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The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, October 30, 2019

Day 36

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, October 30, 2019

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 20 Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019

[Adjourned debate October 29: Mr. Nielsen]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen with about a minute left.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, one minute is not a whole lot of time, but I guess one of the things that I do want to comment about this bill is around the fact that it's incredibly an omnibus bill. I mean, things like deindexing of the income tax brackets: for some of our guests that are in the gallery here this evening, our hard-working public-sector workers, they're going to see some of their income coming back to the government just because simply, maybe they get a raise, things like that.

Also, you know, I think that when we look at the different tax credits that are being eliminated – I had mentioned this the last time we had debated – just simply from one simple industry like the gaming sector, which is poised to make over \$150 billion this year alone: there's been some incredible growth there. With the decisions that this government is going to be making around that, we are going to proverbially be missing our own boat, Mr. Speaker, and they're good, high-paying jobs.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are immediately into 29(2)(a) should anyone wish to take five minutes for quick questions and comments. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 29(2)(a). I wasn't able to hear the first part of the Member for Edmonton-Decore's speech. I know he's very passionate about some of the initiatives our government brought forward to help diversify the economy and spur investment – one of those was, of course, one of the tax credits – in fact, all three of the tax credit programs. But the interactive digital media tax credit: the member just acknowledged that that industry world-wide is significant. We're talking trillions of dollars. I'm wondering if the Member for Edmonton-Decore can talk about some of the dollars that would be coming to Alberta but are likely going to be diverted to places like British Columbia and Quebec and Ontario that have interactive digital media tax credits.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to that. Yeah, he's quite correct. You know, the funny thing is that when you look at the comparative districts, say, Quebec and B.C., the tax credits that they actually offer are significantly higher than what was being offered here in Alberta. When we kind of take that approach of, "We seem to be wasting our money on these tax credits," like I said, I highly, highly disagree because Alberta was starting to become a very significant competitor with those provinces that were offering much, much more so that we see

companies like Improbable that have moved their head office here and started to create jobs in that industry.

You know, as I probably mentioned before, when I spoke with people at BioWare, we're talking about salaries ranging somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$70,000 to \$75,000 a year. Those are very good, mortgage-paying jobs, so when you can offer what is apparently significantly smaller incentives than what's being offered in the other jurisdictions, Alberta was poised, quite honestly, to cash in.

Again, a \$150 billion plus industry just within the gaming itself. That's not even talking about all the underindustries that Alberta would have been able to take advantage of. It kind of makes me feel that – you know, sometimes the way I've explained it to some of my constituents: it's like there's been this bowl of money with Alberta's name on it, and here we are going back to the same old same old like we used to do way in the past. We just kind of pushed that bowl of money away and said: "No, no, no. That's okay. We don't need that. We've got this sector over here. We're doing just fine." I would say that strictly from a capitalist point of view you'd want to be getting your thumb into that pie, grabbing some of that money. We're missing out here. It's an incredible opportunity that we are going to let slip through us.

Now, I remember even back I believe it might have been in the '80s. Of course, I'm probably dating myself here a little bit, Mr. Speaker, when I'm talking about that. Edmonton and Alberta had an opportunity to start, some even touted, a bit of its own Silicon Valley right here in Alberta, in Edmonton on the south side, no doubt. Again, you know, decisions that were made back at that time ended up making those industry players decide to not invest here in Alberta.

With things like the digital media tax credit, it clearly was an incentive for these businesses to come set up shop here in Alberta, to take advantage of the very highly trained people that were being trained and educated here in the province plus all of the other social infrastructure that was there like our very, very strong public-sector workers delivering our services to Albertans. Those are also the kinds of things that companies look at when they are investing in a jurisdiction. It's not simply about a big \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway. That might help the Walton family, okay? Walmart: that may help them, absolutely. But, you know, these growing tech industries, AI, things like that: they are not able to take advantage of that.

It was these things, these tax credits that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview had mentioned, that had really spurred some significant growth within those industries, that would have allowed Albertans to gain access to very good-paying jobs, which, again, gets them to be able to pay mortgages, pay income tax, things like that, and we wouldn't have even had to introduce deindexing of bracket creep. It's unfortunate that we're seeing those things leave.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to speak on Bill 20, Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019. This just came forward after the budget, and it's a remarkable piece of legislation. I've certainly seen a lot, and just the breadth and the scope of this omnibus bill is quite uncommon. I find it concerning because, of course, there are quite a lot of significant changes in regard to anything ranging from the tuition tax credits to the digital media tax credits, that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore was just talking about. It has the consolidation of many different funds

that have existed in different parts of the budget and the government of Alberta.

You know, there are definite things that we could add up here along the way that will cost individuals, families money: the deindexation of tax brackets – right? – some of the tax credits that help to stimulate the economy, which would have benefited individuals and families, and the rollback of the Alberta child benefit and Alberta family employment tax credit. Again, I was just listening to the radio this morning, and an individual was talking about how people would lose money from that choice as well.

I mean, obviously, globally we know that this government is making a choice here around making cuts to the public service, making cuts, most of which we really weren't aware of during either the electoral period or even up to almost budget day. You know, we kept getting reassurances from this government that they would maintain funding and they would make sure that people would be able to get ahead and all these kinds of things. Then this budget has come, and we see quite a different story.

There are a couple of areas here that I want to talk about in particular. I think that the education and tuition tax credit issue: we were just discussing this in the estimates this afternoon, and a lot of people really depended on these tax credits. These are deductions that you can make for tuition and so forth in both your provincial and your federal income tax returns.

7:40

Considering how expensive postsecondary education is to begin with, most families have to plan for years in advance to make sure that they can provide that opportunity for their young students or someone who might be an adult who wants to go back to school or what have you. I mean, you don't just do it on a whim; you make plans, through saving and choices and sacrifice, to pay for postsecondary education because, of course, it does provide a tremendous benefit in regard to potential employment. It demonstrably helps an individual's income to be considerably more if you do have a postsecondary education. You know, quite frankly, it's part of our own personal growth as individuals and citizens to engage in postsecondary education, to learn about the world and learn a trade and get on with your life.

So when you change the rules around a very expensive and considerable moment to make a choice to go to postsecondary school and then suddenly, you know, the financial rules change midstream or just at the beginning or even before you even started, this is a problem. Lots of people say, "Oh, well, you know, you can take that tuition tax credit; people's parents are just getting it anyway," and so forth. Well, for a lot of people, it's the students themselves who are paying – paying through student loans and paying through working in the summer and all of that kind of thing – and looking for that extra bit of money back next April when you file your income tax.

This end to the tuition tax credit: I made myself available this afternoon and this morning, actually – we had six hours of debates on Advanced Education – to people from across the province to submit questions and so forth to the Advanced Education ministry. I would say, Mr. Speaker, that this was one of the most common themes that I saw during the day and over the last week or so since this choice was made to cancel tuition and education tax credits. It's a thing; it's real. When you combine it with the increase to tuition that the government has in their own budget, a 23 per cent increase to tuition over the next number of years, you know, it hits you coming and going, basically, where you literally are paying more for tuition. You get the elimination of the tax credit, and you end up paying more and getting less. I really take exception to this choice that is being made.

You know, it's interesting. A number of student advocacy groups did talk about making changes to the tuition tax credit, but that was to build a fund, a granting fund, to offer more low-income students an opportunity to go to school. I mean, that was a creative idea. That was, I think, a useful idea. I think that's sort of a society- and community-building idea. But the only part of that concept that the government seemed to take was just to cancel the tax credit and leave the rest to the wind. Again, that's part of this Bill 20. I certainly don't agree with the choice that is being made here, and I think that the government would be wise to reconsider that.

Moving on to the interactive digital media tax credit, I think that we heard a lot of talk about this in the last few days, since the budget was introduced last week. We saw quite a number of individuals and companies that were making investments around this digital tax credit to build a gaming industry here in Edmonton and other places, in Calgary as well, and suddenly the rug got pulled out from under them – right? – people who were making significant investment.

Let's not forget that the digital media industry is a very fluid and transferable industry. It can move from city to city, jurisdiction to jurisdiction, even to different countries, quite quickly. For these digital media companies to choose to invest and build here in Alberta was a credit, I think, to this tax credit. I think it was a credit to our education system that we have so many talented computer programmers and so forth that would want to choose to live, stay, and raise a family in Alberta, because probably that's where they're from. But now, again, with the ending of this digital media tax credit, they ended up hitting an abrupt brick wall in regard to that investment.

You know, it's interesting to dig a bit deeper into digital media entrepreneurs. I know that the government said: well, they'll benefit from the reduced corporate tax rate. But, no. When they're building a business like this from scratch, they invest every dollar, plus probably some, back into the business, quite frankly. So this notion that a reduction in the corporate tax rate would be the equivalent of the digital media tax credit, I mean, that's entirely erroneous. The people who were actually building these businesses will tell you that, and they have been doing so emphatically in the media and on social media. I've been following that quite closely, and I just really find it quite disturbing.

It's a very high value-added industry, right? The hundreds of billions of dollars, really, that are being generated from the gaming industry, from games and so forth, is a global phenomenon, and thus it is a very transferable and fluid phenomenon that can move from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, as we probably will see here in the province of Alberta as these companies choose to not stay here as a result of this tax credit being eliminated in this budget with Bill 20.

Another tax credit that came to my attention that is being removed with Bill 20 is the capital investment tax credit, which is a way by which businesses can claim some of the machinery or start-up costs, physical machinery, and perhaps even digital computer parts of their business as a way to enhance and help with start-ups in the industry. You know, this has been a very successful program. We've seen that an investment, probably in the form of a tax credit, in the region of \$200 million has thus leveraged more than \$2 billion worth of economic activity that's directly attributable to the capital investment tax credit. I mean, that's an astounding return that I think is a credit to the innovation that the capital investment tax credit does allow and afford us. It allows lots of flexibility, and it has paid great dividends to businesses across the province.

You know, losing that, again, I think is very short-sighted, and I believe that we could definitely do better. There's a basket of other community and economic tax credits. The Alberta investor tax

credit, the scientific research and experimental development tax credit: again, gone. I guess I would perhaps ask the members opposite: why would you do something like that? It was a demonstrable success that helped to build and diversify our economy here in the province of Alberta. [interjection] I always feel good when the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview gives me affirmation on those things.

I mean, again, like, the scope of this Bill 20 is just breathtaking. This also is enabling legislation to repeal the city charters for Edmonton and Calgary and put a new local government fiscal framework act in its place. Again, an astounding about-face from negotiated agreements with our largest cities that were years in the making, quite frankly. You know, sometimes I think that this government is motivated by their summer of repeal, now stretched into the fall and winter of repeal, for the sake of repealing. But, again, this has represented years of work, these city charters, that could help to really bolster the economic development of our larger cities. You know, we need to remember that our energy industry certainly forms the backbone of the infrastructure of our economy and will continue to do so for a long, long time, but we must recognize the key assets of how we can help to diversify our economy and where the most economic activity is actually taking place. You know, it's our cities that provide that infrastructure for a knowledge economy, for diversity in the widest possible way, and to repeal the city charter, which was quite, I think, very far-reaching and visionary, to replace that with something more regressive I think is a huge mistake.

7:50

The next one – it feels like I'm travelling around the world here with repeal – is the suspension of the indexation of tax brackets for the income tax system. Now, this is a significant change. I found it astounding to be speaking on the same side as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. I saw Colby Cosh going on about this the other day in the *National Post*, but, I mean, you can see what a broad sort of swath of anger and disbelief the suspension of these tax brackets did engender here in the province of Alberta and, indeed, right across the country, I think, as well. You know, it is probably projected in the government's own figures to produce at least \$600 million by the end of the 2022-23 fiscal year. Well, guess where that money is coming from, Mr. Speaker. That's \$600 million over the next few years that comes out of everybody's pocket, quite frankly.

You know, this notion – I saw it as a meme and it was repeated in here yesterday – if you earn exactly the amount of the money that you did . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I saw the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to hear from my colleague from Edmonton-North West on omnibus bills like this. Sometimes it feels like we're going back in time. I know he spoke to a number of omnibus bills years ago. I guess this type of regression is bringing us back in time in a couple of ways. But I know the member spoke at quite a bit of length about how this is damaging for the economy, it's damaging for Albertans, it's damaging for workers. We're joined by I think it's over 25, 30 workers now in the gallery here who are really interested in seeing how important these bills, these two omnibus bills we're debating tonight, are going to be for them.

So perhaps the member could talk a little bit about how the \$4.7 billion, no-jobs handout is hurting these families, hurting these

workers. Perhaps the member can talk a little bit about how, really, these types of drastic cuts to the economy and these types of drastic attacks on the economy really will hurt families. It's something that is so important that when we're in this place, we focus on making sure that communities and Albertans are who we're looking out for.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. I appreciate that very much. You know, my main concern is that when you make a series of quite significant changes to the economic structure, the tax structure, fiscal structure, you can create a spiral of events that can exceed each of the individual things that you've put into place, right? It's like the cumulative effect of, as you say, having a significant reduction in our capacity to raise revenue through this corporate tax giveaway and other mechanisms as well. I mean, we know that a government needs money to run. It's not money to run to pass it off into the winds. It's money to pay for schools, to pay for hospitals, to pay for roads, and so forth and build the infrastructure and the social structure that a modern society needs.

By creating that significant fiscal restraint or inability to raise money, then that's what has precipitated all of these other things that we saw in education and health care and these fiscal changes as well. I mean, these are choices that a government makes. It's not like: "Oh, no. You know, we have no choice. This is what we've got to do." We do see Alberta's economic situation in a precarious place, but we show lots of signs of hope. What I find particularly to be troublesome is that, you know, some of these ways by which we did stimulate hope and optimism for the future, like the capital investment tax credit, the digital media tax credit: again, each unto themselves individually they might seem not huge – mind you, the capital investment tax credit could be demonstrably attributing at least \$2 billion worth of economic growth – but when you start adding all these things up together, that's when you can have a problem.

These are choices that this government is making. It's not as though it's as inevitable as the winter coming to Edmonton every fall; these are choices. We talk about ways by which we can strengthen and diversify our economy. Well, the best way, the most fundamental and time-proven way, is to invest in your people – right? – to make sure you have money in people's pockets. They don't have to be loaded with cash. It's just to make sure that people are spending in the economy, that they're using the local facilities inside of our province and participating in the economy. Each thing that you take away, like this other aspect to Bill 20 with the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit, again, I heard pretty compelling arguments this morning on the radio that people will lose money. It will literally take money out of your pocket. The suspension of indexation of tax brackets: it's good for \$600 million over the next three or four years. That's money that comes right out of people's pockets, just like that.

Again, we want to make sure that we're prudent and careful in how we make choices in this Legislature. I would strongly suggest that Bill 20 and Bill 21, that we'll take a look at here shortly as well, are strong signs that there's a problem.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and Official Opposition House Leader has risen to speak.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and speak to Bill 20, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019. Before I get into that – because as many members in this Assembly will know, brevity is not my strong suit – this bill is

awful. Quite frankly, it's terrible, and I'll tell you why it is. And you don't have to believe me. You can listen to the private sector: the folks that you claimed to listen to, but who clearly you didn't listen to. You can say what you want and spin it how you want, but I will explain how dismantling the tax credits will severely hurt many Alberta businesses, including their ability to diversify the economy.

You can point to your corporate tax giveaway: it does nothing for them, and if you believe that it does, then you clearly haven't spoken to the industry, nor do you understand that small businesses reinvest every penny that goes into their company. They do not pull it out; therefore, they don't pay corporate tax rates. Therefore, you could put the corporate tax rate to zero, and how many of these tech companies would you support? None, Mr. Speaker. Not a one because, again, they reinvest every penny. What they need help in is growing and scaling faster, which means they can hire more people, which means we will create more jobs. The tax credits that you folks are dismantling did that very thing.

Before I get to that, Mr. Speaker, I do want to acknowledge the incredible men and women that have joined us in the gallery tonight. I know they're quite upset, and they wouldn't be here if they weren't. For Bill 21, that we're going to get to in a moment or in about an hour or maybe an hour and a half, I appreciate that – sometime tonight – that bill is an attack on working people. Again, we've seen now in the short six months that this government has formed office that they have gone back on their word a number of times. The government has misled Albertans – we're losing track of the number of times. But we'll talk about that in a little bit. I just want to bid you all welcome. Thank you for being here tonight and representing. There may be 20 or 30 people in the gallery, but I promise you that they represent tens of thousands of Alberta workers. They are here to make it known and send a message to this government that the working people of this province are the backbone of this province. You are attacking the very fibre of our society through Bill 21.

8:00

Now moving to Bill 20, this bill dismantling the different tax credits. I appreciate the comments that my colleague from Edmonton-North West made. The statistics are there. I challenge every member in this House. Don't take my word for it, okay? You can accuse me of being political or partisan, and that's fine. These tax credits, first of all, came from the private sector. It wasn't a New Democrat political strategist somewhere that thought of these. This came from regular consultations with Alberta businesses, with chambers of commerce. I encourage the minister to go and speak with the Calgary Chamber of commerce, because they essentially designed two of the four tax credits, to tell them: "You know what? You were wrong. We know better. We're government. We know better. We know that this corporate tax giveaway is the silver bullet to get the Alberta economy back on track."

Well, if we're looking at facts, Mr. Speaker, so far what we've seen – and today in question period I talked about PrairieSky – is that these companies are saying: "Yes. Thank you for reducing our tax rate. We're going to take this money and either, you know, make it work on our balance sheet or we're going to do share buybacks or we're going to invest it in other provinces." On this gift from this UCP government, Husky Energy said: "Thank you very much. We're going to spend the money not in Alberta; we're going to Saskatchewan or Newfoundland to spend the money." So if that's not an indicator that this corporate tax giveaway is not working – or I should say that it's not working for Albertans; it's working great for the people in other parts of the country – then I don't know what is.

But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that what was working to help diversify our economy and grow our economy here in Alberta were the multiple tax credits that we introduced. I appreciate the fact that the other side hates the fact that the NDs introduced it. I would ask them to set their partisan ideological glasses aside, take them off for a second, and look at return on investment. The investor tax credit is a 30 per cent tax credit. An additional 5 per cent we added as a diversity portion. And this is what I love. I encourage members to look at the stats of the number of women and of minorities that make up boards of companies – right? – either board positions or CEOs. You will see that there is a really, really bad inverse of the number of women and people of diverse backgrounds that go to university and postsecondaries to become programmers, et cetera, but you look – now I'm criss-crossing with the digital media tax credit. You look at the number that make up the boards, and there is a huge deficit.

I was quite proud of the fact that we wanted to encourage companies not only to have more diverse boards, but here's the thing – and I encourage you to look at this. Companies that are more diverse are more innovative and have stronger balance sheets and do better financially. So never mind the feel-good reason or the reason of equality. Look at even the bottom line. Companies that have diverse boards do better. So let's encourage that, which is what this investor tax credit did: \$30 million conditionally approved by government leveraged \$100 million of investment. That's over a 3 to 1 return on investment, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the members: what's your ROI on your current corporate tax giveaway? You're actually negative. It's not creating jobs. I believe that the government is down 27,000 jobs – not the government. Pardon me. That's a whole other issue. The province is down 27,000 jobs.

So this was one of the tools to help diversify the economy. Other provinces have had tax credits for many, many years. In fact, the province of British Columbia, since 1985, has through this one vehicle – and I appreciate that this is just one tool, but it's a tool that's working. It's a tool that the numbers speak for themselves. We introduced a tax credit. It was sector-wide, so there are applications to oil and gas, there are applications to agriculture, and there are applications to our health care sector. I mean, the benefits go on and on, Mr. Speaker. But the 3 to 1 return on investment is significant.

I think that it's shameful that this government – and I know that the Premier knows better. I know that he might be claiming that the corporate tax reduction helps every company. I think he's well enough informed that he knows that that is not the case because it's the companies – I mean, I encourage the minister to go talk to companies like Improbable or other companies that wanted to use the investor tax credit, that were going to investors to say: we can offer you a 30 per cent tax credit. Then this government yanked the rug from under them, and suddenly now these companies are in limbo trying to raise money to grow, to hire more people, to scale, create jobs, to do better, to compete globally, and this tool was taken from them. I mean, that's just the first tax credit.

The other one, the recent one – and I hope that the minister of economic development and trade sits down with the long and ever-growing list of interactive digital media companies that are livid about a support that was helping to level the playing field. You folks claim that you want to level the playing field. You didn't. You actually just brought in the Alberta disadvantage when it comes to digital media companies. You know why, Mr. Speaker? Because companies can go to B.C., Ontario, or Quebec and receive a very handsome tax credit for their biggest cost, which is the cost of labour because these are programmers and designers, very well-educated people who are good at their job, who are paid well, fantastic.

A company like BioWare, founded in Edmonton, started here in Alberta. They're still in Alberta. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? They had at one point 800 employees in the province of Alberta; 500 of those have moved to Quebec. Why, you ask? Great question. Because they have an interactive digital media tax credit, and it doesn't make sense to stay in a province that doesn't have that. Again, you know, I'm sure you're thinking: what about the corporate tax cut? Well, you know what? These companies are not looking for a corporate tax rate reduction. They're looking for supports like through the digital media tax credit.

Those companies were growing and scaling here. I encourage the minister to meet with Beamdog and a list of other companies, Improbable, who came to Alberta and convinced their shareholders and their boards: "Alberta, they get it. They're levelling the playing field. Let's go to Alberta now. We're competitive." Not anymore we're not, not in the interactive digital media space. There's a disconnect between what the government is saying and what they are doing.

You look at the capital investment tax credit. My colleague from Edmonton-North West talked about this. This is a 10 per cent, nonrefundable tax credit up to \$5 million. All fancy speak to say, "Hey, company X, if you're going to build a new facility, expand, or invest in new machinery and equipment, you can qualify for up to \$5 million worth of tax credits if you spend the money now. You pull the trigger; you make the investment. You were thinking about it. This was that incentive to take your money from the sidelines and inject it into the economy." Two hundred million dollars over the last three years has leveraged \$2.2 billion of new investment in this province. That tax credit now, under Bill 20: gone.

I would love for a member of the other side to get up and – let's look at the return on investment, let's look at the jobs created, let's look at the positive impact and argue: no; this was the right decision. I think that even in the Budget Address, Mr. Speaker, it shows that the Finance minister is either out of touch, doesn't get it, or doesn't care because it refers to these tax credits as boutique and complicated. I'm going to venture a guess that the Minister of Finance has never actually looked at the application process for these tax credits because one of the things that industry said to us was: "Make it as simple as possible. We don't have time to be filling out reams of paperwork." But you want the money to get into the hands of these businesses to be able to make those decisions.

What we do know, Mr. Speaker, is that the world is shrinking, everyone is going global, and we're competing. We're competing with every other country and jurisdiction on this planet, and where the folks over there don't get it – and I encourage them to go down to Silicon Valley – is that companies will tell you that one of the things that they want, in fact their number one wish list item, is talent. What we just heard from estimates today: the Minister of Advanced Education and this government are making significant cuts. The 3,000 tech spaces that we proposed, which are needed to help produce the talent for companies like Amazon, Facebook, Google, and Apple to come to Alberta: these guys have just gutted it, saying: "No, no, no. Clearly, we don't need those investments here."

A company called Google – you may have heard of it, Mr. Speaker – decided to invest in Alberta, their first-ever DeepMind lab outside of the U.K., and they came to little old Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Why? Because of investments that our government – and I will give credit to previous PC governments – made, investments in artificial intelligence and technology.

8:10

Now, this government talks a good game about how they're committing some new money to AI. I learned from the Advanced

Education minister today that despite the fact that in the budget documents it actually says postsecondaries, zero dollars of that is going toward postsecondaries. You know what, Mr. Speaker? We need to invest in the people of this province to ensure they have the skills so that we can attract those companies to come to Alberta. Not even that. I mean, there are companies like MobSquad out of Calgary that are doing incredible work, that are looking to other jurisdictions because they don't have the talent here in the province.

Again, I know the Leader of the Official Opposition has said this many times, but it's worth repeating. You know, what made Wayne Gretzky a brilliant hockey player is that he never went to where the puck was; he went to where the puck was going. These guys don't see where the world is going and the value of technology and supporting our tech industry through things like tax credits. You know, it's just disappointing.

I encourage the minister and all the folks over there to listen to the private sector. They're the ones who are the most outraged about these decisions, as they should be. They were creating jobs. It's – you know, frustrating is an understatement. I think that it's offensive – that's more of an appropriate word – to hear: well, that only helped a few hundred companies, and our corporate tax gift is going to help, whatever, many, many more. Well, okay. So far it's helped none. Actually, that's not true. It has helped them. It helped them free up money to invest in other jurisdictions, so kudos for helping Newfoundlanders and folks in Saskatchewan with their job numbers, but as far as here in Alberta, it's not. But these tax credits, albeit maybe smaller: a newer program that was starting to pick up momentum.

My point is this, Mr. Speaker. I mean, every company starts off really, really small. So these tax credits may have helped a small company that could be the next Google or Apple or Facebook. You know what? Uber was started in Calgary.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I believe I see the hon. Member for Red Deer-South has risen.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you. I'd just like to respond to my friend in terms of some of the comments he made. I really do appreciate, though, hearing my friends on the other side speak about their concern for the economy and for Alberta competitiveness. I know that when I was campaigning and knocking on doors of my neighbours and friends, they too were concerned about the economic damage and trials that they were encountering.

You know, I remember observing the tax policies of my friends opposite. Of course, the NDP campaigned on raising corporate income taxes by 20 per cent. They were quite hostile and quite pleased when they did raise corporate taxes. I expected that they felt that they would get a large amount of revenue to pay for some of their socialist programs that they wanted to pursue. But what really happened when we raised the corporate taxes by 20 per cent? Well, Mr. Speaker, corporate tax revenue actually fell. The corporate tax revenue in 2015, prior to them taking office, never recovered during the four years that they were in government to what it actually got to. I think they panicked. I think they saw the failed policy that they had, so they brought in these investor tax credits, the Alberta investor tax credit and the CITC.

I want to read a comment. They talked about how this was so simple and so good. One of the top tax law firms in the country, focused in Alberta, is a firm called Moodys Gartner. They're a firm that has locations in Calgary and Edmonton. They, you know, are really deep thinkers and analyze – they live and breathe tax policy. They looked at these new Alberta tax credits. This is an article in

2017, because, of course, these tax credits came about in 2017, after the NDP experienced how terribly they failed, essentially, in generating economic growth. The title of this article is *New Alberta Investment Tax Credits – Great for Business or Bureaucrats?* The article goes on and says:

The procedures for receiving these credits were released in January 2017. The real winners appear to [be] the bureaucrats who will be hired to administer these programs . . .

The AITC credits will work as follows. I'll put a frown . . . next to every step that involves interaction with a government employee:

1. Create a user account through the online application portal . . .
2. Register as a Venture Capital Corporation . . . or Eligible Business Corporation.

There's an interaction.

The government will evaluate your application and, if approved, [they] will let you know within 30 days of approval. The instructions even say that "program staff will thoroughly evaluate applications to ensure they meet eligibility requirements" . . .

3. Apply for approval to raise additional equity capital . . .

Again, a little frown-y face.

Once you have been approved in Step 2, you are required to submit an application to the government to ask for permission to raise additional equity capital.

4. Raise [additional] equity capital.
5. Apply for Tax Credit Certificates . . . Once you raise the equity capital, you are required to go back to the government by completing and submitting a "Share Purchase Information Form" to apply for Tax Credit Certificates on behalf of investors.

Lots of red tape here.

6. Delivery of Tax Credit Certificates.

I almost said red tape certificates.

The Tax Credit Certificates will be issued starting in January 2018. Once received, you'll be responsible for distributing them to your investors.

This is what Moodys Gartner kind of summarized. He said:

By now, the weaknesses of this program for Alberta business should be painfully obvious.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen to speak.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and talk about Bill 20 – it's a pretty hefty bill – the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019. I guess they call this an omnibus bill. Many years ago, when I was doing my master's degree in social work, I took a social policy course. In that course there was a key question. When you look at any kind of policy, you ask that question, and that question is: who benefits? Who doesn't? This bill – I thought: hey, I'm just going, you know, to go back to that class and do that analysis of who benefits and who doesn't by these proposed changes in legislation because I think that that can be very informative, and I think that that would support Albertans to understand this bill a bit more.

As my hon. colleagues have already shared, this bill ends the interactive digital media tax credit. It ends the capital investment tax credit. It ends the community economic tax credit. It ends the Alberta investor tax credit. It ends the scientific research and experimental development tax credit. So who benefits, who doesn't from that? Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, I would say that the people who are risking, people who are creative, people who are putting themselves out there are being hurt by this. Okay. The government is choosing to not benefit these people.

End education and tuition tax credits: oh, okay; well, that's students. Students getting their postsecondary degrees are going to be burdened even more heavily by the funds that they'll have to pay through student loans, maybe, or having to work extra jobs that may take away some of their ability to focus on their studies. Okay. So you're going to hurt young people who are trying to better themselves. Got it. That's who does not benefit.

8:20

The third is to repeal the city charters for Edmonton and Calgary and put a new local government fiscal framework act in place. Well, I mean, I think we've heard loud and clear from the two big-city mayors that they're not happy. They see this as not benefiting their cities at all, and in fact they feel betrayed. It's really a profound broken promise. The UCP, when they were campaigning, said that they would respect the agreement that our government created. No, they haven't. So the big cities aren't going to be benefiting.

Another thing this bill, this omnibus bill, does is suspend indexation of tax brackets for the income tax system. That means that everyone will be paying more in taxes. I know that the UCP does like to say that taxes aren't going up under their watch, but this very clearly shows that they are. They can try to split hairs, use special words to describe it, but for the average family the reality is that their taxes are going up. Again, you know, regular Albertans aren't going to benefit from this change in legislation.

They're going to end the lottery fund so that, you know, groups – I mean, I've volunteered at many a casino when my kids were playing soccer or other sports so that those teams could have support. Community groups: the lottery fund helped a lot of groups be viable. Child care centres: it helped them be able to give those extras. Community groups, kids' sports groups: they're not going to benefit.

End the access to the future fund and the Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund and the environmental protection and enhancement fund: ah, okay. So people who are trying to make Alberta a better place, people who are trying to help people, you know, if they have an early cancer diagnosis, for example, live in healthy environments: oh, okay. That's going to be taken away. They're not going to benefit from that.

Oh, yes, our environment: well, you know, that's not important to this government, so that, too, will be taken away. People who care, want to be conscious about how they live on the planet to make sure that we can be here for a long time, so our children, our grandchildren are really responsible stewards of our province: no, those people aren't going to benefit.

This one is really of special interest to me. The Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit are going to be rolled into one, and what that means is that fewer families will be supported. I'll talk about that a little bit more. But, again, who benefits from that? Well, I know who doesn't, and that is families with children.

The increase in tobacco tax: I guess smokers don't get any benefit from that, so they're not going to benefit because they'll have to pay more.

Finally, they'll amend the funding agreements for the LRT in Edmonton and Calgary. That means that those projects aren't going to go ahead as quickly, so that does not benefit people who take public transportation, people who do care about the environment, because we know that public transportation pollutes less than everyone in their individual cars. Again, that's another group.

And guess who does benefit from these kinds of programs? I think we know very clearly that with this UCP government it's about people who run wealthy corporations, with their \$4.7 billion giveaway to corporations. I mean, the elite stay elite. That's one of

the things, that's one of the reasons I got involved in politics, because Alberta – and it continues to this day – has the largest income inequality of any province in Canada. You know, there are certainly people who are at the very top, but there are also a lot of people at the bottom. We have that biggest discrepancy. We know a healthy society has a robust middle class, where there is tremendous equality and people have access to public programs and supports. Of course, this omnibus bill seems to be wanting to make all of that worse, make more inequality in our province. Of course, this concerns me greatly.

I want to talk about sort of the combination of the child tax benefit with – what's it called now? It's got a bit of a longer name – the Alberta family employment tax benefit or credit. What's happening is that it's going to be combined so that actually fewer Albertans are eligible. Actually, about 155,000 will receive less from that combination, and 55,000 won't actually receive anything at all. The thresholds have changed so that their incomes will be too high, so those families will not have the benefit of that program at all.

This is a concern to me, especially because of – you know, I must say that it was something that I was so proud of when we were government, that we cut child poverty rates in half. You know why? Largely because of the work that we did on the Alberta child benefit. It made a huge difference. This government's regressive policy now to combine it, increase the threshold is creating more families that will be in distress because they won't be able to access that program or they won't be able to receive that equivalent amount of money. It really was extraordinary what our government did.

You know, I think that on both sides of the House – I can't imagine that the UCP wouldn't want children to not live in poverty. We know that children are our future. We want to have them supported so that they can grow up to be healthy, engaged citizens so that they can contribute to their communities, their families. I mean, any politician would want those things. Children don't live in poverty by themselves. They live in poverty with their families, and their families need support. This combination is kicking a whole bunch of families off this program, and it's going to increase child poverty.

What's really important is that we had a dramatic plunge in child poverty rates, driven largely by both the provincial and the federal government benefits targeted at low-income families. Figures released in February of this year, 2019, show that Alberta's rate was cut in half between 2015 and 2017, falling from 10 per cent of children living in poverty to only 5 per cent. Economist Trevor Tombe, who the other side likes to quote quite a bit, says that the decline is largely due to the Canada child benefit introduced by the federal Liberal government and also the Alberta child benefit, a policy proposal first introduced by Premier Jim Prentice and later enacted under our NDP government. These two policies made a huge difference for families in Alberta.

So it's distressing to see that the UCP government is deciding that families, families with children will receive fewer services. This is part of this omnibus bill, and this is something that will create more inequality in our province and, certainly, more injustice and a lot of, I think, suffering for families who are struggling.

Myself, I'm a single mom. I have three sons. I mean, when I was younger, I struggled a lot, and I did depend on some supports from government. I know that I was in university during the Klein era, and there were grants for grad students that were seen as disadvantaged. That made the world of difference for me so that I could go on, because, you know, I was strapped financially. As we know from history, Premier Klein cut public programs in half, and those grants were taken halfway through my education. So I had an

extremely heavy burden, and it was very difficult for me to raise my children not under the poverty line.

I think this is really misguided, it's a mistake, and I really urge this UCP government to see who they're hurting, who's benefiting from their programs and who's not. They're telling us that, you know, kids should not live out of poverty. They seem to be pushing them further into poverty, and that certainly distresses me.

8:30

Something that I want to focus on, too, is the Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund. I certainly have, you know, again, personal experience with this. I mean, I was diagnosed with leukemia, I guess it's over a year ago. I was treated and, happily, things seem to be going well for me. But I still have a bit of a road to go before I'm cured. I'm not sure. They just sort of follow you; they won't say that you're cured. But it is a type of leukemia that is curable, so I'm very grateful for that.

So I have some sensitivity, you know, when programs like this, the Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund, are cut because it makes a dramatic difference in people's lives and can help people know – I mean, one of the big challenges about cancer is diagnosis. People may not be feeling well. I didn't feel well for a long time, but I just thought: oh, it's because I'm the Minister of Seniors and Housing and I'm super busy all the time. I just thought I was burned out, so I kept minimizing it all the time. I'm so fortunate that I did have some people close to me that could see that something was wrong beyond burnout.

If we have healthy communities, healthy environments, if we have practitioners – like, I had been to my doctor, my GP, three times during that time but never got a diagnosis. Well, this cancer prevention legacy fund works with primary health care and helps physicians, nurses, people in the community know what some of the warning signs are. It creates more awareness about the things that could be done to diagnose properly. I mean, I'm fortunate that I was diagnosed, but I think some people aren't diagnosed because people don't have enough information. This fund actually created more awareness in the community and helped people, you know, live healthier lives.

Some cancers, of course, are caused by lifestyle issues. Leukemia is kind of just, you know, a mutation of the cells. It's not so much about how you live your life. But if you have skin cancer or, you know, depending on if you drink or what you eat, there are some lifestyle issues. Again, this fund helps people to understand that, helps medical professionals with knowing what to do, and actually helps by encouraging positive lifestyle choices in the community.

They're made up of a team of innovative leaders, scientists, and public health experts who specialize in cancer prevention.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The individual who caught my eye was Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very engaged by the speaker from Edmonton-Riverview in terms of her analysis of the question of who benefits from a policy versus who does not benefit from a policy, which I think is a very good question to be asking. It's a good, basic question in terms of intent and direction of a policy.

I just want to speak about the fact that one aspect of this bill is the deindexing of the taxes in the province of Alberta, something that's often referred to as bracket creep. Last night I had an opportunity in this House to read some of the speeches by the Premier when he was actually in the House of Commons

commenting on the nature of these kinds of deindexing policies, particularly ones that happened when he was in opposition, and the fact that he was very concerned about those most vulnerable people who do not benefit from these tax breaks. In his speeches he mentioned single parents and people who are of low income and so on, and he referred to this type of tax break as “insidious.” So his own description of the behaviour of his own minister, I gather, is that it’s insidious behaviour.

I wonder if the former speaker might take a moment to reflect on a quote that I’d come across in which the Member for Central Peace-Notley asked the Finance minister yesterday about those tax creeps. At the time the minister was quoted as saying that this will not result in additional taxes, that if you earn the same amount this year as next, you will pay the same amount. However, Professor Trevor Tombe from the University of Calgary responded to that statement made by the minister in this House with this answer:

Misleading answer, for (at least) three reasons:

1. Anyone [with education] credits will pay more tax, even if their income remains the same;
2. Most people’s income will rise [because of] inflation; they’ll pay more tax;
3. Everyone will pay more than they were going to under prior rules.

He goes on then to clarify that

inflation wouldn’t have previously increased anyone’s . . . tax burden. Now it does. So if your “real” income doesn’t change, your taxes now go up.

So an esteemed professor, who is often in fact quoted by the Premier and other members opposite, is suggesting that the Minister of Finance made a misleading statement in the House the other day, and the point of his misleading statement was to suggest that there are no people who will be negatively affected by this bill.

It brings us back to the question that the member just reflected on: who is benefiting, and who is not? The esteemed professor is saying that the minister is not speaking in a way which we may refer to as truthful in this House. He is saying that his speech yesterday in answer to questions in question period was misleading because indeed there are people who are going to suffer from this bill. Clearly, this government is picking winners and losers. Of course, as they always do, they seek out the most vulnerable people and attack those vulnerable people and, in this case, take money away from those most vulnerable people.

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the Minister of Transportation on a point of order.

Point of Order

Imputing False Motives

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), imputing false motives to another member of the House. Now, there were about 10, 12, 20 examples that I could have used in the speech that was going on. I tried to be tolerant because the member is performing, though, clearly, accuracy wasn’t the biggest part of his performance. He just actually said that a member of this House seeks out weak Albertans in order to cause them harm. That might not have been the exact words, but that was pretty close to what I just heard, and I think that falls exactly under the definition of imputing false motives to another member of the House. I would ask, respectfully, that you have him apologize and withdraw those remarks.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford in rebuttal on the point of order.

Mr. Feehan: Mr. Speaker, I don’t believe that we have a point of order here. I think it’s a reasonable debate as to whether or not the most vulnerable are attacked by policies presented by this government. I think it is quite within my right to declare that the government acts intentionally. Although I will concede, if the member opposite is willing to stand up and say that the government does not act intentionally. Then I will apologize. But given that I believe that they do, I don’t believe that there is a point of order in this case.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. With regard to this point of order I would like to take a moment and just remind the House that I do believe – actually, I’m going to just take the opportunity and say this. I think we are beginning to come close with regard to the line, not necessarily just on this issue per se but also with regard to moving from third person to a more direct discussion of individual members. I would say, though, that I would like to take this opportunity to caution the House.

With regard to this specific point of order, I think that everyone in the House should of course avoid implying that a member is intentionally trying to harm or is causing harm to Albertans. I think that that is a fair assessment of my recollection of what was stated, not having the benefit of the Blues. I still do think that perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford may want to just, if anything, go back and restructure the language that he was trying to make with regard to the point that he was discussing.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I accept the judgment of the chair. I ask that my comments be withdrawn, and I apologize to the House.

8:40

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: I’d still like to hear the member who was speaking speak about how the vulnerable are being hurt by this bill, which I think is the point of the discussion at hand, so if I could defer to the speaker to respond.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, hon. colleague, for this. Of course, you know, both he and I are social workers. Both of us have our master’s in social work. I think both of us got involved in politics because we care about people in the community. We care about the most vulnerable, and certainly we stand very deeply in our shoes to make sure that their voices are heard. I think in the political arena . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is always a pleasure to rise here in this place and speak at this hour. I’ve got to say that it occurs to me that we have over 30 people joining us tonight in the gallery, which, honestly, is more than we sometimes get during question period, so I think it really speaks to how important these two omnibus pieces of legislation are, how important and how impactful this is going to be for so many Albertans, so many workers right across this entire province.

It’s something that I think is going to be very important because we see with Bill 20, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, that it’s a bait-and-switch plan. It’s a plan that is going to make Albertans pay more and get less. It’s a plan that attacks the most vulnerable

Albertans. It's a plan that makes life more expensive. It's something that is, I think, Mr. Speaker, not very well thought out, frankly.

I mean, we see it go after multiple tax credits that were creating good jobs. We see the digital media tax credit disappear, we see the Alberta investor tax credit disappear, we see the capital investment tax credit disappear, the scientific research and development tax credits disappear, all tax credits that were targeted, creating jobs. Instead what we get is a \$4.7 billion handout to the wealthiest corporations. Mr. Speaker, instead of actually using and continuing programs that the NDP government brought in that were out there making jobs, helping workers get back to work, the government has decided that it is their prerogative and a higher priority for them to give money away to their friends and donors and the wealthiest corporations. I think that's something that's too bad. I think that we were doing a good job of trying to diversify the economy, but it appears as though this may not be a priority of the new Conservative government.

We also see that a number of funds were eliminated, Mr. Speaker. We see the access to the future fund, which is worth approximately \$58 million, the environmental protection and enhancement fund, worth approximately \$150 million, the Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund, worth about \$451 million, and the Alberta lottery fund, worth about \$52 million. The shocking thing: all of these funds have been eliminated and brought into general revenue.

I know that the government is going to get up and say, if they do get up tonight: well, we're still funding a number of these commitments through general revenue. Well, what they've opened the door to doing is raiding these funds – well, they won't exist anymore – raiding the assets that were there, raiding the investments we were making for the future of Alberta. We saw the Conservatives do this decades ago with the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, and we're seeing them do it again with the Alberta lottery fund, where they're going after communities, communities like playground organizations, parent organizations, community leagues, Mr. Speaker. They're going after these types of groups, and those are the families, those are the groups that are going to suffer from this.

We see the Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund, which now contributes \$25 million a year to cancer research and cancer awareness – those are the types of organizations that we are now opening the door to being raided by general revenue, to no longer being funded properly by the government, to no longer having this ongoing support, no longer having responsible investments so that the funds can continue to grow and can continue to sustain these investments in important projects in our communities like the access to the future fund, which enabled Albertans to get higher education, or the environmental protection and enhancement fund, which protects the air we breathe. These are the types of projects the Conservatives do not think are important. It's clear they don't think they're important, Mr. Speaker, because they've eliminated them and raided them and put them into general revenue. They've opened the door so that they could take that money away, out of the pockets of Albertans, and that's something that I think is shameful.

We're seeing them raise taxes on every single Albertan. The average Alberta family, Mr. Speaker, every single worker's family that's in the gallery today: all of them will see an increase of \$600 a year just in personal income taxes. This government ran on no new taxes. This government ran on jobs, economy, and pipeline. Instead, what they've done is they've gone and given \$4.7 billion away to the wealthiest corporations, and they've reached into the pockets of Alberta families and taken \$600 out of those wallets. That's what's shameful about this bill. That's what's shameful about what this government is doing.

They don't understand how they are hurting families. They don't understand how workers are seeing the brunt of this attack. They don't understand how this is something that is not supported by Albertans. It's not what Albertans voted for. It wasn't even in their platform, Mr. Speaker. When conservative organizations are calling it a sneaky tax and a sneaky raise in income taxes, that's how you know you've messed up as conservative. That's how you know you've done a bad job, when people on both the left and the right think you messed up. That's simply the case when they're taking \$600 away from every single family right here in this bill, right here in black and white.

It's such a shame because we see time and time again the Conservatives talking about how they have this huge mandate, how they have this platform that they're going through with, and we're seeing so many things that just weren't in the platform, so many things that they just simply did not talk about and now have sprung on Albertans, now have decided to attack Albertans with, and not shown to anybody. They didn't talk about it through their so-called consultation, Mr. Speaker. They didn't talk about it through their campaign. They didn't talk about these issues at all. Instead, what they decided to do was that they're now going to bring them forward. They're now going to make families hurt. They're now going to make their constituents pay more, and that's a shame.

We see the Municipal Affairs changes, Mr. Speaker. We see them ripping up agreements with cities. We see them legislating away long-term funding agreements. We see agreements like the green line for the LRT in Calgary here today. We see that they actually have a clause that they can tear up the agreement if they want. I know the Premier has been up a number of times in this House saying that, well, he funded this line, and he's so proud of the work that he did in the federal government funding this line. But, then, why did he put in this bill and why did he allow his ministers to put in this bill a clause that lets them tear up this same deal?

That's the question Calgarians will be asking today. That's the question that Albertans will be asking. Why are they unilaterally setting decisions on how the conditions of an Edmonton LRT agreement will be made without even going to the negotiating table yet? Why are they telling municipalities how the funding is going to work? Why are they telling them how they're going to pay for the transit system, what the framework has to look like, Mr. Speaker?

That's not how you negotiate in good faith. That's not how you have a discussion about what we want to invest in. That's not how you have a discussion about what's best for our province. What that is is a heavy-handed government that does not care about the best interests of Albertans, Mr. Speaker. They may get up, and I hope they do and speak to that. But it shows very clearly that these ministers and this government don't understand the needs of Albertans. They don't care.

What they're doing is that they're trying to make life more expensive. They're trying to make life more expensive while giving \$4.7 billion away to the wealthiest corporations and creating no new jobs, Mr. Speaker, not a single new job. In fact, this government has actually lost jobs since they brought in the \$4.7 billion handout. They've lost 27,000 jobs. That's what's so shocking.

What's so shocking is that they claim they are the fiscal masterminds, they claim that they are going to balance the budget and all these things, Mr. Speaker, but in fact when we look at this bill and when we look at their fiscal documents in black and white, they're on track to over \$90 billion in debt. Their deficit is larger than ours ever would have been this year.

And we're seeing shocking things. We're seeing that they really don't understand how this will hurt families. They really don't understand. They've gotten up in this House and spoken to it, Mr.

Speaker. They themselves are talking about how this isn't actually an increase in personal income taxes. That's right here in this omnibus bill, the increases to personal income taxes.

When every single economist in this province agrees that this is an increase to personal income taxes because they deindexed it, they're going to say: well, no, no, no; we're just pausing the indexation. Well, every single economist, the ones they've been quoting included, agree that this is actually a raise to taxes because it costs families \$600 more a year – \$600 more per family – \$600 million over four years for the province, Mr. Speaker. It's what's so shocking.

What's so shocking is that this government insists on misleading, that this government insists on not telling the whole truth to Albertans because they are afraid of what will come, they are afraid of being able to speak openly about this. That's something that's really unfortunate. That's something that's really sad, I think.

8:50

We're here as the opposition. We're here, and there are Albertans. I think there are more Albertans than when I looked up the first time, Mr. Speaker. There must be 35 or more Albertans in the gallery here today that are hearing and understanding how this affects them, how this affects their pocketbooks, how this affects their rights, how this affects their families, because we understand that you don't create jobs by giving \$4.7 billion away to the wealthiest corporations. We saw this government try, and in fact what happened is that Husky put the money overseas and then laid off workers right in Calgary.

That's not what Albertans voted for. Albertans voted for jobs, and this government has failed to deliver, Mr. Speaker. This government is failing on their promises. They're failing on what they promised Albertans, and families are realizing it. Families are seeing the costs, they're seeing the problems, and they're seeing that these ministers and this government are tearing up agreements, are delaying funding, and are moving rapidly ahead with projects that will hurt this province, hurt our communities.

We see all of these things, like how they're ending the screen-based production grant in culture, Mr. Speaker. That's right here in the economic development and trade portions of Bill 20. What we're going to watch and what we've already been watching over the last several months is film companies and operations move out of Alberta. They've been fleeing to other provinces. They've been fleeing to other jurisdictions. And those are good jobs. Those are good jobs that are diversified.

But instead of having them right here in Alberta, instead of having different income streams for Albertans, instead of having different income streams for the provincial government, and instead of having all of these different programs and different services that we would be able to invest in and be proud of, what this government has done is that they've given \$4.7 billion away to the wealthiest corporations and then driven investment right out of this province. They've driven investment right out, and that's going to cost every single worker, Mr. Speaker. That's going to cost every single family.

It's what happens when you simply don't understand what this means for families and what happens when you don't understand what a tax actually is. Everybody else agrees that this government is raising taxes except for this government. So who should we believe: every single economist, every single columnist, every single reporter? Or should we believe the government, which has a history of misleading Albertans, Mr. Speaker? Should we believe the government, which has a history of tearing up agreements with the city of Edmonton, with the city of Calgary? Should we agree with a government that has a history of legislating away the rights

of its own employees, legislating away the rights of its own workers? Is that who we should believe?

I don't think Albertans believe so. I don't think Albertans will fall for the same tricks over and over again, Mr. Speaker. I think they know better. I think we know better. Government members, I hope, are hearing some of this and are starting to understand what the implications of this are. I hope the government members understand why it's so damaging to try and go in and legislate agreements and not negotiate in good faith, why it's so damaging for government members to go in and try and act unilaterally without listening to both sides of the table.

I think those are very important things because what this Premier didn't tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that every single Albertan will pay more for the services they count on, every single Albertan will suffer more for the services they count on, while this government will give \$4.7 billion away to the wealthiest corporations. It's something that is so shocking. It's something that is so shameful, that we can see them just simply not understanding the ramifications, not understanding how critical this is, and not understanding how important this is for families because, again, they're going after every facet.

That's the best part, I guess, if you can call it that, of an omnibus bill like this. The best part of an omnibus bill like this, Mr. Speaker, is that they literally go after almost every pocket and every community. When you look at things like – I really can't believe they dissolved the cancer prevention legacy fund. That is shocking, that they don't think that cancer prevention is something that they need to invest in, that they think they can raid that and take it into general revenue. Albertans will be watching. Albertans will realize and they will understand the implications of that.

[The Speaker in the chair]

We can see the Alberta lottery fund being ripped away and torn apart and, instead, brought into general revenue so that those investments that go into communities, those investments that go to families, those investments that go into community leagues and playgrounds, those are the investments that will no longer be made after this Conservative government is done tearing them apart. We've seen them do this before with other funds, Mr. Speaker. We've seen them do this before with the heritage fund just a few decades ago. We know that this is the type of thing that the Conservatives are capable of. It's the type of thing that they're willing to move forward with.

I think it speaks to values. It speaks to the types of values that we want to bring forward. We want to have a government that fights for affordability. We want to have a government that fights for jobs. We want to have a government that keeps their promises, Mr. Speaker. Instead, what we see, in my opinion, is a government that has done none of those things. They have broken their promises on taxes; they have raised taxes. They have broken their promises on jobs; they have created no new jobs. They have broken their promises on investing in communities by giving \$4.7 billion away to the wealthiest corporations.

That's what's so shocking. It's almost shameful, Mr. Speaker, because instead of families getting what they voted for, they're going to see a \$600 per year increase in their personal income taxes. That's what's so shocking, because families did not vote for that. Families thought they were going to be voting for new jobs. Instead, they lost 27,000 jobs. Families thought they were voting for more affordability. Instead, what they're seeing right here in black and white in this bill is more expensive products, making their lives more expensive.

I mean, certainly, I think we need to vote against this. We need to see the importance of this.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I believe the hon. Member for Red Deer-South rose first.

Mr. Stephan: It's one of the advantages, Mr. Speaker, of being able to see the countdown.

The irony of what was said is not lost on me. I want to just kind of repeat a few phrases that the member opposite said. He talked about businesses fleeing Alberta. Certainly, when I was practising law, I knew of many business activities that unfortunately fled Alberta during the tenure of the government over there attacking workers. They actually indicated that this government was attacking workers, yet during their tenure there were tens of thousands fewer private-sector jobs when they finished their term than when they started. That is a profound failure. It's a profound failure, but it's also a tragedy because this represents individuals and families and real hardship. I know I was able to, you know, meet some of those families during the campaign where Albertans overwhelmingly rejected the ideology of the prior government.

I want to just continue reading a few comments that I didn't quite get the opportunity to finish from Moodys Gartner, which, again, is one of the top tax law firms in the country, their evaluation of the NDP tax credits, that really they brought in as a response to try and stem businesses fleeing our province. This is what he says in summary of the Alberta investor tax credit:

Heavy bureaucratic involvement in the process, government discretion to refund or not, government selection of eligible businesses and industries, and short sunset of the program. All of these issues lead to a program that is unlikely to attract any new business to Alberta.

They go through a number of the red tape steps with the corporate investment tax credit, and this is kind of what the summary says at the end:

Similar to the [Alberta tax credit] the [corporate investment tax credit] program is fraught with bureaucracy, is short term in nature, is not refundable . . . is overly prescriptive and full of unnecessary reporting steps.

This is kind of the concluding paragraph. I think it's really good.

The real winners under these two tax credit programs appear to be the government employees who will be hired to administer the programs. While the use of investment tax credits can often be good to stimulate economic investment, the AITC and CITC programs developed by the Alberta government are a textbook example of the creation of a program that is overly bureaucratic, ridiculously uncertain . . . and condescending. Apparently the Alberta government,

being the NDP government,

knows better than the marketplace which investments are worthy of a credit and which ones are not. Very disappointing.

9:00

There was a follow-up article, and it's titled Alberta Investor Tax Credit Program: Even More Bad News. This is a really disturbing element of the Alberta investor tax credit. It says that there was ministerial discretion, based on public policy, as to whether or not you got the credit. This is the concern: "At face value, it would appear that any technology company that might not share the same views on public policy as the reigning government could be disqualified from eligibility for the AITC program." Disappointing. I find it very disappointing, actually, and concerning that the NDP government would inject into an investor tax credit program a necessity to comply with their world view, you know, their socialist world view. We know that in their constitution their goal is to establish and maintain a democratic socialist government in Alberta. We saw the awful, awful failure that that NDP government inflicted on the rest of Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) has expired.

We are back on the main bill. I might just add, to the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, if he hasn't already suggested that he might do so, that it would be reasonable for him to table the documents he referred to.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen to join the debate tonight.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure all the members in the gallery that the dream of social democracy is still alive. We're only in a four-year pause – well, possibly even less – but we are still working to make sure that we achieve our dreams of social democracy here in Alberta. I'm sure that we will get there, the shining city on the hill, as Tommy Douglas used to talk about it. It will be built here in Alberta one day. I have complete confidence in that fact.

There are many things in this bill that I wanted to talk about. Unfortunately, I only have 15 minutes, Mr. Speaker, so I want to focus those things on what I'm personally interested in, and that's video games and the interactive digital media tax credit. Now, I was really excited when we brought in this interactive digital media tax credit. At the time, when we argued in favour of that tax credit, when we brought that legislation before the House, I admitted my penchant for playing video games. Given the statistics approximately two-thirds of all Canadians play video games. Chances are that some of the members here in the House right now are probably playing video games on their laptops or phones as we speak.

The interesting fact, Mr. Speaker, is that Canada has the third-largest video game industry in the world, behind only the United States and Japan. The reason that video games have exploded in Canada is because our major competitors – Ontario, Quebec, and B.C. – all have interactive digital media tax credits in those provinces. Those programs have been incredibly successful. The latest data that I was able to get from the Entertainment Software Association, which is the industry association that represents video game makers here in Canada, is that there are over 20,000 people across the country employed in the creation of video games. The majority of them are in the province of Quebec. The bulk of the remainder are divided up evenly between Ontario and British Columbia. A very, very small number of video game creators are in the other provinces in the country.

We tried to address that fact with the creation of the interactive digital media tax credit. There's no reason that a video game company couldn't set up shop here in Alberta as opposed to British Columbia or Ontario or Quebec. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things that would recommend Alberta for the creation of video games. Certainly, we have a low cost of living, a highly skilled workforce, and weather that can't be beat. It just makes sense to set up a video game company here in Alberta if we levelled the playing field, which the interactive digital media tax credit did. It levelled the playing field. It created similar conditions for video game companies here in Alberta that exist in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec.

As soon as we introduced that interactive digital media tax credit, a number of companies set up shop here in Edmonton. I know that one of the former members of BioWare, which is a very well known – world-wide known – video game company, created many successful video games. This person set up his own shop here in Edmonton. A number of other companies set up shop shortly after that, Mr. Speaker.

You know, we were well on our way to fostering a successful video game industry here in Alberta, and the members opposite seem to think that those aren't real jobs and decided to scrap this

digital media tax credit and send all of those jobs to Quebec, which is really strange, Mr. Speaker, because we've certainly heard from the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, the party chairman, how concerned he is about resources fleeing Alberta and going to Quebec. He thinks it's grossly unfair how the country is structured so that so many resources are taken out of Alberta and given to Quebec, and here he is with the interactive digital media tax credit repeal doing exactly that.

He's telling companies that they're not welcome to set up shop here in Alberta and that it only makes sense to move to Quebec and set up shop there, which is a real shame because I know that there are many young people in the province – I certainly speak to them in my constituency all the time – who are enthusiastic gamers and certainly would love the opportunity to grow up and create games for other people to love as much as they've been able to play the games that they've loved as children. It really breaks my heart, Mr. Speaker, and it's disappointing to the young people that I talk to that they won't get that opportunity under this regime to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to debunk some of the myths that continue to be perpetrated by the members opposite around taxation and the impact on economic development because, you know, we've heard from the Finance minister and we continue to hear from the front bench that all you have to do is lower the general tax rate and that will spur businesses. My colleague the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has been quite clear that you could have a tax rate of zero, a corporate tax rate of zero, heaven forbid, and that wouldn't do anything to promote start-ups in this province, right? You need to have a tax credit structure to incent start-up of new companies, and the general tax rate does nothing to promote the start-up of new companies.

We can see that when we look at the evidence from our competing provinces. British Columbia has a corporate tax rate of 12 per cent. Ontario has a corporate tax rate of 11 and a half per cent. Quebec has a corporate tax rate of 11.7 per cent, Mr. Speaker. The video game industry is thriving in those three provinces and suffering in Alberta not because of the general corporate tax rate but because this government is repealing the interactive digital media tax credit and slamming the door on the creation and growth of an exciting industry.

I also want to talk about personal income taxes because, of course, we continue to hear from the members opposite that personal income taxes incent people to move around wherever the tax rate is most favourable. Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, we know that that's not true because all of these video game companies are very successful at attracting some of the most talented and productive members of the video game industry from all around the world, and the income tax rates in British Columbia and Ontario are higher than ours. Most interestingly, the lowest tax bracket in Quebec is actually higher than our highest tax bracket, and that's where most of the jobs in the video game industry are being created.

So to continue to hear these myths perpetrated by the members opposite that corporate tax rates and personal tax rates are somehow the magic wand that needs to be waved in order to create new industries here in the province is very concerning to me. It fundamentally disregards all of the evidence that's plain to see here in Canada.

9:10

I now want to talk about what's at stake for Alberta. We've talked about the number of jobs that currently exist in the video game industry, 20,000 jobs. You know, the members opposite have killed 27,000 jobs in only six months in government, which is a track record that I certainly wouldn't be proud of. They are intent on killing even more by scrapping this interactive digital media tax

credit. The video game industry is worth about \$6 billion to the entire country of Canada. The members opposite are looking at this \$6 billion pie and saying: "Ah, we don't want a piece of that. Why don't we let Ontario and Quebec have that money? We'll continue to put all of our bets on lowering corporate taxes and hoping for the best." We know that that won't be successful.

Mr. Speaker, I have to emphasize that these jobs that are in the video game industry are good jobs. The average salary in the video game industry is approximately \$75,000 a year, which is well above the average salary that Albertans make. Certainly, right now in Alberta, with the economic conditions that we're experiencing, there are lots of people who would love to have a job that paid them \$75,000 a year. Members opposite are saying: "No. We are going to deny them that opportunity because we just don't believe in tax credits." They're opposed to anything that the NDP has ever done. "So we're going to scrap the tax credit, and we don't care about the consequences to the people of Alberta." It's disappointing to me.

Now, you know, we've got a lot of labour representatives in the gallery watching tonight. I do have to couch my praise of the video game industry with concerns about the poor unionization rates in the video game industry. Certainly, we've seen a number of cases, particularly in the United States, of poor treatment of video game employees. They work really, really long hours for extended periods of time, they can be fired at a moment's notice, and they're not able to get the kinds of benefits – pensions, those kinds of job protections – that come from being in a union. Now, Mr. Speaker, it's heartening to me to see the move towards unionization that's taking hold in the video game industry in the United States. It's my hope that the video game industry here in Canada follows suit. Of course, we won't have to worry about that in Alberta because with the scrapping of the digital media tax credit, we won't have a video game industry.

I wonder if perhaps the threat of having more unionized workers in Alberta, regardless of what industry it is, is one of the reasons that's driving them to scrap this tax credit. We know that the members opposite are ideologically opposed to unions, and certainly we've seen a number of pieces of legislation since the April election that have been designed to destroy the power that unions could have. Regardless of the problems with the labour conditions in the video game industry, these are highly skilled, highly paid, valuable jobs that a lot of people would seek, and I'm very disappointed that this government sees fit to slam the door on the future economic development of Alberta. I will mourn all of the potential video games that will not be born because this government has chosen to scrap the digital media tax credit.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would move to adjourn debate on Bill 20.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 21 Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019

[Adjourned debate October 29: Mr. Schow]

The Speaker: Hon. members, is anyone wishing to join the debate on Bill 21? I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 21, Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019, once again a very ironically named bill considering the scope and the breadth by which it revokes and claws back both the rights of workers here in the province of Alberta and the ability to properly fund people with severely disabled, handicapped supports. It's just

another gigantic omnibus bill, the likes of which I have not seen in the considerable time that I've spent here in this Legislature.

I would like to just spend some time to talk about what this bill seeks to do in terms of giving sweeping powers to the government in regard to collective bargaining here in the province of Alberta. You know, I'm not a lawyer, but I give fair warning that many of the aspects of this bill and the powers that it gives the government to roll back collective bargaining, to exclude individuals from being part of a collective bargaining unit, to bring in replacement workers during strikes and so forth are unconstitutional provisions that this government is trying to bring forward. They've been struck down in other jurisdictions across the country, so not only are these elements of this bill in terms of collective bargaining vexatious, but we also know that you end up in a legal situation that has been proven in many other jurisdictions to be against the law, to be unconstitutional, and to move against and to move backwards the right to collectively bargain here in the province of Alberta.

You know, we have these rules in place for a reason. By allowing workers to negotiate their working conditions, to negotiate wages and benefits, this is part of the fabric of what makes a society stable, that ensures that essential services will be provided to the population and ensures peace and security, quite frankly. We've learned over many, many years, the more than 100 years of collective bargaining action here in the province of Alberta and across the country, that this has evolved into a way by which you can resolve and move forward in a constructive manner. These provisions in this bill are very much the opposite. They're regressive, and I believe that, as I say, they will be sought as illegal and unconstitutional as well.

Some of the individual aspects to this bill that I think are particularly vexatious: first of all, allowing the government to have greater oversight over collective bargaining with public-sector employees, including the length of the agreements, the use of salary surveys, and to determine who gets to collectively bargain or not as well. It allows certain individuals like budget officers, systems analysts, auditors, and so forth to be removed from collective bargaining units. I mean, again, I'm not an expert in history, but this is particularly, I think, a historic move backwards in regard to collective bargaining and to unions. To exclude individuals from being able to join those units, to provide for their families, to make sure that they have the wages and the benefits that they deserve, and to be able to bargain for those things, I think that is particularly onerous and very disappointing as well.

What this provides is the framework for this government to engage in wage rollbacks. We saw the Premier of Alberta yesterday saying quite emphatically and clearly that this government here in the province of Alberta wants to roll back public-sector wages and benefits across a broad swath of our public service, including nurses, teachers, public service workers, social workers, and the like, right? More than 180,000 people that are represented under a collective bargaining process are having those rights, which are constitutionally guaranteed, put at risk by this bill.

9:20

Again, we know that over the last number of years fair and open tables for bargaining is a precondition to ensure the safety and the integrity of the essential services that nurses provide, that teachers provide, that social workers provide, that the police, correctional officers – you name it – provide, by far the largest working force represented here in the province of Alberta.

You hear some language about division, talking about who is Albertan or who is less Albertan or whatever. The sheer volume of the number of people that they're talking about here with these wage rollbacks – illegal wage rollbacks – represents the largest

working population in the whole province. I mean, who is more or less of an Albertan than the teacher that works in the local grade 2 classroom or the nurse that's on the night shift here tonight in one of our hospitals or the correctional officer that works weekends under very difficult circumstances, right? We know that the basic fabric of who we are as a society depends on these essential services. They're there for a reason. They're not a liability to the budget. They are an investment to who we are as Albertans, an investment to ensure that we move forward as a modern industrial society that pays fair living wages and contributes to the economy in all ways.

Each of these individuals lives in our communities. These 180,000 or more individuals live in our communities, they have mortgages, and they buy food in the local shops and contribute to the economy. The economy is not just a single industry or a single corporation or a handful of those things. It is the collection of all of us, 4 million plus individuals contributing to the economy in a fair and reasonable way.

I know that in education, for example, I would say that in the majority of the municipal counties in this province the education system is the number one employer, Mr. Speaker, for not just teachers but support staff and custodial workers and bus drivers and so forth. So when you had, for example, an economic downturn here in this province due to the energy prices across the globe, many of those were jobs that helped to sustain a family when someone in the family might have lost a job or had reduced hours from working in the energy industry. You don't choose to double down on those aspects of our economy. A teacher's job is no less a contributing factor to the strength and the health of our economy than someone who works in a natural gas plant. That person is contributing just as much. They're contributing to education, they're contributing to that aspect of investing in our children, and they spend money in our shops just like any other member in our society.

This whole idea of making choices around making cuts to the public service: that's exactly what they are. They're choices that are being made by this government, and they are choices that are being driven by a significant reduction in this government's capacity to generate revenue. They've made choices about reducing corporate tax by \$4.7 billion. They've made other reductions to make it so that it's difficult to pay for all the public services that we know and expect and need to run our province.

When you hear the arguments – you'll hear them on both sides. I've heard them ad nauseam from the members opposite, that this is the only route that we have left to us, that we're in an economic crisis and that we all have to tighten our belts and so forth. Well, you know, we can make choices around those things. Certainly, our government had a path to balance, and we had a path to reduce deficit. I mean, don't forget that this same budget that has produced this offspring of Bill 21, which is so onerous, also produced a significant deficit, I think \$8.7 billion in deficit, right?

Mr. Nielsen: Two billion dollars higher.

Mr. Eggen: Two billion dollars higher than the last one that we posted, right?

You know, there are ways by which we can achieve balance over time but not compromise the social and economic fabric of who we are as Albertans. Part of who we are is that we look after each other, so we build institutions like public health care. Public health care is a symbol and a manifestation of the values that we together hold as Albertans, as people, that we look after each other and we're willing to contribute collectively in order to ensure the health and the security and the safety of ourselves, our neighbours, and our families, right? These are expenses – yes, they are – but they're

investments as well, Mr. Speaker. To look at them as anything but a way by which we move forward as a society I think is reductive, and it goes against not just logic and reasoning but against the values of who we are as Albertans as well.

Like I said before, I find it difficult to, you know, get behind any legislation that comes forward that is clearly illegal and unconstitutional. But in this case, considering all of the other ways by which it makes a direct attack on the collective bargaining process and all of the essential services that those 180,000-plus workers do represent, I find this bill being brought forward here this evening to be particularly troublesome.

Other aspects of Bill 21, just to list them, to assure Albertans that certainly these other aspects are just as difficult and onerous as well: the suspension of the indexation of benefits to assured income for the severely handicapped, income supports, and the seniors' lodge program. I mean, it feels like I'm reading something out of a 19th-century Dickens novel, you know, with cutting the assured income for the severely handicapped and cuts to seniors, right?

Again, reducing or ending the tuition freeze, that we put in place to ensure that going to school for postsecondary education is affordable for our population; increasing the student loan interest by a percentage – as we calculated earlier this afternoon, this represents at least an \$1,800 extra expense on a typical student loan being paid over 10 years based on a \$30,000 loan – ending the regulated rate option for electricity here in the province of Alberta: I mean, the scope of this. [interjection] Yeah. Prices go up, you get less, and you end up paying significantly more as well.

Allowing the minister to change regulations for how municipalities pay for policing. Again, you know, the minister has been jumping up and down, saying that it ain't so about this whole issue, but it seems pervasive. Here's another clue that paying for policing is going to get a whole lot more expensive for municipalities. Where do municipalities get their money from? Municipal taxes. Where do municipal taxes come from? Your pocket, right?

I mean, there's a whole range of things here. I wanted to particularly focus on the direct attack that this Bill 21 has in store for workers here in the province of Alberta. You know, we all need to get our heads past this idea of adversaries between workers and so forth and this government. It's important to just go back to the first principles of why we have a public education system, why we have a public health care system, why we provide social services for people at various stages in their lives – to ensure security and good health for yourselves and your families when you need it – and remind ourselves that that is a sacred responsibility that is generated from this very Chamber. For any of us to compromise that – I mean, certainly, you can negotiate, right? It's good. I was part of that as a government over the last four years. But the key to negotiating at the table is to bargain in good faith. You do that, and all things will follow, every step of the way.

I think about something, again, that was eliminated by this government – we were debating it today – the classroom improvement fund, which was generated purely at the bargaining table in good faith, to ensure that teachers and school boards could have a say in how to improve classroom conditions for students and for workers, right? That was a good thing.

9:30

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise in this place. Of course, again, it's a pleasure to hear from my colleague from Edmonton-North West. He's been here for a very

long time, so he's seen a few of these types of attacks on workers. He's seen a few of these types of attacks by Conservatives on Albertans. I think it's something that's really important that we hear about. I think it's a very important perspective we had. I know he talked a little bit at the end about how it's so interesting that we see families paying more, communities paying more right out of their pocketbook and, at the same time, we're seeing attacks and the creation of American-style health care right across this province. That's the type of thing that I think is so shocking when we look at these omnibus bills, especially this one when we look at this omnibus bill, how pervasive it is, that it attacks so many different programs. It attacks so many different people while, at the same time, not only attacking workers, it also attacks people on AISH, also attacks people on limited income supports, on the Alberta seniors' benefit, and the seniors' lodge program.

Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague spoke to all of those, but I think, perhaps, my colleague can speak a bit towards how this isn't unusual for Conservative governments. It's not strange that Conservative governments would go in and try and make life more expensive while giving \$4.7 billion away to the wealthiest corporations. That's something that I think we've seen before. We've seen Conservative governments right here in Alberta try to do it before and try to do similar things where they Americanize health care, where they go after the most vulnerable of Albertans, where they reduce supports for communities and families, and then where they attack workers and do things like bring in replacement workers during a strike or even lockouts in areas.

Mr. Speaker, I think those are the things that are really shocking, but I do want to hear from my colleague, and I want to give him a bit of time to talk about how this isn't something that's new. Conservatives have been doing this for decades, and they're going to continue doing this unless we keep fighting back.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has the call.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for asking me that question. Yes, I mean, you know, certainly we've seen some problematic legislation over the last 10 years or so, but the scope of this one and the audacity of this one is what I find to be particularly troubling. It's almost like they went for the big throw to just go for everything; for example, this whole idea of formalizing bargaining oversight by laying out that the minister can issue confidential directives to employers "before, during and after... collective bargaining" respecting the mandate, terms of agreement, and so forth. In other words, change the rules every step of the way as you're negotiating: before, during, and after. I mean, that is absolutely audacious and unprecedented in this Chamber or probably almost any other one in this country.

Another one is talking about the replacement workers, to allow replacement workers to be put into a striking situation, right? I mean, the level of animosity and division and trouble that's associated with this is historic. I really don't think that anyone wants that sort of hostility and that sort of animosity in any workplace.

I didn't mention this one. It prescribes limits on termination and severance pay as well. Here you are reducing people's wages, potentially laying off people – that was not put out of the realm of possibility from the previous comments yesterday that there would be layoffs – and then limiting their termination and severance pay as they're shown the door. All of these things add together, and they form a pattern. I think that what we've heard pretty loudly and clearly is that it is this government's desire to reduce wages here in

the province of Alberta for nurses, teachers, public service workers, social workers, police, and the like, to reduce wages and to do it with the strong arm of the law – right? – not to negotiate, not to talk about working conditions. I mean, like I said before, the element of negotiating in good faith is that you can negotiate not just for wages and pensions and so forth, but you can negotiate about the quality of the services that you are producing for Albertans. If you give people that respect, if you give them the time of day and you listen to the people who actually deliver those things, you will learn something.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is anyone else wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore is rising.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish I could say that it's a pleasure to rise to be able to speak to Bill 21, but it certainly is not.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

You know, to begin with, the scale of this, the omnibus bill, Bill 21 here. I know that when you were on the opposition benches, you had argued very, very passionately around what was believed. Some of the members from the 29th Legislature that sit across the way also argued quite passionately around what they felt was an omnibus bill around labour legislation. Quite honestly, I remember them almost setting their hair on fire in this Chamber around that. Yet here we are. We have a government that has come here, claiming to have the backs of hard-working Albertans. Some of those hard-working Albertans are right up there in the gallery here this evening. They're the ones that sit here and deliver all of the services that Albertans rely on each and every single day, and you're telling them that you have their backs by introducing a piece of legislation like this. Are you kidding me?

Why don't we dig into this here just a little bit? Bill 21. There's a temporary suspension of indexation of benefits for assured income for the severely handicapped, or, of course, what we also happen to refer to as AISH, and income support for the seniors' lodge program. According to some of the budget numbers that we've seen tabled in this House, we will see that this will generate for the government coffers by the 2022-23 year to the tune of about \$300 million. I'm curious, Mr. Speaker. I wonder what people receiving AISH – I think on average they receive about \$1,600 to \$1,700 a month, something like that. What would they do with \$300 million? I bet you they would not say: why don't we give a \$4.7 billion corporate handout to the Walton family? I'm willing to bet that wouldn't happen. I would say: hey, why don't you give me some of that money so that I can improve my lifestyle, so I can live in dignity and respect, so I could maybe even go into some of my local businesses and support them and buy the stuff that I want? Unbelievable, Mr. Speaker.

Then we want to see things like ends to tuition freezes, student loan interest increased by 1 per cent. You know, I was actually hoping I would have had the opportunity to quickly ask the Member for Edmonton-North West, who is a former teacher and a former Education minister in this province, as someone, as I've mentioned, who is, you know, very passionate about all the schools that I have in Edmonton-Decore – I have 26 of them. Three of them, all three high schools north of the Yellowhead in Edmonton, reside in Edmonton-Decore. You know, I would have asked him how many of his students, how many of his parents, maybe parents that are sitting up there in the galleries this evening at this late hour of 9:30 at night, would have come running to us to say: "Hey, can my students pay more on their loans? Hey, can you raise my tuition

over the next three years by 21 per cent?" I'm wondering how many of them would have come running to us asking for that.

When we make those kinds of moves, Mr. Speaker, these are the kinds of things that affect the quality of education that the people of Alberta have, which will then affect the ability for Alberta to be prosperous, because we won't have the highly skilled, highly technical people to be able to put in the jobs of the tech industry. Oh, that's right. We're going to be eliminating a whole bunch of tax credits and eliminating that. I guess it doesn't matter, does it?

9:40

We're going to see the Health minister place conditions on new practitioner identification numbers. Essentially, we're going to say to some of these doctors, that spent a lot of time in school and probably a lot of money: "Oh, hey, congratulations. Your loans are going to be going up, too." Then we're going to say, "No; I'm sorry; I know you live down in Calgary, but you're going to have to go work over here," and maybe to somebody who lives up in Fort McMurray, "Ah, sorry; you're going to have to go practise down in Medicine Hat," when maybe really they wanted to practise in their hometown. I'm wondering what kind of consultation occurred on that. I wonder if the doctors or potential doctors came running up to you and said: hey, please tell me where I can work.

We've heard a lot about policing over this session of the Legislature, yet here we are making changes through regulation, no doubt, to tell municipalities how they're going to pay for policing. We've already clearly seen some of the reaction from Calgary on this and what the mayor thought about this. I'd be willing to bet that Edmonton's mayor is not too excited about that, and we've heard very clearly from some of our rural mayors and councillors that they are definitely not excited about this.

That brings me to things around the labour movement. As everybody knows, I'm very proudly from the labour movement. I was a very proud UFCW local 401 member. I was very happy each and every day to be able to advocate for my members not only in my own workplace but across the different bargaining units the 401 looked after. I was even happy to advocate for hard-working Albertans all over this entire province. Some of those people are up there in this gallery each and every day, and they have been trying to tell this government very, very clearly that if you want to create labour unrest, all you have to do is – oh, I don't know – legislate wages, pass Bill 21. Yeah. Or maybe we'll impose things like the length of agreements, or maybe we can just opt out of arbitrations. Wait; we did that, and we're surprised that our folks in the hard-working labour movement and our public sector, the ones that deliver services to everyone in this province, are a little upset. We're surprised, Mr. Speaker.

But here we are reversing the replacement worker ban in the public sector. Nobody ever wants a strike. I can say that. I was in the labour movement. In a strike the honest truth is that nobody wins. The employer doesn't win. The employee doesn't win. Nobody wins in a strike, but strikes usually occur because of a failure to listen. The reality is that when they do, the one and only thing – companies are never really bound by this – an employee has is their ability to withdraw their labour, to be able to tell the employer: what you're doing is wrong, and you need to come to the table and bargain in good faith. I wish I had the faith to believe that this government is going to do that, but what I've seen so far is not looking good. As a matter of fact, I would say that it is bargaining in bad faith, Mr. Speaker.

Why would this government insist on creating labour unrest? Do you want to reduce the length and divisiveness of a strike or lockout? Do you want to know one of the best ways you could do that? Ban replacement workers. Companies will come to the table.

They will bargain in good faith. You'll get a deal done. Life goes on, and everybody prospers out of it. The use of replacement workers by employers during a strike or lockout has been deemed "a serious violation of freedom of association" by the United Nations International Labour Organization. When employers can use replacement workers, negotiations are undermined, work stoppages are prolonged, conflict is heightened, and, yes, Mr. Speaker, even the risk of picket line violence rises. Nobody wants to go in that direction, but I'm telling you that by taking this language out in Bill 21, that's the exact thing that this government is trying to set up. Quite honestly, it is shameful.

We can do better, and the funny thing is that under the previous NDP government we did do better. I'm not saying that the former government certainly didn't see its share of protests, but I have not seen protests in the number and the size in such a short period of time as when this government took over. It just seems to be growing. I wonder why, Mr. Speaker. Well, if we're going to start setting term limits on the length of the agreement – hey, I know a great idea. I wonder. If we ask these hard-working people up here tonight, if they brought out a salary survey, would you say: lower my salary, please? [interjections] I'm already seeing heads shaking.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but I believe what I heard was a member of the gallery attempting to influence debate, which would not be a privilege afforded to an individual in the gallery. Without knowing who that individual was, I would just issue a caution to the gallery to ensure that they do not act as such.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that, and I'm sure that our folks in the gallery will be able to exercise some restraint.

When we see things like excluding budget officers, system analysts, auditors, and employees who perform similar functions from bargaining units – we want to exclude those – I think we are violating people's rights to association. What we're telling those people is: "Yeah. Sorry. We don't think you're allowed to do that." I believe there's a Supreme Court decision around that, just like there's a Supreme Court decision around striking workers.

What I fear, Mr. Speaker, is that with the passing of Bill 21, in which we're seeing things like reversing replacement worker bans, including length-of-agreement language around the oversight of collective bargaining, being able to issue directives outside of the bargaining process, I think that's going to start to set up this government for lawsuits although from what I've seen since this government took over, they're certainly maybe trying to create jobs for lawyers. I'm hoping that at least those lawyers are Albertans and not out of province.

9:50

We seem to be just absolutely on this quest to fight with everybody. We're fighting with other provinces. We're fighting with the federal government. We're fighting with our own workers. If you want labour rest, if you want workers to come to work every day happy to be there, happy to serve, pay them fairly, treat them with dignity and respect, give them some benefits, and don't come up with hare-brained ideas like this for labour laws. And don't be surprised; maybe there will be a protest about how great the government is. Wouldn't that be a change?

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly not in favour of Bill 21. I am urging all members to not support this legislation. We cannot go backwards. We have to move forward, and Bill 21 won't do that.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am just caught by some of the remarks made by the Member for Edmonton-Decore and would like to hear a little bit more given that he has, I think, extensive experience in the labour movement and has had the opportunity to speak to many people in the labour movement about the reasoning for their participation in the labour movement and why it is essential to them.

I noticed in his speech that he particularly mentioned about the right of an employee to have control over their own labour. I think that's an interesting concept, that an individual not only has a right to the integrity of their body but for the ability of that body to engage in activities, such as labour, which are a benefit to themselves and their families, really speaking to why people would want to gather together in a union environment to provide each other support for that very essential need to have control over oneself and one's own body. Of course, the alternative is one that we in this House would all find quite devastating, you know, leading to some concerns that we have now, that that essential core value of humanity is being attacked. I wonder if the Member for Edmonton-Decore might speak to the importance of being able to have control over yourself in your labour and the fruits of that labour.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is quite right. Most times when you see people that are involved within the labour movement and trying to move that forward, it's about raising conditions for all. It's not just people in the labour movement that we're thinking about. It's the people that aren't in the labour movement that we're thinking about as well. We want to see the lifestyles of everyone brought up. We want to see everyone making more money so they can go and spend it in their local businesses, making the economy go around. We want everyone to be treated with dignity and with respect.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I remember one time having to file a grievance because a manager who didn't get proper training to be a manager, which is too bad in itself, ended up yelling at another employee right on the shop floor in front of customers. That's just not a way to conduct yourself. There's a better way to do it. When people come together in a collective bargaining union, they're able to say to their employers that maybe aren't treating them as well as they could – and I can think of a couple of employers right off the top of my head that do that. We get the opportunity to bargain as a collective for better conditions, to be able to work in safer environments.

And those safety standards go up for everyone, Mr. Speaker, not just for ones in the union. For everyone. I would hazard a guess, you know, that I don't think there's a single MLA who holds a position in this House that would say that nobody deserves a safe work environment. I'm pretty sure they don't think that somebody out there doesn't deserve to come home safely each and every night to their family.

What I worry about, though, with this bill, Mr. Speaker, is that we are making the steps that will create an environment that will be a race to the bottom. We will start to see pay lower, we will start to see working conditions lower, we will start to see dignity and respect lower, and then we will see the people that don't have a labour union looking after them suffer these same consequences. This is about improving conditions for all, but the best way to do that – to answer the question from the Member for Edmonton-

Rutherford – is to be able to come together as a collective and to be able to set those precedents, to be able to set those conditions, to be able to set the bar for everyone.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to speak to Bill 21. As I myself often find in this House, I think it's very important that we take this opportunity for the record to oppose legislation being brought into this House which we think demonstrates a complete lack of learning from the history of democracy in the western world and the establishment of people's rights. I think that will be the point of my short time available to me in this conversation this evening, that while there are many things being done in this bill, all of which are despicable in one way or another, the theme of undermining the rights of people in a western democracy is one which I personally take umbrage at. I am very concerned that it's being done in such a cavalier manner, by tossing a variety of different negative actions into a single bill as a way of covering them up and hiding them in an omnibus bill, which has in its very nature the intent to hide from the sunshine that should be cast on all bills by clouding the issue with putting in too many things it wants to address.

Because they cannot all be addressed, I'll take my opportunity now to address the underlying concern about the denial of human rights. I want to point out that the piece of this bill that is changing or reversing the replacement worker ban that had been put in place is one which will be challenged legally and has been previously tested in the courts to the highest level, at the Supreme Court. In fact, when we brought in the Alberta essential services legislation, it was entitled An Act to Implement a Supreme Court Ruling Governing Essential Services. The very name of the bill told you that this had already been brought to the Supreme Court, had already been tested, and had been found to be not only legitimate but a desirable part of a free, democratic society.

That's what it is that concerns me here today. The Supreme Court has said, with regard to the issue of collective bargaining rights, that the right to strike is an essential part of a meaningful collective bargaining system. That has been tested. We found that it is absolutely critical that if we wish to acknowledge that individuals have rights, they also have the right to gather together to protect those rights. You can't have rights and then not have the mechanism by which you protect them. So collective bargaining is established to ensure that no employer or, in this case, no government can pierce the rights of individuals by piercing their right to work together with other individuals to collectively bargain on behalf of all of those involved. The Supreme Court has been absolutely clear on this.

10:00

What does that say about a government that would bring forward a bill that they know has already been tested in its intent at the highest levels of judicial concern in this province and still bring it forward knowing that it couldn't possibly stand should it be brought again before the Supreme Court of Canada? Well, I can tell you the reason why they do it: because it gives them time. It gives them an amount of time to do that which they know is wrong, that which the Supreme Court of Canada has said is wrong, before they are forced to go back to appropriate and legitimate legislation. That's what they're doing. They're clearing for themselves a space which will allow them to do that which they know they should not do and which others have told them they should not do because they can

get away with it long enough to achieve the nefarious outcomes that they wish to achieve.

We are all here, elected in a Westminster democracy, because we believe in the nature of people to speak to their own rights and to have their voices represented in the construction of the society in which we live. Everyone in this House has participated in that process, believing that that is an essential, fundamental right. Then, essentially, when they achieve victory using the rights that have been hard fought for by union members and democratic society members throughout the western world, they want to pull up the ladder behind them and deny those rights to other people. This is completely unacceptable. This is such an underhanded way of achieving what it is they wish to achieve, knowing that they will be caught one day, but by then they will already have done the damage which they had intended to inflict. This is not acceptable.

Everyone in our society should be very concerned about this, should be very concerned when a government steps forward to begin to impinge upon the rights of its citizens. We have hundreds of years of history where we learned how important those rights are and why we should protect those rights. Learning from that history has been lost on this government. I'm surprised that they continue to fail to learn from history, because they certainly seem to want to live in some historical time before these rights were established, before we arrived at the place where we understand how important it is that we protect human rights. We know that the courts have said that collective bargaining is an essential part of our democracy. They have essentially acted in a way to make kind of a blanket ban on denying the right to strike and have established that denying the right to strike is unconstitutional.

Now, we know that this legislation is not specifically directed at that, but there's something else that the Supreme Court has done, another principle of the Constitution and human rights that the Supreme Court has been very clear about, and that is the doctrine of hollow rights. Once we have determined that a people have a right, then it is also important that we not undermine those rights or minimize or diminish those rights such that they become hollow rights. It is no good to say that an individual has a right but then to act in a way that prevents them from enacting that right in a way that they wish to do. You can't say, "Yes, you have a right to a free election" and then deny everybody access to a voting booth, because denying them access to a voting booth would create a hollow right of the right to live in a free and democratic society.

Yet that's essentially what they're doing in this bill. While they can't actually take away the right to collective bargaining, in the spring they delayed collective bargaining against this idea of the doctrine of hollow rights. Today they have acted in two different ways to begin to undermine that right yet again. They seek to reduce the number of people that can participate in unions. They've identified a group or a class of people that they don't want to be participating in the union, people such as budget officers, systems analysts, auditors, and employees who perform similar functions. They can't actually take the union away, they can't take the right to strike away, so what they'll do is that they'll actually diminish the ability for people to participate in those unions and to participate in those strikes.

That is in defiance of what the Supreme Court of Canada says that you must not do. Once a right is established constitutionally, you must give it a broad and liberal interpretation. That is the language. But here, instead of a broad and liberal interpretation, we have a narrow and conservative interpretation, and it's completely unacceptable.

The intention to ensure that people have the right to control not only their own body, their bodily integrity, but the fruits of the labour of their body is intrinsic to the desire in our democracy for

people to express themselves and to receive the benefits of taking action on their own behalf. If we begin to say to people that when you engage in a behaviour to take care of yourself, to take care of your family, and to take care of others in your community, we are going to begin to remove from you the ability to have control over that, then we move to a place where we have to be very concerned about the imbalance between the power of a dominant government and the citizens that should be represented by that government. That's what we're concerned about here.

This isn't a small, little piece of legislation. This is a deceitful piece of legislation, a piece of legislation that pretends to just be a bunch of small administrative changes being thrown together and slid underneath the door so that people don't become suspicious about what's happening.

But I can tell you that this is not by accident. This is a government that is choosing to find ways to subvert the Constitution of Canada and the statements by the Supreme Court on the rights of people to collectively bargain, to join unions, and to engage in strikes when necessary. They know they can't do it all at once, so what they do is that they engage in a process of slowly undermining and diminishing and eroding those rights, because if they did a direct assault on the rights, people would be more likely to notice and to react with rage. But when they do it in this particular way, people quite legitimately would not necessarily see it as a problem, would not necessarily understand the implications of what's happening here. So they achieve in the end the negative outcome which they have always wished to have without being transparent in their desires or transparent in educating the people about the actions they're taking and the outcomes of those actions.

[The Speaker in the chair]

This is something that we have to worry about. We have to worry about it in society because as we begin to take rights away from people, we diminish our society as a whole. It's been said that the course of history is such that the rights of people are being written in a more expansive way as time goes on and that we each year understand more about how we ensure the well-being of all citizens by defining those rights.

10:10

The last 40 years or 50 years have been very clear on that. The women's rights organizations that started in a renewed way in the '60s and '70s and '80s identified ways in which women's rights were being diminished, and as a result we began to change legislation. This was equally true in the LGBTQ community, where we understood in a clear way in the last 30 years how the rights of members of that community had been diminished by the rules that we had established in society, so we expanded our rights. In the indigenous community it wasn't that long ago that the rights of the indigenous people were dramatically restricted compared to the rights of other members of society.

That is what's happening here, an attempt to diminish the rights of members of unions who are part of our essential, core services in this province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to hear from my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford here. I think that he has a few more things to say. I mean, he is quite eloquent in his speech here in informing this House – and, hopefully, the government members are listening – on how these things historically have been problematic and historically have been

unconstitutional and historically have caused harm to workers. Perhaps my colleague here can provide a few more comments.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford if he'd like to respond.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to say a little bit more about this because I think it's fundamentally important. Members on this side of the House know that history will prove us to be right. We have seen the lessons of the history of human rights over the last, well, hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. From that, we look not just at the simplistic, concrete rules of what right a person does have, but we understand the underlying principles, that having those rights is important to the creation and the ultimate maintenance of a successful society, just as we have learned that the establishment of good structures in society provides for the greatest well-being of the greatest number of people.

We've learned that when we decided, for example, that public water systems should be available for everyone. The greatest health intervention in the history of humanity is the provision of clean water, not the drilling of an individual well by an individual person but the provision of clean water throughout the public. From that, we've learned that the structures of society are such that if we carefully hone them and design them, then we will be able to provide well-being not just for the fortunate few who can afford to do that on their own but for all of society, not just the wealthy but those who are more impoverished, not just the most powerful but those who are most vulnerable.

That is what we are talking about today. We're talking about establishing and building a society and protecting the lessons we have learned over the centuries about how we create a society that will benefit all peoples, that will give them opportunity through access to resources, to education, that will give them good health through a publicly funded and presented health care system, where members of the public service provide the resources necessary to ensure that all people can take advantage of the goodness that the province of Alberta gives us and can contribute to that goodness on behalf of themselves, their families, and the future generations.

Here we have a beginning edge of a wedge attempting to take all of that away from us, an attempt to diminish rights that have been articulated by the Supreme Court of Canada and have been defended by the hard work of union members across this country and across many countries in the western world to ensure that the next generation will not have to deal with suppression by those with more power, will not have to deal with poverty as they once did, will not have to deal with the destruction of their bodies through labour that is unsafe or unacceptable in some other way. Having learned those lessons, it is now requisite upon everyone in this House to stand up and defend those lessons and to be on the record, to be on the right side of history when we say that people by their nature possess human rights and that those human rights are fragile in the face of power which is uncaring and used for the purposes of one individual over another. We stand today to defend those human rights, as we always have and always will.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) has expired.

Is anyone else wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 21, the Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019. I think, as my colleague from Edmonton-North West already pointed out, it's a bit of an ironic name. It does none of those things. I think I'm going to go briefly over some of the things this bill does

do and how it does hurt families, and then perhaps I'll speak a bit more on some of the specific issues that I take particular offence to.

I mean, we can see that it's suspending, as the government likes to say, the tuition cap for postsecondary students. Perhaps, they say, the tuition cap could be set again in the future at some point. But what we know, Mr. Speaker, is that this will cause tuition and enable tuition to go up by as much as 23 per cent for postsecondary students. It's going to make life less affordable for families. It's going to make education inaccessible for some families. That's something that I think is very shameful.

It pauses indexing for a number of really important programs. It pauses indexing for AISH, which is the assured income for the severely handicapped. It pauses indexing for employment and income supports benefits. It pauses indexing for the Alberta seniors' benefit and the seniors' lodge program, Mr. Speaker.

They use these terms that are very technical and complicated, "pauses indexing," but let's be very clear: it's a cut. It's a cut to these families. It's a cut to these communities, Mr. Speaker, and these families – that are already being asked, on AISH for example, to get by on only \$1,600 a month – who are being asked to make do with less. That's shameful. It's something that's very difficult already, and this government is making it more expensive for those families.

They're eliminating the regulated rate cap for electricity. They're making electricity more expensive while also moving to Americanize the electricity system. I think that's something that's very troubling as well.

We're seeing in some of the health legislation, Mr. Speaker, that they're trying to limit practitioner IDs. They're trying to force doctors to go to certain areas in the province, something that's actually been found unconstitutional in at least two other jurisdictions that I'm aware of here in Canada. So I think that's something that's very concerning. If their own lawyers can't figure that out, then perhaps we need to take a look again at this legislation.

We also see that the government is giving itself the ability to unilaterally tear up doctor compensation agreements. They time and time again are going to attack the public service, the services that Albertans rely on. Time and time again they're giving themselves the unilateral ability to tear up agreements with our professionals, tear up agreements with our health care workers and the services that Albertans depend on every single day, Mr. Speaker.

This government is also moving forward to claw back monies from municipalities. They're giving themselves the ability to take over a number of the fines that municipalities collect.

They're also doing things like giving the minister the ability to change the police costing model. This is something we've been talking about for weeks, and the government has said time and time again that it's not true. Now we see it in black and white. Indeed, it is true. This government is changing the police costing model. They're giving themselves that ability, and they tried to do it by sweeping it under the rug with this omnibus bill. But, Mr. Speaker, the opposition is here. We are going to shine the light on this bill. It doesn't matter whether it's 10:30 at night or 10:30 in the morning; we're going to talk, we're going to understand this bill, and Albertans are going to be watching this bill, as we can see tonight in the gallery.

10:20

We're also seeing some other changes that I think are particularly egregious. We're seeing quite a significant number of labour changes, Mr. Speaker, and I think this is where we can start talking about values. This is where we can start talking about: "What values do we care about in a government? Who are we fighting for when

we talk about government?" We can see it in past legislation that this government has been bringing forward already; in Bill 9, for example, where they brought in a big hold or delay in arbitration, in negotiations with workers, and we saw that get challenged in the courts. It's still in the courts because this government doesn't have respect for that process. And just like when they brought in Bill 9, we're seeing the same things, the same types of issues being brought forward here. We're seeing a complete lack of respect for Alberta workers. We're seeing a complete lack of compassion. We're seeing a complete lack of understanding of the types of issues that Alberta workers face every single day, the people that are in the gallery watching us right now.

We're seeing them bringing in repealing the essential services replacement worker ban, which means, Mr. Speaker, that this government will actually have the ability to not only, first, lock out those workers that are in the gallery but then bring in replacement workers to replace them at their jobs. That's something that is shameful. That speaks to the values and the value that they put on these workers, because we know that workers in Alberta, the people that provide us with the services every single day and indeed especially the essential services, deserve our respect and deserve our gratitude. Instead, what this government has said is that they are willing to go in and replace them the moment they disagree, and that's something that is particularly concerning to me. I think it speaks to how this government views the very people that keep this province running, the very people that contribute every single day to the services that run this province. That's something that is very concerning to me.

We also see the government bringing in exemptions for bargaining units for budget officers, systems analysts, and auditors, and I think that's very concerning as well. This government is systematically trying to degrade the authority and power of our labour in this province, Mr. Speaker. They're trying to break up the solidarity of workers. That is very concerning because those are the types of organizations, and having that solidarity is what ensures that we have fair and even negotiation on both sides of the table.

But, again, we know that this government isn't concerned with that. We've seen that the government isn't concerned with being fair, because they've been willing to legislate away those rights. They've been willing to attack those rights with legislation. They've been willing to delay. They've been willing to, in this case, bring in replacement workers. Now they're trying to actually break up the organizations themselves. That's what's so shocking about this bill. It's that this government is moving so quickly, that this government is moving so aggressively to break up the very organizations that represent the workers that keep this province running, that keep our services operating every single day. It's something that is absolutely shocking.

It also does things like formalize bargaining oversight, where the minister can lay out different things around term agreements and fiscal limits and requesting information from employers. That means, basically, that this minister is trying to go out and tell organizations and tell our workers what they need to know. What they want: to take the information from the workers, Mr. Speaker. That, I think, is very concerning, too, because we don't see this respect for a two-way negotiation. We don't see this respect for bargaining. We don't see this respect for our workers,

Again I want to bring this back to values because the real question, when we talk about legislation like this, when we talk about basically anything we do in this House, is always about values. It's about: who are we fighting for? Are we fighting for affordability for every single Albertan? Are we fighting to protect the rights of every single worker, or are we fighting to give \$4.7 billion away to the wealthiest corporations, Mr. Speaker? I think

it's pretty clear who this government is fighting for. This government is fighting for the wealthy corporations and leaving every single Albertan behind. They're leaving workers behind.

What they're also doing, as I already mentioned, is that they're giving themselves the ability to tear up things like doctors' contracts. It shows you, Mr. Speaker, that while they attack the workers on one hand, they also try to Americanize the system on the other. Health care is a perfect example. When you're talking to nurses, whether they're LPNs or RNs, or if you're talking to doctors, what it is is a systemic attack on these workers. It's a systemic attack on not just the workers but the entire system. It's an attempt to Americanize our health care right here in Alberta. It's an attempt to try and bring in failed policies that are risky and ideological and will only cause harm to Albertans.

The workers in the gallery know that, and that's why they're here at 10:30 at night on a Wednesday night. They could be at home with their families, but they know how important this is. They know how important it is that we stand up for the rights of workers, that we stand up for the services that need to be provided to every single Albertan. Whether they're a correctional officer, Mr. Speaker, whether you work in correctional services, whether you work in a school, whether you work in a hospital or a medicentre or whatever it is, it is essential that we support these workers, and we owe them our gratitude. It is essential that we work with these workers in good faith.

This is the type of value that this government is not showing when they bring forward things like Bill 21 or when they bring forward things like Bill 9, Mr. Speaker. We've been seeing a very large amount of mobilization of labour in terms of the concerns around what this government is bringing forward, and I think, again, that speaks to the values. It says that this government has not shown and is not showing that they have the interests of workers in mind, that they do not have the interests of Alberta families in mind, because they are willing to give \$4.7 billion away to the wealthiest corporations and then Americanize health care, all while leaving our workers behind, legislating away their rights, taking away their rights, saying that they can be replaced during negotiations, and that's what speaks to values.

It's a government that is showing workers, it is showing Albertans, it is showing families, it is showing communities that they are not standing up for them. In fact, they are standing up for those wealthy corporations that just received \$4.7 billion, corporations like Husky, who took hundreds of millions of dollars in profits, Mr. Speaker, and then laid off hundreds of people right here in Calgary – right here in Calgary – in Alberta.

These are the types of values we're talking about. We're talking about a government that is showing Albertans that they are standing up for the richest few and leaving workers behind. They're trying to make life more expensive, Mr. Speaker, while also trying to bring in wage rollbacks for the people that keep this province running. We just saw in the last few days that this government is going to be requesting wage rollbacks of 2 to 5 per cent, contrary to what they actually said in their own budget speech – that's what was shocking – contrary to what workers were told and what our public service, the people who keep this province running, were told. They're now going to be going and asking for 2 to 5 per cent, and that's shocking because it's unfair. It's unfair because you should not be negotiating in the media; you should not be negotiating in the public. What you should be doing is moving in good faith.

Now, if the government had the values to understand what that meant, if the government understood how bargaining actually works and perhaps took the time to do the research and did not just try to legislate away those rights, Mr. Speaker, perhaps they would have gone to the bargaining table and tried to negotiate some of

those concessions. Perhaps they would have been able to go to the bargaining table and talk about what needed to happen for their fiscal plan. It's not the fiscal plan I would have proposed and indeed is not the one that we proposed, but it is the one that they are proposing. They could have gone with it, but instead they chose to disrespect our public service.

They chose to disrespect those workers and make bold statements in the media that show they fundamentally do not understand how families and how workers and how our public service should be treated. It shows they fundamentally do not understand who they are supposed to be fighting for. Instead of fighting for those workers, instead of fighting for our public services, instead of fighting to ensure we have strong communities and families, Mr. Speaker, they gave \$4.7 billion away to the wealthiest corporations, watched 27,000 jobs disappear right here in this province, and then asked the people that provide us with health care, with security, with education for 2 to 5 per cent rollbacks, and they didn't even do it at a bargaining table. They did it in the media. That's the shocking thing. It's shocking how much this government does not understand. It's shocking how they don't understand how that could be offensive to the workers that keep this province running.

10:30

Mr. Speaker, we can see that because they simply will not recognize even that repealing the ban on replacement workers – they don't understand why that would be offensive. They say: well, if we lock them out, then we should have the right to hire other people. That's what this government is going to say, I believe. That's what's so shocking, that they don't understand how that devalues the people that keep this province running, our public servants, the people that run our province, that provide us with our health care, provide us with our education. That is what's so fundamentally shocking and broken about this government's process, that their values do not align with what they were put here for.

Instead of trying to make life more affordable, instead of trying to protect our services, instead of trying to actually give Albertans a better province, Mr. Speaker, what we see is \$4.7 billion away to the wealthiest corporations, Americanization of our health care. We see drastic cuts across all fields. We see a tax on our workers, the very workers that are in the gallery right now, the very workers that work for, indeed, actually all of these ministers, likely, that are here today. The ministers themselves are likely responsible for some of these workers, and instead of respecting the work they do, this government has decided to attack them, has decided to negotiate in the media instead of in good faith. I think that is absolutely shocking and shameful.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone wants to add a brief question or comment.

Seeing none, is there anyone else that would like to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and it's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 21, Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019. Again, similar to Bill 20, this is an omnibus bill. It's kind of a little bit hard to know why exactly all of the elements have been brought together in this constellation of Bill 21, but the question I asked earlier when I was talking about Bill 20 was that whenever you look at legislation, it's good to ask that question: who benefits and who doesn't? I would say that this bill, similar to Bill 20, means that the average Albertan doesn't benefit from this bill. Perhaps that's why they put them all together. I can't really see any logic in other reasons.

I'd like to begin by just, you know, thanking the folks in the gallery for staying here at this late hour. I wanted to share that certainly early in my career as a social worker I was a proud member of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, and then later I was a mental health therapist and was a part of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta. I know very first-hand about the important work that the public service does in our province and what they do to support all Albertans.

Some of the disturbing facts in our province are that we do have the lowest unionization rates in the country, and we did, when we were government, implement policies that did support workers to join unions with the legislation that we brought. But today, you know, we're really seeing an attack on workers, and I have no doubt they feel under attack. I'm concerned about that, and certainly the whole New Democrat caucus will stand with the union workers because we know that this is unfair and is creating greater inequality in our province.

One of the things about unions: any province, say, in Canada that has high unionization, it not only benefits those workers, it benefits all workers. It's kind of known as the lighthouse effect. When you have robust union involvement, then all employers actually must be vigilant and make sure that they have good policies and supports because if they don't, people will leave their employment because they know that in a unionized position those kinds of benefits and supports and wages are available to workers. That's called the lighthouse effect, and unfortunately in Alberta we don't really have that because, you know, for the 44 years before our government was elected, certainly the Conservatives were not in support of the average worker, union workers. That's always been an issue in Alberta.

Another issue that I've spoken about before is income inequality, where Alberta has the greatest income inequality of any province in Canada. Again, in areas where there's greater unionization, there's more equality. We know a healthy society has a very robust middle class, and usually in a province with high unionization rates that is true. Alberta doesn't have that.

Just to bring this point home a little bit more, many of you may be aware of that study that looks at the top CEOs in Canada and how much money they make. It's laughable, if it wasn't so disturbing, but by 11:30 a.m. on sort of the first day of work of any new year – in this year, 2019, it was 11:30 – the top CEOs had made the average worker's annual salary. Even though, you know, we're not in the turn of the century, in the late 1800s, early 1900s, the Industrial Revolution, apparently we had unionization and much fairer labour employment laws, we still have this kind of phenomenon happening in our society, where somehow it's ridiculous that some people can make extraordinary wages and many are just scraping to get by.

I just want to bring that out, and I just want to thank my friends in the union movement for their diligence and hard work really standing up for regular Albertans. It's beyond their own workers. They have a vision for the province. They care about social justice. They do many things to support women to be in leadership, to support families, to support the vulnerable. They have many activities and ways that they contribute to the communities. Having a robust union environment is a benefit to all citizens. I just really want to thank my colleagues for all that they do.

As I said earlier, you know, I don't blame them for feeling under siege because since this UCP government has come in, they've done a lot of things to directly attack these workers who are providing public services to Albertans. We know that the UCP plans to cut at least 8 per cent from public services, probably more. The UCP says that service workers, correctional peace officers, policy analysts, physicians, nurses, and teachers are all overpaid. They get way too much money. They're overpaid. I mean, if I was

one of those workers, I'd feel like: oh, they're gunning for me. We know that the scope of practice has just changed for licensed practical nurses, so that means the government intends to get the same work at a lower cost while risking their registered nurses' jobs. Also, there's a move just in general to privatize public services. We know that. They call it nice words like "alternative service delivery" or "outsourcing." We know that's privatization.

Yesterday the Minister of Finance had the audacity to talk about what he expects from the public service workers. They should be taking a 2 to 5 per cent cut. He's negotiating in the media. That's just completely inappropriate, so I just can appreciate how the public servants must feel under siege. Certainly, there is the evidence of that.

In this bill specifically it does talk about doing things, changing things to make it more difficult. One of them is formalizing bargaining oversight. What does that mean? It means the minister can issue confidential directives to employers before, during, and after collective bargaining respecting the mandate, for example, the fiscal limits that they're willing to do – I guess he's already doing that in the public forum, in the media, so okay – and requesting info from employers about employees and things. I mean, things seems like, again, the deck is stacked against the workers, and that's a concern. That's part of this Bill 21.

10:40

I know that some of my colleagues have talked about, you know, just the regressive policy of banning replacement workers. Of course, now the UCP wants to bring that back in with this Bill 21. Certainly, it's well known that this kind of action prolongs disputes, could harm the trust and confidence of people in the workplace, and it could even stoke a lot of anger and, potentially, violence on the picket lines because of allowing these workers to go in and take the jobs of these people who are standing up for their rights. They have the right to do this. That's a significant attack. I can appreciate that union workers are feeling under attack in Alberta. Again, I just want to say that, certainly, our NPD caucus will stand up and speak against these really backward changes to create more fairness and justice in society.

In a totally unrelated area – it's still the same bill but it's not to do with union workers anymore – now we're going to talk about people on AISH, people on assured income for the severely handicapped. Those are people who oftentimes cannot work at a full-time job. They may work a bit, but they have some developmental challenges that don't make it possible sometimes to provide for themselves. Of course, in a just society we do have programs that support people that have these challenges. We have the AISH program in Alberta.

Unfortunately, this UCP government has decided now to not index the AISH benefits. These are not benefits that are – I think the MacKinnon report said something like: they're generous benefits. That just kind of, you know, made me shake my head because I wonder if she understands or has spoken to someone on AISH. Would they say that their benefits are generous? I think they'd say that they're just scraping by, hardly making it.

Our government, when we were in power, actually indexed those benefits to the rate of inflation, so in a small way but an important way, you know, each year, because we do have increases in the cost of living, giving them that little bit more so that they could maintain their lifestyle and not struggle so much. But this government thinks that that's not important. Again, it's just an attack on regular Albertans, Albertans who are more vulnerable even than many others.

Albertans really have to qualify for the AISH program. You know, you have to go through medical tests. It depends on what

kind of developmental disability or whatever it is, I mean, not something that can just go away. It's not something that is even easy to get. I think probably every MLA will know that they have people calling their constituency office to help them because they feel like they should qualify for AISH benefits but have been denied. There's an extensive appeal process. Sometimes even the people who should be getting those benefits don't because of a very strict gatekeeping function of that program. If people qualify, they have demonstrated that there is a significant issue. The word "severely" is in the name, so they can't do what perhaps I could do because of this impediment.

To take away the funding, that is fairly minimal – you know, most of us would expect our salaries to go up each year – is cruel. It is cruel, Mr. Speaker. If it wasn't so disturbing, it would be funny. Some of you may have seen the *Edmonton Journal* political cartoon that showed the Premier throwing a rock and hitting the head of a man in a wheelchair, and it said: an AISH recipient. So he's attacking the most vulnerable. As we've said loud and clear in this House: on the backs of AISH recipients, on the backs of the vulnerable the UCP is preferencing wealthy corporations with their \$4.7 billion tax break. And guess who's paying for it? That just seems inhumane. It seems so unfair.

Besides the AISH recipients who are being deindexed, there are seniors who are being deindexed also. There are a few pieces to it. The Alberta seniors' benefit is an income support program. It's not a lot of money. It's sort of a top-up to the old age security and the guaranteed income supplement for seniors. Those are all federal programs. Some seniors have such small incomes that they're still significantly below the poverty line, so Alberta has an Alberta seniors' benefit and it just sort of tops them up. I think the most is, like, \$285 or something that someone can receive on a monthly basis. That program had also been indexed by our government, again to make sure that people had the money they needed. It was not that they kept getting poorer and poorer, but they actually maintained their lifestyle.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Is there anybody wishing to make a brief question or comment?

Seeing no one, we are back on the main bill. I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika and deputy government whip rising.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for recognizing me. I move that we adjourn debate on this bill this evening.

The Speaker: I appreciate your motion; however, you have actually already spoken to second reading.

Is there anyone else that might be willing to move to adjourn debate? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has risen.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate for the evening.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Just to provide some clarity for the House, the hon. member is pleased to move the adjournment of debate on Bill 21, and then we'll move the House in just a minute. Is that what you've moved?

Mr. Orr: Yes. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we've had a lot of progress tonight, and I move that we adjourn the Assembly until tomorrow, Thursday, October 31, Halloween, at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: I hope you'll all be dressed like politicians tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:49 p.m.]

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