazing Leases and Obsolete Provisions) Amendment Act, 2019.

Madam Speaker, as you know, the ranching and cattle industry provides a vital role in our province, contributing to the environmental, economic, and social landscapes of Alberta. In order to ensure Alberta's hard-working ranchers can continue to protect the environment and help support our economy into the future, we need to take some action.

Now, the cattle rancher is a powerful symbol in Alberta of what it means to be Albertan: rugged, salt of the earth, and self-sustaining. Madam Speaker, as you know, I'm proud to come from Sundre, from the riding of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, to live west of the 22, as we call it there. Some of you would call it west of the 5th. Where I come from, we would refer to that as west of the 22, which is west of the Cowboy Trail. In Sundre we consider ourselves the crown jewel of the Cowboy Trail, the beating heart of

the Cowboy Trail. It is definitely a cattle community that has existed in this province for a very, very long time.

The ranching industry, though, is modernizing, and government should take its lead from them because Albertans deserve fair value for our shared resources and ranchers deserve a predictable and innovative approach. As such, our government is moving to modernize the grazing fee framework so that it's transparent and fair for ranchers and disposition holders. Updating this framework will reflect current economic realities and will ensure that Alberta is receiving market value for its public land resources. Since grazing disposition rental rates have been frozen for so long, changes will be introduced through a five-year phase-in to ensure that there are no sudden changes to costs to ranchers and disposition holders.

The bill enjoys support from all of the province's major grazing stakeholders, a testament to this government's commitment to engagement and transparency through this process. I think it's important to re-emphasize that point. This bill enjoys support from every major grazing stakeholder in the province. That is a sharp contrast to the last pieces of agriculture legislation that we saw the former NDP government bring to this Chamber. Yesterday we stood on the stairs of the Chamber. Behind us was the support of every grazing association in the province. When that government brought forward agriculture legislation in this place – Madam Speaker, I don't have to tell you – there were a lot of farmers and ranchers standing on the stairs of the Legislature, but they certainly weren't there in support of that government's legislation. They were there against it, primarily because that government, the NDP government at the time, did not even take the time to consult with those very members. We have a different approach. This piece of legislation shows that.

It also shows our dedication to the ranching and farming communities inside our province, how much we respect and appreciate their contribution to our economy. The NDP – and this probably is why they don't have any rural members inside their caucus. They don't have any members that represent large agriculture communities because when they spoke and brought in legislation in regard to farming and ranching inside this Legislature, right here in this very spot, they spoke about comments like the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, at the time when he was the Finance minister, who rose inside this House and implied that farmers and ranchers in Alberta needed Bill 6, that they hadn't consulted with them about, because farmers and ranchers were trying to hurt their employees. You can go and check *Hansard* about that, Madam Speaker. It happened live in this Chamber. I know you were sitting there at the time, watching, likely with the same reaction that I had, quite appalled on behalf of my constituents that a then minister of the NDP would imply that the farming and ranching communities that I am proud to represent would in some way deliberately try to hurt their employees.

Now, if they had taken time to consult, as we had, they would know that those are not the farm and ranching communities that I come from; they're not the farming and ranching communities any of my colleagues come from. I'm proud to call ranchers my neighbours and my friends.

Importantly, though, as well, the bill will also help us avoid possible trade countervails from the United States under NAFTA. Now, Madam Speaker, you may not be aware that in 1999 a United States Department of Commerce countervailing duty investigation identified grazing rental rates as a significant contributor to the subsidization of the Canadian cattle industry. If a countervail investigation was launched today, there is a risk of a subsidy and a duty being imposed on the Canadian cattle industry, not just the

Canadian cattle industry that uses grazing leases inside our province but on the entire Canadian cattle industry.

This is an issue and a risk that the cattle industry has faced for a long time, that they have raised both with this government and with the previous government. In fact, I was shocked to know that the previous government did not act on this despite the fact that grazing associations and the cattle industry were very clear with them, is my understanding, as to the risk to the cattle industry, again, I would submit to you, Madam Speaker, showing the complete disconnect that is the NDP with rural Alberta, with agriculture communities in particular. If passed, Bill 16 will help to mitigate that threat.

Simply put, the current grazing rental rates have been frozen for 25 years, Madam Speaker, and they are drastically in need of updating. Many of these changes will bring us into harmony with other jurisdictions, including the province of Saskatchewan, to the east of us. They will also remove barriers to succession or entry of young people into the industry, an important step in order to keep the industry thriving for generations to come.

There are several additional changes outlined in the bill, all aimed at benefiting the ranching community and Albertans as a whole. In order to streamline our government system, we are proposing changes which allow for updates to rental rate formulas to recognize a two-zone grazing system, with boundaries that recognize the true cost of maintaining a grazing disposition and the differences faced by ranchers in northern and southern Alberta. As you know, Madam Speaker, ranching up in High Level, with its climate and shorter growing seasons, brings challenges that they don't see in Lethbridge or even in my home of Sundre, and our new rental rate formula takes that into account. Two zones employ a different minimal rental rate charge when profits are low to reflect differences in capital cost. As profits rise, the rental rates will increase, and the formula will capture a progressively greater share.

4:40

If this bill is passed into law – and I do hope all members of the Chamber will support this important piece of legislation – we plan to annually allocate 30 per cent of grazing disposition rental revenue above \$2.9 million in rangeland sustainability initiatives. To be clear on that, Madam Speaker, we intend to take 30 per cent of the increase in grazing disposition fees and invest it back in rangeland sustainability initiatives. This will ensure that Alberta receives a fair share for the use of our resources and that, when market conditions are good, a substantial amount of money is dedicated to supporting rangeland sustainability through proactive partnerships.

While more details of the exact programs being funded will be determined once the legislation is passed, we do believe that this could include improvements to existing research and better rangeland management. We already have stuff, Madam Speaker, inside our platform around this. Our platform promised to invest over \$1 million in a program called cows and fish, that works with the agriculture community on important waterways in grazing areas to be able to protect fish habitat. It also means support for programs that will benefit our shared environment, namely the wetlands and grasslands Albertans treasure so much. This is also one of many legislative changes that demonstrates our government's commitment to create a fair and balanced system that supports the environment and helps grow the economy.

Madam Speaker, passing Bill 16 will support our ranchers now and for the years to come while ensuring that Albertans remain leaders in the ranching industry, an industry that has deep ties to our past and to our future. I truly believe that ranching and our agriculture community are integral to the future of our province. They are our second-largest industry. We depend on them. In many ways they've helped keep us going over the last few years.

While the former government continued their prolonged attack on our largest industry, the oil and gas industry, our farming and ranching community has stood up and fought for this province despite the fact that they had to work with a government that thought – it's appalling to me that the last time we saw a major piece of legislation associated with ranching or agriculture in this House, the former Finance minister, the worst Finance minister in the history of this province, the Member for Calgary-Fort stood in this very Chamber and implied that my neighbours and my friends and the people of the hard-working ranching and farming community inside this province were somehow deliberately trying to hurt their employees.

Madam Speaker, through you to them . . .

Ms Hoffman: That's not true.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora saying that it's not true. You could check it on Facebook. It's on my Facebook page, has been for years because I confronted him about it that day.

That's the history of this former government when it comes to agriculture. We have a different approach. We will continue to partner with our second-largest industry, make sure that they can benefit the province for future generations to come, and stand with them because that's what matters. We are about jobs, the economy, and pipelines, Madam Speaker, but we recognize on this side of the House that it's not just the energy industry, though that's important, that we have other industries, including forestry and agriculture and others inside this province. Through you to them, to the agriculture and ranching community, I want them to know that their new Alberta government stands with the ranching and agriculture community side by side.

We value their benefit to both the economic development of our province but also to the environmental protection of our province. The importance of ranching and grazing, the importance of that industry to our environmental protection inside this province cannot be overstated, Madam Speaker.

We will continue to stand with them. We will continue to work to always get the best deal that we can for the farming and ranching communities and the best deal for Albertans, a sharp contrast to the former government. I'm excited about that, and I do look forward – and I do hope that all members of the Legislature support this important piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, to be clear, you're moving second reading?

Mr. Jason Nixon: That's what I said.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this important piece of legislation, which will affect the farmers and ranchers of our province on an issue that we began to work on when we were government as well. We support the bill that the current government is continuing with. We applaud their good work in moving forward with this. It's part of a way of demonstrating that the economy and the environment can go hand in hand.

I think that stewardship of our grazing lands is something that Alberta farmers and ranchers take very seriously. They've demonstrated this by their advocacy to have this piece of legislation brought forward. I know that there was a concern over the risk of a potential countervailing action taking place by the United States if, indeed, these measures weren't taken, and I'm glad to see that we

are moving forward with them. They will have my support. That's for sure.

I know that many Albertans don't realize, I think, that the figure is that 14 per cent of all our forage that our cattle consume actually comes from these grazing leases, so it's an important part of the makeup of the nourishment that our cattle herd actually receives. Protection of these lands is important, and ensuring that they're fairly distributed and that fair payment for those grazing leases is achieved is something that we're pleased to see implemented in this proposed legislation. The new formula for grazing leases is oriented toward market conditions and fluctuates with the price of cattle, and that, I think, is a reasonable way to go. Phasing it in over four or five years, of course, as the minister indicated, will soften the blow.

When in conversation with the people who came to the Legislature yesterday, I sat down and ate my lunch and talked with them. Some of them, of course, reacted knowledgeably to my comment about how the added costs of this would have to be borne by them because it is certainly something that's going to increase in cost. It's not often that you'll hear an advocacy group suggest, you know, that "it's time to increase the cost on us," but indeed they realized the risk of not doing this, and they were willing to pay their fair share for the privilege of grazing their cattle on these leases and entering into these leases. The opportunity to finally finalize a new modernization of this grazing lease legislation is something that they may welcome. We welcome it as well, and we look forward to supporting the bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Our world is constantly changing every day. Twenty-five years ago not everyone had a computer at home. It was only about three years after that that the World Wide Web became public, and four years after that we had Google, every university student's favourite friend. Now we have computers in our pockets. We can live stream things online, including the proceedings in this beautiful Chamber, and we can search anything on Google and talk to someone across the world instantly. Twenty-five years ago even some of the members in this Chamber weren't even born or were toddlers, and I would love to consider myself part of that group, but that would be false. Now we look to what our constituents want, and we're advocating for them.

Madam Speaker, I'm not saying any of this to make anyone feel old, but I'm trying to make a point that in 25 years, a quarter of a century, our world has rapidly modernized, and it doesn't take much to look around to notice it. That's why our government is determined to pass this Bill 16, and I hope that members of this Chamber will vote in favour of it, the public lands modernization act. This is based on our commitment to keep Alberta's ranching industry thriving now and in the future, an industry that, particularly in Cardston-Siksika, is near and dear to my heart and essential and vital. It only makes sense that our government create the conditions so that one of our most historic practices, that which shaped our province's history, can continue to thrive in the modern economy.

Madam Speaker, of all of these things that have changed over the years, from music to culture and technology, one thing has remained completely consistent: people have to eat. We depend on our ranchers and farmers to produce the food that ends up on our tables, and sometimes I find there's a disconnect between where people think their food comes from and where it actually comes from. The fact of the matter is that it doesn't come from a grocery store. Someone gets up early in the morning every day year-round to make sure we have food that we can purchase and create meals

and feed our families and ourselves. That's why our government wants to ensure that our ranchers and beef producers are set up for continued success as they play an important part in our provincial economy and the environment.

4:50

Bill 16 will continue with our province's high environmental standards, that we have worked so hard to build and maintain throughout our province's history. This legislation will modernize the public land grazing disposition fee framework, which is to decide the amount of rent and fees that are paid by ranchers for the use of public lands. It will also lead to the establishment of dedicated revenue that will support rangeland sustainability initiatives to ensure the long-term success of the industry and the environmental health and sustainability of Alberta's rangelands. This bill also updates Alberta's current grazing zones and removes outdated regulatory requirements, something the government has been committed to for a while now. The changes implemented will allow for the creation of a rent framework that is fair and transparent, Madam Speaker, and reflects current economic realities faced by our province. We want to ensure that Alberta receives a fair return for our natural resources.

Our current grazing rental framework is outdated. It was implemented in 1960, and the rates have been frozen since '94. Alberta has had the same rates now for 25 years. Madam Speaker, when you get a notification on your phone or your computer saying, "Hey, it's time to update your operating system," you know how most of us react; it's "Remind me later." Well, successive governments have been hitting the Remind Me Later button on our grazing framework for 25 years now. It is time for us to go ahead and press the update button. By using market-based rental rates rather than outdated arbitrary rates, it reduces the risk of trade actions. Our government realizes that we cannot continue to operate this way. That is why we're taking action. Our government has worked very closely with industry and stakeholders to get their feedback and listen to their concerns so that we can create a comprehensive solution.

Madam Speaker, this is something that I wish the previous government had done on the famous antifarm legislation, something that I talked to grazing lease holders, farmers, and ranchers about across my constituency of Cardston-Siksika, and none of them were consulted. Rather, they didn't feel consulted, and they definitely didn't feel like they were heard. But I can tell you that in the short time since the election in April I have been contacted by numerous agricultural producers, telling them the dramatic shift between the current government stance on agriculture and how we've been consulting them versus the previous government. One even went as far as saying that he tried for four years to get a meeting with the former minister of agriculture, who is no longer in this House, but since the election he's had three meetings with the minister of agriculture. That is the difference. It's a stark contrast, and it's exactly why the previous government was voted out with historic numbers.

We've gotten widespread support from the ministry with these proposed changes. One of the new initiatives that we're proposing is a dedicated revenue stream to proactively invest in rangeland sustainability initiatives. Not only will this dedicated revenue stream support and improve existing initiatives within our role as government and as landowners and resource managers; it will also ensure the long-term sustainability of rangeland areas. If this bill becomes law, we plan to annually allocate 30 per cent of grazing disposition rental revenue, which is over \$2.9 million, Madam Speaker, to rangeland sustainability initiatives. Wow. That's a big number, and that's something I'm really excited about. It will

ensure that Albertans receive a fair share for use of their resources. When market conditions are good, a substantial amount of money is dedicated to support rangeland sustainability through proactive partnerships.

There are some more details in this legislation that can come into effect if it is passed such as improvements in existing research and in rangeland management practices. This would maintain Alberta's position as a leader in rangeland management.

Our government is also proposing changes that will allow for updates to the rental rate formula to recognize a two-zone grazing system with a boundary that recognizes the true costs of maintaining a grazing disposition and the different geographies and contexts in which ranchers in northern and southern Alberta operate. Different areas of Alberta experience varying weather conditions that impact their seasons of farming and growing crops. It doesn't take a genius or a geologist to know that. You just have to simply go outside, wait 15 minutes, and the weather is likely to change. For example, ranching in High Level, with its colder climate and shorter growing season, brings more challenges than when normally started earlier in the season in southern Alberta. Our new rental rate formula takes this into account.

Our government's proposed changes also include a switch to a flat-rate assignment fee, which is to say the amount paid to transfer a disposition to another individual. This will help remove barriers to entry into the industry and align with assignment fees charged for all other public land dispositions.

These changes will transition Alberta's beef industry to a future that is sustainable and based on sound environmental practices. Our ranchers and farmers are vital to our economy and livelihood in our province. Without farmers and ranchers, we would have to rely heavily on imports of all of our food, which would be costly for all Albertans, similar to the way that eastern Canada relies heavily on conflict oil from Venezuela and Saudi Arabia, something that we could change with a pipeline to the east. But I digress.

Alberta is known for amazing beef, and it would be a shame if our ranchers were forced to stop raising Alberta beef because they cannot afford the outdated fees. Our ranchers and farmers are not getting the best or a modern deal for allowing their animals to graze. Our government is committed to creating a fair and balanced system that not only grows the economy but also protects the environment. This is one of the many legislative changes that demonstrates that.

Our government is committed to also reducing red tape that burdens our hard-working Albertans. We are shocked that it took 25 years for a government to update their rental rates. It just shows where our loyalty lies. This government is committed to our agriculture sector.

While the previous NDP government implemented bills and taxes that hurt Alberta ranchers and farmers, our government has been working with them to ensure that they get a fair deal. This is because our government understands the needs and the concerns of ranchers. All you have to do, Madam Speaker, is talk to them, something that, unfortunately, the previous government failed to do over and over and over.

We have many United Conservative MLAs and a minister who are and have been ranchers. They know how difficult these fees can be when the weather gets too cold or snow is unexpected in the province. We were elected to be advocates for the people who are not getting a fair deal due to unfair legislation that was implemented by our previous governments, not only unfair legislation but incredibly outdated. All of us may live in a modern world, Madam Speaker, but our farmers are still getting the same fees from 25 years ago, and they are stuck in the past.

When I was visiting the Lethbridge tractor show not long ago, I took a walk around the expo facility. It doesn't take long to see the

modernization of farm work and farm capabilities in this province and across the country, so if we're modernizing our equipment and modernizing our practices, we most certainly should be modernizing our legislation. It's our job as representatives of all Albertans, including farmers, that we propose amendments to outdated legislation. I'm surprised that it took three different governments to implement a change and update this legislation. We were elected to bring jobs to Alberta, to make sure that the economy is doing better than it was under the previous NDP government, and to ensure that unnecessary red tape does not hinder Albertans. Modernizing this act will do just that.

It will also ensure that Alberta ranchers and farmers are able to continue their work providing food for Albertans. By providing rental rates that are responsive to market conditions and reducing financial barriers to new producers entering the cattle industry, we are thus creating more jobs. It will be responsive to market conditions to ensure that all Albertans, producers and consumers, are getting a fair deal, and it will reduce red tape and create a system that is transparent and fair for all. Transparency: something a little bit foreign to the previous government.

5:00

Our government is working hard to maintain our campaign promises that we were elected for, and we also want to do this in an environmentally sustainable way. This bill will use a portion of the rental revenue to support rangeland sustainability initiatives to ensure a long-term sustainability in Alberta's rangeland through proactive investment. We have put a lot of effort into ensuring that our ranchers are getting a modern and fair deal. It's 2019, Madam Speaker. It's about time.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. Are there any members wishing to speak?

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

Mr. Williams: Under 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: You should stand a little quicker, hon. member. I will allow you, though, this time and this time only to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was just struck, again, when the Member for Cardston-Siksika was speaking, about the importance that the industry has on the day-to-day lives of his constituents and the economy and about the really personal impact, how it affects the lives of those constituents. I was wondering if he could speak a bit more as to how this bill will help improve the lives of constituents in or out of the cattle industry.

Mr. Schow: Well, Madam Speaker, I'd be happy to respond to that question. I think, actually, the better answer is just given by talking about the general direction this government is going, which starts with consultation. When I was campaigning for this provincial election, I heard time and time again from agriculture producers how upset they were with the way they were treated by the previous government, how Bill 6 affected their livelihoods and their ability to operate family farms and do what they do best. You know, they create jobs, and they grow our food, and they raise our food. They make it so we can buy our food at the grocery store.

But the reality is that I think it really came down to this level of respect that we do have and a respect for the people that we work for. It's unfortunate that I heard all these stories, because you'd think that a government elected by the people, one that at the time represented a number of rural areas, would be in touch with their

constituents in rural Alberta. But it's apparent to me and became very apparent with every bill they passed that agriculture and oil and gas, for that matter, were at the bottom of the priority list. You know, we can serve up Albertans platitudes on a silver plate all day long, but the actions speak far louder than the words. The previous government made it apparent to us that agriculture really was not a priority for them.

It was interesting when the Leader of the Opposition said recently that she was surprised that she's still here. Well, frankly, so am I. You know, the reality is that Alberta repudiated the previous government with record numbers. Well over a million votes were cast in favour of this United Conservative government because we put forward a clear and transparent campaign platform that put the needs of Alberta on the front page: jobs, economy, pipelines. What creates jobs? Albertans create jobs, and a big part of that is our agriculture sector. Our producers are grateful – they're grateful – for the direction this government is taking in the relationship that we are building with our agriculture producers.

Madam Speaker, you know, I'm grateful to stand here today to talk about this bill because we are modernizing legislation in our agriculture sector, something the previous government failed to do, something that we're committed to doing. It's the first of what will be, I'm certain, many more pieces of legislation that show our commitment to Albertans, to our oil and gas sector, to our job creators, to the small businesses, and, of course, agriculture.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will conclude my remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, first, I just want to start off by saying that I love Alberta beef. I mean, who doesn't? In my opinion, it is the best-quality and absolutely the best-tasting beef in the world bar none. But we would not be able to have such amazing beef without our ranchers. They work day and night year-round to provide not only for their families but also for Albertans and Canadians.

Many take for granted the work that is put into ranching. As a society we are often removed from the source where our food comes from. It doesn't come from Safeway, Madam Speaker; it comes from our farmers and ranchers. There are many steps involved in bringing beef to market and before we can enjoy it at our dinner tables. Ranchers must ensure that they have suitable land that is not only ample in size but is also fertile to allow the animals to graze. Ranchers have to feed and water their cattle daily, especially in winter, when there is not visible food for the herd to graze.

Ranchers must also ensure that their cattle are safe and healthy throughout the year. When animals are healthy and well, all is well. But sometimes animals get sick or grow old. Not only do ranchers have to worry about their animals and their health but also about constant concerns over weather and food supply for their animals, not to mention all the details that contribute to the life of a rancher. Waking up before the sun is up and working way past sundown, a lot goes into this job. I have such respect for our farmers and ranchers such as my friends the Balisky family, friends who farm near my constituency of Grande Prairie. I have been out to the Balisky farm during calving, and it is definitely a 24/7 responsibility, not for the faint of heart, for sure.

Our government realizes the struggles of ranchers. Many of our United Conservative members are ranchers or farmers themselves. They have shared stories and advocated for ranchers across this

province. That is why our government is introducing Bill 16, the public lands modernization amendment act. We have a commitment to keep Alberta's ranching industry thriving not only now but far into the future, Madam Speaker. We understand that Alberta's ranchers and beef producers play an important and pivotal role in our provincial economy and in the care of our environment as well.

We know the concerns and issues that ranchers face with this outdated act. That is why our government wants to ensure that our cattle industry is set up for continued success. We will do this by modernizing the public lands grazing disposition fee framework. This outlines the amount of rent and fees paid by ranchers for the use of public lands. It will also update Alberta's current grazing zones and will remove outdated regulatory requirements.

Our government is determined to maintain the highest environmental standards, that our province has worked so hard to implement over the years. This act will lead to the establishment of a dedicated revenue stream that will support rangeland sustainability initiatives. This will ensure the long-term success of the industry and the environmental health and sustainability of Alberta's rangelands.

The changes that this bill will make include allowing for the creation of a rent framework that is both fair and transparent and better reflects the current economic realities faced by our province by ensuring that Alberta receives a fair return for its natural resources. Our economic realities are very different than in 1994. We are recovering currently from the former NDP government, who through their policies caused significant economic challenges for our province.

Currently Alberta's grazing rental framework is outdated and not responsive to today's realities in ranching. It was first implemented in 1960 – in 1960, Madam Speaker – almost 60 years ago, and we have had the same rates for the past quarter of a century. I can certainly attest to the fact that a lot has changed in the past 25 years, yet for 25 years we've been using the same arbitrary rates, and it is definitely time for an update. By using market-based rental rates, we are reducing the risk for trade actions.

We are not going to stand back and allow outdated bills to determine the viability of our ranchers and their ongoing ability to produce food for Albertans and for Canadians, for that matter. But it does not surprise me that the previous NDP government did not take action to modernize this bill. They definitely have a track record of not caring about our farmers and ranchers and not demonstrating that meaningfully to the farmers and ranchers.

In contrast, this government has been working very closely with industry stakeholders in order to create a comprehensive solution. We value the feedback and concerns they have expressed. The proposed changes are getting widespread support from industry and, in fact, have come largely from the industry's suggestions. One of the new initiatives we are proposing is a dedicated revenue stream to proactively invest in rangeland sustainability initiatives. This dedicated stream of revenue will support and improve existing initiatives within the government's role as both landowner and resource manager and will ensure the long-term sustainability of rangelands and riparian areas.

We plan to annually allocate 30 per cent of grazing disposition rental revenue, which is over \$2.9 million, to rangeland sustainability initiatives if this bill is passed into law. This will ensure that Albertans receive a fair share for use of their resources. When market conditions are good, a substantial amount of money will be dedicated to support rangeland sustainability through proactive partnerships. We will have specific programs that we are funding that include improvements in existing research and rangeland management practices, which would maintain Alberta's position as a leader in rangeland management.

5:10

Our government is also proposing changes that will allow for updates to the rental rate formula. It will recognize a two-zone grazing system, with a boundary that recognizes the true costs of maintaining a grazing disposition and the different geographies and contexts in which ranchers in northern and southern Alberta operate. The climate and growing season for crops is very different, obviously, between the north and the south in our province. Farmers may face seasonal challenges, depending on where they live; for example, a severely dry summer or perhaps a cold and early fall. The new rental rate formula would take these factors into account.

Our government's proposed changes also include a switch to a flat-rate assignment fee, which is the amount paid to transfer a disposition to another individual. One of our goals for this bill is to remove barriers to entry into the industry and align with assignment fees charged for all other public land dispositions at this time. These changes will transition Alberta's beef industry to a future that is both sustainable and based on sound environmental practices. This is only one of the many legislative changes that demonstrate our government's commitment to create a fair and balanced system that both protects the environment and grows the economy.

Our government is committed to ensuring that Albertans are getting a fair deal. That is why we have already passed legislation that reduces the unnecessary red tape and regulatory burden by at least a third for Albertans. Our government understands the needs of everyday Albertans. We understand the needs of our ranchers. We understand that it takes a lot of work to bring high-quality beef to Alberta's dinner tables. We understand the burdens and hardships that ranchers have faced over the years. We also have a connected investment into the land and want to ensure that the best sustainable practices and environmental measures are undertaken and continued.

Our government cares about jobs and our economy. We want to ensure that we will continue the high environmental standards we currently uphold. That is why an important part of this bill is not only modernizing the past land rental fees but also investing in sustainable measures for rangelands. It is time that our province adapts and modernizes the grazing fee framework. We need to ensure that our farmers will have continued success so that they will be able to afford to produce the world-class, quality beef that Alberta is famous for world-wide.

I hope that all members of this Assembly understand the importance of this bill with respect to sustainability measures and to our hard-working ranchers. We live in a modern world, Madam Speaker, and we must adapt our legislation accordingly. I will certainly be supporting this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. Are there any members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, any members wishing to speak to the bill in second reading? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Today I have the privilege of speaking to Bill 16, the Public Lands Modernization (Grazing Leases and Obsolete Provisions) Amendment Act, 2019. Ranchers and farmers have been integral to our economy for generations. Settlers came to Alberta from eastern Canada, the United States, and Europe to farm here. Between 1914 and 1921 there was an influx of farmers and settlers coming into northwestern Alberta, where I live. At that time Alberta's population grew from 73,000 to over 584,000. Farming and ranching: it's what we know.

We often don't think about it when we're at the grocery store, but without farmers and ranchers we would have to rely heavily on imports for all of our food, which would be ridiculously expensive. Alberta farmers help supply a substantial proportion of the food you and I eat every day.

Like many Albertans and probably like yourself, Madam Speaker, I enjoy a good steak every now and then, and there's no better steak than Alberta beef. I've had a chance to eat some steak in different parts of the world, and I can attest to that fact wholeheartedly. There's nothing better than Alberta beef. In fact, I've had clients come from around the world, and that's one thing they always comment on, the quality of our beef and our steak here. In fact, I had one group come from Florida, and they ended up wanting to eat steak every single day, so they actually bought their own little barbecue and barbecued steak every single day they were here. They tried to figure out how they could take steak home with them. It's obviously high quality, it's got a great taste, and of course it's important to our economy.

Our ranchers need stability and fairness in the grazing lease fee schedule. This doesn't mean fees dropping; it means stable and fair. That is why I'm excited to see that the minister of environment has introduced Bill 16. This is in line with our commitment to keep Alberta's ranching industry thriving now and into the future. We recognize the need to ensure that our ranchers and beef producers are set up for continued success as they play an important part in our provincial economy and the environment. Bill 16 will see that our province's high environmental standards remain intact, standards that we have worked so hard to build and maintain throughout our province's history.

This bill will modernize the public land grazing disposition fee framework, which is to decide the amount of rent and fees paid by ranchers for the use of public lands. It will also direct a portion of revenues towards rangeland sustainability initiatives to ensure the long-term success of the industry and the environmental health and sustainability of Alberta's rangelands, and we know that our farmers and ranchers feel that is very important.

This bill also updates Alberta's current grazing zones and removes outdated regulation requirements. The changes implemented will allow for the creation of a rent framework that is fair and transparent and gives a better reflection of the current economic realities faced by our province. We want to ensure that Alberta receives a fair return for our natural resources. Our current grazing rental framework is outdated. It was implemented in 1960, and the rates have been frozen since 1994. Alberta has had the same rates for 25 years.

Madam Speaker, it is time for an update. By using market-based rental rates rather than outdated and arbitrary rates, it reduces the risk of trade actions by our trading partners around the world. Our government realizes that we cannot continue to operate this way. That is why we are taking action. Our government has worked very closely with industry and stakeholders to get their feedback and listen to their concerns so that we can create a comprehensive solution. We have gotten widespread support from industry when we proposed our changes.

One of the new initiatives we are proposing is a dedicated revenue stream to proactively invest in rangeland sustainability initiatives. Not only will this dedicated revenue stream support and improve existing initiatives within our role as government, as a landowner and resource manager; it will also ensure the long-term sustainability of rangelands and riparian areas. If this bill becomes law, we plan to annually allocate 30 per cent of grazing disposition rental revenue, which is over \$2.9 million, to rangeland sustainability initiatives. It will ensure that Albertans receive a fair share for the use of their resources. That's because we need balance.

Balance includes the viability of the ranchers and a return for Albertans, and when market conditions are good, a substantial amount of money is dedicated to support rangeland sustainability through proactive partnerships.

This bill also contains provisions that would see enhanced research and rangeland management practices. This would maintain Alberta's position as a leader in rangeland management.

Our government is also proposing changes that will allow for updates to the rental rate formula to recognize a two-zone grazing system, with a boundary that recognizes the true costs of maintaining a grazing disposition and the different geographies and contexts in which ranchers in northern and southern Alberta operate. Different areas of Alberta experience varying weather conditions, that impact their season to farm and grow crops. For example, ranching in High Level or in the north Peace Country, with its colder climate and shorter growing season, brings more challenges that are not normal in southern Alberta in an area such as Lethbridge. Our new rental rate formula takes all of this into account.

Our government's proposed changes also include a switch into a flat-rate assignment fee, which is to say the amount of money paid to transfer a disposition to another individual. This will help remove barriers to enter into industry and align with assignment fees charged for all other public land dispositions. In essence, it'll help new young farmers get into the business without having those barriers of high costs of transfer fees.

These changes will transition Alberta's beef industry to a future that is sustainable and based on sound environmental practices. Our government is committed to creating a fair and balanced system that not only grows the economy but also protects the environment. This is one of the many legislative changes our government is bringing forward that dedicates our commitment to fulfilling our promises to Albertans.

Madam Speaker, if the members of this Assembly support our ranchers and fair legislation, they will support this bill. Not only does it modernize the fee framework, that will reduce unnecessary red tape for ranchers; it will also create a system that is transparent and fair. Not all ranchers in Alberta experience the same weather, soil, and other conditions that will affect their crops and animals. Northern Alberta not only experiences overall lower temperatures in fall and winter but also has experienced forest fires that will impact farming. Northern Alberta grazing lease holders also have to deal with trees growing up through their fence and also falling on the fence, adding costs to their operations.

5:20

We need to not only create a system that responds to weather changes but also to a fluctuating market. It has been 25 years since the rental rates have been updated, and a lot has changed in the past 25 years, including our economy. This caused most people to suffer. What's happened with our economy in the last four years is that with the NDP government they have driven out so much investment that it has caused a lot of suffering to Albertans. This suffering has been felt by our farmers and ranchers, too. We need our rental rates to reflect the market issues in the ranching industry by providing rental rates that are responsive to market conditions.

Our government is committed to reducing red tape that burdens our hard-working Albertans. While the previous NDP government implemented bills and taxes that hurt Alberta's ranchers and farmers, our government has been working with them to ensure that they get a fair deal. We love our ranchers and the world-renowned beef that they produce. Madam Speaker, I'm grateful for our ranchers and all the work that they put into providing food for Albertans. When we go home at the end of the day to eat supper, they are still out in the fields working. We know that with the weather conditions

that are happening this fall, many farmers are in a tough situation as far as getting their crops off right now.

I know our own minister of agriculture and many UCP MLAs can speak to the farming life as they, too, are either presently or have in the past experienced the farming life. They know first-hand how difficult it is and that the outdated rental rates have been tough on farmers. That is why our government has been working so hard on this bill. They've not only heard from Alberta's ranchers but their own MLAs who know how difficult it is to be a rancher. Ensuring that Albertan ranchers' and farmers' voices are heard is one of the many reasons why these MLAs have committed to representing their constituents in the Legislature.

Madam Speaker, we live in a modern world, and over the last 25 years a lot has changed, and it's time for an update and change. We all live in this modern world, so why should our farmers be stuck in the past? It is time for a change and a fair deal for our farmers and ranchers. Our weather conditions in Canada and the varying conditions throughout the province provide different farming experiences for farmers. We need to have rental rates that reflect those differences. We have the ability and technology to be able to do these types of changes, so in 2019 it's time for a change.

Maybe just to kind of summarize some of these changes that will happen because of Bill 16, what we know is that the new fees will better align with land values and make sure that ranchers benefit from any market fluctuations. When markets are down, so are the fees. We know that we worked closely with farmers and ranchers to develop this new fee structure, and this has broad support among the major associations. Modernizing the framework will reduce red tape for ranchers and will create a system that is transparent and fair.

Government is now ready to implement this new framework, which will update the public land grazing disposition fees and ensure trade stability. Of course, when we look at our agriculture industry, we know that we have an export market there, too. We provide for Albertans, of course, but we also export a lot of our products. In order to be able to export, we need to be viewed as having fair-trade practices with other countries around the world. This will help build that stability and that trade stability. We know that we have to have long-term economic viability for ranchers, and this will help do that also. Of course, we need a fair return for Albertans on their resources, and of course this bill is focused on that, too.

I think it's also important – and we need to remember that we dedicated funding, using a portion of the rental revenue, to support rangeland sustainability initiatives and to ensure long-term sustainability of Alberta's rangelands through proactive investment.

Of course, this bill reflects the geographic differences that I mentioned earlier and their impacts on the beef production across this province, and of course it helps address demographic issues in the ranching industry by providing rental rates that are responsive to market conditions and reducing financial barriers to new producers entering the cattle industry. The thing that'll have the effect there is the flat-rate assignment fee. We know that this will create management efficiencies and align the act with regulation to current business practices and operations. It will help maintain market access and social licence and provide dependable funding for rangeland sustainability initiatives. We know that the rental rate and the assignment fee are currently embedded in the Public Lands Act and the public lands administration regulation. Therefore, amendments were required to change these things.

Madam Speaker, I think it's fair to say regarding Bill 16 that there's been widespread consultation. This consultation has been going on for years. I know that when I was first elected, grazing lease holders came to me, and we had several meetings over the last

few years. This is something that has been key to their requests. The previous government, of course, didn't seem to get it done in the four years they were here. Obviously, we're just a few months in, and we're taking care of our farmers and ranchers. We know it's important to them, and we know it's important to Albertans.

I encourage everybody to support Bill 16 when we vote on this. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was very interested in listening to the hon. member speak. You know, as a Smith that's from Saskatchewan, at least born in Saskatchewan, there's a little bit of a debate in my family as to whether my cousin's ranching operations in Saskatchewan provide better beef to Canada than do Alberta ranchers. I have sometimes found myself in a little bit of trouble in my family when I have come to the defence of Alberta ranchers and tried to convince them that indeed the beef that we process in Alberta seems to be number one in my books.

However, it was also a rather interesting thing that happened when we had a caucus meeting down in Lethbridge. I happened to go down to the hot tub that night in the hotel that I was staying in, and who do I see in the hot tub but my cousin and his family. They were there for an auction of beef. They were auctioning off the beef in that hotel, and I had the opportunity to witness first-hand some of the modernization that has occurred in the modern ranching industry. They are now auctioning off cattle through the Internet, where they are posting the videos of these cattle, and the bids are coming in from far and wide.

In listening to the member speak about geography and about the modernization that this Bill 16 will bring, I was wondering if he could talk a little bit about the differences between how a northern rancher in his area is going to be able to see themselves in this piece of legislation and somebody that may be from down in the Lethbridge area, how this new Bill 16 will allow us to be able to accommodate the differences between the north and the south as well as, perhaps, address some of the issues with regard to modernization that we see in this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, and thanks for the questions and comments there. I think maybe what was most important about the comments that the member made was that his family from Saskatchewan had actually come to Alberta to buy beef. I guess that just proves who has better beef, obviously. They wouldn't have been coming to Alberta to buy poorer beef, so obviously they're trying to improve their stock in Saskatchewan by coming to Alberta. I think that's probably the most important part of that story.

I guess I should mention that I grew up on a cow-calf operation. My dad was a farmer and a rancher, so we grew cattle on our farm, but we didn't do the finishing. We just had the cow-calf operation. We sold the calves every year. Growing up in that operation and seeing, I guess, kind of the changes – like, obviously, I grew up with it. We had cows since I could walk, kind of thing. When I see the changes between how operations run now and how efficient they are, I think I can see also how the concern for the environment has grown and grown over the years. I think that years ago when we were doing farm practices, we'd probably seen things that we thought we could improve, and I think that over time we did improve those things. I think that's why we're such a leader in the world when it comes to our environmental record in our resources

industries and also in our agriculture and farming and ranching industries. Those kinds of improvements, I think, are why our resources and our beef should be so desirable around the world.

5:30

When it comes to the question itself about northern ranchers versus southern ranchers, as I mentioned in my speech, we're talking a bit about the little differences, of course, with the trees and how the forest affects fences and that sort of thing. Also, I think the shorter growing season in the north, of course, affects things, too, and there's a shorter amount of time that you can have cattle on grazing leases in the north versus the south. So I think there are some differences there.

I think we need to realize how important the ranching industry is to Alberta, to its economy and to our production of food. Like I say, when we talk about the quality of beef, our quality is second to none around the world. I think that's important, and what we need to realize here.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to second reading of Bill 16?

Seeing none, shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 16 Public Lands Modernization (Grazing Leases and Obsolete Provisions) Amendment Act, 2019

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak?
Shall I call the question on Bill 16?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 16 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report the bill.

[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 the following bill: Bill 16.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the motion, do the members concur in this report? All those agreed, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. Carried.
The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do appreciate, all hon. members, lots of progress today, and as such I will move that we adjourn until tomorrow, October 17, at 9 a.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Given all this talk about Alberta beef and steak, do the members agree with the motion to adjourn the House until tomorrow at 9 a.m.?

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:34 p.m.]

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