



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, October 21, 2019

Day 30

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

First Session

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United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, October 21, 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 to her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interests and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by the Maryview elementary school choir, and I would invite all members to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, this afternoon, from the constituency of Red Deer-South – I am so pleased to welcome our very first school choir to sing *O Canada* and to do it on such an important day in Canada – it is my absolute pleasure to welcome Miss Tammy Davis from Maryview elementary. Thank you so, so very much for bringing your class to join us today. You did an absolutely terrific job.

Visiting guests of the Leader of the Official Opposition, Katherine Engel and Ricky McCoshen, please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Also in the galleries today are guests of the Minister of Transportation visiting from the motherland of many of you, I am sure, the province of Saskatchewan. Marilyn and Wayne Elhard, please rise.

And last but certainly not least: the better half of the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, Ms Donna Hanson.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis has a statement to make.

Election Day

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

'Twas the day of the election, and all through the Leg.
Politicians were stirring, their people's futures unhedged.
Party platforms were etched in their minds with great care
And hopes the next morn wouldn't wake to a nightmare.

Our government was restless, not snug in our seats,
With dreams of built pipelines, balanced budgets,
support for our beef.
Our opposition still hadn't voted
As none of their options were quite what they'd hoped.

But suddenly on Twitter there arose such a clatter,
I rose to my feet to see what was the matter.
I turned on my Windows, hit refresh, refresh:
Another scandal for Justin Trudeau, perhaps?

Albertans skipped work to get out and vote.
To all Liberals on the ballot they promptly checked "nope."
Jobs are depleting, the country at war,
And all they wanted was something to live for.

So goodbye Goodale, McKenna, Sohi, and Morneau.
Let's elect Cummings, Lilly, Blake Richards, John Barlow
To the highest of cabinets, to the top of the chain.
Today Albertans pray Conservatives will reign.

The clock strikes 6. Politicians go home
But really to a place where much beer is poured.
The fate of the country they love and serve dear
Awaits its verdict for the next four years.

Will identity politics, global embarrassment, and
mismanagement win, too,
Or will a leader with competence, compassion, and
principles pull through?
Four more years of Justin Trudeau the grim:
Will Andrew Scheer win these voters with his dimply grin?

Also, cuts to corporate welfare, overspending, foreign aid,
Energy corridors, and tax breaks sure all sound great.
Conservatives speak the language of the west.
I just hope the east sees a united Canada best.

So today I stand here to proudly state clear
That I will be voting for the Andrew Scheer.
Our country needs leadership, ethics, and care
And to ensure this election is won by much more than a hair.

So dress in your woolies from head to toe,
There are only six more hours to go hit the polls.
Go start your trucks, give your friends a whistle,
And elect a federal government that isn't such a thistle.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has the call.

Public Health Care

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Albertans are consulted, they frequently cite public health care as a defining characteristic of Canada and a primary factor in their pride in being Canadian. But it seems that this pride is waning on the other side of the House. Health care guarantees are not worth the cardboard they're printed on, and instead of investments in health care we keep hearing about cuts to finance a \$4.5 billion giveaway and more American-style health care in Alberta.

On this side of the House we're proud to be Albertan Canadians and proud that public health care was initiated by NDP leader and greatest Canadian Tommy Douglas. We were also proud, during our time in office, to have shown significant support for Albertans' well-being by hiring 4,000 nurses, building the Calgary cancer centre, committing to the south Edmonton hospital, and ending parking lot medicine in rural Alberta.

What we see coming from this government, however, is an insidious agenda to deprive Albertans of what they want the most, strong, affordable, universally accessible health services. With the

cancellation of the Edmonton lab services building construction and the failure to support Bill 203 in committee, we can see that the UCP is bent on bringing down the excellent public services available to Albertans and bringing in American-style, two-tiered health care, with boutique services for the wealthy and diminished services for the rest of us.

Here is yet another time when we see the UCP ignoring the research in order to impose their rigid ideology on the province. Canadian and international research tells us that increasing private systems reduces resources to the public system, results in long wait times for people without money, and does not provide better results. Private services lack accountability as Alberta Health Services cannot obtain universal health records. The commodification of medical care benefits only the few, ignoring the everyday, hard-working Albertans who, with the trauma of illness, are burdened enough without the added strain of financial barriers to their well-being. Albertans deserve better, and I'm calling on this government to reconsider and not go down this dangerous route.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Small Business Week

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is Small Business Week, when we celebrate the small businesses across our province. My own riding of Camrose has many wonderful small businesses, whether you're walking down the historical main street of Camrose or in many of the communities that I'm proud to represent. You can truly see that they are the economic engine of our province.

Last week I had the opportunity to attend the Camrose chamber of commerce excellence in business awards. These awards celebrated businesses, with awards ranging from small business of the year to young entrepreneur of the year. These businesses contribute heavily to my community, whether it be by offering employment, selling goods, or even sponsoring the local youth sports team.

It was great to see them being celebrated because, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's small businesses deserve recognition and celebration. Small-business owners are dreamers. They have a vision, and they work tirelessly to carry it out. Small businesses hire local employees. They invest in their communities, they find innovative ways to meet a need in their community, and they contribute in countless ways. Small businesses in our province make up 98 per cent of all businesses and are responsible for 45 per cent of private-sector employment. Together they form the foundation of Alberta's economy. Each of us here in this Chamber knows of a small business that has made an indelible impact on their neighbourhood or their community, whether it's a family member, friend, or just someone you see as they tirelessly open their business every morning and close it every night.

1:40

After four years of unpredictability under the NDP – the carbon tax, countless other barriers to starting or growing a business – our government is making Alberta the best place to start a business or raise a family. I'm proud to be part of a government that will make it easier for small-business owners.

As we celebrate Small Business Week, I encourage all Albertans to take some time to recognize and support local business.

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. Schmidt: On Friday I joined thousands upon thousands of Albertans concerned about climate change at the climate strike here on the steps of the Legislature. We were joined by the founder of the climate strike movement, Greta Thunberg, who addressed the

rally. She reminded us of what the best science on climate change tells us, that to avoid catastrophic global warming, we have only eight years left to get our carbon emissions under control. She urged all of us to treat this like the emergency that it is, to set aside the partisan bickering, and to unite behind the science and get the job done. While the UCP chairman and the rest of his crew wanted to smear this little girl's reputation, portraying her as a communist and sending his former staff members to harass and intimidate her, she rose above and sought to unite us all in action. Our main enemy is not our partisan political opponents, she reminded us; our main enemy is physics.

Albertans need to start planning now for a low-carbon future. The good news is that the tools we need for creating this future are at hand. Investments in energy efficiency; renewable energy; clean, affordable public transportation; and reducing methane emissions will produce real, immediate results. Used correctly, these tools can also be used to make sure that every Albertan has a job that can support their families, allow them to live in prosperity, and retire with dignity.

Planning for a low-carbon future may be the greatest task that Albertans have ever had to undertake, but Albertans have never been scared to take on tough jobs. We don't make excuses. We don't wait for others to do the job for us. We just roll up our sleeves and use our skills and ingenuity to get the job done. We've only got eight years left, Alberta. Let's get to work.

The Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane has risen.

Chester Mjolsness

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize a man that epitomizes the heart of my constituency, Chester Mjolsness. Chester is one of the founders of Spray Lake Sawmills in the town of Cochrane. Last year the mill celebrated its 75th anniversary, and this year, in fact last week, on October 14 Chester celebrated his 100th birthday. Chester was born in Didsbury and grew up on a family farm west of Sundre, and he resides in the area today. At a young age he lost his father and began cutting wood to help his mother make ends meet. In 1943 he founded the sawmill and was joined by his brother Lloyd a few years later. With determination and dedication to his dream he laid the foundation for what became an industry-leading sustainable forest management operation which now employs about 400 people. In 1980 Chester stepped away from the sawmill and passed the reins on to his son Barry, but – make no mistake – his presence is felt throughout the company, and his legacy is strong.

Chester and his family, along with many generous donors, in 2001 funded the construction of Spray Lake Sawmills Family Sports Centre in Cochrane. This centre is used by thousands and is a focal point for families, sports enthusiasts, seniors, and the entire community. Chester's positive impact reaches beyond our constituency. To recognize and honour Chester's lifelong commitment to hard work, leadership, and his faith, Ambrose University introduced Mjolsness Hall, an area that houses the library and academic offices.

Chester's philosophy is simple: live with integrity, keep your word, build relationships, give back, and trust God. There are many examples that demonstrate Mr. Mjolsness' commitment to his family, friends, and community, but I'm only afforded two minutes here, so thank you for all that you've done. Happy 100th birthday, Chester.

The Speaker: Chester, indeed, is a good man.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Over the past few months I have been meeting with students and staff across Alberta, and one message has come through crystal clear: now more than ever we must invest in education and postsecondary education in particular. We have an important and time-sensitive moment to act on immediately. Alberta has the fastest growing youth population in Canada. Students currently in grade school will require thousands more postsecondary spaces than what is currently available here in Alberta's colleges, universities, and trade colleges. We need to invest, not make cuts.

Furthermore, we cannot afford to delay progress on diversifying Alberta's economy. Our colleges and universities are the most powerful tool that we have to nurture and support industry and the knowledge economy. Each dollar we invest in research and development and the education and training of our population will pay us back exponentially in terms of good-paying jobs, economic development, and financial security.

The alternative is grim: thousands of students will be denied postsecondary training because there are no spaces available or they simply won't be able to afford to go to school; instructors and support staff laid off, resulting in lower quality education; a lack of investment in capital projects, resulting in crumbling classrooms and research facilities; graduation and completion rates will decline. All of this will combine to reduce the competitiveness of our province, resulting in a further decline in investment and job creation.

Students need affordable tuition and access to programs. Colleges, universities, and training programs of all types need to be supported and expanded, not cut. For the sake of Albertans today and tomorrow, we must invest in and support postsecondary education. Our future depends on it.

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

Front-line Public Service Workers

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm standing in this House to recognize the exhausting and often thankless work of teachers, nurses, and other front-line public service workers in this province, many of whom live and work in my constituency. These people are unsung heroes among us. They may never get accolades, awards, or even a simple thank you, but everyone in this room should think of a front-line worker they know who deserves all of that and more.

This is why I'm committed to our government's mandate of ensuring that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. We must be confident in taxpayer investments equalling improved services that are accessible to all. Finding the balance between fiscal prudence and delivery of world-class public services is no easy task but one that is absolutely necessary to ensuring that Albertans receive the best possible value for investment in their public services.

You see, Mr. Speaker, as we move into a position where we must make difficult fiscal decisions, I have no doubt that my colleagues on this side of the House recognize the value brought by our public service workers. The opposition often misdirects the focus from this absolute responsibility of budgetary realities, but in my view it is this requirement that shows true respect to teachers and nurses across our province and ensures the best outcomes for our children and patients.

Currently we are spending \$2.5 million an hour on our health care in this province. That's not \$2.5 million a week or even a day; that is \$2.5 million per hour. Mr. Speaker, I'm not saying that our expenditure isn't worth it or that it doesn't help people, but should

it not be one of our most urgent responsibilities to make sure that every single cent of that \$2.5 million is spent in the most effective, transparent, and responsible way possible? We owe it to our valued public-sector workers to make the right financial decisions that will lead to the effective provision of world-class services for all.

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

South Sudanese Community Round-table

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend in Calgary members of Calgary's South Sudanese community held a youth emergency crisis round-table on Saturday. The round-table was to discuss recent tragedies among the members of the community and included mental health experts and government leaders, with the goal to encourage the discussion of mental health wellness and addiction recovery within families.

Mr. Speaker, this community is suffering and needs supports. As many as six young people in the community have died due to overdose or suicide since September. That is more than one a week. The mothers in this community are desperate to find solutions to this crisis, to save their children. They ran away from their war-torn countries to find a better, safe life for their families and children, only to face a different enemy. The mothers at the round-table made it very clear that they know that the desperately needed supports are out there, and they want to see action taken to help them.

The associate minister of mental health said that his presence at the round-table demonstrated how seriously they are addressing the issue, that his government supports a full continuum, from prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery. But, Mr. Speaker, these aren't answers for these mothers. They need concrete action, not empty words. The minister needs to step up and support the mental health issues being faced in this community and communities across this province by ensuring that the funding necessary is in place to meet the needs of Albertans. To fail to do so will put lives at risk. When this happens, he should explain to mothers across this province why their children will have to pay for the \$4.5 billion giveaway to corporations instead of the supports that they need.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, in the last election the Premier promised over and over again that he wouldn't cut education and that students wouldn't have to pay for his 4 and a half billion dollar corporate handout. In January he said that he didn't need to cut 20 per cent or even 10 per cent to balance the books against his corporate giveaway, but now we have internal memos from Mount Royal University showing that every department is planning for a 25 per cent cut over three years. To the Premier: why did folks over there choose to mislead students and their families in the last election?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Mr. Speaker, of course, at the moment we're working through the details of the MacKinnon panel report and taking a close look at our finances. An important point to note: when it comes to spending in postsecondary education, over the past decade there's been over a 106 per cent increase, far outpacing inflationary growths and enrolment growths. We're working very closely with our institutions to ensure that we can get the most bang for our buck when it comes to postsecondary delivery.

Ms Notley: Well, the misrepresentation does not stop there. The UCP platform said that he would “maintain operating spending at current levels . . . to balance the [books] . . . without compromising core services.” Now, Mr. Speaker, I don’t know about you, but a 25 per cent cut does not sound like maintaining spending, but it does sound like severely compromised core services to me. To the Premier. It’s election day. Should Canadians from coast to coast expect the same demonstration of dishonesty from your pal Andrew Scheer in Ottawa?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, it’s well known that we will be rolling a budget out this coming week, this Thursday, and we will be rolling a budget out that Albertans elected us to deliver on. It will work to clean up the irresponsibility that we inherited from the previous government around financial management in this province.

Ms Notley: Actually, Mr. Speaker, the problem with misrepresentation is that Albertans voted for them to maintain operational spending and not cut core services, so that’s not what they voted for. This Premier’s Advanced Education minister had the nerve to tell this House that students didn’t want the tuition freeze, but the Council of Alberta University Students disagrees. Instead, they say that the freeze continues to save students and their families thousands and has made their education more affordable. To the Premier. Explain this to students: why should their tuition go up just to pay for your 4 and a half billion dollar corporate handout?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans voted for was a government that would stand up for them. This hon. member, the leader of the NDP, admitted over the weekend that in advance polls she voted for the NDP, who are led by a leader who said, and I quote: when it came to TMX, I am firmly opposed to the pipeline; I’ve been opposed to it; I will continue to fight against it, and that is absolutely one of my priorities. So the question is this: how many times is the NDP, whether in opposition or in government, going to sell out Albertans to their eastern socialist overlords?

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: At least, I know that when I vote for Heather McPherson, she’s going to fight for Alberta, and she is not going to go to Alberta and make a bunch of cuts that she misrepresented to the people of Alberta or Canada.

Alberta Energy Regulator Funding

Ms Notley: Now, the Premier promised Albertans he would review the AER to speed up approvals. What he didn’t say is that he would be gutting the regulator, sacrificing crucial oversight and quality. The AER’s president says that they’re anticipating making cuts of 18 per cent in just one year. The Premier can’t have it both ways. He can’t speed up approvals and slash funding by almost 20 per cent. To the Premier. Your platform promised responsible energy development. Why did you mislead Albertans?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, that hon. member belongs to a party who – she confirmed that she voted for a leader who said, when referring to the TMX: I definitely don’t believe in expanding it; I’m clear on that; I don’t believe in expanding TMX. The hon. leader of the NDP has just confirmed yet again that she will not condemn her leader federally in his attack on this province and,

instead, went and voted for him. She voted for him again. So again my question to them is: how many times is the NDP going to sell out Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to protecting the energy industry, this Premier’s promises always seem to be at odds with his actions. With massive cuts of 18 per cent, he’s practically begging the regulator to cut corners, roll the dice in our largest industry, and brutalize our international reputation. This means sacrificing landowners, letting workers do unsafe work, and letting down all those who depend on higher environmental standards. Again to the Premier: why did the people over there misrepresent their plans to Albertans?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, why does the NDP continue to misrepresent themselves to Albertans? They say one moment that they’re for pipelines, and then the leader of the NDP admits she voted for a leader who said of a project like Trans Mountain: I’ve been very clear that that’s a project I don’t think should go ahead. That is a quote from their very leader. So are they for Trans Mountain, or are they standing with their leader and they’re against it? It’s a very simple question: are they for Trans Mountain, or are they against it? The fact that the hon. member admitted that she voted for a leader who is anti Trans Mountain, anti-Alberta is shameful. Again to them: how many times are they going to sell out Albertans?

Ms Notley: Nine years of a Conservative government in Ottawa, a Conservative government in Edmonton, a Conservative government in Victoria, and no pipeline under construction. Four years under our leadership, and the pipeline is under way. I know what I stand for. I know what I worked for this whole time. I know I got shovels in the ground. Those folks over there sat around dithering for nine years with nothing standing in the way. But now what they’re going to do is undercut our international representation by gutting the AER. Why, Mr. Speaker? Why?

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

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For four years the NDP did not defend our energy sector. Instead, they spent four years in pursuit of a so-called social licence. But their social licence turned out to be nothing more than a one-and-done deal with Justin Trudeau, a deal that saw one pipeline approved but not built and, in return, a deal that saw Energy East killed, Northern Gateway killed, a carbon tax, Bill C-69, Bill C-48. That is the NDP legacy, a failed social licence and a one-and-done deal with Justin Trudeau. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen with a question.

Commercial Driver Training and Testing Standards

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Transportation changes course every day when it comes to whether or not he’s committing to listening to the parents of the Humboldt bus tragedy and taking real action to make our roads safe. His office told the *Globe and Mail* they would no longer exempt 6,800 school bus drivers and truck drivers that earned a class 1 or class 2 licence while new testing standards were being introduced, but the minister said the exact opposite in a letter to the *Edmonton Journal*. To the Premier. Maybe you can sort out your minister’s mess. Are you exempting drivers or not?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've told the hon. member several times – but I'll say it again because he's not getting the message – MELT is here to stay. Of course, we're giving a little more time to qualify for MELT to the agriculture industry and a little more time to the school bus drivers, actually an exemption that that member's government put in place and that we extended because of the mess that they left with driver examiners. But the higher standards are here to stay for safety.

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

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have continued to talk to the families of the Humboldt bus tragedy in recent days, and they have said that they won't stop until all school bus and truck drivers undergo the more strict testing that comes with the new, mandatory entry-level training program. But this Premier and this minister continue to hedge. To the Premier. We know you love giving billions in political favours to big corporations, but are you really willing to listen to lobbyists over the families of people that were lost in the Humboldt bus tragedy?

2:00

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike the past NDP government, we actually listen to all Albertans. We have a special spot in our heart for the families of the Humboldt tragedy, and we did listen to them. Some of the decisions that we made were as a direct result of conversations that I had with them, and I'm happy about that. I'm actually pleased that they took the time to talk to our government, and I would say to them that our government listened carefully. We pointed out where we made changes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister did meet with the Humboldt families that travelled to this Legislature last Wednesday, and I thank him for that. But Shauna Nordstrom, who lost her son Logan in the tragedy, left the meeting feeling even more frustrated. On Friday she sent us the following: "We are not stopping this battle. Today is my day to cry and wish my son was here and not gone because of this corruption." Minister, you need to answer this grieving mother. Are you going to immediately end the corruption in the trucking industry with stricter training and testing? Yes or no?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's sad that the hon. member won't acknowledge that the tragedy that happened was under their government, but the fact is that it's more important that these were systemic problems that needed to be solved. One of the solutions is to institute the MELT program, mandatory entry-level training, that came out of the United States of America. What I told the Humboldt families, which is what I've told this member in this House many times, is that, yes, those standards will be implemented. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has the call and no one else.

Education Funding

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, among the hundreds of Albertans I had the opportunity to meet during our opposition's budget town halls this fall was 12-year-old Ricky McCoshen. He came to our budget town hall in Grande Prairie amid fears that this UCP government would make, I quote, the same Conservative cuts, end quote, to education as those imposed by the

Doug Ford government in Ontario. To the Premier: Ricky is here today with his mother, Katherine. Will you promise him and all Alberta youth that you will not make cuts like Doug Ford did in Ontario in this Thursday's budget?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were very transparent in our platform during the election that we were not going to cut K to 12 education funding. We will be rolling out a budget this Thursday that honours that commitment to Albertans. More importantly, it will be a budget that is responsible and a budget that will bring this province back to balance within four years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, Ricky is right to be worried. The Financial Accountability Officer in Ontario estimates that that province will lose about 10,000 teachers over the next five years due to the cuts from Doug Ford. School councils in Ontario have also taken a cut, and it was announced yesterday that their Catholic teachers will vote on a province-wide strike action next month. To the Premier: is this really the type of chaos that you want to bring to Alberta and to classrooms where students like Ricky are trying to learn?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you for that. Again, I've been clear with Albertans that we will honour our commitment to maintain education funding. My question would be, through you to the member across the way: does the member have any ambitions to run for office in Ontario as those Ontario issues seem to be of great concern to that member?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I dare say that members of government have spent a great deal more time in Ontario in the last while than I have. Thank you.

Now, Ricky attended our budget town hall, 1 of 8 that we held across this province while repeatedly calling on this government to consult with Albertans, too. Their response: a 90-minute, heavily controlled telephone town hall and a UCP postbudget fundraiser that's exclusive to their donors. Now, I imagine they will say again that the election was their consultation, but to the Premier: will you point me to when during that election you explained to Albertans why a 4 and a half billion dollar corporate handout is more important than teachers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a privilege to actually reach out to Albertans not only during those two telephone town halls but also throughout this whole summer as I travelled around to communities.

In terms of the job-creation tax cut, which we are absolutely confident will return investment to this province, while the opposition does not believe us, perhaps they'll believe economists who say this. I quote Kevin Milligan, *Maclean's*. "All taxes harm the economy in some way, so the job of raising taxes involves a choice among bad options. Most economists agree that corporate taxes are the most harmful . . ." [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will have order. You might not like the answer, but he does have the opportunity to provide it.

You have 10 seconds remaining.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I'll say it again. From Kevin Milligan in *Maclean's*: "Most economists agree that corporate taxes are the most harmful among [all] choices" in the tax category.

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

Municipal Funding and Autonomy

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many municipalities, large and small, serving the people of the constituency of Central Peace-Notley, which I serve. I've heard from numerous municipal officials about the previous feast-or-famine nature of municipal funding and their lack of ability to plan ahead in their budgets. Can the Minister of Municipal Affairs please tell this House how our government intends to provide efficient and sustainable infrastructure funding to municipalities so that they can make long-term budgets and plan for the services and projects they provide the people in their jurisdictions?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government is committed to ensuring that all municipalities have predictable, long-term funding. The NDP had time to get a long-term funding deal done with the two big cities, but it left everybody else in the dark. They picked winners and losers. We are not going to do that. We spent the entire summer consulting with municipalities. We have done the hard work. I will look forward to updating this House on how we are going to bring stability to municipal funding when we table our budget later this week.

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that this government wishes to work with municipalities in reducing red tape and to streamline regulatory approvals and decision-making so they can officially accomplish the work they do on behalf of their residents and given that this government has amended the Municipal Government Act to allow municipalities to offer property tax incentives to attract investment and development, can the minister please comment on how these changes to provincial regulation and paperwork for Alberta's municipalities will allow them to pass on those savings to taxpayers?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, we have made tremendous efforts to cut red tape and reduce regulatory bottlenecks, that will save our municipal officials time and money. In fact, we are one of the leading departments on this front. I was proud to announce the following changes at the AUMA conference. I was also proud to defend Bill 7, which will empower our municipalities to offer property tax incentives and create jobs. We ran on a platform that puts jobs and the economy first, and we are keeping our promises.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for the answer. Given that positive partnerships between municipalities and the provincial government allow for long-range planning of community priorities and given that municipal governments are on the front lines for the people they serve for the needs of their communities, can the minister explain how this government will

provide municipalities with more autonomy while ensuring transparency and accountability to all Albertans?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and once again to the member for the question. Municipalities are indeed the closest level of government to all people. We are continuing to work on the municipal measurement index, which will provide transparency for everyday Albertans and municipal officials. We also are strengthening municipal autonomy by listening and taking action to reduce red tape, advancing MSI funds, and working with Treasury Board on a long-term, predictable funding model.

The Speaker: I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Rural Police Service

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Justice minister may claim that rural municipalities aren't concerned about his plan to change the funding formula for rural policing, but I'm going to quote directly from a submission of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta: if anything, it will reduce the level of policing in rural areas if municipalities must reallocate funds used for enhanced policing or other public safety services to pay their share of front-line police costs. End quote. To the minister: are you really trying to claim that RMA is onside with your rural police cut?

2:10

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, last week we wrapped up our consultation with municipalities across Alberta. We've been listening, and we've been very, very clear that we're talking about more policing. If we do review the model, it will result in additional money coming into policing.

Also, concerns have been raised by the mayors of Brooks, Wetaskiwin, and Lacombe about the comments of the leader of that party over there and the misrepresentation of the facts for political theatre. When are they going to apologize to Albertans for their misrepresentation about rural policing?

Ms Ganley: When is the minister going to apologize for misrepresenting RMA's position?

Given that RMA's submission is being backed up by a number of rural counties and given that a Northern Sunrise county councillor said that the proposal from the minister is just, quote, a clear downloading, point-blank, and given that the government rushed to hand over \$4.5 billion to big corporations but Northern Sunrise county is getting nothing but a tax burden for its residents, to the minister: won't you admit that rural counties will have to raise taxes on their residents to maintain police services, or do you not understand your own proposal?

The Speaker: Hon. members will know that preambles aren't allowed after question 4, and that was a perfect example of what is not allowed.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, it's like we're in an alternate reality here where the NDP is passionate about rural crime after being silent for four years. Weeks ago I invited that exact member to come to a rural crime town hall and hear from Albertans about their NDP legacy on rural crime. Come to Rocky Mountain House. I'll even pay the transportation costs personally for that member to come to Rocky Mountain House and hear about their legacy on rural crime and their absolute failure to deal with this issue.

Ms Ganley: Given that the minister continues to deflect instead of answering questions about rural policing and given that the reeve of the municipal district of Smoky River was quoted in the local paper as stating that the province's plan to download policing costs could eat up "15 to 20 per cent" of the district's budget and that those numbers were "crazy," to the minister: will you finally answer the question? Are taxes in places like Smoky River going to go up to pay for your rural policing cut?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're still waiting to hear if that member is willing to come and hear about their legacy on rural crime. Again, I'm willing to personally pay for her transportation costs to get to Rocky Mountain House. Come and hear about your legacy. Albertans are living in fear. One thing that I've heard – we've met with over a thousand people in our town halls. We've had over 5,000 submissions about rural crime. We're at a crisis point on rural crime. That is that member's legacy. That is the former government's legacy on rural crime. We are listening. We are making sure that we are dedicated to fully implementing our campaign commitments on rural crime. [interjections]

The Speaker: One thing I can hear is the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Perhaps when he doesn't have the call, he would prefer to remain silent.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Education Funding (continued)

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many MLAs participated in Read In Week, including the Minister of Education. I think that's great. The teachers and principals that the minister met shared their most pressing needs for their schools and students. Will the minister please share with this Assembly what they told her she could do to help them?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. What I hear constantly from our students and from our staff is that they want a world-class education system, and that's what we're going to deliver.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Given that perhaps more specifically the minister was told that they need more resources, more educational assistants, and more teachers and given that the minister has been priming us for cuts to education, saying don't worry, that she'll fix the formula, will the minister please tell this House who she believes is overfunded and why she couldn't vote fast enough for a \$4.5 billion no-jobs corporate handout but has nothing to give to teachers and students?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. When I spoke with students and staff, they continually shared their dreams for what education is. What they said was that they want a world-class, high-quality education, and that is what we're going to deliver on. If I can go on to say, it's just another example of the constant NDP fear tactics, and they're continually wrong. We said we're going to maintain funding for education. There are no cuts to education. That's where it's going to be at.

Ms Hoffman: Given that when I asked the minister what she heard and she starts reading from a binder, I don't think that shows a very

deep level of understanding of that conversation that was happening, Mr. Speaker, and given that students like Ricky shouldn't have to be in a class of 40 students and that the ATA president believes that 42 will become the norm and given that the Minister of Education and Minister of Finance can't keep their stories straight, claiming that they will fund enrolment out of one side of their mouth and then claiming that they'll freeze funding out the other, will the minister admit that while she may fund enrolment in this Thursday's budget – I emphasize the word "may"; she may fund enrolment – she will be taking deep cuts from other areas of the budget to pay for it?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, complaining about the minister looking at her binder at the same time as the hon. member is looking at a piece of paper to ask the question is very, very rich.

But, again, I have a question for the hon. member. Her leader of her party says that he is firmly opposed to the TMX pipeline. He says he's been opposed to it. He will continue to fight against it; it's absolutely one of his priorities. Then her leader . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Hon. members, we will have order.
The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Then her leader . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member from Edmonton-Glenora, immediately post me asking for order, you chose to create disorder. It is not appreciated by the House, including not appreciated by Ricky, likely.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Then her leader admitted that she voted for her federal leader even though he is against TMX. Mr. Speaker, we know how the leader of the NDP in this House voted. I'm curious. How did the acting leader of the NDP vote? Did she vote against pipelines? Did she sell out Albertans yet again?

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

Rural Health Care

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Alberta has unique challenges in the delivery of health care. Due to the costliness of delivering medical services, many have to travel hundreds of kilometres to find a hospital or to see a specialist. These challenges were and are currently exacerbated by the previous government's desire to centralize services and structure, preventing appropriate and timely local care from developing. To the minister: is our government working to enable local service providers such as HALO air ambulance in my riding so that solutions can be developed for local matters?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, our government believes very strongly in working with our community partners. Certainly, it's an issue for the AHS review, how to balance the efficiency of province-wide services with the ability to make the right kinds of decisions locally. As I've said before, HALO is a great community partnership, and I expect it to continue. AHS is going to review all of the helicopter partners to make sure that they're funded fairly based on their distinct roles.

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

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the reply. Given that emergency department wait times have increased and given that in rural Alberta there is already often a lengthy drive, over an hour in some parts of my riding, just to get

to a hospital and given that these distances force people to wait even longer for important treatment, what is our government doing to get on track in order to improve ER wait times and accessibility for rural Albertans?

Mr. Shandro: I share the member's concern, Mr. Speaker. We campaigned on improving access to the health system, and that means the system as a whole. To reduce delays in emergency, we need to free up hospital beds for patients who are waiting to be admitted. To do that, we're bringing back the successful ASLI partnership to build more continuing care beds. This is the program, of course, that was cancelled by the NDP. We also need to do more care outside of emergency through approaches like telehealth so that patients can get more care without going to the hospital, including advance services like stroke care and rehab.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that rural constituents must often travel long distances to the nearest doctor or hospital and given our government's commitment to expanding the role of nurse practitioners in Alberta so that they can take on more jobs that used to require a doctor and given that in September our government made a commitment to spend \$3 million on nurse practitioners in rural Alberta, can the minister comment on how this investment will improve access to rural health care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great question. Thank you to the hon. member for it. I want to emphasize that we designed the nurse practitioner initiative to increase access in rural areas, and it will make a real difference. The 30 new nurse practitioners are targeted to primary care, an area where they haven't been working traditionally, in places that are currently underserved, almost all outside of Calgary and Edmonton. We're also looking at other ways to increase access to primary care. For example, we're planning to increase midwifery services, and we're looking at alternative payment plans for physicians to build on the team approach for our primary care networks.

2:20

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, we all remember when the Premier handed out earplugs in this House to drown out the concerns of Albertans, and we remember when this government put posters in the windows of the Legislature offices to troll people at a rally calling for action on climate change. Then on Friday, with the largest rally in history here on the steps of the Legislature, this government's staff refused to attend and shut their blinds. To whichever minister is allowed to answer this question: do you feel that the actions you and your staff have taken to drown out Albertans are appropriate, and will you apologize to the thousands gathered Friday on the steps of the Legislature?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I see the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar continues to want to distract from what the real question of the day is, and that is the federal election and the fact that his leader has admitted that she voted for a federal leader who is antipipeline and anti-Alberta oil and gas, who has a platform that only mentioned this province once, so we know that the provincial NDP leader sold out Albertans yet again. My question to that hon. member: is he standing with Alberta in this election, or is he selling out to his overlords in eastern Canada?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that we continually get lectured on backing winners and losers and given that they're clearly backing the loser, Andrew Scheer, and given that this Premier was quoted as saying that the Legislature was the people's house, can he answer the question? Which people was he referring to, those asking for a \$4.5 billion corporate handout?

Mr. Jason Nixon: This side of the House stands up for Alberta oil and gas, stands up for our province, stands up for our constitutional rights. That member and his former government sold out Albertans at every corner. In fact, their leader said: we would also specifically assure Quebec that there would be no pipelines imposed on Quebec. That's who their leader voted for. That's who their party leader stands for. She stands with Quebec, not with this province. So answer the question. Mr. Speaker, through you to him: is he voting for Alberta, or is he voting for his eastern overlords?

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, given that the member opposite couldn't build a pipeline with a welding torch and a flashlight in his own hand and given that this Finance minister is going to have a budget town hall with only party fundraisers, to the Premier: how much do the protesters demanding action on climate change have to donate to his political party in order to be heard?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this side of the House is taking concrete action when it comes to climate change. I look forward to tabling TIER in just a few days, unlike the former government . . .

Mr. Feehan: Tell that to the crowds of indigenous people leading that protest.*

Mr. Jason Nixon: . . . who was all economic pain and no environmental gain with their tax. But here is what's even more appalling. Their federal leader described Alberta as a bargaining chip in a potential coalition federally.

Mr. Feehan: You don't care about the indigenous people or . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, we will have order.

Mr. Hunter: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order is noted.

The Government House Leader still has the call.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Their leader described Alberta as a bargaining chip in a potential federal negotiation, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is much more than a bargaining chip. It is offensive that they've done that. Will they apologize for voting for him and apologize for selling out Albertans once again?

Greta Thunberg's Visit to Alberta

Ms Renaud: Albertans are friendly, welcoming, and courteous. We are excited when visitors come to our beautiful and vibrant province. Thousands of Albertans came to the Legislature to meet 16-year-old Greta Thunberg and to join her in the call for action on climate change. But the night before an employee of Rebel media harassed Greta and followed her to her hotel room. To the Minister of Status of Women, do you think it was okay for a man to harass Greta, and will you condemn this terrible action here and now?

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much for the question. As always, and I would agree with the member that Alberta is welcoming and Alberta is very gracious. We have such a wonderful opportunity to show what we're made of here, that we are the best producers of the

**See page 1908, right column, paragraph 7

most ethical oil and the most wonderful opportunity to be able to get those products to pipeline and to make sure that we stand up for Albertans in this province. We welcome all people. We would welcome anybody who has the opportunity to come and speak to us about our incredible opportunities here.

Ms Renaud: Given that in this House we should take steps to ensure that everyone, whether residing or visiting, feels safe in Alberta and given that the Minister of Community and Social Services introduced a bill just last week that she says will provide more support and protection to women, to the minister: will you please take action today and make sure that Rebel media is barred from all government press conferences and government interviews until they apologize for their employee's disgusting harassment of Greta Thunberg?

Mrs. Aheer: I would like to again state for the record, Mr. Speaker, that this province has welcomed various people from all over the world to be able to share the message of what it is that we do in this province, the most ethical oil. The fact is that we are standing up for our province and for human rights issues while there are members in this House who actively work every single day against every single Albertan in this province to make sure that not only our products don't make it to tidewater, but on top of that, making sure that we get our ethical products to other countries to help them out.

Ms Renaud: You can't condemn Rebel media.

Given that we also saw a mural of Thunberg painted near this Legislature defaced over the weekend and given that I haven't seen anyone from the government of Alberta condemn this act and given that the world is watching as she toured our province, to the Minister of Community and Social Services: do you worry that the tone that your government set about Thunberg's visit is encouraging these disgusting acts?

Mrs. Aheer: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the fact that the opposition would use this despicable act to link in any way to government is absolutely ridiculous. The fact that . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Hon. members, I understand that this is a very passionate issue, but we've heard the question; we must be able to hear the answer.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Of course, we condemn that act. Of course, everybody in this House should condemn that act, but the fact that the opposition would use that opportunity, especially a 16-year-old little girl, use that little girl to make it somehow linked to government or everyday Albertans in this House is absolutely ludicrous. We condemn the act, absolutely.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has risen to ask a question.

Red Tape Reduction

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the previous government Alberta was given a failing grade from the CFIB on their red tape report card. Our government has made it clear that reduction of red tape is priority. As part of this initiative we created the Associate Ministry of Red Tape Reduction and appointed his honour, the associate minister, to this role; however, there is still much yet to be accomplished. My question to the associate minister: with January approaching, how can we be certain that we will be able to obtain more than a failing grade on our red tape report card next time around?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we are actually doing something about it, unlike the NDP did in the past four years. Our job creators have been feeling for the past years that they are being crushed by what they call death by a thousand cuts. The NDP added a 20 per cent increase to corporate taxes, they added over a hundred pages of legislation to the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and numerous other measures that sent a strong message to our job creators and innovators that Alberta was not open for business. Within the first six months of our mandate we sent a new message to those hard-working men and women that put it all on the line: we are open for business.

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

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Associate Minister. Given that the associate minister can confirm that important red tape reductions are indeed taking place, particularly for the many small, independent businesses that drive the economies of ridings like Livingstone-Macleod, to the same minister: when will we be able to see evidence that the Associate Ministry of Red Tape Reduction is making a difference for every Albertan?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, we're already seeing lots of evidence, but the first thing we did was start by counting all of the red tape in government. By measuring and identifying where those regulatory pinch points are, we can fix legislation and regulations so that our job creators can do what they do best, create jobs and jump-start the economy. It is with them that our job crisis will be fixed, so we need to get out of their way. The next thing we did was that we set up a website. To date we have received over 3,800 submissions to cutredtape.alberta.ca. If anyone has an idea, we invite them to submit it.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the associate minister stays firm in his commitment to reduce red tape in Alberta and given that constituencies such as Livingstone-Macleod would significantly benefit from such a reduction, once again to the same minister: is the goal to reduce red tape by one-third realistic, and what measures and steps are being taken to ensure that Albertans won't see any further increases going forward?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, it's a very realistic approach. We need to change the culture of our government. Businesses aren't the problem; they are the solution. And we need to start treating them like the partners in prosperity that they are. Red tape disproportionately affects small businesses as they don't have the economies of scale to hire compliance officers like larger businesses do. Our red tape reduction strategy is really about fighting for the little guy. Two out of every 3 new jobs come from small businesses, so it only makes sense that any strategy to get Albertans back to work has to be that of red tape reduction.

Canadian Energy Centre Oversight

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are quite worried about what the government is doing with \$30 million for the so-called energy war room. This weekend I was out and about quite a bit, and I was approached by several constituents who were unhappy with the level of answers that they were getting from the government. To the Minister of Finance. Just a piece of friendly advice: drop the

politics; just give my constituents who stopped me in the grocery store this weekend a straight answer. Will the minister commit that the name of every single war room contract vendor will be publicly disclosed by the government?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, I was very clear last week about the transparency level of the Canadian Energy Centre, and it all is subject to transparency. But what I'm not done speaking about is the one-and-done pipeline deal from that side of the House, a deal that saw one pipeline approved in return for every other one cancelled. That's extremely important today because tonight in the election that one pipeline is at peril, and that side of the House voted for the one party and Jagmeet Singh who's putting it at peril. That's why we have the energy war room.

Ms Phillips: So I'm hearing that the names of each vendor will not be disclosed.

Given that we have rules governing sole-sourcing to deal with Conservatives giving sole-source contracts to their friends and insiders, which is what happened before our government took over, will this government commit that their \$30 million war room, designed to make war on political enemies, will be in compliance with the government of Alberta's sole-source contracting rules? It's a simple question. I need a simple answer.

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, there are multiple measures to ensure accountability in the Canadian Energy Centre, including the Auditor General. It's subject to Auditor General reports. We have the Canadian Energy Centre precisely because the other side of the House did not stand up and defend our energy sector for four years. That led to a narrative being developed by those opposed to our oil and gas sector, that they did not dispute. We are in the situation that we are in this province right now because of the one-and-done deal that the former . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Did the Minister of Finance or any other minister discuss with the Auditor General the role that his office would play in the audit of the \$30 million and the contracts being given out by the energy war room prior to establishing this very unusual situation of three ministers being the directors of a corporation? Yes or no? Spare us the partisanship.

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, as with any other provincial corporation, it is subject to audit by the Auditor General. Of course, it's a matter of legislation. It's in the rules. It's transparent. It's subject to audit by the Auditor General.

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

Rural Police Service (continued)

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Municipalities from across Alberta are warning this government about their failed policy to download police costs onto them. Reports from presentations made by the government of Alberta to rural municipalities estimate that the changes they are pushing could result in property tax increases by as much as \$400 per year for residents. To the associate minister of red tape: what steps are you taking to combat the mass accumulation of municipal red tape being driven by this Justice minister?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, again, maybe I'll extend the invite to that member as well. Come on down to Rocky Mountain House to hear about the NDP legacy on rural crime. You know what? I'll make the same offer; I'll even pay for the transportation. They can both come together. We've been clear. We're going to implement our rural crime commitments to Albertans. We're consulting right now with municipalities. Every additional dollar, if we proceed, will go back into more policing right now. More policing.

Mr. Nielsen: They don't need more politicians there; they need more police.

Given the associate minister's apparent mandate to reduce red tape and given his pledge to eliminate old regulations for new regulations created but given this UCP government's growing interest in downloading red tape and costs onto municipalities, to the associate minister: what issues of red tape have you eliminated to cope with the massive new costs being dumped on municipalities by the Justice minister? Please be specific about the government's intentions rather than misleading.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, you know, we've actually posted the stuff that we've done on our website, and all the member has to do is go on our website to get that information. What is interesting is that that member sat in the government for four years and did absolutely nothing on this file. In fact, what they actually took all their time to do was to give a whole bunch of taxes to Albertans, a 20 per cent increase in corporate taxes. This is the sort of thing that they have a legacy for. Our legacy is going to be able to get Albertans back to work.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, given, I guess, that municipalities can't expect this associate minister to rescue them from the red tape that the Justice minister is insisting on downloading on them and given that the end result of this policy could be rising property taxes, utility rates, and reduced services, to the associate minister: do you think forcing Alberta residents to deal with higher property taxes, higher utility rates, and more red tape is a fair trade for a \$4.5 billion corporate giveaway that hasn't created a single job yet?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is rich coming from the members opposite. This is the political party that, when they were in office, imposed the biggest tax hike in Alberta's history, multibillion dollars in taxes and the carbon tax. These are the members opposite that, you know, were led to pursue policies that devastated all of our communities. These are the same members opposite that went, I mean, around the country campaigning against our oil and gas sector. We will not be lectured by that side of the aisle.

The Speaker: The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Agricultural Concerns

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's agricultural sector has plummeted under the previous government. It's unacceptable that employment in the field has dropped 19 per cent in four years; 11,300 jobs have been lost. Under the previous administration Alberta farmers were put through tough times dealing with skyrocketing government-driven costs simply to make a living. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: how is this government working to revitalize this important staple of Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture has risen.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for the question. Actually, I'd like to start off by saying that I was pleasantly surprised to hear that the deputy NDP leader is actually spending time in her riding of Lethbridge-West. That is a great thing to hear.

Under Alberta's one-and-done NDP government there were 11,000 job losses in agriculture, investment plummeted by 7 per cent, and the ag sector felt attacked or ignored at best. But, Mr. Speaker, we are working with farmers. We had consultations that went out across the summer at 25 different stops for the repeal and replacement of Bill 6.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, given that the previous government made it mandatory to have farm worker WCB coverage for their employees and given that WCB insurance premiums are rising and costing more money annually for employers, to the same minister. Over the summer you had the opportunity to talk with many farmers and ranchers. What did you hear from the consultations regarding employee insurance, and what will you be attempting to implement with upcoming legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We did hear that mandatory choice in insurance was something that farmers wanted. It's something that we're committed to. Our farmers compete on a global stage. We need to be able to have regulations and rules in place so they can actually get their products to market, which are primarily export-oriented in nature.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that small farms are often hit hard by regulatory and tax changes and given that small farms do not have the same financial flexibility as larger agricultural operations, so the annual cash flow management challenges are often huge, to the minister: how will this government work with our federal counterparts to reduce regulatory and tax burdens on small farms?

2:40

Mr. Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, I'm very hopeful that tonight Canadians across the country will elect a strong, stable, national majority Conservative government which this government will be able to work with to help our farmers compete on a global stage.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis has a question.

Tourism Development in Banff-Kananaskis

Ms Rosin: Yes, I do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tourism is vital to the success of this province. It is one of the largest employers in Banff-Kananaskis and is accountable for 89 per cent of Banff's GDP. This industry significantly contributes to the province's economy and vibrant well-being. We need to continue to put our province on the map by attracting visitors from around the world, so can the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism please tell us what she's doing to encourage tourism growth in my riding?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We will be developing a 10-year tourism strategy,

where we will be consulting closely with many stakeholders in your riding, led by Travel Alberta. The strategy will have a bold and ambitious target for tourism investment in our province, and the member's riding of Banff-Kananaskis will be a big part of that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that many tourism companies cite their inability to secure long-term funding as a barrier to their ability to build new tourism ventures and, further, given that we must assure potential investors that Alberta is a place to invest in tourism development, can the minister please outline what she has already done to address this concern?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development and tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for the question. It is true that the tourism industry has been mired in regulatory burden and red tape that has stifled growth. My colleague the hon. Government House Leader actually took action on this very issue, and our government has increased the maximum tenure on public lands for tourism operators from 25 to 60 years, which will allow the securing of long-term financing.

The Speaker: I'll provide the Member for Banff-Kananaskis the opportunity to ask her second supplemental.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that red tape regulations around investment and entrepreneurship are a serious burden on our economy and given that this burden is particularly onerous when trying to invest in our tourism industry, our beautiful provincial parks and our world-renowned attractions, what is the ministry doing to ensure that the concerns of red tape raised by tourism operators at the round-tables held in my riding are heard?

The Speaker: The hon. minister is answering.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for the question. As I mentioned, we have already taken action to reduce some red tape for tourism, and we are continuing to do so. My colleague the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has also already held a round-table for the tourism and hospitality sectors. I also attended a red tape consultation hosted by the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, where we heard great discussions about the future of tourism.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will proceed to Members' Statements.

Hon. members, please leave quickly.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie is rising to make a statement.

Election Day

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across the country Canadians are casting their votes to influence the future of our country. In my riding, Calgary-Currie, many of my constituents come from war-torn countries where any vote is already fraudulently predetermined. Not here, though. Not in Canada.

In recent days I've spoken to several new Canadian constituents, and this is their first opportunity to vote, and they value that right. Every Canadian who can vote should; therefore, it stands to reason that every voter should educate themselves on the issues.

For me, I voted for the only party that is standing up in support of the Alberta economy.

I voted for the only party that recognizes that we are a global leader in environmental stewardship, labour standards, and ethical and social principles in the production of oil and gas.

I voted for the only party that wants Canada to stop importing oil and gas from dictators and totalitarian regimes like Venezuela and Russia. In those countries regular citizens are scared to come out and simply be themselves for fear of imprisonment or death.

I voted for the only party that knows that supporting our energy industry means keeping our standard of living and being able to build new roads, new schools, and new hospitals, not only here in Alberta but across all of Canada, because we give the rest of Canada tens of billions of dollars each year through equalization payments. Without our economy that all goes away.

Therefore, I had one choice. I voted for Andrew Scheer and the Conservative Party of Canada.

In conclusion, to every voter living in a province that has benefited from our equalization payments to you, such as the Atlantic provinces, historically Ontario, et puis aussi le Québec: these equalization payments contributed to your roads, your kids' education, and your health care. Therefore, if you haven't voted yet and if you value your standards of living, then vote the way that I did because you have one viable choice, and that choice is Conservative.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Standing Order 3(1.2) there shall be no morning sittings on the following dates: Tuesday, October 22, 2019, and Thursday, October 24, 2019.

I further wish to advise that pursuant to Government Motion 31 there shall be no evening sitting tonight.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a report by the Conference Board of Canada, which I referred to in my question last week, titled *Ready for Life: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Early Childhood Education and Care*. This report concludes that given the substantial potential benefits to society and the economy, there's a strong case for universal child care and early childhood education.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has caught my eye.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite five copies of a document from the *South Peace News* entitled *If You Want Us to Pay, We Should Have a Say*, that I referenced in my question earlier today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A new session, so I thought I would not miss the opportunity to table five copies of the NDP's anti-oil Leap Manifesto. Clearly, the opposition has voted against Alberta again.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite copies of a document called *Abortion Bans Strip People of Their Human Rights: Here's Why We Must Stand in Solidarity against Them*. There you go.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first one is from *Women's Studies International Forum*, *Spatial Disparities and Travel to Freestanding Abortion Clinics in Canada*, by Christabelle Sethna and Marion Doull.

The second one is "Job Intensive": *Study Says Clean Energy Fast Track to Employment Growth*, by Canadian Press.

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table five copies of a report. Thank you.

The Speaker: To the Minister of Service Alberta: typically speaking, you would provide some context of what the report is.

Mr. Glubish: It's the 2018 report on the act to protect against predatory lending.

The Speaker: Very well tabled. Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Schweitzer, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Law Society of Alberta 2018 annual report; on behalf of hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Securities Act the Alberta Securities Commission 2019 annual report; on behalf of hon. Mr. Shandro, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Disciplines Act the Health Disciplines Board 2018 annual report.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. I see the government whip has risen.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much. I am very proud to stand up here on behalf of the point of order that was noted by the associate minister of red tape at approximately 2:24 this afternoon. Mr. Speaker, as you are fully aware, there was a very robust question period, full of debate and back and forth. I think there were a number of times where you certainly had to calm the House down, and I know that it is very much appreciated, I believe, on both sides of this House.

However, during one of the exchanges a question was posed that our Government House Leader was attempting to answer, and what could be heard from across the room from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was, quote: that member doesn't care about indigenous people. Unquote. Really, under 23(h), (i), and (j) – of

course, “makes allegations against another Member” and “imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member” or even “uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder” – I would argue that, in fact, it did create disorder. Hence, you actually had to single out that particular member to get him from not speaking not only in a tone – but, obviously, from what we heard on this side of the House through the associate minister, what he had actually heard, I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that this is indeed a point of order. I would ask that that member or somebody on his behalf apologize to the Government House Leader.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader has risen to defend a point of order.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, this is not a point of order. I did not hear clearly the same thing that the member opposite thought he heard. You know, for that reason, this is really a difference of opinion. I’m sitting on this side, mere feet away from the member who was accused of uttering comments that possibly would have been or could have been a point of order, but that’s not what I heard. There is clearly a difference of opinion between the government whip and our side, and for that reason, there is no point of order.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, due to the volume at which the member was speaking quite often throughout this debate, you didn’t have to sit mere feet away to be able to hear what he said. There was no doubt in my mind that that is exactly what he said, and this should be definitely a point of order.

The Speaker: I hesitate to recognize the member, particularly if he is only going to add his viewpoint on what we’ve already heard, but if he has something new to add, I’ll hear it.

Mr. Hanson: Just to confirm, Mr. Speaker, that I actually heard the same thing, too. It was quite clear in the House.

Thanks.

The Speaker: I hesitated to recognize you unless you had something new to add, and unfortunately you didn’t add anything new.

Does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford have any desire to add to the statement today?

Perfect. Hon. members, I do recognize that today the House was particularly rambunctious. The Speaker certainly did hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford quite loudly, and he was called out. I certainly did hear him make comments around indigenous people. Whether or not, in fact, he said, “You don’t care about indigenous people,” which, if he did do, certainly would be a point of order and he would be required to apologize for and withdraw – having said that, without the benefit of the Blues or knowing exactly what he did say, it would not be appropriate for me to ask him to apologize for something that I am not a hundred per cent certain that he did say.

What I would remind all members of the Assembly: we are responsible for the tone and tenor of the debate, and certainly . . . [A cellphone rang] I’m sure he wants to apologize for his cellphone ringing now. Certainly, yelling out in such a manner that the Speaker can hear a member over all other members’ raucous debate would not be appreciated by the Speaker.

But on this point, I am not certain that that is, in fact, what he said. As such, there is no point of order, and I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Hon. members, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Motions for Concurrence in Committee Reports on Public Bills Other than Government Bills

Bill 203

An Act to Protect Public Health Care

The Speaker: Hon. members, on June 27, 2019, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members’ Public Bills presented the report of that committee on Bill 203, An Act to Protect Public Health Care, and requested concurrence of the Assembly in the report, which recommended that the bill not proceed.

As this is the first time a motion to concur in the report of the committee has been debated during this Legislature, I’ll briefly outline the procedure that we’ll follow. Under Standing Order 7(5.1)(c) if a member other than the mover rises to speak during daily Routine to a motion to concur in the report of a committee on public bills other than government bills, debate on that motion is called under Orders of the Day on the Monday after. The speaking times: Standing Order 29(3) provides for the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition to have 20 minutes speaking time and all other members to have 10 minutes. Under Standing Order 8(7)(a.1) up to 55 minutes are allotted for debate on the motion. The mover of the concurrence motion, in this case the Member for Calgary-West, has an additional five minutes to close debate. As a member other than the mover rose to speak on June 27, 2019, debate on the motion will proceed today, which is the first Monday on which the Assembly has sat since that date.

As the motion to concur in the committee report on Bill 203 has already been moved, I now wish to recognize any additional members who wish to speak. Are there members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity. Just to confirm with the table, as the representative for the leader, do I have 20 minutes to speak at this time or 10?

The Acting Speaker: It’s my understanding that you have 10 minutes to speak.

Mr. Feehan: Ten. Okay. Just wanted to be absolutely clear. Then I’ll divide my time roughly in half because there are two issues here. One of them, of course, is the issue that’s inherent in Bill 203, which is the protection of public health care services in this province. Of course, the other one is the deep concern about the antidemocratic stance of this government and their demagoguery in designing this system to ensure that only their bills arrive in the House. I’ll speak to both of these pieces as we go along, I gather, giving about five minutes to each.

The first one is that it is ultimately critical that we spend time in this House talking about the importance of protecting public health care services in this country. As I mentioned earlier today in my member’s statement, it is one of the identifying characteristics of people’s pride in Canada that we have such a public system and that any person in this House can go to receive medical care not having to worry about whether or not they can afford to pay for that care when they’re in the midst of crisis, family trauma, and perhaps even the grieving of a death in a family. Yet what I’m finding is that members opposite have simply begun to engage in a practice of snubbing the protections that are necessary for public health care in this province.

Now, in the committee at hand, that we addressed on this issue, I brought forward numerous incidents of studies that have been done

about the existence of public health care and what happens when you start to introduce private health care.

3:00

I can tell you that studies done across Canada by people such as Tuohy, which I will introduce in the House later for the record, and others across Britain and Australia and New Zealand have all indicated that when you introduce private medical care into the public health care system, you begin to undermine the effectiveness of the public health care system and you begin to create a system where only people with substantial money can receive the benefits of the larger system.

In fact, in Tuohy's report they suggest that systems allowing for parallel publicly- and privately-financed sectors raise the question of whether a parallel private system can reduce pressure on the public system. Our review suggests that it does not: public-sector waiting lists and times are longer in nations with parallel private sectors, such as Britain and New Zealand, than in nations that draw the public-private boundary in other ways.

That's the primary issue. The government does not want to protect the citizens of the province of Alberta from longer wait times because there seems to be some benefit for this government, which I suggest has something to do with their coffers at election time.

Moving past the evidence, because I know I presented evidence from research studies – as you know, prior to arriving in this House, I was an academic, so I often go to research literature to develop my opinion. I presented evidence on a variety of things like that trickle-down economics doesn't work, and of course the government ignored me. I provided evidence on issues such as climate change, and of course the government ignored me. It seems to be a very clear trend that any time academia spends thousands of dollars and thousands of years of man-hours to determine some greater understanding of our world, this government is sure to ignore it on behalf of something their buddy said to them in the coffee shop last week. Given that I think that that's the nature of their decision-making, there's not much point in speaking about that.

What I do want to say today is that this decision by this committee, if this government were to accept this decision, would be an assault on democracy. This is an attempt to quiet the voice on the other side simply because you disagree with them. Nobody is saying that the committee had to ask the government to accept the bill. We are just asking them to debate the bill, and they won't even do that. They won't even have the fortitude to stand up and defend their own position in the House because they know it's indefensible. They know that their only hope of getting their way is to actually undercut democracy and make sure that the opposition does not have a voice, the same way they've done by reducing our time in the House, by reducing our chance to introduce our constituents when they come in here, and now they're reducing our chance to bring bills into this House.

I notice that a hundred per cent of the bills presented by government members who are not part of the cabinet have been presented into this House, and now a hundred per cent of the bills presented by opposition members have been denied. I can tell you what this is all about. This is about putting earplugs in permanently in this House and preventing people in this House, who were elected to represent their citizens, from actually speaking to the issues that they were elected on.

That is a disgrace in a Westminster democracy. The very point of our having this nature of a democratic government is to hear from the people. If you don't like it, you vote it down, but if you come in with your jackboots on and step on the necks of the opposition so that you don't even have to hear them or you put earplugs into your

ears, then you have learned nothing from 300 years of democratic growth in western democracies. It's a shame that you find yourself here in this House saying that you want to represent people in a democratic way and then use every trick you possibly can to deny us the right to engage you in that democracy. This is the most shameful act that I've seen this government conduct since they got in six months ago, and that's after quite a list of shameful acts.

I would like to be able to say, "Let's look at the evidence, and let's look at whether or not it's important to protect health care," but I know they don't care about evidence. Instead, I would ask this House to take the moment to realize how important it is that we actually have the opportunity to stand in this House and talk to the issues.

If you won't even give us that, if you put the earplugs in permanently in terms of the structures of the House, then we have a serious problem of moving toward a nondemocratic state in the province of Alberta, and that's something that I will stand in this House and fight against. When my kids get older and look at what's happened in this House, I want them to know that I stood against them, that I stood against their attempts to shut everyone down who doesn't agree with them and prevent them from having a voice in this House, that when they tried to move in the direction of dictatorial policy-making on the part of the government, I was here to say that that is unacceptable.

I'm proud to be a person who is not afraid to look the government and the government members in the eye and say: what you are doing is wrong. All you have to do is accept this bill into the House to talk about it and then vote it out. You have a majority. So what is it that you don't even want to hear from the opposition? The level of cowardice in that, not even wanting to sit and be part of a normal democratic process when you know you have the ultimate power to defeat the bill, tells me that you're afraid of something. What it tells me you're afraid of is that you are on the fast march to destroying public health care, that you're going to make sure that in the next few years the average person in society is going to have less access to public health care because your wealthy donor friends want private, elite access to health care. And that is unacceptable.

You can't even stand up and defend yourself on this, and that tells me something. You could have said, "Sure, we'll have a conversation about it, and I'll stand up and I'll defend my point of view," but you've chosen not to do that through this committee, and you've set up this structure to ensure that whenever the opposition brings an idea forward, you will be able to squelch it before it arrives in this House. That's the kind of demagoguery that is completely unacceptable in a Westminster democracy and one that should make you feel ashamed for what you're doing.

Go back to your constituents and tell them: yeah, the opposition tried to bring something forward and tried to suggest a bill that we could work on.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Looking to see other individuals looking to speak to Bill 203, I saw the hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion of concurrence. Like, wow, that was a rambling mess of anger and misplaced thoughts, most certainly, but that seems to be consistent with messaging coming from the NDP this day and age.

First off, I appreciate having this opportunity to speak to this bill called An Act to Protect Public Health Care. I'm not actually speaking to the bill. I know that we're on the motion of concurrence. I think one of the reasons why it was never successful going through a committee is because it's actually a bill to stifle innovation in our

health care system. What we are doing with health care right now is not working. What the NDP did with health care for the last four years by throwing money at it is not working. In fact, we are seeing that we have worse health care outcomes at the end of the day, yet the NDP are committed to protecting that kind of system. Good job. That's great. That's what Albertans voted for.

No. Albertans actually voted for the opposite of that. Albertans voted for hope in the health care system. They voted to bring down wait times, and that's exactly what this government is doing. I'm so proud to be moving forward on that with my colleagues alongside Albertans, who are so hopeful for the changes and the hope that is before them.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford stood up and said that public health care is under attack. I haven't really heard that. Oh, no. Wait. I have heard that. I've heard that, again, from the messaging machine of the NDP. The NDP are using this fear and smear campaign amongst Albertans. They're using our health care system. They're creating fear in families, in parents.

The UCP is not attacking the health care system. We are doing everything that we possibly can to do the exact opposite of what the NDP did and failed in our health care system. I'm so proud to be moving forward with our government.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, the member who brought this ill-thought-out bill forward in the first place said that there are so many studies on public health care, and they presented all of these studies: it's been done; you know, the science is settled on public health care, and we can't change a stinking thing. What they should have been presenting are studies on how to make our health care system better, how to make it work, how to make it work for families that are stuck in the waiting rooms in hospitals, riddled with fear because their child is sick, studies on how to make it better for families in our communities. We should be spending time on innovation, not studies that keep producing the same failed results over and over again.

So, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the people that I represent in the riding of Airdrie-East, who are as a community working on policies and thoughts and ideas to make healthier communities and to make the health care system work better, we are ashamed that the NDP would even think that this is something that Albertans are excited about or looking forward to. Again I just say big kudos to the platform commitments, which our government will be carrying through with, enhancing and strengthening our health care system. We are so proud.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will certainly be voting this down.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that was entertaining.

Work hard, stay humble, and earn every vote: that was apparently the credo of this government, Mr. Speaker, that they have claimed again and again and then turned around in this House and basically wiped their feet on. They claim one thing in words, but their actions are clearly very different. Whatever diatribe the members of this government want to get up and make in this House in protestation about their mandate from Albertans and how they got the support of all Albertans for every last little thing that they're going to plan to do, they at no point during their campaign ran on reducing the voice of opposition.

They at no point ran on increasing a dictatorial mandate for the government of Alberta, on shutting down debate in this House, or

indeed on making the kind of changes they made in the standing orders to do what they would have screamed about if our government had ever tried to do when they sat in these seats in this House, and they know that full well, Mr. Speaker, because they took every opportunity, when they felt that our government was not allowing one of their private members' bills to move forward, to make a good deal of noise about it.

I do not see in the behaviour of this government, Mr. Speaker, that they are living up to those words that were put forward by their Premier. Indeed, that Premier does not live up to his own words. Humility is the furthest thing from this government, as we saw again and again during question period today, as we just heard from the Member for Airdrie-East, as we see demonstrated by the members of this government that sat and laughed and yawned and heckled my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford as he spoke about his bill being stifled by this government, which does not have the courage to even stand and debate it in this House. They make every effort to hide it behind closed doors, to keep it at committee, and then refuse to actually let it come forward, where Albertans could actually have the opportunity to hear about and learn about the particular issue. That is not working hard; that's the utmost in laziness. That is not staying humble; that is the utmost in arrogance. That is not earning Albertans' votes; that is spitting on them.

Things have gotten rather quiet in the House now, I notice. Members don't see fit to laugh at me like they did my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford.

Respectfully, Mr. Speaker, this government has made a number of changes – and these members well know it; they've each voted in favour of it – to reduce the opportunity for members of the opposition to raise concerns and legitimate points in this House.

They actively participated, a number of them, in accepting earplugs from the Premier and placing them in their ears during a debate in this House, exercising the precise same tools that their own colleagues exercised when they sat in this position in this House. Democracy, Mr. Speaker, is not meant to be convenient. It is not meant to put members of government at ease. It is intended to allow for debate. It is intended to be uncomfortable. It is intended at times to slow down the work of government to ensure we have proper checks and balances and consideration of all ideas that members wish to bring forward.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that at times I've listened to some incredibly vacuous and unintelligent debate in this House, absolutely ridiculous conspiracy theory, but I sat and listened because that is the right of members in this House, to bring forward whatever thoughts they wish to in this place. We, when we were in government, did not attempt to take steps to stifle that debate. Even when it might have been advisedly wiser for some of those members to perhaps not make some of the comments they chose to make on the record, we allowed them to do it.

What we have here, Mr. Speaker, is once again this government demonstrating arrogance, the type of arrogance that they claim they displaced from former Conservative governments in this province. Let's be clear. They did not get to Alison Redford in a year or even in four years. That was the accumulation of 40 years of decisions like this, backed by members who felt that they had to back up a Premier or a government. In order to get some things done, they were willing to fudge the lines a little bit, willing to allow that little extra step over the line of decency or ethics or democracy, and that builds up like mud on your shoes. I can only imagine how much this government is going to be carrying around and, with it, each one of these private members and ministers who continue to support this kind of behaviour and decision by the end of their four years and, indeed, what that may cost them with Albertans.

Indeed, that's what we have in this bill, Mr. Speaker. We have a bill looking at how this has been allowed to continue in our health care system, how certain health organizations are fudging the rules and are blurring the lines between what is a publicly covered service and what is a privately covered service, through things like block billing, so you can't tell where one dollar starts and where it ends as to which services it's being applied to. And if this government does not want to debate that in this House, if they feel that they have to go to these kinds of extreme measures, I can only assume that they're okay with that. Indeed, we've seen that in many cases.

This is a Premier, after all, whose own leadership campaign is under investigation for precisely that, blurring the lines of ethics, fudging the rules, skirting around the boundaries, shady money moving back and forth, members sitting in this House that were part of those actions and part of those conspiracies. So, indeed, it's no surprise, Mr. Speaker, that members of this government do not want to debate a bill on the record that talks about that kind of behaviour occurring in parts of our health care system.

They can stand, and they can express their outrage. They can stand and try to make claims that they are doing this for the betterment of Albertans. We know they are doing this to cover their own selves because they want to streamline their ability to ram through whatever legislation they wish, to silence the voice of opposition, and to reduce democracy in this House. They feel that that is what the electoral mandate they received back in April allows them to do. Mr. Speaker, that is not what they told Albertans they were going to bring to this House. But by their actions here today it is precisely what they are demonstrating they are going to do.

3:20

Why, Mr. Speaker, should we trust them on any other part of their platform and, indeed, on their plans for health care in this province when it's clear they are willing to bend and change and break the rules whenever it is convenient for them to maintain power and to do what they wish for themselves and their friends? That is what this government does, and that is the legacy of each of the members in this House that chooses to vote against allowing this bill to be debated in the House, who voted in favour of the standing orders that made the changes that allowed this to occur, who took part in that committee that chose to recommend that this bill not have the opportunity to move forward.

That's not why I was sent to this House, Mr. Speaker. I was sent to this House originally in 2015. I ran because I wanted to see better, because I saw the arrogance of previous Conservative governments, and I wanted to work to change that. I have worked in my community to uphold that standard, and that is what I was re-elected for back in April, and that is why I stand in this House and decry this action by this government today. This is not what my constituents voted for in 2015 or in 2019.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I believe that I saw the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't very long ago that this side of the House was given a resounding mandate by the people of Alberta. The people of Alberta chose a government that would get our province back on track, including putting its people back to work and getting our fiscal house in order. Completing this mandate requires hard decisions and difficult conversations, but none of these conversations should be a surprise or a slight to anyone. We were elected on clear and explicit platform promises to

this province and its people. Today I'm standing in this House to remind everyone of the commitments we have made and the promises we will be keeping. These promises are clear and emphatic, and they are the reason why I am unable to support this bill.

As a member of the private members' bills committee – we were asked for a recommendation, and we brought one to the House, democratically debating the bill right now. We also allowed for every moment of debate and expert presentation available during that committee time, and we allowed the opposition to bring forward their arguments.

It is in this government's platform, however, to maintain or increase health spending and maintain a universally accessible, publicly funded health care system. Increasing access and decreasing wait times are paramount in that plan. This commitment is undeniable. We know that we must take care of one another, including through providing an accessible public health care system. There is no doubt in my mind that we agree with this statement on this side of the House. What we cannot agree on, Mr. Speaker, is the accusation of the other side, that the opportunity for innovation equals cuts to availability and equal access.

After much personal research I have found that I agree with the position of the Alberta Medical Association. In their letter, as submitted on June 24, 2019, to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills, the Alberta Medical Association states:

Bill 203 does not make substantive changes to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act . . . [and] The adoption of Bill 203 would not, for example, change what the AMA already advises its members in terms of their provision . . . and payment of uninsured medical services.

In fact, according to the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta's letter, also submitted on June 24, 2019, to the standing committee, paraphrased: insured medical services are clearly identified in the schedule of medical benefits as outlined in the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. Physicians may charge privately for health services that are not included in the schedule. For example, they may charge for travel advice, immunizations, precare, nutrition, and when patients are uninsured. When charging privately, physicians must follow CPSA's standard of practice on charging for uninsured services. The standard of practice is based on their core principles, including clear principles such as a patient's ability to pay, adequate notice and transparency, equal access for all, professional obligation to provide urgently required services regardless of whether or not payment is possible.

Through reading these two letters and hearing from the professionals themselves, who are experts in their industries, we are left with only one conclusion, that this bill, in essence, does not achieve the key objectives of increasing access to services or decreasing wait times. I find it perplexing that this wasn't brought forward in the four years that that member sat as part of the government, instead bringing it forward now. It addresses fee structures related to block billing and membership fees to boutique clinics, of which there seem to be only 10 operating in Alberta, based on the presentation of the Parkland Institute representative. This represents an overwhelmingly small minority of services in our health care system. It is not, then, able to increase access to services or effectively combat wait times. Rather, this bill is a prime example of ideologically driven policy-pushing that does little to effectively address the issues that Albertans care about. This government has already made the standing commitment to public health care that Albertans needed to see in order to elect us seven months ago.

Bill 203 seems to be an excessive response in an attempt to address a problem that, again in the words of the Parkland Institute

representative – I quote directly – may or may not even be a problem; we just don't know. Unquote. Therefore, we now have a bill that ostensibly introduces additional red tape to the health care system. Red tape, by definition, is the excessive bureaucracy or adherence to rules and formalities, especially in public business, with no added benefit. From what we've heard today and read today, I think we've found a new project for the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction should this bill be passed.

What we do know is that Alberta's population is changing, the demographics are changing, medical technology is changing, and the demand for access and availability of new treatments is changing. Given this dynamic and shifting expectation, we need legislation that increases the flexibility and responsiveness of our public system so that more people get seen sooner. These are everyday Albertans' top objectives, and they must be ours. We cannot be deterred from that primary aim. We have kept our commitments to Albertans first and continue to serve their very best interests rather than pushing ideological issues in this House that may or may not exist.

Further than that, we must respect and acknowledge the input of professionals who work directly in Alberta's health care field. Their recommendations, suggestions, and experiences need to be the driving force behind our policies, not theoretical situations and what-if scenarios built around a different perception of the reality we face in this province as Albertans. The main thing here is to keep the main thing the main thing, and this requires our absolute discipline and focus in any health care legislation brought forward in this House. That is why it is my recommendation and will be my vote not to proceed with Bill 203.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has the call.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to go back to the reason why we are in the House right now. On a motion for concurrence, which allows the bill to go forward – for the benefit of the dozens of people watching at home, I'm just going to explain a little bit about how this process is supposed to work. That is to say, private members can put forward their priority outside of the normal workings of Executive Council, Mr. Speaker. What's Executive Council? It's the cabinet. Generally speaking, the cabinet priorities are set by the cabinet Agenda and Priorities Committee or some semblance of that in concert with the Premier's office. What private members' business allows people to do is that people who are not in cabinet on both sides of the House can put forward their priorities and their ideas. We do this through both motions and through actual bills.

Now, back in the day – and get ready for, you know, an old-timey lecture because I've been around this place a long time – Ralph Klein did a lot of things that a lot of people decried as undemocratic. He cancelled one year, in 1997, the fall sitting, and a lot of people lost their minds. I remember being pretty young and attending a protest about that. But he always let private members' business go forward. Always. Why? Because Klein was always managing his caucus. Not everyone can be in cabinet. He had a number of pretty powerful, especially rural, MLAs that were not necessarily in cabinet, and he had to manage their priorities, too. Certainly, we saw private members' business come forward, and that was one of the ways that he sort of let the air out of the balloon and allowed caucus to express itself and allowed caucus some power instead of concentrating everything in the Premier's office.

But, you know, this new Premier comes from a very different management style, learned at the feet of Stephen Harper, where the

boys in short pants in the centre control everything. That's where we're at right now, and I think it's an interesting point, that taking away that voice of private members takes away a valuable political tool for the Premier's office. If I were a private member on the other side, I would be worried that I was not able to put forward my own priorities and the priorities of my constituents.

3:30

You know, sometimes, Mr. Speaker, back in the day the parties used to even sometimes agree on private members' business. I know that's a wild assertion, but I remember once the New Democrat opposition bringing forward a private member's bill on flaring. At that time there were a bunch of technological changes that had taken place, and the companies and the ERCB at the time also in the main concurred that we could have new regulatory limits on flaring. The government actually adopted that, the New Democrat opposition private member's bill, as a government business bill. That is also the kind of stuff that can happen, and we can actually do what oftentimes our constituents want us to do, which is not yell at each other all the time. But that is also being taken away.

I think what's interesting about this manoeuvre – and we're talking about the motion for concurrence here; we're not talking about the substance of the bill, so I think it's really interesting that the members of the government caucus have focused on the substance of the bill. That's why they're not voting on the motion for concurrence. If they don't like the bill, they should let it come to the floor of this House and vote it down like PC governments since time immemorial did with the opposition business. This is a very straightforward process, and it happens on Monday afternoons. Welcome to the Legislature. This isn't difficult.

They could do that, but this isn't about, actually – and here I will even just add to what my colleagues from Edmonton-Centre and Edmonton-Rutherford talked about. This actually isn't necessarily about managing the opposition. This isn't necessarily, in the first instance, about stifling this side of the House. It has that practical effect. But in the first instance – here's the thing. On public health care I will still leave this Chamber and at every available opportunity express my support for a single-payer medicare system that is consistent with the principles of the Canada Health Act. The same cannot be said for many of the backbenchers in this House on the government side. I will still, after I leave this debate, at every available opportunity stand up for a woman's right to choose. At every available opportunity I will stand up for reproductive freedom, for individual liberty, and for women across this province and indeed across this country. I have no problem doing that. I'll do it here. I'll do it there. I'll go everywhere that anyone will have me. I will make that pro-choice argument.

It is not so on the government side of the House that necessarily that is an opinion that is even in the majority held. Certainly, their opinions, which are offside of mainstream opinion in this province: the Premier's office probably does not want those sorts of views aired via private members' business, and that is why they have made the changes that they have so that all private members' business gets stifled. This particular process and the point at which in the process we find ourselves now is not about controlling the opposition; it's about controlling the government side of the caucus and the Premier's office controlling their own MLAs. If I were a private member, I would be worried about this. I would worry about the arrogance, the hubris that this implies because, in fact, it is stunning. It is breathtaking. Even the massive majorities enjoyed by Ralph Klein did not have to undertake this level of control of the backbench.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, this is in the long line of other changes that we've made to this House that essentially are used to

control members. It has the practical effect of, of course, controlling the opposition, but it is in the main about controlling their own caucus. It will be up to private members on the other side of the House to consider over time whether their own privilege as a member is being curtailed by power being controlled in such a centralized fashion by the Premier's office.

These sorts of things have a way of cracking over time, and I will make the prediction today that that level of control will not always be enjoyed by this Premier's office and not always be enjoyed by a small group of staffers and insiders who are directing the government's agenda. At some point backbenchers, private members, in this government caucus will want to stand up because their local priorities will not be met through such an approach and the local voices that they were sent here to reflect will not have expression in this House.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has risen to speak.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief here. First of all, let me say that I will be supporting the motion for concurrence. This bill has been sent to committee. It was researched. It was studied. This motion to somehow take health care to somewhere else that the NDP wanted is not something that the committee recommended that we support.

Quite frankly, I find it tiring that the NDP continually wrap themselves in some kind of mantle as if they're the champions of health care. They aren't, and history proves that. They really don't tell the full truth when it comes to this story. They were not the first to bring comprehensive health care to this province or to this country, for that matter, and although they want to claim that all the time, the truth is that they weren't. Like everything else that socialists – the left never lets the truth matter in reconstructing history or twisting a story for their own purpose. The UFA introduced comprehensive health care to Alberta long before Saskatchewan did, long before the NDP were in existence.

I'd just like to quote a bit of a paragraph from the Legislative Assembly produced *The Centennial Series, The Mantle of Leadership*, page 392.

... The Alberta Health Insurance Act, which established a Health Insurance Commission.

This, by the way, was under the premiership of Premier Reid of the United Farmers of Alberta.

The Commission established local medical districts and collected health-insurance funding from municipalities, employers and private citizens in order to cover the costs of medical, dental and prescription services for Albertans. Notably, this Act represented the first government-legislated insurance program devoted exclusively to health [care] and entitled every resident of a medical district to "receive without charge" necessary health-service benefits, including hospitalization, nursing services, surgery, dental treatment, laboratory services and medicines.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the NDP act as if they're the only ones who care about health care in this province. They act as if they were the originators and the creators of it. The truth of the matter is that they copied what the United Farmers of Alberta already had in place many years before they actually got onboard to do it. Just like they claim to be supporters of pipelines and, in fact, they aren't, they claim to be the champions of health care. The truth of the matter is that Albertans actually had this vision a long time before they arrived, before they started showing up, and Albertans don't really need the NDP claiming some sort of superior righteousness just because they copied a good idea that Albertans introduced way

before them. I suspect that the NDP actually got the idea from the United Farmers of Alberta.

Here's a party, the United Farmers of Alberta, that was opposed to the colonial, liberal powers of Ottawa continually trying to take from our province and give nothing back. The biggest challenge of the day was to get our resources under Alberta's control, which the same Premier did, Premier Reid. He's the one who also introduced health care in a comprehensive sense to Canada. The United Farmers of Alberta stood up for this, stood up for Albertans. They cared for the health care of their people. They cared for Albertans. The United Conservatives of today also represent united Albertans, and we're going to do the same regardless of what these members say.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude.

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

3:40

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to indicate why I will not be supporting this motion that this bill, private member's Bill 203, not be debated in the House. I want to go back to what Bill 203, introduced by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, actually says because we've heard some comments from the members on the government side that seem to reflect that they have not read the bill and are not actually familiar with what the content of the bill is about. The bill was intended to prohibit the charging of block fees, and the reason for this is because there are a number of I believe they're referred to as concierge clinics that are currently operating in Alberta that charge block membership fees to individuals seeking service from that clinic. Now, these clinics offer a combination of both insured and uninsured services. The concern, of course, is that it is a violation of our health care act as well as the Canada Health Act for physicians to charge for insured services. The concern is that these block fees run in different amounts, usually multiple thousands of dollars, for an individual to be charged a membership fee to even access services from the clinic.

The concern is that in obtaining those services from that clinic, that individual may receive both uninsured and insured services. By charging a block fee, it's difficult, actually impossible, to tell whether or not what's being charged for is insured or uninsured services. Of course, one is a violation of our legislation, and the other is not. It was actually raised quite well by the stakeholders that were invited to speak to the committee on this matter. In fact, one of those stakeholders, who was representing the Parkland Institute, the executive director of the Parkland Institute, gave a very good explanation as to why this is a concern, because there actually is very little information that is accessible and is transparent about how those fees are being charged and who is charging for them.

Now, we did also have a member from the ministry, the legal counsel for the ministry, speak to the fact that, yes, there is – I note that the Member for Lethbridge-East did raise this – a standard that the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta has which says they cannot charge for insured services. The problem is that there's no information as to whether or not any physician has been held accountable under those standards for actually charging for insured services. In fact, what actually came out during our discussion in the committee was that it's very clear that not only can they not be told who is charging them, but really who is charging those fees is often the accounting departments of those concierge clinics. The concern, of course, is that those people are not held accountable to the standards set by the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta for charging for insured services.

The reason I bring all of this up is because Bill 203 is meant to address an actual problem. There is an actual problem that is being addressed by this bill, which is that by setting up an upfront membership fee for individuals who are seeking access from the clinic, they are – and it's right now not transparent. It can't be determined whether or not those clinics are actually charging for insured services, which we don't support in this province. Now, we can get into rhetoric about whether they should or should not, but when, for example, the Member for Airdrie-East stands up and talks about how this is stifling innovation, it shows to me that she actually hasn't read the bill because the bill has nothing to do with innovation. It has to do about when these fees can be charged. Really, the intent of the bill is to say that charging for uninsured services should only happen after the fact, should only happen after it has been determined that the individual who has sought service from the clinic has received an uninsured service and therefore should be and can be charged for it. This bill was actually intended to address a very real problem, and we had information from the stakeholders who presented to the committee about that problem.

Now, certainly, we could have a debate about whether or not this bill adequately addresses that issue, if more information is necessary, but the point is that that should be a debate before this Assembly. The merits of the bill should be open for debate by the members. By not even allowing for a debate on the merits of the bill to take place in this Assembly, essentially what my colleagues on this side of the House have been saying is true: we are stifling democracy.

Now, I actually just came from attending a three-day seminar in Victoria with a couple of my colleagues here from the House. The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville was there as well as the Speaker, and we had an excellent conversation about debate in the House and how we can improve the quality, decorum, and civility of debate in the House. One of the things we discussed was how that works differently in situations where there might be a minority government, a majority government, however the case may be. One of the comments I made while I was there, which was that when we're in a situation – and it was actually quite interesting to hear the experiences of parliamentarians from other jurisdictions talk about how the situation is different when it's a minority versus majority government and how that somehow affects the quality of the debate. One of the comments that I made was that we are in a situation in Alberta where there is a clear majority, and we see that. It's obvious in the numbers that there are many more members on the government side than there are on the opposition side.

What that means is that we know that on matters of votes, we are going to lose. We know that. The members on the opposition are aware of that. But we also still have an obligation to the constituents that we represent because each of us members here do reflect the majority of the constituents in our ridings, and we have an obligation to still stand up and express those views. Because we live in a democracy where majority gets to form government, it does not mean that the minority is silenced and does not mean that those who have differing views do not have a right to have those views expressed. That is our obligation, and that is the obligation of every member: to express the views of their constituents. So when we get into this House, yes, we are very aware that the government members have a majority and will either vote down whatever the opposition brings forward or will vote in support of what they bring forward, but that is not the sole purpose of our Assembly. It is not simply to outnumber each other and have winners and losers; it is also actually to debate the merits of things and to express those ideas.

We have no doubt on this side of the House that when the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford brought forward this very valid

and legitimate bill, it would likely be voted down because we don't have the numbers. Absolutely, that's true. Nobody is disputing that. But that doesn't mean that there's no validity to bringing those views forward. In fact, if we think of democracy as beyond just a winner-take-all situation – which is what we should be doing, which is why we have the Westminster system of democracy – to have that exchange of ideas and to find out opportunities to improve the legislation and improve our policies, we should be taking that. That is also the purpose of this Assembly, to have that fulsome debate about the ideas and about the issues. Would we win? Of course we wouldn't. We don't have the numbers. But that doesn't mean that we can't still have that debate, and we should still feel obligated when we're in this House to have that debate.

When we were in committee on this matter in the summer session, I recall that there were a number of comments from the government members around the fact that Bill 203 as proposed by my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford wouldn't solve all the woes in our health care system, wouldn't solve the wait times situation, wouldn't solve queue-jumping. But we also were aware that our health care system has a lot of challenges. No government to date has been able to fix all of those challenges. But to say that we won't make efforts to improve it simply because it won't erase all problems with it would be an exercise in futility in our government. For example, we see a lot of bills that we actually support on this opposition side that are being brought forward by government that won't fix the problems, but they will certainly address some of the weaknesses or noted gaps in our system.

I will give an example of even a couple of bills that have been brought up in this session. I mean, we have private member's Bill 202 around the changes to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, allowing individuals to report to police if there is a situation of child abuse. That's not going to end child abuse in this province, but we support it. We believe that that is a measure that could improve the situation, so we support it. We still consider that, and we still give light to it. We still debate it. We still discuss it because it will hopefully make the system better. Similarly, this government has recently introduced what's known as Clare's law, Bill 17, I believe. That's going to allow survivors of violence to be able to get information about their partner's criminal history, perhaps to help inform them. It might help them make decisions about whether or not they need to take some action in their personal relationship. Is that going to solve the problem of domestic violence? No, unfortunately, it's not. I wish there was one piece of legislation that could do that. But it still is a valid and important action to take, to take some improvement measures on the very serious issue of domestic violence.

I was disheartened when I was in committee to hear government members say that we shouldn't go forward with Bill 203 simply because it wouldn't resolve all problems with our health care system. It is intended to and would resolve one obvious problem which has been identified by stakeholders.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

I see the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler with about three minutes to go.

3:50

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to have this opportunity to rise and speak today to Bill 203, An Act to Protect Public Health Care. I think the name of this bill itself would seem to suggest that public health care is somewhat in jeopardy in Alberta, and I just would say that's certainly not the case. We're bound by the Canada Health Act: universal, accessible, and publicly funded.

I guess we're kind of running out of time, Mr. Speaker. I would say that what Albertans told us at the doors when we were campaigning is that we need to do better. Wait times have gone up for cataracts, for knees, for hip replacements under the opposition's watch the last four years, and we need to focus on outcomes.

I'd leave the members here with a quote from the Auditor General from 2017.

Albertans already pay for the most expensive health system of any province in Canada . . . Yet they receive results that lag the results being achieved by the best-performing health systems in other jurisdictions.

Albertans are paying for the best. Why would they not demand the best?

It's time for this House to focus on real-world health care outcomes. That's what Albertans expect and deserve. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? There is about a minute left. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's interesting here. I know there's not a lot of time left, but it's interesting how obsessed the government members are with not listening to Albertans, not listening to the opposition, not debating the issues, and defending American-style health care. They could have that opportunity.

In a couple of minutes here they could have the opportunity to defend American-style health care all they want. They could get up and debate that. All they have to do is vote against concurrence. Let us do our jobs and talk about why we want or don't want American-style health care here in this province.

The government members have done quite a bit of talking about American-style health care already today, so I know they have opinions about it. I know that they have thoughts about it and thoughts about how using these American-style systems and American-style health care is going to benefit Alberta, so they have that opportunity to get up and speak to those right now. They can vote with the opposition. They can vote to debate these issues, and we could have what we were sent here to do: debate under the parliamentary system.

We can have what our jobs are to actually do, to stand here and talk about why the government believes in American-style health care. That's what we're sent here to do. That's why we're all sitting in this Chamber right now. That's why thousands of Albertans in every single one of our ridings, tens of thousands of Albertans voted for every single one of us, so we can talk about why this government loves American-style health care, Mr. Speaker.

I hope that the members are going to be bold enough, brave enough, strong and free enough, Mr. Speaker, to get up and talk about the American-style health care that they love so much, the American-style health care that they are trying to bring here to this province, because they won't even get up and stand and let the opposition speak about the issues. That's something that I'm hopeful government members will be willing to get up and defend, because it is their baby. It is their intent.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-South, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to five minutes for the mover to close debate, I would invite the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Bills and Private Members' Public Bills, the hon. Member for Calgary-West, to close debate on the motion to concur on the committee report on Bill 203.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, certainly, I would say, with robust debate between the opposition members and the government members, it certainly was great to see how some of the members on the government side, who were members of that standing committee, were able to certainly provide their perspective as to why they voted in the way that they did.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank everyone for their participation in this discussion and move forward to the vote. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for concurrence carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:55 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Jones | Rowswell |
| Amery | Lovely | Sawhney |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Luan | Schow |
| Barnes | Madu | Schulz |
| Dreeschen | Nally | Schweitzer |
| Ellis | Neudorf | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Fir | Nixon, Jason | Singh |
| Getson | Nixon, Jeremy | Smith |
| Glasgo | Orr | Stephan |
| Hanson | Pitt | Walker |
| Horner | Rehn | Williams |
| Hunter | Rosin | Wilson |
| Issik | | |

4:10

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------|----------|---------------|
| Dach | Irwin | Renaud |
| Dang | Nielsen | Shepherd |
| Deol | Pancholi | Sigurdson, L. |
| Feehan | Phillips | Sweet |

| | | |
|---------|----------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 37 | Against – 12 |
|---------|----------|--------------|

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 202

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2019

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I see the hon. Minister of Justice and Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Chair, I move that we rise and report.

The Deputy Chair: Prior to that – going forward, perhaps.

Are there any members, though, who do wish to debate at this time?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 202 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader and Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Now I'd like to move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 202. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Schweitzer: Well, Mr. Speaker, somebody can always throw a shoe at me if I mess up some of the procedural stuff on this. It wouldn't be the first time. I'd like to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 8 in order to proceed to immediate consideration of third reading for Bill 202.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 202

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2019

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

I'm looking to the hon. Member for Calgary-West to move third reading of Bill 202.

Mr. Ellis: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I guess you start third reading; is that correct, sir?

The Acting Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Ellis: Yes. Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, it certainly has been an honour and a privilege. This has been a long – it certainly feels like a couple of years, to be honest with you, that I've been working on this. I mean, this particular case is, you know, what sort of started this whole process in regard to Bill 202: poor young Serenity. Sadly, her life was taken from us.

Just to, I guess, talk a little bit historically, Mr. Speaker, I certainly sat in this Chamber, and I think everybody here would agree that when we're talking about children, it would be considered nonpartisan. Certainly, the allegations, shall we say, the medical report that came out of this particular case: I don't think anybody can argue that they weren't horrific, and they're certainly something that we wouldn't wish upon anyone, let alone a small child.

I know that there was a committee that was formed and recommendations that came out of the committee. I consider that – we'll call it a positive step forward. I look at Bill 202 as something that is tangible, that can have an actual, immediate impact. We talk about a bill that – you've got to forgive me, Mr. Speaker; I'm somewhat paraphrasing. When we're talking about a child whose life might possibly be at risk, we're not talking about a child that might be in the backyard or something like that of some home. We're talking about cases where these children are on, literally, the verge of death. I think it's important to know that the current process was that you're to report the situation to a director. I think that we've been able to articulate that. Certainly, for me, in the past – and I think many of the members in here in second reading were also able to articulate that – that's not as simple as it sounds, the question of: "How do I contact the director? Who is the director? How could that be enforced if you didn't call a director?"

4:20

Obviously, with my consultation with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police at the time and certainly stakeholders – I've talked to defence attorneys, as an example, and, of course, the family that was involved in the Serenity case, meaning the mom and her family members, about that if we do of course pass this through third reading, it will let everyone in Alberta know, or every adult, should I say, that no longer can anyone turn a blind eye to a child that might possibly be at risk, that indeed you have a fiduciary responsibility to let the police know about that child at risk. It may come across to many as a small change, but it's actually a fundamentally huge change, and it allows a level of accountability that, sadly, was never there before. I think it was somewhat implied in the legislation, but, like I said, the ability to certainly apply the reasonable and probable grounds, let alone prove beyond a reasonable doubt, was certainly challenging and, I would say, very unlikely, hence why no charge had ever been laid under that particular act in circumstances that most of the public would think would be warranted. This, again, allows a whole level of accountability and, again, lets everyone, every adult in Alberta, know that no longer can you turn a blind eye to a child at risk.

Mr. Speaker, this journey has gone on for, again, quite some time, and I don't think it's important to rehash the highs and the lows and the left turns and the right turns, but for me it's important to – where are we today? I'm very optimistic where we are today. I thank everyone in the House, including the opposition, for allowing the unanimous consent to even go to third reading on this. I sincerely do thank you, and it's certainly not my intent to point fingers. To me, that's not what politics is about. I mean, I look at when I got involved in this five years ago, if not longer. I looked at: how is it that we can make positive changes for our community and actually have an impact on the community? I was very fortunate to be able to do that with Bill 205.

Certainly, talking to my friends and my former colleagues in the Calgary Police Service, talking to doctors, they've indicated that possibly Bill 205, certainly using it to take opioids off the streets and get the pill presses off the streets has actually likely saved a lot of lives, probably lives that we may never know about. Here we are again with this particular bill to let everyone in Alberta know that you cannot turn a blind eye to a child at risk. Again, maybe it allows that voice, we'll say, in the back of someone's mind to say: "You know what? I'm going to have to let the authorities know about a particular case." I'll make the same argument that I made under Bill 205 several years ago, which was that if we can save even just one life – right? – I mean, it makes it worth it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that many of my colleagues that I'm very fortunate to have worked with have some very kind words

that they would like to say. I know that Serenity's family – you know, I've had an opportunity to even talk to them not that long ago, actually, out front on the steps of this Legislature as we were supporting children in care in these types of situations. Whether they get the justice that they would like – I mean, that obviously is debatable, and that's certainly something that's going to be up to the justice system in the courts. But through the conversations that I've had with them, I would argue that what isn't debatable is the fact that this family doesn't want to see anything like this happen again to another child in a similar type of circumstance. I think that was a message that they were very, very clear to me about. We'll call it a bit of a legacy that they would like to leave. I'm very proud that Bill 202 is commonly referred to as Serenity's law because I think that this is something that Serenity's mother can look at and be proud of.

In my conversations with her, Mr. Speaker, she's the first one to admit that she's not perfect – I don't think there's anybody that's in this Chamber that is perfect; I don't think that there's anybody that I've ever met that is perfect – but I can tell you that this is a lady who's very smart. She had overcome addictions and other, I would say, posttraumatic issues that she faced in her life. That's part of the reason why Serenity and her two siblings were taken from her. But I can tell you that in the conversations that I've had with her, whether it be on the phone or in person, I've seen nothing but a loving, caring mother who has other children, more than three. She actually has several children. She wants nothing but the best for them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Just a small procedural note. I believe I missed it, so I apologize for that. I just wanted to confirm that you're moving third reading of Bill 202.

Mr. Ellis: Yes.

The Acting Speaker: Yes. Okay.

Are there any members wishing to speak to third reading of Bill 202? I see that the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has risen.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm honoured to rise in the House and speak on Bill 202, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2019. Children are the leaders of tomorrow. They should be loved, cared for, and given a safe home to grow up in. I believe children are the greatest gift that life can provide. They bring us innocence and joy to our daily lives. Today our tragic reality is that many children end up in a situation that exposes them to being abused, being taken advantage of, or affected by violence. This is a situation that I would hope no child would experience. However, this seems to be, unfortunately, the reality that some vulnerable children in Alberta are faced with.

Bill 202 will make necessary changes to existing legislation in order to protect children and youth who are affected by abuse and acts of violence. It will make adults more accountable to the children who desperately need help. A world where individuals would prefer to be bystanders instead of standing up for a child in distress is disappointing. I cannot understand as to why someone would not jump in and stand up for a child who could not stand up for themselves. This legislation will penalize those bystanders who witness a child's distress and choose to turn a blind eye. Further, this bill will add that adults are required to contact police and will create more substantial penalties for failing to report. This will make a difference in children's and youths' lives. Having a requirement to report these situations can give a child a chance before it's too late.

It will amend legislation in order to promote our best efforts to protect Alberta's children and youth thoroughly, effectively addressing the prosecution of those who commit these unthinkable acts. By having stronger penalties, it will further our stance that this is not a crime that will be taken lightly and that there are consequences. Bill 202 will be a large step forward in keeping adults accountable for their actions.

To stand up for vulnerable youth is a tremendous task. I stand here today being the voice of those who have fallen victim to acts of violence and abuse, to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves, who are scared and young. We can promise children and youth of this province that we are taking steps to be their voice and that we care about them. They do not deserve these cruel acts committed upon them. Worse, they especially do not deserve anyone not standing up for them afterwards. Our young people need to be encouraged and to feel valued, not neglected and abused.

Legislation like this is important in promoting a stronger and safer Alberta. It is dear to me that the young people of Alberta are treated fairly and respectfully. No child should be a victim of abuse and violence. We as a government need to be accountable to the children who have been exposed to these hideous acts. We need to stand strong to show Albertans that these acts of violence towards our young people will not be tolerated. It is unacceptable for anyone to turn a blind eye to children in danger.

4:30

This bill will ensure children do not get left behind and neglected in their desperate times of need. It will be clear to Albertans that there are considerable consequences for their abuse towards children. This legislation has the potential to save children's lives. Together we can give them a safer today so that they can prosper tomorrow. After all, extending a helping hand to those who cannot help themselves is what adults should be doing for children all the time.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has risen.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to be able to rise today and speak to Bill 202, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2019. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-West for bringing this to the attention of this Legislature. Child protection has been a core commitment of all Canadian governments, including our federal government, for a great deal of time. I think that we can see historically that this has been a bipartisan effort to improve child protection. It does not know a left wing or a right wing. We all understand the need to protect our children.

We have passed legislation and signed agreements both provincially and internationally. We signed the United Nations convention on the rights of the child in 1990, and with the ratification of this convention by our Parliament in 1991 and by almost the rest of the entire world, child safety has been brought into the public awareness and has become a major issue. This is a good thing. Article 19 of that convention requires that parties take appropriate legislative action to protect children from abuse, neglect, violence, and other dangerous situations. Article 19 specifically includes protective measures which should be implemented to ensure the necessary protection of children in dangerous situations.

Mr. Speaker, specifically, this convention requires countries to adopt measures that will support the identification and the reporting and the referral of children in cases of mistreatment and abuse.

Although Canada certainly has more stringent standards than are found in some places around the world, we should and are continuing to strive to improve and to fill the gaps in our current legal framework and to ensure that our legislation reflects real-world circumstances and instances.

There have been several high-profile cases, which have been brought up by many of our colleagues as we've debated this bill, which show that the reporting requirements within our current legislation could use some enhancement. We need to send the message that failing to report child abuse is unacceptable in Alberta. If there is a child who needs help, it must be reported, and we need to ensure that it is clear to Albertans to whom they can report these cases.

Mr. Speaker, as a teacher I learned very early in my career that nothing – absolutely nothing – was more important than the safety and the security of the children that we taught. This piece of legislation dovetails very nicely with what we were taught as professionals, as educators. Curriculum was important. Doing all the things, the myriad of jobs, that I as an educator had to do every day was important, but nothing was more important than the safety and the security of the children. If it ever came to my attention that a child was at risk, I had no choice, rightfully so, but to make sure that the appropriate authorities were informed.

This bill simply adds clarity to the existing reporting process that Albertans can use to ensure that children are safe within our province. It clarifies the process by allowing Albertans to report children who are in danger to police and by requiring those police officers to report the case to a director, and it will toughen the existing punitive measures for those individuals who are aware of a child in danger and who choose not to report that situation. The importance of reporting when children are in a dangerous situation cannot be overstated. It truly cannot.

Albert Einstein once said: the world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil but because of those who look on and do nothing. Mr. Speaker, I can remember being in my classroom and looking at the rise of the Holocaust and looking at some absolutely terrible historical examples of how people have had their rights taken away from them and where they have ultimately paid the ultimate price, their lives, and I had a quote very similar to this on my wall. You know, it's one thing for people who are evil to do evil; it's another thing for good people to stand on the sidelines and say nothing.

Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to be able to speak to this bill today, that makes it very clear – it sets a standard for Albertans – that when we are confronted with children that are in danger, we do not have a choice. We must intervene, and there is a clear process for doing so. If we do not know who a director is, then we simply need to pick up the phone and call the local police. By doing that, we can get the process kicked into gear. When Albertans see children in dangerous situations and when they report these situations, they save lives.

Mr. Speaker, I can remember reading in the newspaper about a babysitter in 2017 who did exactly that. She was asked to babysit, and when she went into the home, she realized that the children that were there were living in a dangerous situation, that they faced neglect, and that they were abused. This babysitter had the courage to inform the authorities about this situation. This babysitter reported the conditions that led to five children receiving treatment at the Stollery children's hospital. The accused pleaded guilty to two counts of aggravated assault and to a count of forcible confinement. Without the report from this babysitter, these children may have been left in that situation.

It's simple. Reporting saves lives, saves the lives of our children, and this bill makes it easier for Albertans to report. With the

standards in this bill, more people will look on and will take action instead of remaining bystanders, and that will make Alberta a less dangerous place for our children.

Mr. Speaker, today we work to change the existing legislation. It's one of the privileges that we have in this House. There are 87 of us in this House, 87 people that have been enshrined by our constituents with the privilege of being able to speak to the laws of this province and to be able to make changes to the laws of this province. This is a bill today that deserves the support of this Legislature. We have the capacity today by our votes and by our talk to be able to make lives better for the children of this province. With the standards in this bill, people will be able to identify how to take action.

4:40

Today we change the existing legislation, or at least we have that opportunity to, so that when Albertans are aware that children are in danger, they know exactly where they can report them. They can go directly to the police. This bill doesn't take away the option to report to the director, but it adds a very clear alternative, and that alternative is reporting to the police. Every Albertan knows how to contact the police. I believe that it's a reasonable thing to say that not every Albertan would necessarily know how to contact a director, whoever that happens to be.

Thank you.

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, it is a complete honour to rise in this House today to speak to Bill 202, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2019. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-West for bringing this very important piece of legislation forward. In the past I've had a very unique opportunity to have many discussions with the Member for Calgary-West about this piece of legislation, and I'm very happy to stand up and support this bill. I also want to say that his passion for protecting our province's most vulnerable is really humbling, and I'm really happy to be able to contribute to this very important debate.

This bill really should mean something to each and every one of us. We've all seen the consequences of inaction, and we've all seen some of the most vulnerable in our communities fall through the cracks. I think that with this bill, inherently it's our responsibility to do everything we can to make sure that we don't have our most vulnerable falling through those cracks.

It never gets easier to witness new cases come forward or to remember old cases like Serenity's, that shook, in a lot of ways, the very foundation of our communities. It's our job as Albertans to take care of each other. We are generous, we are kind, and we're here to fight for our most vulnerable, and I believe that Bill 202 does exactly that. It helps us fight for our vulnerable.

It will never get easier seeing vulnerable children abused or mistreated, and I feel that we must act now if we wish to stop it. Acting now means knowing what abuse looks like. I think we're all aware of the most extreme forms of abuse and what it looks like. I think most everyone here would intervene immediately if they witnessed any such abuse, but in a lot of cases abuse rarely takes place in public. Children are taken advantage of and assaulted by those closest to them and in private, and it's a compounded tragedy that those who are trusted the most by children are sometimes the most likely to take advantage of that trust.

We need to be more aware of how abused children appear and behave as a result of that abuse. Beyond the obvious signs of physical abuse, children can become withdrawn, anxious, fearful. Physically abused children can change the way they dress to hide their injuries. They can be overdressed for the weather. Neglected

children will have clothing that is ripped or torn or doesn't fit right or is dirty.

This bill is really important because it can stop and help stop the pattern of abusive behaviour for so many children. It empowers all Albertans to be able to say something. It empowers us to take responsibility for children who may be at risk, and that is a responsibility we all need to take very, very seriously.

It is heart-wrenching to think that families have had to experience this, that they put their trust into the system and in some cases for it to fail. We need to stand here today and do everything to make this right. We need to make sure that everyone is responsible for the care of the most vulnerable in our society. People need to act when they see children in danger.

I am pleased to see that this bill focuses on making it perfectly clear that we all have a responsibility to report this behaviour by increasing the penalty from \$2,000 to \$10,000 and with up to six months in prison, or both. I think this sends a very clear message. All Albertans need to know how serious this is and that we all have a part to take in this. They need to know that we have a duty to protect those who cannot protect themselves, and that is exactly what this bill aims to do. It says that we will not look away when we see these atrocities. It means that we will no longer be able to shrug off the responsibility to someone else.

Now, I would like to think that nobody would neglect to report if a child was in danger, so maybe there's something that we need to consider a little bit more, and I think that the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon kind of touched on that. We need to look at the system and why possibly in the past individuals wouldn't report or had difficulties reporting if a child was in need of intervention. Could the hesitation to report be due to a lack of knowledge on just how to do this?

When speaking to constituents from my area – I went home and actually had this conversation – and when I was talking to the Member for Calgary-West, we went through it and talked about who the director is. It wasn't really clear. Just talking to everybody in my area – friends, family, teachers, doctors – I asked them: do you know who the director is here? Most of them were confused. They were lost. They didn't know who the director was. They didn't realize that when it came to intervention, they had to report to a director.

If they're unaware of who a director is or how to get in touch with one, we're kind of putting barriers up on how to report. It kind of is restricting and slowing down the system. In a lot of ways, when a child is in need of intervention, they're in immediate danger, and I think that that is where the strength in this bill really is. It's making the information and the accessibility of reporting so much easier by clarification. It allows Albertans to report to those that they are already aware of and trust: police officers. That's simple. This legislation is allowing for another option to report to those that society already relies on in a time of danger.

I also think that by allowing people to report to police officers, we're really underlining the importance and the gravity of the situation itself as well. Police are here to protect us from danger. They're here through the most dangerous and life-threatening situations, which is exactly the point. These children are in hard situations. This is a situation of emergency for those children. Their lives could essentially be in danger, and we must treat it as such. It is an emergency.

This legislation has the potential to save lives. It has the potential to stop the trauma that rips through families, friends, and our communities when we fail to protect the most vulnerable in our province. This bill sends a powerful message to all Albertans that we are in this together, that we must rely on each other to protect

the children in our communities, because it takes a community to raise a child.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Airdrie-East has risen to speak.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise here today in third reading on Bill 202, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2019. I don't have a lot to add to this conversation, but I just wanted to be on the record in third reading. I'm certain I've spoken in favour of this in second, and I would like to commend my hon. colleague from Calgary-West for pushing so hard on this issue over the last almost four and a half years that we've been in this Legislature. It's commendable, the amount of effort that the member continually puts into protecting children in this province.

4:50

One of the most unfortunate things about being in this position for the last number of years is hearing some of the worst cases of neglect, that most people never hear about, but we do in this Chamber, and we do in our constituency offices. They're sometimes so hopeless. Sometimes it's hard to be in a position where people think that you're able to actually make a difference and change the way that child abuse is viewed in this province and how we can go about sending a message for people to continue to report these things.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that everyone – everyone – if you ever asked them, "Hey, if you knew about a child being abused, would you report it?" they would say yes. But the reality is that that's not actually the case. I watched a video the other day. I was in this antibullying program that our swim club puts on for parents, and one of the videos that they put on was the Burger King commercial. Some of you might have seen it. There's a bunch of kids that are bullying this one kid in the Burger King, and nobody, no adult steps in to stand up for this child that's being bullied. Near the end there was one adult – one adult – I think, out of 10 that actually intervened and said, "Hey, are you okay, and can I help you?" and sort of scared away the bullying kids.

[The Speaker in the chair]

That's the reality that we're in, so it's so essential to make sure that you have to report. It's now a crime – if you've seen that, if you've witnessed that, you have to report this. It's so important to have this piece of legislation and to compel those to do the right thing. Sometimes you're just not sure: like, maybe you didn't see that, or maybe you're looking at this the wrong way. Well, guess what? That's not for you to decide anymore. That's for the authorities to do.

Mr. Speaker, that's all I have to add to this debate. I thank you for the opportunity to participate and to all my colleagues that have lent their voice to this cause and, hopefully, will write about this in their local papers to their constituents and send this out in their newsletters and just let people know that what we're doing in here are sometimes really great things. We're not just, you know, yelling at each other and disagreeing with one another. I think that all members in this House think this is an important piece of legislation that we're all going to be in favour of for our kids. It's one small piece, but it's one really, really big piece for a child who is in a situation that they have no control over.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I see the hon. minister for the status of women rising to speak.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to again thank everyone who has spoken on this amendment and on the legislation, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2019. I especially, again, would like to thank the Member for Calgary-West for his incredible work on this. All of us lived and breathed in this House during some of the hardest days when we heard some of the material that was happening when it came to Serenity. As a mom I found the discussions at that time to be life altering. I found that I looked at things differently very, very quickly. But, more than that, I found that it's very difficult, as we all know, when we're in crisis, when anybody you know is in crisis, in that situation. You could have literally the entire gamut of what you're supposed to do, who you're supposed to phone and who you're supposed to talk to, laid out directly in front of you, but because of the moment and the crisis and the situation it's very hard to even see straight at that moment.

When we talk about children especially, we have to have some very, very strong lines in the sand when it comes to prevention. I really think that this bill lays out a very, very strong sense of prevention, and the clarification with this amendment goes further to make sure that – because normally the first phone call will be to Children's Services, but we also have the opportunity to engage our police and our whole front line.

One of the things that I think is probably most profound in this legislation – and the member has actually already said this – is that this is a call of duty. All adults in the province and anybody who is a mentor or an advocate or anybody who works with children is on notice that we have a larger responsibility in the grand scheme of things.

You know, I've been very blessed in my lifetime. I've worked with a lot of children. I've been teaching music for probably 25, 26 years. You have all sorts of munchkins come to your studio, all sorts of different age groups, from different socioeconomic backgrounds, various families and everything, and after a little while you start to be able to see the way that kids develop. Music is one of those really personal things that's a beautiful way to be able to interact with young people, but it also is a very personal experience in a lesson. You're really, really entrusting your teacher to show your voice and to sing and to breathe. One of the most nerve-wracking things for a young person to do is to sing in front of somebody else. If any of you have ever tried to do that in front of people, or if you were asked to stand up and sing right now in front of somebody, you'd probably say no – right? – unless you're the Speaker of the House. He sings for us all the time. It's actually really nerve-wracking, and it's very, very personal.

A lot of emotions come out during those discussions. I know you wouldn't think that that's where it happens, but it does. A lot of what kids are going through and what they're feeling in that 45 minutes to an hour that I had the privilege of having them in my studio – you learn a lot about a kid. You learn a lot about a teenager. You learn a lot about what's going on in their families, and quite often they're very, very willing to share that information.

Fortunately, in the many years that I've been teaching, there have only been a couple of incidents where I've had to report, and I have had to report. It's a terrifying experience. It's terrifying to think that you are interpreting what it is that you think you're interpreting, and I think that for most of us, when we're in that situation, we want to believe the best in people and the best in parents and the caregivers and the people that are in charge of these kids, but in the few situations where I found myself in that situation, I really had to think about it. I had to think, like: "Am I doing the right thing? Am I intervening in a family situation where I don't belong?" All of those questions, even though I know better, were there. This clarification will explain.

As the Member for Airdrie-East has said, not only are we putting the adults in the province on notice that we have this responsibility, but actually as legislators we have this responsibility. We have the responsibility of sharing what we learn in here, how we legislate. We've done this all together in here, in opposition and in government, to make this legislation come to life, but more than that is that we're reporting on a regular basis not only the great work that we're doing but the immense responsibility that comes with a piece of legislation like this.

We have the opportunity to say to a perpetrator, to say to a person: "This is not going to happen. We see you. We see the kids. We see what's going on here. There will be consequences, and we will follow through." For a child that is in a situation of crisis like that, for a child that cannot speak up for himself or herself, this is a game changer, knowing, for families, that we are paying attention and that there will be consequences.

There's just no place for this abuse, for this level of cruelty, for neglect, for emotional abuse. There is no place for it. We cannot deviate from the fact that what we learned in some of the cases that we heard – and many of us are impacted by this in our constituency offices. To the Member for Airdrie-East I just wanted to say that I know how hard it is for her. She has a beautiful heart, and I know it's really hard for her to talk about these things. I know, for many of us in our areas, especially some of us who have some pretty remote rural areas, how difficult it is for people to come and report on these things. They need to know that we have the ability to make sure that we're making differences in people's lives.

To every parent and every adult: we are all on notice. We are all being given the opportunity to do right by the children of this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time for consideration of this matter has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Abortion and Reproductive Health Services

506. Ms Renaud moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to conduct a thorough review of access to abortion services and reproductive health services in Alberta, take action to remove barriers to these services, and ensure access to safe, timely, and equitable services in all communities across the province.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and to talk about Motion 506. It's hardly a surprise that sales of Margaret Atwood's 1985 dystopian book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, have spiked in recent years. In an interview she recently said that she believes the re-emergence and success of her novel is due to the bubbling up of regressive attitudes towards women, further adding that control of women and children has been a feature of every repressive political regime on the planet and throughout history.

The right of every human being to control their body is the most basic of human rights, yet we're surrounded by wealthy special-interest groups intent on removing and restricting those rights. By my count we have 28 UCP antichoice MLAs that have been elected. Let me rephrase that: 28 anti human rights MLAs. I'm sure that each of your offices has been bombarded by targeted e-mail campaigns from organized groups right across the country because that's what they do. Although we're not Alabama yet, the focus is

clear. We now have a rabid antichoice Minister of Education and a Premier who's been fighting to remove and restrict the right of women to exercise freedom and control over their bodies and lives for decades. This new reality in Alberta is why I'm introducing this private member's motion.

In 1988 the Supreme Court of Canada recognized that a woman's right to continue or terminate a pregnancy is protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Let me be very clear here. Abortion is legally treated like any other medical procedure. Under the Canada Health Act health care must be accessible, portable, comprehensive, and publicly administered nation-wide, the key here being accessible and public. However, access to reproductive health care or abortion is restricted in Alberta due to extralegal factors, which are institutional policies – I'll talk about that a little bit later – the imposition of gestational limits; most importantly for me antichoice harassment and violence; the location of services.

I think we can all agree that there are cases in which our provincial government provides financial assistance to patients who must travel outside of their communities to access medical services. It's not that uncommon. I'm sure that if you looked around your own constituencies, you would find examples of that. Yet similar support does not exist for women forced to travel a great distance for reproductive health care. When I talk about reproductive health care, I'm not simply talking about abortion services or the prescription of Mifegymiso. Women are being forced to travel great distances, so unless they live in large urban centres like Edmonton or Calgary, their reality is very different. I would suggest that the support is not readily available to women because religious ideology, which has no place in our health care system or service delivery system, has been allowed to override that very same delivery system.

Here are some other disturbing facts. We know that access to reproductive health services such as abortion or birth control has declined in recent years because of harassment of practitioners. One example that was recently shared with me was a physician practising in the Grande Prairie area, and this particular physician had difficulty getting her patients time in the local hospital. Doctors are actually experiencing difficulty prescribing the medication because they need to have a backup plan – should that medication not work, they would need to go into the hospital – and they are not being given free, clear access. Unfortunately, sometimes women are showing up at these facilities and just lying and saying that they had a miscarriage. The lack of access to needed resources such as operating spaces is very problematic.

As of 2013 under 16 per cent of publicly funded hospitals provide procedures directly related to reproductive health care. That's dismal. In Alberta access to abortion is largely restricted to Calgary and Edmonton. In Edmonton we have Woman's Health Options, which is on 124th Street. What is really disturbing about that particular clinic is that kitty-corner to it on the very same street there is another clinic, and the signage out front is very much put there to trick people. People will literally go into that clinic. It is not a clinic that supports a woman's right to choose. In fact, it's a religiously driven, ideologically driven clinic that, in my opinion, shares information that is incorrect with women and urges them in one particular direction as opposed to offering them choices. In Calgary there are two providers: the Kensington clinic, and services are offered at the Peter Lougheed Centre.

Surgical abortion as a regular service is not offered at any other location in this province. That should worry us, all 87 of us in this place. Health care facilities in Cold Lake, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, High Level, Hinton, Peace River, Slave Lake, and

Whitecourt have the ob-gyn capacity to offer abortion services but choose not to.

In 2017 the NDP government took action to cover the cost of a Mifegymiso, a two-stage drug combination that induces medical abortion, but currently only two providers are listed by Alberta Health Services, and those are the Edmonton and Calgary clinics. Access to this drug is not universal, again underlining the failure of our delivery system. You might be interested to know that in 2018 Mifegymiso has been used, or was prescribed and used, 1,528 times.

Access to reproductive health services in rural and remote communities in Alberta is dismal, with virtually zero access in rural north. The limitations of access to reproductive health services has a greater and potentially much more harmful impact on women in rural and remote communities. Interestingly, in 2015 polling data from Lethbridge College suggested that there is a supermajority of support across all demographic groups in Alberta for abortion as a personal choice, with 80.5 per cent overall support and 56.3 per cent among religious Albertans.

So why am I bringing forward this motion? I'm bringing it forward because I believe in human rights, and I believe the right of a woman to control her body and her future is the most fundamental and important right that she has. It doesn't matter why women make those choices, and women should never be forced to share those stories, those very personal stories about why they did. Whether it was about their health, whether it was about economics, whether it was about their age, it really doesn't matter. Chances are you know somebody that has had an abortion: your mom, your sister, your daughter, your wife, your grandmother.

I am urging this government to put their religious ideology aside and examine how we can all ensure that women have equal access to the broad range of reproductive health services. As lawmakers we need to look at the facts and the laws within which we operate. The Canada Health Act states that health care must be accessible, portable, comprehensive, and publicly administered. Each one of us represents thousands of constituents. Their safety and access must trump your personal religious beliefs. It's your responsibility to protect the most basic human rights of your constituents. I look forward to the debate, and I look forward to hearing what everyone has to say.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak against the motion proposed by the Member for St. Albert, not only due to my own personal convictions but also because the motion is unnecessary and only seeks to create division. I am not here today to debate the merits or morality of abortion. That would involve a very lengthy, convoluted, and emotional discussion. It is my personal conviction that all human life is sacred and should be protected. I am unapologetically and unreservedly pro life and my constituents were aware of this when they sent me to this place.

I imagine that everyone here has their own opinion on abortion and for their own unique reasons, but I'm not here to criticize the opinions of others. In fact, I'm proud to be a member of a caucus that recognizes the myriad of ways that one can approach this topic. We are all entitled to our own beliefs. I respect the Member for St. Albert's right to her opinion, and in return I hope that she and her colleagues would respect mine. That is democracy after all. But my hopes that the hon. member will do that, Mr. Speaker, are quite low because time and time again I have seen her and her colleagues take aim at me and my other colleagues for not falling in lockstep with their ideology.

5:10

Over the course of the provincial election I was made a target time and time again by the NDP and their proxy groups simply for associating with individuals who are openly pro life. They took aim at my Christian faith and tried to imply that I would be an unfit legislator because of it. NDP candidates actively took shots at me on Twitter for my own personal views on this matter, and after we leave this Chamber, they'll likely continue their campaign of fear and smear. If they do, that would just be par for the course, I'm afraid. In fact, they'll probably advocate that I can't be an advocate for women because I refuse to subscribe to their ideology.

This past weekend we proudly celebrated Persons Day and a woman's right to vote for who represents her in this House. Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but there's no caveat in there about what kind of women ought to be allowed to run based on their personal moral convictions. It is simply recognized that women have a voice that is needed in public discourse and consequently deserves to be heard. To assume that a woman elected to this House cannot act in the best interest of the public and at arm's length of their own personal convictions is reductionist, and it actually runs counter to the feminist narrative that they so aptly will claim as their own. It undermines the mandate that Albertans granted this government, and it calls into question the competence of women who have fought very hard to be here today.

I stand here today to not only give a voice to the voiceless, the unborn, but also to the many Albertans and Albertan women who do not fall in lockstep with that former government's ideology. During the election and in my nomination I met with countless young families, women, girls, men, and everyone in between. Many of them hold similar views like the ones that I do. These Albertans are compassionate. They give generously to agencies for mothers experiencing a crisis pregnancy. They support families. They objectively and without judgment counsel young women, praying for them and giving them shelter and other necessities. They set up programs and centres that help young mothers get back on their feet no matter their choice. They work to make life better for women and families in times of great need. These Albertans do not deserve to be vilified, Mr. Speaker; they deserve to be heard.

I'm a young woman, and as such I do take women's health very seriously. Many women struggle with real reproductive health-related issues, many of which go undiagnosed or are dismissed by medical practitioners entirely. Endometriosis, for example, impacts 10 to 15 per cent of women of reproductive age, yet it is one of the most commonly misdiagnosed or underdiagnosed gynecological conditions. The same is true for polycystic ovary syndrome. In fact, 6 to 10 per cent of women are expected to suffer from this disease, and one of those women is me.

The symptoms of PCOS are somewhat of a mystery, which lends itself to underdiagnosis, and many doctors don't know how to treat it. Some of the symptoms are physical and visible, but many of them are not. Many of these symptoms in combination can actually end up resulting in infertility. For someone like me, who has always dreamed of becoming a mother of a not yet determined but hopefully very large gaggle of kids, the thought of infertility is absolutely crippling. There have been instances where my concerns weren't taken seriously, where I've been told to tough out my pain or that I was making things sound worse than they actually were.

Mr. Speaker, I want women to access health care. I want them to be taken seriously. I believe that women's health is paramount to the longevity of a thriving Alberta. Imagine a couple who is trying to conceive but are having no luck, so they decide to pursue the costly procedure of IVF, except it takes months to get an appointment with a specialist. In 2018 the Royal Alexandra hospital

right here in Edmonton decided to stop providing IVF services, causing hundreds of patients to seek new referrals to specialists at other clinics. To imply that I or any other member on this side of the House does not care about women or their health, that would be a grave mistake.

This motion also calls for safe, timely, and equitable services across all communities in the province. You know, Mr. Speaker, I would relish the opportunity to talk about equity and health care services. As the MLA for Brooks-Medicine Hat I understand the struggles that exist when it comes to accessing these services. Rural Albertans often experience long wait times for surgeries. They often have limited access to specialists. In the south zone doctors asked the previous government repeatedly for a cardiac catheterization lab, but they chose to centre their funding on urban centres. This left roughly 3,000 patients each year to be transferred to Calgary when they had a serious cardiac incident.

Another example of inequity in health care is ambulance services. In my riding ambulance services are scarce. Thankfully, we have HALO air ambulance, but not every area in the province has such a wonderful service available to them.

It's quite rich for the NDP to talk about wanting to ensure equitable access to a certain service across this province, when they directed most of the funds for their capital plan towards urban centres, neglecting the health care of rural Albertans and my constituents entirely. For example, in 2017 they closed the Medicine Hat diagnostic laboratory, a privately owned lab that served the towns of Brooks and Foremost and Medicine Hat as well. The issues of health equity across this province are about all forms of care, but the NDP just want to make it about a single topic, thereby ignoring all of the other pressing issues with health care that rural Albertans have raised, just like when they were in government. We shouldn't be playing games with people's health, Mr. Speaker. That's why our government is already examining the issue of health equity through the review of AHS.

Mr. Speaker, this motion isn't about making sure that women's health services are taken seriously or anyone's health, for that matter. It's about dividing Albertans, reopening a debate that our government committed to keeping closed, and silencing Albertans who do not agree with their agenda. You know how I know that's true? Because if the NDP wanted to achieve the aims outlined in this motion, they would have done so while they were in government, but they didn't. The Member for St. Albert tried to pass a similar motion last year, but it was never even debated. She was obviously vocal about this issue when her party was in power, so why didn't they act on it then? They had the entire government and all of its bureaucracy at their disposal, and they did nothing.

So is this about women's health, Mr. Speaker? No. It's about stoking the fire and fanning the flames of division in this province. Still palpably bitter about their party's defeat in the last election, the NDP are trying to find something, literally anything, to create more baseless controversy. They're trying to buy more time in the news cycle in an attempt to distract Albertans from their government's disastrous record and from how hard this side of the House is working to make life better for all Albertans. They've used this tactic over and over again while they were in government and again during the election. Neither time did it prove to be successful, and it appears they have not learned.

The NDP also loves to tout that it's the party of Tommy Douglas and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, but what many Canadians might not know is that Tommy Douglas was a proponent of eugenics and believed in forced sterilization of those with what he called subnormal intelligence and morality. That should be appalling no matter what side of the House you sit on.

Mr. Speaker, I am pro life because I believe that all life is precious and worthy of dignity and respect. It is not something that I am ashamed of. It is a conviction that I and countless Albertans hold deeply and defend fervently. We are not a marginal portion of the population. The members opposite have been scowling at me this whole time, and if history is any indicator, the nastiness has only begun, but quite frankly I don't care. I have been open and transparent about my views from day one. My constituents know where my conscience is on this, and many voted for me because of it. While the NDP turn inside out and feign outrage any time the words "free" and "speech" are used in the same sentence, I am proud to be in a party that celebrates and encourages diversity, a party that allows me to speak and vote my conscience on matters such as these. Regardless of my own personal beliefs, which I believe I made pretty clear, the motion solely seeks to stir up more fear and division rather than allowing for productive discussions about how we can make life better for Albertans.

At the end of the day, I represent all constituents, not just those who hold the same personal beliefs as I do, so my rationale for voting against this extends far beyond my own personal views on morality. Mr. Speaker, I am done playing the NDP's games, and I won't allow their attacks to silence me. I will be voting against this motion not only because I am pro life. I am voting against this motion because it is divisive, and we need to move on and do the work that we were elected to do; that is, unite Albertans and advocate for what matters to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has the call.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the critic for status of women I've heard from countless Albertans about the importance of access to safe, affordable health care for all. This motion from my colleague the Member for St. Albert is so critical. I must also just take this moment to mention that as the critic as well for LGBTQ2S-plus issues, it's important to remind folks that reproductive health access is not just for women. We must be mindful of our language as trans and gender-diverse folks, who do not identify as women, often face barriers to health care access as well.

This is a human rights issue, and it's also an economic issue, which I'll speak about shortly. Fundamentally, any person seeking reproductive health services in Alberta should be able to do so in a safe and timely manner. For those saying that this is about dividing Albertans, like the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has just noted, it's not. This is more than a discussion about abortion. If you read the motion, "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to conduct a thorough review of access to abortion services and reproductive health services in Alberta," reproductive health services include access to birth control, in vitro fertilization, fertility treatments, midwifery, and other services. This is not just about abortion.

5:20

I'm so proud that my NDP colleagues, when they were in government, fought hard to ensure access to abortion and reproductive health services. However, as we can see from the comments already today, that work is in jeopardy of being rolled back. That work must be continued as we are talking about health care supports for so many of our neighbours. We still hear reports from all over this province from folks who cannot access Mifegymiso prescriptions in their communities, health providers who are harassed for providing any sorts of services, and earlier today we heard from that

same Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat as she asked about access to rural health services. I appreciated that question because that's exactly what this motion seeks to ensure: health services for all Albertans – all Albertans.

I grew up in rural Alberta. I spent much of my life in rural Alberta. I was a teacher, and I saw first-hand from some of my high school students the struggles that they experienced trying to access health services such as these. It's likely no surprise to folks in this House that reproductive health services are concentrated quite heavily in cities. In fact, the folks from pro choice Edmonton tell me that there's virtually no access for people outside Edmonton and Calgary, especially if "they're young, poor, they can't take time off of work or school." Alberta Pro-Choice tells me that even in cities with major hospitals there's no access outside of those two big major cities. People in rural Alberta deserve the same access to these necessary health services, and that's why I'm so proud to support my colleague from St. Albert's motion. Regardless of personal opinions, every member should support every Albertan having access to safe, affordable health care, just as the member asked about earlier.

As I said, it's not just a social issue, not just a human rights issue; it's an economic issue as well. There are significant costs associated with forcing folks to travel long distances to receive the health care that they so desperately need, and the wait times are long. I heard from one person today who noted that a friend of hers was trying to access such services, and the wait-list was over three weeks for an Edmonton clinic. She pointed out: listen; we need to consider those folks who don't have the capacity to even travel.

This shouldn't be controversial because, again, it's about more than just abortion, but I ask you to not take just my word for it. I have actually a number of statements from folks, various stakeholders who work directly in the field, and I'll table some of these statements tomorrow. The first person that I'd like to point out is Joyce Arthur. She's the executive director of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada. She says:

The timing of the vote on this motion is significant, coming in the same week as the federal election. Advocates across Canada have been asking the federal party leaders, that if elected, will they commit to working with the provinces to improve access to abortion and other reproductive health services?

Unsurprisingly, not all the federal leaders are clear in their support of such a motion.

Alberta's services do not meet Canada Health Act standards because there are so few access points. The Alberta government needs to pass this motion as a first step to meeting its obligations under federal law.

Melanie Anderson, who's a board member with the Alberta Pro-Choice Coalition, says:

The lack of abortion access is in the spotlight across Canada and this motion is very important for Albertans. Access to reproductive health and abortion services has been very limited in Alberta for many years with people living outside Calgary and Edmonton being denied these services in their own communities. Surgical abortion services, in particular, are restricted to clinics in Edmonton and Calgary and although any doctor who prescribes contraception can also prescribe Mifegymiso [which is] medical abortion, this medication is all but inaccessible to many living outside these two [major] centres, [Edmonton and Calgary].

And she says:

We look forward to our elected representatives addressing the reproductive health needs of women and gender diverse people by supporting this important initiative.

I think it's important that we hear from somebody who is in one of those major centres that's not Edmonton and Calgary. Lauren Lagoutte is with Red Deer & Area Pro Choice. She says:

We are in need of more access in Red Deer, not only do we not have places within our hospitals, but currently we have no doctors who are willing to prescribe [Mifegymiso]. We aren't even rural, we have over 150,000 people who use our hospital and services, and I spend my time as an abortion doula referring to Calgary. We are forgotten. Our pregnant people are forgotten. This can't happen anymore.

I've heard from her before. She's got some very heart-wrenching stories of folks who've not been able to access services in communities across Alberta, and she's travelled hundreds and hundreds of kilometres trying to support those women and gender-diverse folks who need those services.

Fort McMurray, a huge city. This is from Melissa McIntyre from Fort McMurray pro choice.

Fort McMurray being a remote city means that abortion being inaccessible is detrimentally the same as being illegal. We can't utilize services out of our reach.

We're talking about a huge population of folks who don't have access to those basic reproductive services.

Lethbridge, another huge city in our province. The Pro-choice Society of Lethbridge & Southern Alberta notes that

access to reproductive health and the erosion of hard-fought for rights to bodily autonomy and choice is a major concern for many Albertans. We would like to see [political parties] be clear on where they stand on these issues, and we support efforts to bring problems of access to services and information to the forefront.

I like this point.

This issue is entwined with so many others, with social supports, transportation, addictions, education, and basic health care to name a few. These challenges are not going away and need to be addressed.

Again, such a multifaceted issue. I can't say it enough. It's not just about access to abortion. It's the connections. It's how it's inextricably linked to so many other issues that we need to be addressing.

Deb Tomlinson, the CEO of the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, notes the following.

Central to [our] mandate is to enhance access to services and supports for all Albertans impacted by sexual violence. When someone sexually assaults another person, they are abusing power and taking bodily control away from the person they are assaulting. Therefore every effort to return choice and control through access to reproductive health care is of the utmost importance. Given the connection between sexual assault, unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, easy access to reproductive health services (including abortion) is a key factor for survivors in coping with the many negative after effects of experiencing sexual assault. Sexual assault centres in Alberta would also like to stress that when access to reproductive health services is restricted, this most adversely affects those who are marginalized in our communities, particularly racialized and trans folks, as well as those from our rural communities.

I'm going to end on that statement from Deb because, again, I think this points out something so crucial. We're talking about access for folks who are often the most vulnerable, someone who's just been sexually violated in a rural or remote community in Alberta and needing access to services and having nowhere to go. She talks about access for racialized and trans folks as well. Again, we're talking about some of the most vulnerable folks in our communities.

I'd like to just end by urging the members opposite to think about some of those folks – I mean, a number of people in this Legislature represent rural and remote communities – and to broaden your perspective to really recognize that this is not just about abortion. This is about critically important reproductive health services for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Motion 506, put forward by the hon. Member for St. Albert. I'd like to begin this conversation with what we can all agree on. That is what is most important, and that is a conversation about women's health in this province. It's a conversation about access to services. This conversation is extremely emotional for many Albertans, and when we engage in this, we must do it with the utmost respect and sensitivity. This is a discussion that is deeply personal for many and often one of the most difficult things that a woman can experience.

Let's have these conversations and do so in a way that is respectful of the differing views that exist. We have conversations in this Chamber that impact the lives of many, many Albertans, and I think we all know as members that debates in this House can go beyond the issues and can become political theatre. I hope, especially today, this debate can be one that does not just merely descend into that political theatre. Politicizing this issue does a huge disservice to the very real people that are impacted by it. We must look at the facts that impact this issue to ensure that our decisions are based upon details and information as opposed to supporting a politically motivated narrative. It's way too important.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to serve here alongside 25 incredible women from both parties, and I was so excited to see a record number of women run for office in the last election, women of all political stripes, points of view, and backgrounds. As the minister that is responsible for multiculturalism I've met many, many Albertans who come from a multitude of diverse backgrounds and faiths. My job as minister is to learn about all of these cultures and beliefs and ways of life without judgment or preconceived notions.

This is a very, very sensitive conversation, and we must remember that. I am personally pro choice and, moreover, extremely grateful and proud to be a part of a caucus that welcomes and celebrates a diversity of opinions, including those of my very dear friends in our caucus who are pro life. We have caucus MLAs, party members, and everyday supporters with a wide variety of views on various subjects, including this issue that is at the centre of this motion, of the opposition motion, that being abortion. I welcome and respect all of these views, even those I may personally disagree with, and I hope that every member of this Assembly applies that same approach, particularly, Mr. Speaker, when we are debating such sensitive topics like that which is presented in this opposition motion.

In 1969 the Criminal Law Amendment Act legalized abortion. This was based upon the approval of a committee of doctors, and it was required that they sign off that it was necessary for the physical and mental well-being of the mother. In the 50 years, Mr. Speaker, since that time we've made immense advancements in women's health services. Fifty years ago this decision would not have been in the hands of the woman, and now it is a woman's right to make this decision that is protected by federal law.

This motion calls on the government to review access to abortion services and remove barriers to those services. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to touch on what I understand to be the current landscape for access to abortion services. In Alberta, women can access abortion services up to the 24-week mark, which is longer than most provinces. Abortion services, both at hospitals and clinics, are covered by the provincial health care plan. There are three nonhospital abortion clinics in Alberta, and they provide surgical abortions. Two are in Calgary, and one is in Edmonton, as has been previously mentioned. However, surgical obstetricians are able to perform these services.

The access to Mifegymiso: Mifegymiso is a pill that can be taken at home which actually can medically induce an abortion up to nine weeks' gestation and has been expanded. It also can be used past the nine-week point but also does require further medical supervision. The pill can actually be prescribed by any doctor or any nurse practitioner registered in the province and dispensed at pharmacies. A possible outcome of this option is that it may decrease the number of surgical procedures required. The medication already has been and will continue to be critically important in making sure, hopefully, that women have to undergo fewer invasive surgical procedures. This is along with being able to access services.

Expanding access to the option to independently go through this process to abort a pregnancy at home has given many women, especially those who are in rural areas, the opportunity to decide what the best option is for them. They can choose to remain at home, perhaps to be surrounded by their support systems or the space that they feel most comfortable in. They can also choose to utilize the services, Mr. Speaker, offered by women's health centres that provide services.

Women across the province can access numerous options when it comes to services. Mr. Speaker, I do believe that it's imperative that women have access to safe abortion services. It is due to options that I've actually just shared today that I simply – I don't see a scarcity of the access that is implied in this motion, in this opposition motion. In fact, we had the opportunity to speak with the Ministry of Health. I was informed that Alberta Health Services, which is actually responsible for the delivery of abortion services, has not seen an increase in demand, and that would be required in order to initiate increased access to services.

In the four years – and I think this is probably the most problematic – that the NDP was in government, they had every opportunity to expand services and create more bricks-and-mortar centres across the province. I guess the question all of us have is why they didn't do that. My guess is that they were advised, as our government has been, by Alberta Health Services that further expansion is not required at this time.

Furthermore, our government – and I'm so proud to say this – is making a huge priority in health care. The Minister of Health has recently announced, of course, the expansion of the scope of practice of the 16,000 licensed practical nurses, which will alleviate pressure on other caregivers, obviously, Mr. Speaker, like registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and doctors. The addition of 30 new nurse practitioners in rural and remote areas is actually what we're talking about here, is making sure that access to services is available. If you recall earlier in my statement, they're also able to prescribe Mifegymiso.

Further, our government is prioritizing health care access in general. Alberta Health Services is conducting a review, and our government is taking steps to ensure that wait times for surgical procedures decrease. We take, Mr. Speaker, the commitments that we have made to Albertans very seriously, and our record, in our very short time in government, speaks for itself. We will continue.

We will continue to honour our commitments to Albertans, including our commitment – as was said by the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, we are committed to not reopening this issue. I think we've said it at least 150 times. We'll continue to repeat this message over and over and over again.

Furthermore, I think what is most glaring is that it's become apparent that this issue is being weaponized in a partisan way. We are dealing with vulnerable populations, as the member said. This is not how we focus on people in this province. We do not weaponize issues like this for our own political gain. It's a profound disservice to the women who have and may require these particular

services, to the care providers, and actually, Mr. Speaker, to the unity of our province as a whole.

I do support a woman's right to choose in what happens to her body, and having these conversations is very important. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore should time allow.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today in support of the motion brought forward by my colleague the Member for St. Albert, which seeks a review of access to abortion services and reproductive health services in Alberta and to take action to remove barriers to access to those services.

I've been listening very carefully to the comments from both my colleagues but also from the members from the other side. There are a few things I'd like to just mention. The first is that I really want to highlight that this motion is about access to reproductive health services as well as abortion services. In fact, I believe that on this point we are actually in agreement because what I was hearing from both the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women as well as the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat is that all Albertans should have access to health services that they require. The Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat gave great examples of the kinds of reproductive health services that women and anybody who identifies as a woman and trans people require.

The issue here is that abortion has been decided in terms of federal law, as the minister for status of women said. It is a right, but nobody is here to dispute that. We're simply saying that in order for a right to have meaning, it must be accessible. Again, the members from the other side have highlighted that; in fact, the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, even today in question period, raised the issue of access in rural areas to medical services. In this province women have rights to access reproductive health services, including abortion services. But if those services are not accessible and are not available and are not safe, then it's a hollow right. There is no right to it.

5:40

We're simply stating with this motion that we conduct that review to see whether that right is fully accessible by all Albertans who require it and, if there are barriers, to remove those barriers, because that is actually the fulfillment of our obligation, under the charter of human rights, to the safety and security that all people have, to make sure that there is access to those rights.

Certainly, the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women stood and alluded to perhaps some information from Alberta Health Services which may indicate that there is not a problem with access to reproductive health rights. I don't know if that's the case. I have not been privy to that information. I have not seen that. If that's the case, then it should be no problem to fulfill this motion, which is that – maybe the review has already been conducted. That may be the case. But I think we can all stand in agreement – we've repeatedly talked about it – that access to health care services in rural areas is a problem. I would be interested to see if there is actually a report that indicates that there is not a problem with access to reproductive health services and abortion services in rural areas because I don't think that that has been the experience or understanding of most people. If that's the case, by all means bring that information forward, and we'll be able to fulfill what's set out in this motion.

I also want to highlight again – we did talk about it – reproductive health services. My colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and myself had an opportunity over the summer to meet with a doctor in Calgary, Dr. Rupinder Toor, who operates an IUD

clinic there. She serves vulnerable newcomer communities, and we would talk very much about access to safe contraception, access to safe reproductive health rights, and how the most vulnerable and, particularly, newcomers, I would say, indigenous communities – certainly, if we're talking about there not being great access in northern Alberta, that has to include a lot of our indigenous communities. Access to those reproductive health services – contraception is not available. We know that if that is available, that affects the quality of life of Albertans in so many ways.

I agree that we should not be weaponizing this discussion. I actually take great issue with that characterization of this motion because it's not just about abortion services. We've been very careful and, I think, clear in our discussions on this side of the House that this is about access to what all women are entitled to have in this province, which is reproductive health services.

I also want to mention that I'm not in disagreement with the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat about all of us having our personal views. We all do have our personal views. Whether they be religious, ideological, whatever the reasons are, our opinions and our personal beliefs about access to abortion: we are all entitled to those beliefs. Certainly, if somebody has an ideological or religious belief that would prohibit them from seeking abortion services, whether it be a surgical abortion or Mifegymiso, that is completely appropriate. If an individual does not believe in that, do not access that. Do not seek that access.

The problem is when not all people have access to those services because of where they live. They're not having an opportunity to exercise their own personal beliefs or to exercise the right to safe and accessible health care to which they are entitled as part of their security of the person, protected under the charter of human rights and freedoms. Certainly, we are not in disagreement. If an individual has personal views against it, by all means, nobody is forcing anybody to use those services.

But if an individual, whether by personal belief or by need, because there are many situations where a woman perhaps would never conceive of a situation where they would want to access it, but they may find themselves in a situation where they need to access either reproductive services or abortion services – and they are entitled to have access to that. I think that that's really important to mention. I think it's very important that we say: this is not about imposing one set of beliefs on another. The law has already decided that issue. The law has already decided that there is access to abortion rights. That is what every woman in this country and in this province is entitled to access, but that access must be meaningful. If you don't have access because of where you live or how far away you are from a centre or a service or a clinic that provides it, then you don't have access.

Again, the facts of this situation are that in Alberta we have centralized reproductive services and abortion services. Compared to our population and if you look at what's happening in other provinces, in B.C., for example, they have a very interconnected network of services and recommendations for people in remote areas to have access to those services.

That's simply what we're talking about here. We're talking about reviewing our existing system, identifying where there are opportunities – and there should be meaningful access – for women who need those reproductive and abortion services and making sure that they have them and, if there are barriers, to make sure that those barriers are taken down so that they can access their rights.

I am standing here saying that, of course, I have my personal views. I have very strongly held personal views. But this isn't about my views, and it isn't about individual views. It is about the law. It is about that there is a legal entitlement to those services in this country. If you don't believe in it, don't access it, but you should

not be prohibited from accessing it because it's not available to you, because it's not accessible.

That is simply what this motion is about. I am proud to stand up and say that I believe that everybody should have the opportunity to fulfill their own personal beliefs and to seek medical supports that they need. I have a number of constituents in my community – and I'm sure they exist all over – for whom infertility is a problem, and it's something where people deserve the services needed to address it all over the province. That is not an Edmonton and a Calgary need. That is a need of families and individuals across this province. They are entitled to get those services wherever they live, and that's what this motion is about. I am proud to stand up and support it because I believe it entitles everybody to fully exercise the rights and views that they all hold and that are constitutionally protected in this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore has the call and will be followed by the Member for Edmonton-City Centre should time allow.

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Motion 506. I want this debate to be respectful. Reproductive health is important. It's an important topic. So is the issue of access to health services in rural and remote parts of the province. I want to make sure that these issues are treated with the importance and the respect they deserve, and I really hope that this motion and the debate around it are not actually an attempt to weaponize the issue of abortion for partisan purposes. I really hope that we are not here to discuss abortion services only because the members opposite wish to score political points, especially after the dog-whistle politics that pro-choice women like myself had to endure in the last campaign. I will pass on another attempt at wedge politics. I, for one, am sick and tired of women's rights being treated as a political football.

Outside of this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, Albertans have told me that on this subject they are tired of polarization. They do not appreciate all-or-nothing propositions. Like me, most of my constituents support the proposition of a woman's right to choose. The government should not make that decision. They also believe that women should have access to safe termination services. I do not think anyone is in favour of the desperate, life-threatening measures that women undertook so many years ago. Most of my constituents, like me, respect the views of those who consider themselves to be pro life. These are deeply held, personal convictions, and they should be respected. In fact, many, many people hold personal pro-life beliefs and also support a woman's right to choose.

So, Mr. Speaker, I really hope that this motion is not another attempt at wedge politics, raising a hot-button issue to get headlines, because what happens is that when the extremes on both sides take their one hundred per cent for or one hundred per cent against positions, the majority in the middle are essentially silenced, left out of the discussion altogether. Research actually shows that this is particularly true for women, especially women under the age of 35.

That brings me to the motion itself, which reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to conduct a thorough review of access to abortion services and reproductive health services in Alberta, take action to remove barriers to these services, and ensure access to safe, timely, and equitable services in all communities across the province.

Mr. Speaker, the motion tabled by the Member for St. Albert talks about women's reproductive health, which I do believe is an important topic for discussion, but I think that the narrow scope of

the text in this motion limits the broader conversation that we need to have about women's health as a whole. While abortion is largely discussed as a women's health issue, it is not the only women's health issue.

5:50

There are 26 women elected in this Chamber, including myself. Statistically three of us will get breast cancer, and I'm sure that everybody in this Chamber knows someone who's been impacted by breast cancer at some point in their life, and their families have also been impacted. We need to have that conversation, Mr. Speaker, about how we can support those who have received a breast cancer diagnosis and help them also support their families.

There are other gynecological conditions that don't get a lot of attention, Mr. Speaker, conditions like endometriosis, which is a painful, sometimes debilitating condition and one of the most commonly misdiagnosed gynecological conditions. And guess what? Roughly four of us in this Assembly will suffer from it.

Another 10 per cent of us will struggle with fertility issues. In 2017 the previous government closed a fertility clinic right here in Edmonton which was operated by Alberta Health Services, forcing couples to go and seek care at private clinics. The clinic served families from all over northern Alberta. Many families waited months to see a specialist, only to be told that they had to start the process all over again. Some couples now go to other provinces to see a specialist. The opposition repeatedly claims that our government is going to limit access to reproductive health care, including the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who during her tenure did not act on the content of anything in this motion.

That brings us to the issue of access to health care in rural and remote areas. There is a vast disparity in access to health care that exists between rural communities and urban centres. The previous government did little to help bridge these gaps in care. They diverted funds from their capital plan, actually, away from rural communities and back towards urban centres. Honestly, Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite really wanted to rectify health inequity, they would have addressed that which is already existent between rural and urban Alberta.

Just a quick example of another women's health issue. The average wait time for a hysterectomy in July 2019 in Fort McMurray was 14.9 weeks compared to a provincial average of 12.7 weeks, which is a very long time. In that same month in the Edmonton zone the wait time was 11.3 weeks. Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the previous government had four years to address the very issues that are discussed in this motion.

I understand and appreciate that this is an issue that the Member for St. Albert cares about. It's an incredibly emotional issue for many in this Chamber. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I fear that regardless of how I or my colleagues end up voting on this motion, there's very little hope that the opposition will ever be satisfied. I really hope that this is not just an example, another example, of the opposition seeking to weaponize a sensitive topic for political purposes. Women's health is an incredibly important topic, one that we should all be willing to talk about, but this motion doesn't allow for the broad, holistic discussion that needs to be had.

So, Mr. Speaker, I simply can't vote for this motion today. I'm focused on addressing issues through meaningful action, not through platitudes. Should the member opposite choose to come back with a motion that will allow for co-operation, discussion, and mutual understanding, then perhaps I'll reconsider.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, and there are approximately two minutes remaining in debate.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recognize that my time is brief, so first I'll start by just correcting a bit of information that I'm sure was just accidentally overlooked by the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, since she did declare that she was not here to create any sort of division. She simply forgot to mention – and I'm quoting from the *Canadian Encyclopedia* – that “by the time [Tommy] Douglas became Premier of Saskatchewan in 1944 . . . he had abandoned his support for eugenic policies,” and when he received two reports that recommended legalizing sexual sterilization in that province, he rejected the idea, having progressed in his moral views, Mr. Speaker, as many people do.

As the opposition critic for Health it's my pleasure to rise in support of this motion. As many have noted, we continue to have issues of access to health care in rural Alberta, some of which our government sought to meet, providing improved dialysis services in rural Alberta – a Conservative government had chosen to leave people receiving dialysis on a bus, Mr. Speaker – and other investments which our government made. On this, we recognize that women across the province have the right to access health services.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, but under Standing Order 8(3) it provides for the mover of the motion to have five minutes to close debate at 5:55.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to clear up a couple of things. There are some basic facts.

One, we understand that the Supreme Court of Canada recognized a woman's right to continue or terminate a pregnancy. This is a protected right under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That's already been determined.

Now, under the Canada Health Act health care must be accessible, portable, comprehensive, and publicly administered nation-wide. That's really what this is about. This is about access. What we know is that access to reproductive health services is primarily available in large urban centres: two in Calgary, one in Edmonton. That leaves people that live in rural and remote communities without access, particularly in the north. That is a problem.

This isn't just about abortion services. This is about reproductive health services, so it's also an economic issue for women that live in rural, remote communities if they are unable to take time off work, if they can't afford it, if they can't find child care, if transportation is sketchy. All of these things are important to consider. This is a motion that encourages the government to look at removing barriers. This isn't about weaponizing anything.

I'd also like to clear the record for some of the organized groups that are sending e-mails about this all over the place. This is my third time doing this, and the reason I got to do it again is because it's a lottery. You all know this. Private members, all of us: our names get put into a lottery, and we have a chance. Certainly, would I like to bring it up again and maybe change the wording so that people would vote on it? Sure. Is that likely to happen? Probably not.

I'm doing this today because I'm asking the people in this House to consider the reproductive health care of women and trans people in this province to be a priority, particularly people that live in rural and remote communities who are forced to travel to urban centres for things like having an intrauterine device put inside of them. They shouldn't have to take time off work to come to a clinic here in Edmonton or Calgary to get that done. Doctors have told us that they are having trouble even prescribing this because there are problems in their community based on some kind of religious ideology.

This isn't about religion. I don't care about your religion. I don't even care about your stance on this particular issue. This is about the law. This is a protected human right – a protected human right – and this is about health care: health care for women and access to health care for women, safe health care. If it's not safe, it's still going to happen. It's just going to be dangerous, as it was before. This is about urging the government to look at: what can we do to increase access for people in Alberta that don't readily have those clinics or doctors available to them? There are many thousands that do not, that don't have the ability to pay for child care, transportation, hotels, time off work to go to Edmonton or Calgary to receive the services that they need. I'm encouraging each member: put aside your ideology, and look at access to health care services in this province.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 506 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:59 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------|----------|---------------|
| Dach | Irwin | Shepherd |
| Dang | Pancholi | Sigurdson, L. |
| Deol | Phillips | Sweet |
| Feehan | Renaud | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Allard | LaGrange | Rosin |
| Amery | Loewen | Rowswell |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Long | Sawhney |
| Barnes | Lovely | Schow |
| Fir | Madu | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Getson | McIver | Singh |
| Glasgo | Neudorf | Smith |
| Glubish | Nicolaides | Stephan |
| Guthrie | Nixon, Jason | Toews |
| Hanson | Nixon, Jeremy | Turton |
| Horner | Orr | van Dijken |
| Hunter | Pitt | Walker |
| Issik | Rehn | Williams |
| Jones | Reid | Wilson |
| Kenney | | |

Totals: For – 11 Against – 43

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 6:17 p.m.]

Table of Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Prayers | 1863 |
| Introduction of Guests | 1863 |
| Members' Statements | |
| Election Day | 1863 |
| Public Health Care..... | 1863 |
| Small Business Week | 1864 |
| Climate Change Strategy..... | 1864 |
| Chester Mjolsness..... | 1864 |
| Postsecondary Education Funding..... | 1865 |
| Front-line Public Service Workers | 1865 |
| South Sudanese Community Round-table | 1865 |
| Election Day | 1873 |
| Oral Question Period | |
| Postsecondary Education Funding..... | 1865 |
| Alberta Energy Regulator Funding..... | 1866 |
| Commercial Driver Training and Testing Standards | 1866 |
| Education Funding..... | 1867, 1869 |
| Municipal Funding and Autonomy..... | 1868 |
| Rural Police Service | 1868, 1872 |
| Rural Health Care | 1869 |
| Climate Change Strategy..... | 1870 |
| Greta Thunberg's Visit to Alberta | 1870 |
| Red Tape Reduction | 1871 |
| Canadian Energy Centre Oversight | 1871 |
| Agricultural Concerns | 1872 |
| Tourism Development in Banff-Kananaskis | 1873 |
| Notices of Motions | 1874 |
| Tabling Returns and Reports | 1874 |
| Tablings to the Clerk | 1874 |
| Orders of the Day | 1875 |
| Motions for Concurrence in Committee Reports on Public Bills Other than Government Bills | |
| Bill 203 An Act to Protect Public Health Care..... | 1875 |
| Division | 1882 |
| Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders | |
| Committee of the Whole | |
| Bill 202 Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2019 | 1882 |
| Third Reading | |
| Bill 202 Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2019 | 1883 |
| Motions Other than Government Motions | |
| Abortion and Reproductive Health Services..... | 1887 |
| Division | 1895 |

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