



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 18, 2019

Day 42

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

First Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 18, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, please remain standing as we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by His Worship Mayor Ben Kellert. I would invite you to all participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm very pleased to welcome our very first elected anthem singer, the mayor of Killam, Ben Kellert. His Worship has recorded three albums, sung at numerous football games and hockey games and even the occasional rodeo as well as many seniors' events, including at churches and lodges. Today he is joined by his wife, Tanny. I invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, this afternoon we have a School at the Legislature group visiting us from the constituency of Edmonton-South. Please welcome the students from Roberta MacAdams.

Also joining us are dedicated members of the public service, employees from the Ministry of Service Alberta. Welcome, and thanks for everything you do.

Also, guests of the Minister of Advanced Education, representatives from students' unions and student union associations from the University of Alberta, MacEwan University, and Mount Royal University.

Last but certainly not least, in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon are family members of the MLA for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock: the hon. member's son Jaron van Dijken, his grandchildren Niko and Emma, and the beloved Mrs. van Dijken.

I invite you all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Freedom of Expression

Mr. Jones: Freedom of expression and peaceful protest are foundational to the academic experience, the pursuit of knowledge, scholarship, teaching, and all intellectual endeavours. The purpose of a university requires the fullest and most varied expression of intellectual life for students, faculty, and staff. Critical inquiry, discovery, exchange of diverse perspective and ideas, and open discussion and debate are fundamental to the intellectual and academic life of any institution.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right. It reinforces all other human rights, allowing societies to develop and progress. The ability to express opinions and speak freely is essential to bringing about change in a society. Free speech is not only about your ability to speak but also the ability to listen to others and allow others' views to be heard.

Mr. Speaker, every student has a right and responsibility to speak, be heard, and engage in active citizenship and peaceful protest. We have some of our own postsecondary students with us today who are here to do just that, speak and be heard. That is why our government has asked all of our institutions to implement the University of Chicago statement on freedom of expression, so that our students and faculty have the highest protections. We firmly believe that freedom of speech and expression are essential to a healthy democracy.

During this time of fiscal crisis it is important that all of us work together and hear voices from all across this province as we work towards a stronger economy with more jobs. Our government is committed to ensuring Albertans from all walks of life live healthy and prosperous lives now and into the future. While we know Budget 2019 came with some very difficult decisions, I am confident that we can work together, moving forward to make Alberta the best place to live, learn, and do business once again.

Thank you.

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

Oil and Film Industries in Alberta

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had many reach out to my office regarding the film industry, and I wanted to share a story with you today from a stakeholder who compares his experiences in both the oil and film industries in Alberta.

The well was drilled by Shell; the film, *Unforgiven*, made by Warner Brothers. Shell hires a drilling supervisor; Warner Brothers hires an executive producer. Shell hires a drilling contractor; Warner Brothers hires a production manager. The drilling contractor hires a tool push, a driller, and a derrickman; Warner Brothers hires director Clint Eastwood, a first assistant director, and a cinematographer. The drilling contractor hires motormen, roughnecks, lease hands, et cetera; Warner Brothers hires gaffers, grips, makeup, hair, props, et cetera. Both companies hire accounting and payroll people.

In the case of the 4,500 metre triple rig 110 trucks moved it to site in the mountains near Hinton; *Unforgiven* rolled about 60 trucks, but unlike a rig that moves twice in a year, the film trucks moved every day until the final month of filming. On site at the drilling rig they had roughly 30 people in camp; on *Unforgiven* at various points they had 100 people in small-town hotels at Brooks, Drumheller, and High River.

Both crews spent money in small-town Alberta. Both projects worked 12-hour days. The pay scales on drilling rigs are similar in hourly rates to Warner Brothers' film crew. The Shell rig was blue

collar; a film set is also heavy blue collar. Both crew rates are in the mid-five figures, all the way to six figures in annual Alberta taxable salaries.

Who works on the rigs and films? Your friends, neighbours, hockey coaches, et cetera, regular people trying to make a good life for their families, who love where they live. He always thinks fondly of his days on that big rig in the mountains and on the Oscar-winning *Unforgiven* set.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the stakeholders for sharing their stories with me. I will continue to highlight the toll that this budget has on Alberta families and blue-collar jobs.

Thank you.

550th Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Birth

Mr. Toor: Mr. Speaker, diversity is one of Canada's greatest strengths, and Canadians benefit from our country's multiculturalism and spirit of openness. On November 12 Sikhs in Canada and around the world celebrated the 550th birthday of Sri Guru Nanak Sahib Ji. He's the founder of the Sikh religion and one of the world's greatest symbols of peace, unity, and social justice. During his lifetime Guru Nanak travelled the world promoting equality, diversity, service, and compassion, which became the core principles of Sikhism.

1:40

He brought enlightenment to people who lived in darkness, where women were considered impure and less than human. Baba Nanak condemned those who committed abuse and discrimination against women. To him, this was one of the most shameful deeds that one could commit. Guru Nanak asks in his hymns how a woman can be called inferior, from whom kings and saints are born, and says that the reproductive strength of a woman is in itself a symbol of divine supremacy.

Many Sikh Canadians bring these values to life and enrich our country every day, reminding us that the principles of inclusion and respect for all are not only at the heart of the Sikh faith but are also central to all Canadians.

On this very special day I also want to thank the governments of India and Pakistan for their beautiful gift of opening the Sri Kartarpur Sahib corridor. I am hopeful this goodwill gesture will help to ease some of the tension between two nuclear nations.

Canada is proud to be home to one of the largest Sikh communities outside India. As a member representing the large Sikh community in Alberta I wish all those who celebrated the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji the best wishes of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has a statement.

Premier's and Adviser's Travel Expenses

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recently this Premier tried to justify sticking Alberta taxpayers with the bill for a \$16,000 joyride in a private plane for him, his buddies, and his buddies' wives. The Premier claimed it was just a bit of Alberta hospitality. Well, to borrow a phrase, that dog won't hunt, because while the Premier and his friends were piling into the party plane, Mr. Doug Ford, the Premier of Ontario, made the same trip on a commercial flight. It's a dark day when Doug Ford has better judgment than the Premier of Alberta.

In just a few moments we'll hear him again try to defend the indefensible. This time he's sticking Alberta taxpayers with an

\$18,000 bill for his principal adviser to make four trips to London, where he dined out 43 times, Ubered around the city, and slept in the finest hotels. Maybe he'll say that it was a trade mission. Maybe he'll say that it was a war room mission. Maybe he'll say that it was kind of like the war room but not exactly.

Those are the three different stories his office has produced so far, Mr. Speaker. The excuses don't matter. There is no government business that requires a political staffer to stay in a five-star hotel, in a historic Georgian townhouse with an attached art nouveau champagne bar. This hotel describes itself as "a home to aristocrats." It was opened by the favourite chef of French Emperor Napoleon III.

So is Alberta in tough times or not? To borrow another phrase, this Premier needs to pick a lane. Here today in Alberta teachers are being laid off, disability benefits are being cut, and people are being thrown off their drug plans to pay for the Premier's \$4.7 billion corporate handout.

I know there are members of the government caucus that deplore what is happening in the current Premier's office: the police investigations, the sneaky tax increases, the no-bid contracts for friends and family, and now this repeated abuse of taxpayer dollars. Albertans have seen this movie before, Mr. Speaker, and the sequel is always worse.

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

Federal Methane Regulations

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A potential catastrophic situation is about to be imposed on Alberta on January 1 with the federal backstop for both methane and carbon coming into effect. The cost to our energy sector will be enormous, and it could lead to more companies, especially the smaller gas producers, going bankrupt. In fact, the methane regulations, by the federal government's own regulatory impact analysis statement, indicate it will cost Alberta billions to comply, a cost the feds don't even try to hide.

The largest emitter of methane in the entire country lies at Toronto's waste disposal facility, but I don't hear cries to reduce those GHGs.

Our province has worked for months with the federal government to achieve equivalency, but a decision has not been made because it has rested at the political level with Justin Trudeau. That said, we shouldn't even be having these discussions as both backstops are a significant intrusion into provincial jurisdiction, and we should seriously consider a constitutional challenge. The basis of that challenge lies in section 92A of the Constitution, which states:

92A. (1) In each province, the legislature may exclusively make laws in relation to . . .

(b) development, conservation and management of non-renewable natural resources and forestry resources in the province, including laws in relation to the rate of primary production therefrom.

Albertans just got rid of an ideologically driven NDP provincial government who supported special-interest groups, stacked on taxes and red tape, and imposed a carbon tax. Now the federal government wants to pick up where they left off and pile on carbon and methane regulations in their quest to decimate our province's resource sector. This is not right. Albertans said, "No more," and elected us to defend this province, and, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we intend to do.

Thank you.

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, today I joined students from the University of Alberta and MacEwan University. They were protesting hikes to tuition, increased interest rates on student loans, and cuts to overall budgets.

This Premier blew a \$4.7 billion hole in the budget with a no-jobs corporate giveaway. Students are upset that the government is now asking them to pay double to dig him out of this mess. Just a few weeks ago we were presented with a budget that has drastic negative impacts on postsecondary students and institutions. The government is proposing huge cuts to postsecondary funding, doubling tuition costs, and increasing interest on student loans. In addition, the government cut the education tax credit and cancelled the student summer employment program. These changes will have significant impacts on our students. Some students have told me that they will have to delay their education or they just won't be able to go at all. These short-sighted decisions will not only just affect many of our students individually but will also hurt the economic future of our province.

Mr. Speaker, there is a better way. Under our government, tuition went from the highest in the country to amongst the lowest in Canada. We also limited noninstructional fees to postsecondary students. Our changes saved students an average of more than \$2,000 for a four-year degree.

The students were clear on the steps of the Legislature today. They should not have to pay for this government's irresponsible \$4.7 billion giveaway to profitable corporations.

Tax Policy and Government Spending

Mrs. Pitt: Winston Churchill said, "For a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle." Not that that stopped the previous government. Hikes on personal income taxes resulted in lower revenue. Hikes on corporate income taxes led to lower revenue. After all that, they decided to take everything with a carbon tax. Well, Mr. Speaker, if you find yourself digging into a hole, stop digging. Some people still don't get it. The crowd that wants to spend like there's no tomorrow is now asking for a provincial sales tax. In the tough economic times that we find ourselves in, the spenders want us to dig deeper into the pockets of hard-working Albertans. This can't go on.

We have a government that is going to do better. We know that we spend more per person than B.C., Ontario, and our recipient Quebec. We know this because we took the time to study our finances through Dr. MacKinnon's review. More of the same is literally something Albertans cannot afford. We cannot continue to spend more and get less in return. We finally have a government committed to getting our fiscal house in order and getting our economy back on track. We're protecting our cherished services like health care and education while making choices so that we have better and smarter public services. We're taking a reasonable and steady approach despite what the over-the-top critics are saying. After years of being the highest spending province, we're going to do what our critics couldn't do, find 3 cents on the dollar.

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. Schmidt: Climate data released earlier this month revealed that this past October was the hottest October on record. September was the hottest September on record. So was June. So was July;

2019 will be one of the five hottest years in human history. The evidence of climate change is all around us, and with only eight years left to drastically reduce carbon dioxide emissions, we are quickly running out of time to prevent its worst effects from happening.

Rapidly reducing carbon dioxide emissions is pretty straightforward. We need to invest in renewable energy, energy efficiency, public transportation, and research and development. The money to pay for these measures has to come from somewhere, and Alberta has been collecting it from heavy emitters since 2007. But this government is committed to collecting less money from heavy emitters and using that money not to reduce emissions but to pay for a \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway.

We tried to get this government on the right track by bringing forward an amendment to their heavy emitter carbon price legislation that would require all the money collected to be spent on reducing carbon emissions and mitigating the impact of climate change, and we didn't even prescribe where it should be spent.

We know the UCP loves to mock purchasing shower heads and light bulbs even though those are proven ways to improve energy efficiency, but what we don't know is what they think we should do to tackle climate change. We've heard a lot from the other side about saddling future generations with debt but nothing about saddling future generations with the catastrophic effects of climate change. Eight years from now, when it's too late to do anything about the problem, the members opposite will have to explain to their children why they spent so much effort reducing the debt from \$95 billion to \$93 billion while doing nothing about what really mattered, tackling climate change.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Premier's Travel and Bill 22

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that today Bill 22 will be tabled in the House. Now, the contents of that bill are under embargo. I believe, however, that Albertans will want the Premier to account for it very much. To the Premier: why are you scurrying away to Texas instead of facing Albertans and being accountable for your actions?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government was elected on a mandate to get Alberta back to work, in part by restoring investor confidence, by going around the world to tell them the story that Alberta is open for business. That's one of the reasons I'll be travelling to Texas for the next three days to meet with CEOs of some of the largest energy companies and petrochemical companies in the world, to discuss, potentially, billions and tens of billions of dollars of future investment that will create jobs here in Alberta. While the NDP used to fly people like Tzeponah Berman around attacking our energy industry, we're going to where the decisions are made to get jobs created in Alberta once again.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I suspect those investors are also going to be very interested in the health and safety of this province's democracy. The Finance minister had an embargoed press conference with media on this from which the opposition was barred, but it's not the Finance minister who's attacking our democracy; it's this Premier. Once again I ask: why won't this

Premier look Albertans in the eye and explain himself? He can't stay in Texas forever.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I understand the opposition had a briefing on that bill today. Secondly, I'm here answering questions. I always am available every week to answer questions from the media and in this Assembly. But where the NDP drove tens of billions of dollars of job-creating investment out of this province during their four years of catastrophic economic mismanagement, we are now proactively going out to try to restore investor confidence and bring some of that money back to Alberta. That's what Albertans hired us to do, and we'll do it without relent to restore investor confidence, to once again create good jobs in the Alberta economy.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, a little bit of a hypothetical question, still linked to the topic a bit: if Paul Martin had fired Justice Gomery during the sponsorship scandal, if Justin Trudeau had fired Commissioner Dion during the SNC-Lavalin case, if Stephen Harper had fired the commissioner of the RCMP during the Mike Duffy investigation, in the event that those absolutely unfathomable scenarios had ever occurred, doesn't the Premier think that those leaders would have an obligation to stick around and explain themselves to the people of this country?

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition will know that *House of Commons*, page 509, would prevent the asking of a hypothetical, but if the hon. Premier would like to respond, he's more than welcome to do so.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the government isn't firing anybody, but the voters fired the NDP in the last election for their economic mismanagement, and then they hired a new government to focus on job creation. They understand that that means restoring investor confidence. You know, I have here the expense tabs of the NDP's friend and ally Tzaporah Berman. That leader of the NDP sent Tzaporah Berman around the country, costing thousands of tax dollars, to fight against Alberta's energy industry, to fight to kill jobs in Alberta. We're doing the exact opposite.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition for her second set of questions.

Ms Notley: None of those things are correct, Mr. Speaker.

Premier's Adviser's Travel Expenses Public Inquiry Commissioner's Legal Contract Award

Ms Notley: What is correct, private planes, luxury hotels, sweetheart deals? Mr. Speaker, pro tip: this is not what tightening your belt looks like. The Premier and his friends are living large, giving out \$4.7 billion to corporations while insurance goes up, school fees go up, vulnerable Albertans get less. The *Calgary Sun* says that Toryland is back in business. To the Premier: why are you cutting services, preaching fiscal responsibility at the same time that you fly around in chartered planes, let your staff bill Albertans for luxury hotels, and let your friends jump through loopholes to hire their family?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, none of those things is true. I don't know where to start. Is she talking about Dr. Legg, a man with a PhD from Yale, who has made a massive pay cut to help work for this government to get people back to work? You know, I've got here the NDP's friend Tzaporah Berman staying at the Fairmont Hotel, charging taxpayers for her mochas and cappuccinos at

Starbucks while she was campaigning to kill energy jobs in this province. I'm proud to have Dr. Legg going to major financial institutions to fight back for this industry and this province.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier's top adviser – poor guy, only making \$200,000 a year – had to spend at least \$18,000 for luxury London trips as well. I say "at least" because we don't know how much more he expensed to the war room slush fund. First, London was a trade mission. Then it was a secret, undercover operation. Either way, this Premier's 007 needed a champagne bar and vitamin C showers. To the Premier. Albertans deserve to know what expensive tastes are being satisfied through that \$120 million slush fund. When will they come clean to Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the answer is none. There is no such thing as a slush fund. Dr. Legg works for the Premier's office and, through it, for Executive Council. His expenses are transparent. His travel expenses were arranged by the government travel office according to government travel rules, flying economy and staying in government-booked hotels. You know what he's doing? He's fighting back against the Extinction Rebellion nonsense that the NDP has aligned itself with while they're out there in front of the Legislature campaigning for the shutdown of our energy industry. We've had to dispatch somebody to argue against that case in amongst the major financial institutions of the world.

Ms Notley: Actually, we were out in front of the Legislature standing up with the young people who see this government destroying their future.

Now, we also learned that the head of the Premier's public inquiry into un-Albertan activities, coincidentally a major donor to the Justice minister, gave a \$1 million contract to his own son's law firm: no bids, no business case, no oversight except by the same public official who oversaw Tobaccogate. To the Premier: did you intentionally set this up to encourage this kind of cronyism? And if not, why don't you apologize to Albertans and fix this mess?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the NDP fear and smear has no limits. Mr. Allan has 40 years of experience as one of the country's leading forensic accountants, former president of the Alberta chartered accountants institute, former chair of the Calgary Stampede, chair of Calgary Economic Development, chair of the Canadian Tourism Commission, voted the most respected member of the Calgary community, Alberta Order of Excellence recipient, has worked in the nonprofit field for the homeless, for indigenous people, for the arts community. You know, we've asked Commissioner Allan to get to the bottom of the foreign-funded campaign against this province. He's a widely respected Albertan. How dare they smear his name.

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

Ms Notley: How dare these guys exempt him from conflict-of-interest rules, just like any other Albertan.

Panel on Federal-provincial Relations

Ms Notley: The economy is slowing, jobs continue to be lost, and now our kids' future is in jeopardy. The Premier's \$4.7 billion corporate handout hasn't created a single job, and now he's trying to distract from that failure by sending Preston Manning and friends on a road show to relaunch ideas that Ralph Klein shot down in 2004. To the Premier: will you admit that this is a cynical attempt to play on people's fears, or are you trying to distract from the fact

that you are failing to create jobs and to grow the economy? Which is it?

Mr. Kenney: That question perfectly illustrates why that was the first Premier to lose an election after one term in the province's history, Mr. Speaker. That leader and her party are so radically out of touch with the frustration of Albertans and our role in the federation that they actually voted for the federal NDP, that got 11 per cent of the popular vote. They went out and campaigned with Extinction Rebellion to shut down our energy industry, and now they refuse to listen to the voices of Albertans who say that we need a fair deal in the federation. We instead are going to listen with respect to those Albertans and come back with a plan to get fairness for Alberta in the Canadian federation.

2:00

Ms Notley: Albertans are angry, and they want a Premier who will focus on getting them jobs, not try to distract them with shiny objects. Mr. Speaker, the head of the Calgary Chamber of commerce calls it politics over policy and says that it creates uncertainty. Doug Griffiths rejected the ideas of Ralph Klein, saying that they were all risky and that they would cost too much. So either this is all a show or the Premier is seriously considering these risky, billion-dollar, ideological experiments, not one of which he discussed with Albertans in the last election. To the Premier: which is it?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP still doesn't get it. It is about jobs. When they made their failed strategic alliance with Justin Trudeau, they gave him a licence to shut down Northern Gateway, kill Energy East, surrender on Keystone XL, bungle Trans Mountain, bring in the no-more-pipelines law, bring in the tanker ban, bring in the cap on oil sands emissions, bring in the carbon tax: a body blow, all of that, to our industry and our jobs. Albertans elected us to fight back. We're going to listen to them on how best to do so, and we are going to keep our word with Albertans. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, fighting for jobs doesn't mean attacking people's retirement. You know, the Premier is a privileged recipient of a six-figure pension from Ottawa, so it's hardly surprising that he doesn't understand that for most Albertans CPP is the only retirement money they can count on. Now his panel is floating the idea of taking it over for politics. To the Premier: how does someone who only describes pensions as a tax on employers and someone who didn't lose a night's sleep over taking \$30 a month out of the pockets of people with severe disabilities think Albertans should ever, ever, ever trust him with their retirement?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we're going to listen to Albertans, unlike the NDP, who are rigidly ideological about these questions. Albertans want this province to assert itself within the federation. One idea is to do what Quebec has done successfully for six decades, to operate our own pension plan. We'll listen to Albertans on that. Ultimately, Albertans would have the final say in a referendum, but doing so, in principle, would allow us to reduce job-killing payroll taxes on Albertans. Because we have the youngest population in the country, we subsidize benefits for the others to the tune of \$3 billion a year. How about the NDP actually stand up for Alberta for a change?

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

Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Education minister took \$10 million away from Rocky View schools to pay for a \$4.7 billion, no-jobs corporate handout, and last week both of Airdrie's government MLAs confirmed that Rocky View is facing provincial funding cuts. That means more fees, less support for kids with complex needs and larger class sizes. To the Premier: can he explain why his Minister of Education just removed the class-size reporting requirements? Just admit that this is an attempt to conceal the impact of her cuts.

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. The reporting was tied to a failed grant. That is why I am now assembling a working group of education partners to re-examine this issue. Instead of working with education partners to develop new solutions, the NDP chose to continue to recklessly shovel money into a program that the Auditor General had already called ineffective. We will not do this. We are going to move forward.

Ms Hoffman: Hiring teachers and educational assistants is not recklessly funnelling money anywhere, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier's cuts mean that Rocky View parents are going to pay \$308 in busing fees. For the Premier's benefit let me explain that this is an onerous amount of money for ordinary folks. These parents are also paying for the Premier's provincial adviser to sleep in a luxury, five-star London hotel. How can the Premier justify charging parents \$308 more while his best buddy sips champagne in London?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The truth of the matter is that every single student who walks through our doors is funded. The envelope still remains at \$8.223 billion. We collect approximately \$2.5 billion in education tax dollars, but we are spending \$8.223 billion. This is unsustainable, and we are going to move forward.

Ms Hoffman: The next shoe is about to drop, Mr. Speaker. Parents and kids in Calgary schools will be learning in the days to come about an unprecedented mid-year fee hike. This fee hike used to be illegal. These new fees are the direct result of the Premier cutting the budget to Calgary schools. Why does the Premier think it's okay to charge parents more while he gives \$4.7 billion away in a no-jobs corporate handout?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over 98 per cent of the Education budget flows to school authorities who deliver services to students. Over the last 15 years enrolment has grown by 25 per cent, inflation by 33 per cent, but operationally we've grown by 80 per cent. Again, this is unsustainable. Boards have the autonomy to allocate funds, and I expect them to prioritize their funding by directing it to the classroom and continuing to put teachers in front of students. Teachers in front of students are the ones that have the greatest impact in the classroom.

Thank you.

Canada Pension Plan

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, over the past 10 years the design of federal formulas and programs have stripped more than \$200 billion

from Albertans to other areas of the country. One example is CPP. In 2017 CPP contributions by Alberta businesses and workers were about \$3 billion more than benefits paid to Alberta retirees. A government panel is soliciting input from Albertans on an alternative Alberta pension plan. To the minister: what similarities would an Alberta pension plan have to the existing CPP?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canada Pension Plan Act states that any province wishing to withdraw from the Canada pension plan, or CPP, must create a provincial pension plan with comparable benefits. If Alberta were to create its own provincial pension plan, Albertans would receive benefits similar to what they would have received under the CPP. While the benefits would be similar, there are reasons to believe that Albertans would benefit from lower payroll taxes under a provincial pension plan.

Mr. Stephan: Given that the Trudeau Liberals over the next four years are increasing CPP payroll taxes for Canadian businesses and workers by over 20 per cent and given that Alberta businesses and workers already subsidize the rest of the country with billions more each year than is paid to Alberta retirees, to the minister: will this increase to the CPP further disproportionately exacerbate the billions already taken from Alberta businesses and workers for other parts of the country?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans work more hours and make higher wages than Canadians in other provinces. As a result of that, Alberta will pay the lion's share of the enhanced Canada pension plan premiums. The end result of this attempt to expand the Canada pension plan will be a greater net transfer from Alberta to the rest of Canada.

Mr. Stephan: Given that CPP taxes for Alberta businesses and workers could be lower if Alberta did not have to make multibillion-dollar subsidy payments every year and given that with lower payroll taxes Alberta businesses could be more competitive, incent more employment, with Alberta workers retaining more after-tax salaries, to the minister: if Alberta had its own pension plan, could there be an opportunity for lower payroll taxes while maintaining or increasing benefits for Alberta retirees?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been independent reports that would indicate that if Alberta administered its own pension plan, it could result in lower contributions for employees and employers in this province, and that's why the Premier announced this as an idea to be added to the fair deal panel. One thing that I want to be clear and that the Premier has made clear, before any final decisions would be made, this concept will be researched thoroughly and it would ultimately be brought before Albertans in a referendum.

Automobile Insurance Premiums

Ms Phillips: Higher income tax, higher insurance, raiding our retirement savings, higher property taxes, higher deficit, same debt. The Premier's \$4.7 billion corporate handout isn't creating any jobs. It's just costing Albertans more. The Premier gave a massive gift to the insurance industry by taking the cap off our car insurance

rates. Constituents of mine have shown me bills that have gone up by \$500 or more a year. To the Premier: why are Albertans paying higher car insurance as part of your high-deficit, high-taxes corporate giveaway agenda?

2:10

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the previous government brought in a rate cap, which was just a Band-Aid on a problem that didn't fundamentally deal with the reasons why insurance premiums are going up in the automobile industry. Their rate cap was resulting in fewer Alberta insurers, which was resulting in less choice for automobile owners, and would ultimately result in much higher costs. We will not kick this problem down the road like the previous government did. We will work to deal with the underlying problems in the Alberta insurance industry. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, this minister and this Premier need to show leadership and find a better way to regulate insurance rates than slamming Albertans who can't afford it, or would Albertans only get a break if they were taking a private plane?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is exactly what we're doing. We're taking time to identify the fundamental issues that are creating higher premiums and costs in Alberta's automobile insurance industry. We're going to work with the industry and with Alberta consumers to ensure that we have a solution that will ensure Alberta automobile insurance consumers have sustainable, cost-effective premiums in the future. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Phillips: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that the time for that conversation is before people get stiffed with hundreds of dollars in new bills every month and given that Kim Zook of Tofield told the media, quote, \$30 isn't much for your average joe, but to me it's a tank of gas for four days – right? – so it's harder for me than a lot of people, why is this minister more interested in defending his fancy staff toot-tooting around London than he is in Kim Zook of Tofield's pocketbook?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, as I've mentioned, we're dealing with the fundamental underlying issues that are pushing insurance rates up in this province, and unlike the previous government who didn't have the courage to deal with the issues facing the insurance industry, this government will deal with those issues on behalf of Albertans.

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, the list of Albertans feeling the pinch of this Premier pandering to insurance companies continues to grow. Calgary father Scott Johnsen told Global News that the insurance hike will likely force his family to give up one of their vehicles. Just one problem: both of them work. To the Premier: can you explain to Scott Johnsen how exactly he and his wife are supposed to keep getting to work and supporting their young child if they have to sell off one of their vehicles?

Mr. Toews: Again, Mr. Speaker, we are aware that insurance premiums are going up. We're also aware that there are underlying contributing factors that are driving those costs up. It's complex. We're already starting to work with the industry and with consumer groups to ensure that we can deal with those underlying issues and

ensure that Albertans have sustainable, cost-effective insurance in the future. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Carson: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans from across the province have written to us with concerns of their insurance premiums rising even with clean records and given that the Premier and the minister don't seem to want to budge on their talking points as real Albertans struggle to keep their vehicles on the road, to the minister: will you commit to releasing a list of every organization you consulted before lifting the insurance rate cap?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the previous government, the NDP government, brought in a rate cap, which, again, limited options, ultimately limited products that were available to Alberta's motorists, resulted in some Alberta motorists not being able to buy collision insurance or comprehensive insurance. They were unable to actually buy plans that would extend their payments and make it more affordable. There were unintended consequences of that rate cap. We have lifted the rate cap, but more importantly, we're dealing with the underlying issues of the insurance industry.

Mr. Carson: Given that the minister has said that insurance companies could no longer afford to operate in Alberta with the rate cap in place but given that I'm not aware of any major insurance companies leaving Alberta in recent years and that threats from the industry seem to have been hollow, will the Minister of Finance commit to releasing any and all studies into the viability of Alberta's insurance industry, and will he release all other documents that guided his decision to lift the rate cap and hammer the budget of Alberta families?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, all this is pretty rich coming from the previous government, who didn't have the courage to deal with the underlying issues of automobile insurance. We will not make that mistake. Albertans elected us to come up with solutions that will stand Albertans in good stead today and tomorrow. We will deliver for Albertans.

Bill 207

Member Irwin: Bill 207 is an attack on women, an attack on LGBTQ2S-plus Albertans, an attack on Albertans seeking medical assistance in dying. In committee this morning the Member for Peace River did nothing to persuade us that this bill is anything other than a foot in the door to reduce access to health care, particularly in rural and remote areas. I'm glad that the Minister of Justice has read the bill, and I'm glad that he's publicly planning to oppose it. Can the minister tell this House why he plans to vote against Bill 207?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, our party and our government campaigned on making it clear that we would enshrine into the standing orders the right of private members of this place to be able to bring forward legislation during their time and for each member of this place to be able to have free votes. Bill 207 is going through the private members' process. It will be debated through that process, and each and every member of this Chamber will have the opportunity to be able to make a decision that reflects what they think is in their conscience and in the best interests of their constituents when it comes to Bill 207.

Member Irwin: Given that the members have the opportunity for free votes but not the opportunity to freely speak when asked

questions and given that the Minister of Health claimed that he hadn't even read the bill as recently as last Wednesday and given that the same minister, who's a lawyer, said that the bill was, quote, over his head, can the Minister of Health tell us: has he done his job now, has he read the bill, and what will his response be? Will he oppose it?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I might just remind you that the use of preambles after question 4 . . .

Member Irwin: I said given.

The Speaker: I'm pretty certain that it was a preamble. Otherwise, I wouldn't have reminded you.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, as I said, our party is committed, our government is committed to free votes when it comes to private members' business inside this place, including all members of the government, including all members of cabinet, who have committed to that process, voted for it to be enshrined in the standing orders of this place. I understand that the NDP do things differently when it comes to their members, that they whip them and make them speak and do certain things that fit within the party line. For this party, when it comes to private members' business, we believe in open and free debate, which we look forward to having inside this Chamber. [interjections] We certainly believe in not shouting down other members of this Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford will come to order. I had no problem hearing you; I did have some challenge hearing the Government House Leader during the question.

Member Irwin: Given that the Member for Peace River admitted today that he had no idea if he had consulted with a single member from the LGBTQ2S-plus community and given that this community is really hoping that the minister for the status of women will show up and speak up for them, can the minister or perhaps the House leader tell this House if she is satisfied with this lack of consultation, and will she oppose this attack on women's and LGBTQ2S-plus rights?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we have a robust process when it comes to private members' business. The hon. member knows that and, in fact, I think, is a member of the private members' committee, the standing committee on private members' bills. I understand that there was some preliminary debate around Bill 207 today and that there will be more to come in the coming days. This is something that we strongly believe in as a party, the free vote process. We will honour that. We will honour our commitment to Albertans, and we look forward to hearing the debate when it comes to Bill 207 inside this Chamber.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, if the Advanced Education minister had gone outside a bit earlier, he would have seen hundreds of students gathered on the steps of the Legislature to protest this government's policy of higher tuition, higher interest rates, slashed tax credits, and lower supports for our schools. This minister is making students pay more just to pay for his \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway. Will the minister start listening to students and end his attack on postsecondary education?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite confused, to be quite honest with you. I'm not quite sure what the member opposite is talking about. You know, if you have a look at my calendar, most of my time, a lot of my time, is spent meeting with students and talking with students directly. As well, just on Thursday I was in Fort McMurray visiting Keyano College and had a town hall with over a hundred members of the university community: students, faculty, staff. Students are our absolute top priority, and they have the strongest possible seat at the table to help inform government decision-making moving forward.

2:20

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that if this minister was actually listening to students, he would hear that they are opposed to an increased tuition of more than 21 per cent, they're opposed to losing their tax credits, they're opposed to \$600 million being taken out of operating expenses for postsecondary institutions, and they're opposed to leaving all of the money for capital projects away, when is this minister going to actually start addressing students' needs and start doing his job?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm taking a lot of time engaging with our students and listening to them and implementing their concerns and their objections. [interjections] I know the NDP wants to continue to yell and scream and not hear the response, but postbudget I had an opportunity to meet with student leaders. As we talked about moving forward from the budget, they wanted to ensure that the postsecondary institutions and universities were consulting with them and speaking with them. On Friday I was happy to send a note to our board chairs of all of our institutions and ask and encourage them to engage and consult with students as they're developing those . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park. [interjections] Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. I'm very happy to have the second supplemental. Given that if this minister was calling those board chairs, they would have told him exactly the same thing, that they don't want their capital budgets liquidated, that they don't want to have to impose 21 per cent increases to tuition, that will literally cut off tens of thousands of students from being able to go to postsecondary, and given that this is really the best way by which we can diversify our economy, why is this minister making cuts to postsecondary education at exactly the worst time he could possibly do so?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, thank you for that question. The answer is quite clear. Those members, when they were in government, drove the province off the fiscal cliff. We are in a very clear situation that is not sustainable. We can't keep going in the same direction. Postsecondary enrolment in the province over the last 15 years increased by 21 per cent, yet funding increased over 107 per cent. In order to ensure the long-term sustainability and high-quality nature of our postsecondary system, we have to make some changes now. I know our students understand that, and we're working with them to make some challenging decisions.

The Speaker: Now the hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Federal-provincial Relations

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have spoken loudly about their concern surrounding an out-of-touch federal government. They know that Alberta needs to stand up for itself in Confederation in order to get a fair deal. We know that many politicians have been dismissive of the very real concerns of Albertans in this regard. Could a minister tell us whether this government believes that we should listen to the concerns of Albertans and work toward solutions or whether we should dismiss concerns, as some politicians have said, as, quote, distractions?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will always listen to the concerns of hard-working Albertans who legitimately feel that they have not been treated fairly by Ottawa. Albertans have very real concerns and frustrations, and standing up for them is not a distraction. It's what we were elected to do. For the NDP to say that this is a distraction shows how completely out of touch with Albertans they are. That is part of the reason why they were the first one-term government in the history of this province.

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, given that amongst the many voices that have been dismissive of the concerns of Albertans, we have heard from eastern opinion elites and the leader of the separatist Bloc Québécois and given that the federal leader of the NDP has said that western Premiers listening to the people of their provinces is, quote, distracting, to the same minister: is it the job of this government to listen to Albertans or to those who have little understanding or respect for the deep frustrations of the people of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rather than representing the interests of Albertans, the members opposite have chosen to join their federal NDP leader, Jagmeet Singh, who over the weekend dismissed the concerns of Albertans and told Alberta to, quote, do better. Well, the federal NDP received about 11 per cent of the vote in Alberta in the last federal election, and their leader is not in any position whatsoever to tell Albertans how we should feel. We will listen to Albertans, not the NDP or the Bloc.

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, given that in response to our plan to listen to the concerns and frustrations of Albertans, the Leader of the Opposition said that, quote, what we are seeing is an effort to distract and given how this displays how out of touch the opposition is with the concerns of Albertans, to the minister: can you tell us whether MLAs and ministers should be listening to find solutions for the people of Alberta or dismissing Albertans' concerns as a, quote, effort to distract, echoing the language of the federal NDP leader and the leader of the Bloc Québécois?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The kind of rhetoric that we heard over the weekend by the NDP here and in Ottawa is a continuation of the last four years, where the government in Ottawa set up roadblocks in policies, regulations, and legislation that harmed Alberta. For four years, while other jurisdictions around the world were supporting their oil and gas industries, the NDP here and Justin Trudeau in Ottawa were taxing and regulating everything they could find. They pursued a failed social licence, they built nothing, and they drove investment out of this province. They burned it to the ground and salted the earth. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has a question.

Seniors' Benefits

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this government's recently released fiscal plan, there is a bar graph that compares three provincial seniors' income support programs: B.C., Ontario, and Alberta. The narrative in the document indicates Alberta seniors receive funds that put them squarely on the poverty line and claims Alberta has a generous support system for seniors. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: have you talked to seniors about your government's efforts to push them below the poverty line? Did seniors tell you they received too much money?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, in my six months as Minister of Seniors and Housing I went to 30 different communities besides the two big cities, listened to our seniors, and listened to a lot of Albertans about how to better serve them and how to utilize our money and control the spending for something they really want. We are going to continue to do that. This government is going to spend the money on quality services and products for our seniors.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, income support programs are fundamental to supporting seniors to live with dignity in our province, and given that each year the cost of living rises, negatively impacting those on fixed incomes, like our seniors, and given that seniors built this province and deserve our respect and given that this UCP government has cut seniors' benefits, to the minister: why are you paying for a \$4.7 billion handout to corporations on the backs of Alberta seniors? How can you possibly justify cutting their benefits?

Ms Pon: Please review, Member, our budget. We increased by \$9 million our budget for seniors' benefits. Also, our government must get spending under control. Seniors have made our province into what it is today, but they also understand we need to live within our means. The MacKinnon report indicates that if we continue down this road of spending out of control like the previous government, we will soon be more than a hundred billion dollars in debt. They spent \$5 million a day on interest.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It amazes me that the minister cares more about interest rates than about seniors in our province. She's showing no compassion for them.

Given that the seniors population in Alberta is growing at the rate of 23 per cent annually, significantly higher than the general population, and given that the budget does not account for this growth in many areas, including the Seniors and Housing ministry, will the minister please explain to Alberta's growing seniors population why she's okay with seniors paying more and getting less as a result of this terrible UCP budget?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member will know that even though this is a very important and sensitive topic, the rule for preambles still applies.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me repeat it again. Budget 2019 included an increase of \$9 million for Seniors and Housing – an increase – and we always make sure Alberta's growing seniors population is well equipped. It's not like the previous government. The four years they managed were unsuccessful years. The NDP did not address the needs of the growing seniors population. By 2035 1 in 5 Albertans will be over the age of 65. Our government will ensure that our most cherished residents have the supports they need, including maintaining . . .

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

Hospital Emergency Liaison Officer Program

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, for many years ambulances have been getting stuck at our major urban hospitals for hours, leading to paramedic burnout and code reds, where there are no ambulances available to take a call. This problem has been especially difficult in Calgary. The hospital EMS liaison officer program, or HELO, was an initiative of the previous government to help ambulances turn around faster at major urban hospitals. That program was successful. To the Minister of Health: why did you cancel this program this past June?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps just to provide some clarity, I cancelled nothing. This is a decision of AHS. As the hon. member knows from the question that arose at estimates, HELO is one of, I think it's estimated, about a hundred different initiatives that AHS has done recently to try to deal with wait times in our emergency departments as EMS and paramedics are dropping off patients at our emergency departments. HELO: I'm advised by AHS that there was no information to provide that it actually made any difference. They are going to continue to try and innovate to be able to help our patients get admitted to the hospital.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that AHS's own analysis, which I will table, actually showed that all four of Calgary's major hospitals showed dramatic improvement in hitting their turnaround targets and given that both the chief paramedic and the associate executive director of Calgary EMS said that HELO was creating immediate improvements – and I will table those comments as well – why did the minister disregard this evidence and advice from paramedics and allow AHS to cancel this successful program?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, again, I made no decision to cancel anything. This is a decision of AHS. It was actually advice of the chief paramedic himself. When I spoke to him about this, I'm sure it was him who told me that HELO made no difference and that they're going to continue . . .

Ms Hoffman: Read the report.

Mr. Shandro: . . . to innovate and try to find new programs to be able to make sure that our patients are admitted to our hospitals and that ambulances are going to get back on the street as quickly as possible.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that this minister clearly has not read the report – and I would encourage him to look at the documents that I will table today – and given that behind these statistics are paramedics trapped at work, away from their families for hours

after their shift was supposed to end, and given that this minister is choosing to leave Calgarians in acute distress waiting longer for an ambulance, to this minister: how could you possibly justify AHS cancelling the HELO program and leaving Albertans in distress while you stand willingly behind a \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway that has yet to create a single job?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, I agree that this is an issue that we have to deal with as a government.

Ms Hoffman: You should read the report.

Mr. Shandro: I'm very happy to answer the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora as well, Mr. Speaker, as she likes to heckle throughout my answers.

The answer is this. [interjections] We get asked and I get asked quite often why in six months we haven't fixed the mess that we were left by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. No, I haven't in six months fixed her mess. It's going to take a lot of work by this government to be able to make sure our patients are cared for. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mobile Home Owner Consumer Protection

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, residents of mobile-home communities, like all Albertans, are hard-working, persevering individuals. Many of these individuals live in mobile-home communities in West Yellowhead, and these families deserve fair treatment. I'm hearing from my constituents that in some cases targeted rent increases have forced these hard-working Albertans to leave their community, and my constituents don't feel that the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act has proven that it will protect tenants. Could the Minister of Service Alberta tell me how this government is going to ensure mobile-home owners are treated fairly?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for West Yellowhead for raising these important concerns. You know, I heard a lot about these kinds of concerns when I was on my tour this summer, and I want to assure the member and his constituents that I take these concerns very seriously. I wouldn't have toured the province if I didn't take this seriously and if I didn't think it was important. What I can further assure the member and his constituents is that we're getting there, and residents of mobile-home communities can trust that I've heard them. I as well as my department continue to spend a significant amount of time on this very important issue.

Thank you.

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, given that constituents in my riding are concerned that their rights aren't always being respected and given that mobile-home site residents are concerned that their landlords are being unjust and given that information on the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act is not always readily available and easily accessible and given that Albertans want to stand up for themselves and their own communities, what is this government doing to ensure that mobile-home site residents know and understand their rights laid out within the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important that all Albertans, including mobile-home residents, know and understand

their rights. That's why we have a tipsheet specifically related to renting mobile-home sites, which is available on the government website. This includes information for both landlords and tenants, including, as I've talked about with several members of this Assembly, the fact that landlords cannot increase rents more than once a year and that they must give six months', or 180 days', notice of any increase.

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, given that my constituents have turned to municipal and provincial government members, including the minister during his tour in August, and given that they are frustrated that they don't feel they're getting the answers or the attention they need regardless of whom they turn to and given that they're also frustrated because they don't feel that they get the attention or action required from site managers and community owners and they're nervous to speak up for fear of repercussion, again to the minister: how is this government going to make sure that tenants are able to get answers to their questions and their concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you for question, and thank you again to the member for his continued and tireless advocacy for his constituents in West Yellowhead. In fact, I just want to point out that when I was on my tour – I believe that it was in Hinton – the member had organized what was the most well-attended meeting to discuss this topic, so thank you to him for standing up for his constituents.

What I would tell him and his constituents, through you, Mr. Speaker, is that the best thing they can do is work with their local MLA and share their concerns and their challenges, and to the extent that they're having issues there, then they can work with my department. We are there to make sure that they know their rights and that their rights are protected.

Parent Link and Family Resource Centres

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, as a father of three children I understand the challenges that many families in our province may face. Many new families with young children across my constituency have accessed services such as parent link and family resource centres. They've expressed support and a sincere wish to continue these services. To the Minister of Children's Services: what does the future hold for parent link and these family resource centres?

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much to the member for the great question. Some early intervention and prevention contracts have been in place for more than 20 years. Instead of reviewing those services, new programs have been layered on top of existing programs, and we now have an inconsistent patchwork of programs and services across the province. We owe it to the vulnerable Albertans who rely on these services to transform the system. With the new family resource network and the support of community partners that's exactly what we'll do.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you to the minister for that answer.

Given that young people across the province face unique challenges and may not have strong support networks and given that it's crucially important that we have early intervention and prevention services in place to address these needs before they become critical, to the Minister of Children's Services: can the minister tell us what she is doing to ensure that Albertans receive equitable and necessary supports regardless of their income and where they live?

2:40

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we won't continue to do things the way they've always been done just because that's the way we've always done them. Over the next six months this transparent process will allow community partners to propose best approaches on how we can strengthen the prevention and early intervention system. It needs to be more consistent across the province, it needs to reflect unique community needs, it needs to address the gap in services that sometimes exist for children over the age of six, and we need to implement the precedent-setting well-being and resiliency framework introduced this spring. Many organizations are already there, and we as government need to catch up.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you to the minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I've heard a lot of discussion in my riding about the perceived end of these services, which has been exacerbated by the fearmongering of the opposition, to help put these families at ease and provide some assurance to them, to the Minister of Children's Services: can she set the record straight on funding for these critical supports?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, these programs will continue to support at-risk kids and parents. This is about providing services where they have the greatest impact and building on partnerships that are already happening between community agencies across all areas of the province.

Mr. Feehan: This is misleading.

Mr. Loewen: Point of order.

Ms Schulz: That means simplifying the system and reviewing where we are spending tax dollars. One example: we know that these dollars are going to things like community newsletters and system navigators. Mr. Speaker, if Albertans need navigators to access important services, then we need to change the system to better support their needs.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will return to Members' Statements, but prior to doing that, I think it's fair that we deal with the point of order at this point in time.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: I very clearly heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford say, "This is misleading." Of course, that is wildly unparliamentary language, and I'm sure that he's happy to apologize and withdraw.

I don't understand why you might be standing. You don't look like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, but I'm happy to hear your call.

Mr. Bilous: No, Mr. Speaker, I'm not, but I would like to speak to the point of order that was called.

The Speaker: That's not possible because the Speaker is actually addressing the point of order. Even if the hon. member hadn't raised the point of order, the Speaker would have called the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to order because it was very clear to the Speaker. Of course, the Speaker's discretion at any point in time is to call a member to order, which I've done for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford because he very clearly said, "This is misleading," which is clearly unparliamentary and out of order. So

he's happy to apologize and withdraw, or we can continue to have this discussion.

Sorry. Hon. Opposition House Leader, you are not the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. The only path forward today is for him to apologize and withdraw. I'm happy to hear you one last time, but let's be clear that that is what is going to happen today.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I rise because in many accounts in this place, when it is government or an entity or a body, you have allowed the word "mislead," and it has not been a point of order. The member was not referring to the individual minister; he was referring to a topic, and therefore it is not a point of order, sir.

Ms Hoffman: Based on your past rulings.

The Speaker: I am very clear on what my past rulings are, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. I appreciate your assistance. In this House the Premier has apologized for utilizing the term "misleading" when he said that the Leader of the Official Opposition was misleading the House.

There was one individual who was speaking at the time that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford heckled inappropriately that "this is misleading," referring to the individual who was speaking. As such, by saying that "this is misleading," he has said that the minister is misleading the House.

He can apologize, or he can find the door. What would he like to do?

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw the statement and apologize to the House for their interpretation of my comments.

The Speaker: This matter is dealt with and concluded. See how easy that is, hon. members.

In 35 seconds or less we'll move to Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Drumheller-Stettler has the call.

Don Cherry

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Political correctness in Canada is completely out of control. This time it is Canadian icon and hockey legend Don Cherry, who was fired by Rogers Sportsnet on Remembrance Day.

Don Cherry is a man who has dedicated more than most to helping support our veterans and active service personnel. He travelled to Afghanistan to entertain our troops during the conflict, and that is just the start of his support. Now he's been fired for making inarticulate comments about how everyone, especially new Canadians, should be wearing poppies and understanding why. Most Canadians agree with this point. The poppy is an important symbol of the sacrifice which previous generations made on our behalf.

His point was not made well and certainly not with political correctness. His passion no doubt comes from experiencing World War II as a young boy. He has already said that he wishes he had said "everyone" rather than "you people." This phrase has significant connotations of racism attached to it, especially when directed at marginalized groups. It is, however, a stretch to accuse anyone of racial bigotry simply because they used a phrase you do not agree with. Our own Prime Minister has dressed in blackface on at least three separate occasions, but he didn't lose his job. I guess Canadians experienced that differently.

In the words of Cherry's lifetime friend Bobby Orr: it's a new world, I guess; freedom of speech doesn't matter. Orr describes Cherry as: the most generous and caring guy that I know. Cherry has been saying controversial things on *Hockey Night in Canada* for over 30 years. To act in composure is not what made him synonymous with hockey. Cherry is an Everyman. He is passionate about hockey and has found his niche by being confrontational.

The point is this. Whether you agree with Cherry or not, we can't keep cancelling individuals just because we disagree with what they say or how they say it. This is not what breeds a healthy society nor a healthy debate. It certainly isn't fair treatment for a man who's devoted much of his time to supporting our troops and veterans. He simply wanted to urge all Canadians to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to provide oral notice of three government motions and a few pieces of legislation if I could.

First would be Government Motion 35.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 22, Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, 2019, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in second reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Government Motion 36.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 22, Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, 2019, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Government Motion 37.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 22, Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, 2019, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I wish to provide oral notice of three bills for the Order Paper, those being Bill 26, Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019, sponsored by the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry; Bill 27, Trespass Statutes (Protecting Law Abiding Property Owners) Amendment Act, 2019, sponsored by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General; and finally Bill 28, Opioid Damages and Health Care Cost Recovery Act, sponsored by the Minister of Health.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 22

Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, 2019

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 22, Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, 2019. This is the last of the three budget implementation bills being introduced, preceded by bills 20 and 21.

2:50

This legislation will eliminate needless government spending, improve the efficiency and oversight of public agencies, boards, and commissions, and increase the value of taxpayer and pension plan investments. This bill will strengthen the governance and oversight of ABCs while also reducing duplication and nonessential spending. In some cases this will involve simple changes such as reducing the number of board members at certain agencies, boards, and commissions. In other cases we will dissolve agencies, boards, and commissions, otherwise known as ABCs, entirely and move their functions into ministries. These reforms will allow our government to realize significant administrative savings while still delivering the high-quality services that Albertans depend on.

Another key objective of Bill 22 is to strengthen the Alberta Investment Management Corporation, better known as AIMCo. The bill aims to consolidate the investment of pensions, funds, and endowments under AIMCo's management. The proposed changes are expected to increase AIMCo's investment portfolio by \$30 billion. This will enhance AIMCo's economies of scale and allow it to deliver higher expected returns for lower investment management costs. Strengthening AIMCo benefits all Albertans since it will increase the return on Alberta government funds and endowments, including the Alberta heritage trust fund.

Albertans know that our government is focused on finding savings through improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the public services that their dollars pay for. Mr. Speaker, Albertans have waited long enough for action to be taken to ensure publicly owned enterprises and agencies, boards, and commissions are delivering the best possible value for taxpayer dollars. This legislation takes a step in that direction.

This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 22, Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, 2019.

The Speaker: Thank you to the hon. Minister of Finance for that very thorough introduction of first reading.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for first reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:53 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Lovely	Savage
Copping	Luan	Schow
Ellis	Milliken	Schulz
Getson	Neudorf	Shandorf
Glasgo	Nicolaides	Sigurdson, R.J.
Glubish	Nixon, Jason	Stephan
Guthrie	Nixon, Jeremy	Toews
Hanson	Orr	Toor
Horner	Pitt	Turton
Hunter	Pon	van Dijken
Jones	Rehn	Walker
LaGrange	Reid	Williams
Loewen	Rowswell	Yaseen
Long	Rutherford	

Against the motion:

Bilous	Gray	Renaud
Carson	Irwin	Schmidt
Dang	Nielsen	Shepherd
Deol	Pancholi	Sigurdson, L.
Ganley	Phillips	Sweet
Goehring		

Totals: For – 41 Against – 16

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(7) deems that unless notice is given prior to 3 o'clock, at 3 o'clock the daily Routine is deemed complete. As such, we are at ordres du jour.

3:10

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 204 Election Recall Act

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the MLA for Drayton Valley-Devon to move second reading of Bill 204, the Election Recall Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is a measure to make elected officials in this province more accountable. The political climate in our province and across the country is rapidly changing, and we're seeing that politicians, in addition to the media and other public entities, are far less trusted than they have been in the past. This measure is an opportunity for us to restore some of that trust, to ensure that politicians are accountable to their constituents, those who elected them. We want to make sure that trust is restored. That is the motive for this bill.

I'm pleased to rise on this bill. I'm pleased to speak on it because it is something I have advocated for a very long time and the predecessors of mine have also advocated. To cite Paul Hinman is a great example, a true champion of recall legislation, someone who has fought for greater transparency and accountability in this Chamber when he was elected and someone that I consult regularly because I believe it's important to go to those who have gone before and to seek wisdom and guidance.

But what this really does is give more power and more and more authority back to the constituents, back to the ones who elected us. I am happy that this is being brought forward by the MLA for Drayton Valley-Devon. Now, in addition to being an important piece of legislation, it was also a campaign commitment and something that I'm glad that the member decided to use his luck of the draw, the private members' bills draw, to bring forth. In the United Conservative Party campaign platform on page 89 it says:

A United Conservative government will:

- Introduce a Recall Act based on precedents in several jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, the United States, and in British Columbia where the provision has existed since 1996.

Now, I believe this also speaks to a larger issue of changing the way we do things. One of the most detrimental phrases that could every be uttered in an organization is: this is how it's always been done. This is how it's always been done. It's terrible. It suggests that we're going to stay inside the box, that we're not going to look for new ways to be more efficient, to be leaner, to be better. For

years we have not had recall legislation. It was introduced in the past by a private member, but it never saw third reading, so now we're sitting here talking about it today.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

An example from my own life about changing the way that we do things: you know, back in late July we welcomed our third child in our family. It was a very joyful time, but with that came a lot more constraints on my own time. I needed to stay home with my wife and my kids and make sure that they were well taken care of. In doing that, I was a bit remiss in maybe taking care of my own diet and even going to the gym. Naturally, the body does as it does as it ages, and when the time came to prepare to come back to this historic Chamber, I realized that some of the suits that I usually wear may not have fit quite the way they used to fit. So I was faced with two choices. The first choice, Mr. Speaker, was that I could just go buy some new suits. Now, that would be a pretty significant dent in my pocketbook, and I choose not to do that. Or I could change the way I was doing things in my own life. I could take better care of myself, go back to the gym, change my diet. That is exactly what I did. I think that speaks to the main point of this bill, which is changing the way we're doing things.

Now, I also look at the process for this legislation, what it takes to initiate a recall. I'll go through some of those steps with you. The first is that a voter can only petition to recall a member for the electoral district in which the voter is registered to vote. What that means is that you, Mr. Speaker, could not introduce a recall legislation on me in my constituency given that you are a resident of Calgary and not God's country, Cardston-Siksika.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The second is that upon receiving the voter's application, Elections Alberta issues the petition and the voter has 60 days to collect the requisite signatures totalling 40 per cent or more of the number of voters that appear on the postelection list of electors. That is to say that of the list of electors on election day you must be able to garner 40 per cent of those signatures. That's very important to note.

The recall petition can only be signed by individuals who are eligible to vote in the member's electoral district at the time that the recall petition takes place. So if you may have been a resident, Mr. Speaker, in the constituency where the recall petition had been initiated but you were no longer living there but you were on the electoral list on the day of the election, that does preclude you from signing the petition.

Now, once that's done, the voter returns the petition to Elections Alberta at the end of the 60 days, and the Chief Electoral Officer has the following 42 days to verify the signatures. If the required number of eligible voters have signed the petition and the rules were all met, the member ceases to hold office, and a by-election must be called.

To wrap all that into a nice little package, it's important to know that there is a threshold here of 40 per cent. That's the big number. That's the bingo number here that people need to know. If you want to initiate a recall of a sitting Member of the Legislative Assembly, you have to be able to get 40 per cent of the signatures of the number of electors that were on the list on election day.

Now, I guess the question begs: when would this be applicable? I don't think the purpose of this is to try to recall a member of this Chamber just because you may not like something that they said in the media or something that they did while they were at a local event. This is a very serious process, something that we here must take very seriously, and the electors must do the same.

If I can take a little jaunt down memory lane, you know, sprinkle a little history on your ears, I'll do just that and give an instance where I think recall might have been applicable. I take a step back to during the leadership campaign for our now Premier. I was out knocking on some doors in the wonderful constituency of what was Calgary-North West. Now, for anyone who can remember, Calgary-North West was represented by none other than Sandra Jansen. Sandra Jansen was originally elected in 2012 as a member of the Progressive Conservative Party. We all know that the parties did merge and that the electoral districts have changed since then, but what hasn't changed and what remains still seared in the minds of the voters of what was Calgary-North West is the dramatic betrayal of trust that Sandra Jansen perpetrated on their votes. Ms Jansen crossed the floor on November 17, 2016, and was even subsequently named Minister of Infrastructure. How coincidental. How convenient.

Now, going back to that day, when I was out knocking on doors, I was often greeted with: "Thank goodness you're out here; thank goodness you're knocking on doors. Thank goodness you're moving towards the right direction of uniting the conservative parties in this province. We just wish you could do it faster so that we could get rid of this MLA of ours." I cannot tell you how many times I heard it. I'm paraphrasing, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that the language was far more colourful in many instances.

Then I went over to one of the local businesses afterwards to treat some of the volunteers to some nice refreshments and some appetizers, as I usually believe you should. You know, I think that one of the first rules of campaigns is that you've got to feed the troops. That's really important. You show that appreciation. I think everybody in this Chamber would certainly agree with that. Even the owner of the business that we were at, the restaurant, started asking us what we were doing there, and before we even got to it, that owner saw one of the T-shirts we were wearing and said: "Thank you for what you are doing. You are moving in the right direction. We've got to get rid of this MLA we have. I wish we could do it faster."

Well, Mr. Speaker, if only recall legislation was available back then, because I am certain that in the – well, I guess that I don't want to presuppose too much, but from the constituents that I heard in the wonderful area of Calgary-North West, I believe that there would have been an important call for that recall. For that reason, I'm grateful to speak on this today.

3:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, I see the hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has risen.

Mr. Hunter: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Bills.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Bills (reversion)

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

Bill 25 Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2019

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the House for this. I'll keep this short. I rise today to introduce Bill 25, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2019.

Bill 25 follows through on our government's commitment to cut red tape. This is one of many steps to make Alberta one of the freest and fastest moving economies in the world, and I look forward to many more red tape reduction bills to come in order to be able to fulfill our one-third reduction.

With that, I move first reading of Bill 25.

The Speaker: Thank you for keeping that short, hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a first time]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

Bill 204 Election Recall Act

The Speaker: I saw the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise to speak to Bill 204, which is the Election Recall Act.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, the speaker before me was correct in at least one of his comments, which is highly unusual, when he indicated that this bill has a very high threshold. That is correct. This bill does have a very high threshold in order for this to occur, so for that part of the bill, we're fine with it.

I think the thing which concerns us more about this bill is that it's essentially a backdoor way to allow third parties to advertise during a different time period. Every time one of these things is started, we're going to see campaigns amping up and third-party advertisers mixing into the political mix. What this is is essentially an attempt by the UCP to Americanize our democracy, to put us in the position of constant campaigning, to put us in the position of pay-to-play politics, where if you don't have millions and millions of dollars, no one's really interested in your opinion, and I think that's incredibly sad. I think that our democracy is something that is under increasing threat here in this place.

Not only do we see this, but mere moments ago we saw closure invoked before a bill was even introduced – I would be surprised if someone could tell me that that had ever happened before in this place – a bill, incidentally, to fire an Election Commissioner who is investigating this government. That goes exactly to this bill, which is to say that it's just another backdoor way to slide in additional campaigning, additional money, pay-to-play politics, and I think that everyone should be concerned.

You know, this is premised on the justification of accountability of elected officials, and that justification in and of itself is an incredibly important thing – it is – but I'm not sure this achieves it. I think that what we lose here is so much larger than what we could ever possibly gain.

I also think that it's a distraction. It's yet another thing like this panel investigating the Wexit and everything else that's going on that's intended to distract from a terrible budget. This bill is being introduced to try and attract attention and pull attention away. In fact, I suspect there are a number of private members' bills that have recently been introduced in this place that exist for exactly that same reason, to try to detract attention from what Albertans should be paying attention to, which is a terrible budget, a budget that

hands \$4.7 billion to profitable corporations while taking from pretty much everyone across the entire province.

Mr. Speaker, I continue to be shocked by the behaviour in this place. You know, there are a lot of long traditions in this House. I apologize; I am trying to speak to the subject matter, but in light of what happened earlier today, it feels a bit shocking. Certainly, again, this bill does have a very high threshold. It's quite unlikely that recall could occur.

I'm not surprised to discover that the hon. members from across the way took this opportunity to once again attack a female MLA who stood up to the current Premier. I'm not surprised at all because they attacked her repeatedly in the past. You know, all of this goes on, Mr. Speaker, at the same moment that we're seeing this incredibly terrible budget, at the same moment that we have multiple members of the UCP under investigation. Well, I guess maybe not under investigation for much longer, since they've used the Legislature to remove the individual investigating them, but I think, again . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you. I just want to ensure that we stay on task with the topic at hand.

Ms Ganley: Okay. Well, how about if I speak to the last member's comments?

The Acting Speaker: I think that what I'm getting at with this is that it sounds to me like we might be getting close to talking about a decision previously made by the House. I don't think that this would be the right avenue to do so. If the hon. member would please continue with comments on Bill 204.

Ms Ganley: Sure. I'm happy to comment on Bill 204, and I'm happy to comment on the comments of the speaker immediately before me, who used the opportunity of this legislation to slide in a series of digs at a female member of this House who was the subject of some genuinely egregious behaviour in the past.

Mr. Speaker, again, the bill does have quite a high threshold, so it's unlikely that this will ever occur. We're not, again, opposed in principle to the idea that a person should be accountable. Mostly, this will introduce an enormous amount of cost. It will introduce a backdoor method by which political action committees can operate outside of the normal electoral time. It will introduce a method by which, you know, campaigning can pretty much become continuous, as in American-style politics. It's unlikely to be effective, although on that basis I wouldn't reject it because the point of the thing is good. I would reject it on the basis that it's likely to be extremely expensive, and it's likely to drive us further, again, to that Americanization of politics, which unfortunately we're seeing here in Alberta. I'm hearing it from constituents. I hear it on the doorsteps all the time, that the things people feel that they are entitled to say, that bar has shifted significantly. I don't want to see that happen here.

I think that, you know, this has been a place of respectful debate and respectful discourse for years. For years and years Alberta has been a place where we can respectfully disagree with one another. We're starting to lose that, and I'm worried that this plays into our starting to lose that. Again, by allowing backdoor entry of political action committees to be campaigning virtually constantly, we won't just get this sort of hyperpartisan electoral rhetoric in the months immediately preceding an election, but we'll get it constantly.

You know, I think we've probably all had the experience, everyone in this place, of volunteers coming back to our campaign office who have had a really negative experience, sometimes not even at a door. I mean, certainly, my colleague that ran in Calgary-Varsity had a horrendous experience of being followed around by a

truck, being followed around and having her volunteers threatened, having people take pictures of their licence plates and threaten to come to their homes. This is not something that we want entering – and I don't think that anyone in this room really wants that in politics. I don't think that anyone really wants that to be the case, that people are physically – physically – afraid to speak their opinions.

3:30

I don't think that that's the way we should be moving. I don't believe that anybody thinks that that's the way we should be moving. But as we let these American-style politics sort of seep into our Canadian democracy, as we let it seep into our democracy that the loudest voice and not the voice with the most coherent argument wins, I think we're going to see it more and more. I think that is sad, I think it is a loss that we should all mourn, and that is ultimately why I will stand in opposition to this particular bill, again, not because of the substance of what it does but because of this sort of backdoor attempt to bring big money into politics, you know, in between election cycles.

I think that between the provincial election and the federal election we're all a bit exhausted by the level of discourse that occurred. I think that it's good to have a break. It's good to go back and try to be able to have some time in between elections. I mean, it doesn't seem to be the way it's going, unfortunately, in this place. Certainly, today's events make it pretty clear that we're not going that way anyway, but I suppose my heart can wish that that could be a thing that exists in Alberta again, that that could be a thing that continues to exist in this province, because I think it's an important thing. I think that, yeah, this is an incredible concern.

With that, I will end my comments. I will say again that we are not against the substance of the bill. It's just this sort of additional allowing in of political advertising action committees as well as the additional cost that goes with this. I mean, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you're probably aware that by-elections are quite an expensive thing, and I suspect that in addition to – again, we're very unlikely to see a by-election, but the process itself is likely to add a certain amount of expense, and I don't really think that that is necessary at this point.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 204, the Election Recall Act. I do sit as a member of the private members' bills committee, so I did have the opportunity to hear the presentation by the hon. member putting forth this legislation and to hear from the stakeholders who provided their input as well with respect to Bill 204. I actually want to echo a number of the comments from my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View in that my largest concern with respect to Bill 204 is that it does appear to be a distraction.

What I did find interesting about the fact that this bill was brought forward as a private member's bill – and I understand that the member bringing it forward had a bit of a history with respect to this issue. However, this idea of recall legislation was actually set out within the UCP platform. It was set out there as a highlighted thing that the government would be bringing in. We've heard repeatedly from the Premier and from members of cabinet and all members on the government side about how important their UCP platform is to them, how they appear to justify any action, particularly if it was outlined in their very, very detailed, lengthy platform, with the assumption that all Albertans who voted for the

UCP voted for all of the commitments in that platform. We certainly do challenge that assumption.

However, it was set out as a commitment made by the UCP in their election platform, so I find it remarkable that this is being brought forward as a private member's bill and not as a government bill. It could have been part of the numerous pieces of legislation that we are seeing brought forward. It was a very intense legislative session that we had in the summer and that we are having now, but clearly this was not a priority for the government because it was not brought forward as a government bill. In fact, it was brought forward by the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

To me, it also speaks to my questioning about whether or not there actually is a commitment within the government caucus. I understand that it is a private member's bill, and we've heard a lot of comments recently about free votes on private members' bills. Perhaps there is a division – and I believe there likely is a division – within the members on the government side with respect to their support for this legislation. We know that with this kind of recall legislation, it's not the first time that it's been brought forward in this Assembly. Several of the members on the other side actually have voted against legislation like that in the past. I'm curious as to whether or not there really, actually is, despite it being in the government platform as a commitment, a commitment to this legislation. I suspect we're going to see a bit of division on this one.

You know, for me, my concern, when I look at the bill, is twofold. First, it's that there seems to be a lack of detail within the bill, that I think suggests to me that some very big loopholes, either intentionally or unintentionally, have been created. This was an issue that came up a number of times when we were in the private members' bills committee, which was questions about: who is authorized to collect funds during a recall petition? In particular, there was concern, actually, that the way the current Bill 204 is phrased, there is some room there for third parties to essentially be fund raising during a recall petition. Although the member bringing the private member's bill forward maintained that he did not intend for that to be the case, I believe that the current wording – and we confirmed this when we spoke with both the Chief Electoral Officer as well as the representative from Alberta Justice who came and spoke and gave a technical briefing on the bill – does not limit who can actually collect funds during a recall petition.

It does leave an opening for a prescribed entity to, by regulation, be able to collect funds, to be a participant, and that, to me, raises some red flags. It raises the alarm that perhaps we are going to be in a situation where we will have third-party actors, political groups organizing behind the scenes, and maybe even political parties, because there's actually no prohibition within this current act that would prevent political parties and other third parties from actually being the ones to raise funds for recall petitions. I take the member who brought this bill forward at his word when he said that that was not his intent. However, that is the outcome of the current wording of the bill. My concern around that is that perhaps it's not an unintentional oversight. Perhaps it is an intentional oversight and maybe not an oversight at all.

Really, my concern is exactly what my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View's was, that this is about continuing campaigning in between election periods. This is about creating a machine, a way for fundraising by political parties to continue to raise funds outside of election periods, outside the current parameters of our elections legislation. You know, I actually was very struck by the comments from my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, because when she talks about the Americanization of our political system, that is, actually, precisely what it feels like. As an outside observer who watches what's happening in the American system, it does feel like the campaigning and the fundraising is going on all the time.

Now, of course, political parties have rights to fund raise, but to use a recall petition to do that actually seems like it's deliberately designed to continue to fuel the division that we are seeing, that is being promoted actively by this government. We've seen that the entire tone of this government has been about creating and identifying enemies. We've had members in this House stand up and basically say that it is about us versus them and that you're either with us or you're against us. To me, this kind of system, where we're going to be allowing fundraising and recall petitions to be filed, is just going to continue to fuel that.

To some extent, we have to have some trust and faith in our democratic institutions and the democratic systems that have been in place for some time. Now, I have to tell you that I believe that my own personal faith in our democratic institutions is starting to be challenged because we're seeing that we have a government that's actively undermining democracy. We saw a perfect example of that a mere two hours ago, less than that, actually, when, before even introducing a bill into the Legislature, the Government House Leader stood up and invoked closure of debate on that bill, before even introducing it.

Certainly, at a time when our democratic institutions are under attack by the very government that's in place right now, I think we have to go back and say: "You know what? We need to start looking at ways to be moving forward and actually governing."

3:40

One of my concerns that I'm consistently seeing when we hear the rhetoric that's coming from this government caucus is that it's all about lawsuits and war rooms and inquiries and referendums and potentially looking at ways to separate Alberta out from Canada. This is being fuelled by this government if not by the Premier directly. At some point we actually need to get down to business and govern and actually make decisions in the best interests of this province and stop fighting fights and actually move forward in a progressive way.

We're seeing no indication of that because this government, with its budget and all the measures it's taking, is attacking all Albertans from all sides right now. This is just one more piece of that puzzle as far as I'm concerned. It's another way to keep continuing to have this environment and a climate where we are in combat with each other, where we are constantly divided, where we are constantly seeking to tear down our institutions. Rather, there has to be some acceptance of the democratic will of the people when an election is made.

I think, actually, one of my concerns with respect to the details of this bill is that we have seen recall legislation in other jurisdictions. In the United Kingdom, for example, they do have recall legislation, but there is a requirement there that there be just cause to recall an elected official. You know, I'm not very familiar with what the details of the requirements for just cause are or what qualifies as that. Certainly, you would think it would be an automatic disqualification, even in our system, if there was criminal conviction of certain kinds. Certainly, there should be some reason, perhaps, that would give some assurance that this is not simply a way to continue to have political division and individuals and constituents fighting against each other when an election has taken place and the system has worked properly. If there have been no concerns about whether or not the election was proper, at some point we have to respect the outcome.

That is why we have terms in our democratic system. If an elected official has not been doing their job, has not been performing well, and if the majority of their constituents are unhappy with their performance, that's what the next election is for. That's the time to be mobilizing. We know you don't just mobilize and vote the day

of the election. You're really doing that for some time beforehand. Really, I think that that is the system we have in place, and I support that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Sherwood Park has risen to speak.

Mr. Walker: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Very happy to take part in this very important debate, giving me the opportunity to speak on this very important bill. Bill 204 is a crucial step forward to achieving a more transparent and accountable government.

I got into politics not because I needed a job – I was happily employed – and not because I wanted to make a name for myself but because I wanted to help get a better life for the people of my own constituency of Sherwood Park and all Albertans. I believe that my colleagues, on both sides of the aisle, ran for office for the same reasons. Even though we might disagree on policy, I am sure we all want to see a better Alberta. But time after time, Mr. Speaker, Albertans have seen politicians who say that they have the best interests of Albertans at heart and then completely ignore the voices of their constituents and who, we must always remind ourselves, will often break promises and who abuse their power, with little or no consequences.

Mr. Speaker, we are lucky to live in a democratic state, where all citizens are able to participate in the democratic process, but the voices of Albertans should not only matter on election day. They should matter every day, because Albertans are our bosses, and we should be held accountable to them each and every day. That is why I am proud of the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon for introducing the Election Recall Act. It is time for us to adopt legally binding measures that will ensure Albertans have the tools to hold their elected officials accountable. This is something all of us as elected officials should strive for because, at the end of the day, we are working for the people of this province, and underperforming members should not have tenure that prevents them from being held responsible if they are not doing a proper job according to their constituents.

Alberta currently does not have any recall legislation, which means that displeased constituents have to wait up to four years to express their disapproval. The changes made in this bill will allow constituents of the riding to petition for a by-election if a total of 40 per cent of the number of electors that appear on the post polling day list of electors in the constituency sign within a 60-day period. This can only be done after the MLA has been in office for more than 18 months. This prevents officials from being ousted before being given a fair chance to represent their constituents. Completely reasonable, Mr. Speaker.

This idea is not new or particularly revolutionary. It is common-sense, pragmatic legislation. B.C. has had recall legislation since 1995, and many states, including California, Arizona, Washington – you have a mix of blue and red states, conservative and liberal there – have also implemented similar policies. This is not simply a North American phenomenon either, Mr. Speaker. We love the comparative international review here. Furthermore, dozens of countries world-wide have employed analogous rules regarding accountability for their elected officials.

Recall legislation not only improves accountability but also empowers private members to make the voices of their constituents heard and heard loudly. The bill also has measures to ensure that the recall process is fair and in accordance with the Election Act. The fact that canvassers cannot be paid in tandem with requiring a sizable chunk of the voting population to sign is a steep barrier preventing partisan or well-funded attempts at unrighteously attempting to remove an MLA from office in terms of frivolous

attempts. In the extremely rare cases, Mr. Speaker, where officials are undeservedly removed by a well-co-ordinated minority, they will still be allowed to run in the next election. Thus, the will of the people will still be reflected. The people are always right.

Mr. Speaker, a fundamental component of any functional democracy is checks and balances. Recall legislation is another check that ensures MLAs are held accountable by their constituents. This means that MLAs can't get elected and then do as they want with disregard for the feelings and wants of the constituents who elected them and who they're supposed to represent. This is so important. There should be recourse for constituents who do not feel adequately represented by their MLA, and this is what recall allows for. If an elected official is not properly representing their constituency, they should be promptly held responsible and accountable for their poor performance. This bill strikes an ideal balance between holding members liable for their actions and ensuring our government runs smoothly, without constant changes to its members.

In the 2015 election my riding was taken by the NDP, who won that riding. They then implemented vastly unpopular policies, to the disapproval of my constituents, including the carbon tax, which sprung out of nowhere. It was a total surprise. It was not in the NDP platform, nor was it mentioned in any of the debates. This tax was implemented despite mass disapproval among Albertans. The numbers showed 64 per cent opposition. But despite the huge backlash from my constituents in an energy-heavy riding, where 30 per cent of our income is derived directly from the energy industry, my constituents were very upset when the previous MLA in my riding voted in favour of this tax, which they did not run on. Had we implemented this recall legislation, that MLA would have been held accountable to their constituents and would have chosen the action that would have benefited the people in their riding rather than force their political agenda on them.

3:50

Our party, as mentioned previously, campaigned on delivering recall legislation. This is clearly outlined in our platform, that over 1 million Albertans voted for, a historic election and a historic support level. Our government has demonstrated that we are committed to keeping our promises, many of which were designed to ensure a more transparent and accountable government. Some of our key promises to make Alberta's democracy more transparent, accountable, and fair include fixed election dates, restrictions on government advertising approaching an election, and free voting. Recall legislation goes hand in hand with these other platform promises, Mr. Speaker.

When recall legislation was passed in British Columbia in 1995, it received overwhelming support, 81 per cent, at the polls.

Accountability to the people is crucial for a healthy and fair democracy. When underperforming members have to worry about their job security, it will encourage hard work and, frankly, reliability. Recall legislation would have prevented massively unpopular policies like the carbon tax from being implemented and discouraged elected leaders from breaking their promises or pulling out surprises, to many people's dismay. This would have come in handy for Manitoba voters when Premier Greg Selinger broke his promise to not increase the provincial sales tax, in Ontario when Premier McGuinty broke his promise not to increase taxes in 2004, and for Albertans when the former Premier, again, introduced the carbon tax, something that she did not campaign on, Mr. Speaker. And it applies to our government members, too.

Introducing and implementing this bill is about keeping a promise we made to Albertans in the last campaign. A fair and accountable electoral democratic system is crucial for a healthy and

functional democracy. There is simply no plausible reason to oppose this bill. It is a nonpartisan law that will only bring positive change for Albertans by holding our representatives to the same standards we would hold any other worker to in this province. As elected officials we are here to work for the people, not for our own personal gain. There is simply no excuse for having immunity to the political recourse and the consequences of not doing an adequate job representing the interests of our constituents, be it in the political profession or in the workplace outside of politics.

The requirements to successfully recall MLAs are high enough, Mr. Speaker, that it cannot be hijacked for partisan gain, and it will also be a rare enough occurrence that it will not destabilize the government. Operations will continue to run smoothly. This will be a large step forward for constituents who have a major and rightful grievance with their elected officials.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's an honour to rise on Bill 204. Like my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud stated, I too sit on the private members' committee and had an opportunity to hear a little bit more about this bill and hear from the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, who was certainly quite passionate about this bill. I wish he was just as passionate about other issues like health care or LGBTQ issues, perhaps.

Actually, before I get into some of the meat and bones, I do want to respond to the comments from the Member for Sherwood Park. I must say that while I am a new MLA, I was quite proud to see the work that the former Member for Sherwood Park put into her constituency, so to speak of her in the way that he did, to imply that she could have been subject to recall because of her support of the carbon tax, is absolutely shameful.

You know, I wonder. I have many, many friends who live in the Member for Sherwood Park's constituency who are teachers, who are public servants, who are nurses, who work in a variety of occupations, who are currently very frustrated with their member and are feeling like they're under attack. I would urge that member to think about his own approach to his constituency. I presume from his comments that perhaps he'll vote against – I don't know – Bill 20 and Bill 21 as well, then, if he's going to make those sorts of remarks about the previous Member for Sherwood Park. Again, I know because I've heard from a number of folks. One of my good friends teaches in Sherwood Park, and he tells me that he's written multiple times to his member and has not had an adequate response. So I just want to leave that there.

Now let's get back to Bill 204. It is a distraction and I believe it's a waste having this conversation right now, at a time when there are so many other topics that we could be discussing. You all have heard me speak about how proud I am to represent Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, a diverse riding which has incredible folks in it but also has its share of challenges, that I as an MLA am trying to address as best I can. You know, admittedly, it gets hard from time to time given the stories I hear from my constituents, folks who are AISH recipients who are struggling to make ends meet.

These aren't just hypotheticals. These are stories that I could point any member in this House to. I could point them to multiple e-mails, the correspondence I get from folks every day who are struggling, the calls my office staff receive on health care, affordable housing – that's a big one, right? – postsecondary education, education, and the list goes on. The point is that there are so many issues that we should be focusing on. I worry that this is a distraction, that this takes away from the important issues at hand.

I know that there's also a lack of – I've got the bill in front of me. I mean, it's a little more robust than some of the other private members' bills, I must admit, because some of them are quite thin. This one has a little bit more detail, but it does lack details in some areas. For instance, there's nothing to deal with PACs, third parties, political parties, or the use of data collected. You know, we're not seeing a lot of specifics around what is to happen with third-party advertising and whatnot. Again, I know we asked some questions about this in the private members' committee and were less than satisfied with some of the answers that we received, so I do worry about that as well.

Also in those meetings we asked the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon to talk about, you know, who he spoke to, who he consulted with, to kind of walk us through the process, because he said that he'd heard from many of his constituents about the need for this. I'm not doubting his honesty, but I have to tell you that I've been knocking on doors for quite a long time. I did prior to the election. I've knocked on every single door in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, many doors multiple times. I like door-knocking. I like talking to folks in my riding, and I can honestly say that the issue of recall legislation did not come up. It didn't, ever. I'm happy to be wrong in case one of my volunteers got it at the door, but I certainly personally did not hear about that issue.

What did I hear about? I heard about the need for housing, I heard about folks feeling unsafe in the neighbourhood, and I heard about the need for investments in education and health care but, again, nothing about recall legislation. I think it's important that we listen to our constituents. Again, I'm not doubting. Perhaps that member did hear about it, but I would gather and I would guess, in looking at some of my colleagues here, that they probably had a similar experience where they didn't hear a lot about recall at the door. I'm seeing some nods there.

An Hon. Member: Never.

Member Irwin: Exactly.

The other thing I want to point out is that this is actually in the UCP platform. I pulled it up. It was kind of an important pillar in the platform, in fact, on page 89 under Democratic Reforms. I'll just read this to you: "introduce a Recall Act based on precedents in several jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, the United States, and in British Columbia where the provision has existed since 1996." Then there are a few other specifics provided in the UCP platform.

It's always nice to have the UCP platform handy for when there are confusing items brought forth by this government. In this case what I would ask about this – sure. That's fine. It's their prerogative to include that in their platform, but if this were such an important measure for this government, then why not move it as a government bill? I'm quite curious about that, and I'd love to hear one of the members opposite talk about why it wasn't prioritized if it is, as some of the members have shared already today, such a critical issue.

The other thing I want to speak about is the populist element of this bill. Now, hear me out. What I'm going to do is refer to an article – and I will share this with *Hansard* later on – in the *Calgary Herald* from February 2019 from someone who's not known to be too critical of this government, Corbella. I want to just pull out a few things that she notes because I thought it was quite interesting. Again, it's quite relevant to this bill, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you of that. She notes that "whether it's called populist Pablum or democratic drivel, one thing is certain, a few of the democratic reform promises made by [this Premier] can best be defined as bad policy."

4:00

Now, what she notes is that she actually pulls in the comments from a previous Member of the Legislative Assembly, Richard Starke, who talked a lot and went on a bit of social media discussion about how recall legislation is not the best step forward. He notes that, "Populist parties sell people on keeping elected officials on a short leash with a choke chain." He says that when you peel back the onionlike layers of policies like recall legislation, you should expect metaphorical electoral tears.

Now, Dr. Starke gives a couple of examples, and I looked up some of these, too, because I found them, as a former social studies teacher – I know the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon is one as well. Quite interesting. Dr. Starke points to the case of Covina, California, a city of about 50,000 in the Los Angeles area, as a prime example of why recall legislation is a bad idea and says:

In July 1993, the entire . . . city council was recalled by angry voters after councillors raised municipal utility taxes by six per cent to make up for a \$2.3-million budget deficit.

A new election was held and most of the newly elected city councillors were leaders of the recall movement. Once the new councillors got into office, however, they discovered that if they didn't increase taxes they would have to shutter the library, shut down the parks and recreation department and lay off 77 city workers. By the time a new election had been held a year had passed, the deficit had increased and the new councillors concluded that they had to raise taxes by 8.25 per cent to keep vital city services running.

This then – wait for it –

sparked yet another recall petition – which . . . was not successful.

Now, his point though – and it's a relevant case study – is that to suggest that this is going to provide better accountability, as some of the members opposite have suggested, and sound political decisions is false.

Dr. Starke actually goes on to point to another example. I won't read that whole example, but essentially: "In Peru, over 5,000 democratically elected authorities in 747 municipalities (46% of all Peruvian municipalities) were recalled in the period between 1997 and 2013."

It's not just a matter of inefficiency and of the fact that evidence shows that it doesn't lead to increased accountability; there's also the issue of cost, right? We did talk about cost a little bit in the private members' bill committee and, you know, the numbers didn't necessarily sound too alarming. But when you're talking thousands of dollars, when you're talking about the fact that that money could be used in so many other ways, I think we do need to think about thousands of dollars as being substantial amounts of money. Again, we haven't experienced this in Alberta, so we don't know exactly what the costs will be. We do have examples in other jurisdictions where in some cases the costs haven't been extreme, but again we don't know how regularly this could be used in Alberta. There's the administrative burden, and then there's a whole lot of additional work needed to move things forward.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has risen.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been an interesting debate so far, and I'd like to be able to touch on a few of the points that I've heard. Before I do that, I wanted to talk a little bit about my experience at the doors in Calgary-Klein. Granted, I hear and recognize the experiences of all the members of this Assembly and their experience at the doors. I started door-knocking in Calgary-Klein back in 2010, so I've got about nine years of experience knocking on doors in Calgary-Klein.

I'm just thinking of one particular story, actually, from this last election. I can tell lots of stories like this – I'm sure that you can also tell stories, Mr. Speaker – of the people that, when I've knocked on their doors, were feeling disillusioned and feeling like their elected people don't listen to them, feeling disconnected from their elected people, like they can't actually have an impact and that their voice and their vote don't matter. Many times people had come to the door like I had been at their door and had told them something and had promised them something and then went and got elected and did something completely contrary to that.

I think that this bill is absolutely critical. What it does is that it gives individuals like that a voice between elections, at the end of the day, making sure that their elected people continue to be accountable to them and not just showing up every four years begging and asking for their vote. I think what it does is help engage people throughout the election process.

We've heard a few kind of references to continuing campaigning. If continuing campaigning means that you're out and engaging with your constituency regularly and hearing from your constituents and making sure that their voices are heard, then this won't be a problem for you because your constituents will like you, and it's very unlikely that they're going to come out and enact this process in regard to recall. That's where I think this is so important.

I've been campaigning on recall legislation for eight years. That's why it's so much my pleasure to be able to rise here today in support of Bill 204, Election Recall Act. Again, for eight years I ran on the election platform that promised to strengthen Alberta's democracy. That included recall legislation. Introducing the Election Recall Act is a direct promise that this government and I made to Albertans during the election, and by now everyone should know that when this government makes a promise, we are going to keep it.

The key goal of this legislation is to enhance democracy by making MLAs directly responsible to their constituents between elections. As it currently stands, MLAs can only be fired by their constituents during a general election. We can all think of examples, I think, especially over the last four years, where this might have been particularly relevant, without getting into specifics. This bill would give constituents a method to recall an MLA if they are no longer representing them. As the MLA for Calgary-Klein I know that my boss is the constituents of Calgary-Klein, and I'm here to serve them and be their voice in the Alberta Legislature. I take that very, very seriously. If myself or one of my colleagues is no longer acting in the interests of those whom they represent, then they shouldn't be in that position anymore, and their constituents should have the opportunity to recall for that.

Our democracy lacks direct accountability to the public. As elected representatives we should strive to find ways to make our system more accountable and democratic. Bill 204 does that. It will strengthen Albertans' trust and participation in the democratic system. It allows for everyday citizens to be more involved with the political process by increasing their power. Isn't that what democracy is all about, the people having the power to choose their government? Why should this power be available only every four years? Bill 204 puts the public back in the driver's seat and in control of democracy.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a partisan issue. On both sides of this aisle we should be striving to improve our democracy regardless of our political stripes. I think we can all agree that as an MLA our job is to represent our constituents, and if we are not doing this important job, we shouldn't be in this House. As the Premier said, government should be the servant, not the master, and you as the voter should be in charge.

Let us consider an example of when recall legislation would be used. An MLA, regardless of their party, wins a seat in the

Legislature. During the election this person could have presented themselves as someone who would work hard, represent their constituents. However, once they become an MLA and have their seat, they do a complete turnaround. They don't show up to work either in their riding or in the Legislature. They do not meet with constituents, and they do not bear the minimum duties of an MLA. Now, this MLA could get kicked out of a caucus and continue as an independent. However, they are still the person that is supposed to represent their constituents. If they are not doing this, there is currently no mechanism for constituents to remove the MLA as their representative. The MLA could not be doing any work and would continue to be paid. This does not make any sense to me. Speaking for myself and I'm sure for many of my colleagues, we did not want to be an MLA for the job security. In every other job you can get fired for poor performance. Why should there be a double standard for elected officials? This is a common-sense bill, and I see no reason to oppose it.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 may be a new idea in Alberta, but similar legislation exists in British Columbia and other jurisdictions across the United States and in 12 other countries. Bill 204 proposes the same parameters as we've seen in B.C. In order for a recall to go through and a by-election to be called, 40 per cent of the total number of voters that appear on the post polling day list of electors for the constituency must sign a recall petition – that's a pretty high threshold – no sooner than 18 months after an election. This threshold of 40 per cent ensures that the Election Recall Act is not used unless constituents are genuinely concerned about an MLA.

4:10

In British Columbia recall has been attempted 26 times, and we've been told that the costs associated with that are actually very, very small. However, it has only been successfully used once, and the MLA did step down before being recalled. I would say that the costs associated with not doing recall in regard to accountability of MLAs to their constituents and the concern that constituents feel disengaged from the political process because their MLA is no longer representing them are greater than the costs associated with recall.

Voices of Albertans should be heard every day, not just on election day. Bill 204 was a key aspect of a platform that over 1 million Albertans voted for and, certainly, something that I heard about lots at the doors. Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to strengthen our democracy by supporting the legislation.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen to speak.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to provide some initial comments on Bill 204, the recall act. As I understand, it was contained within the platform, so fair enough. Here we are, Mr. Speaker.

I just heard some comments from my hon. colleague prior indicating that it wouldn't be a problem if there was a constant campaign and so on. Okay. Let's take that at face value, then. Let's take that comment at face value but subject it to a little bit of rigour. We're here to debate, after all, not just to agree with ourselves but to be open to input from others. After all, that is the point of being here.

There are significant issues with this concept of the constant campaign, in particular, if it opens the door to a constant, lawless stream of money that, in turn, opens the door to a stream of invective from the deepest pockets of external actors' international

funds funnelled to PACs and outside foreign interference in our free and fair elections. That is, Mr. Speaker, a problem.

What is the basis upon which I make those statements? Well, it is the Justice official who appeared before the private members' committee on November 4 in which she flagged five things. One, nothing in the bill addresses the role of political parties in funding, supporting, or organizing recall petitions. In other words, political parties are not subject to the normal rules. Neither, too, as I understand it then, is anyone else, and even money outside of Alberta is not governed by this.

There is no included offence for harassing someone who is canvassing for signatures or who is signing a petition. That, Mr. Speaker, must cause our colleagues to pause. Bill 204 does not contain rules relating to the role and conduct of the member or the member's supporters in raising or spending money. Once again, this would appear to open up some of the holes we've already blown in our election financing rules via the senatorial elections and calling them into further question by allowing, by my reading of this, international money, foreign money, money outside of Alberta to come in under the guise of a recall act.

It is not an offence to offer or accept an inducement to sign or refuse to sign a petition. In other words, people may be paid to sign a petition. That sounds an awful lot, Mr. Speaker, like some of the offences that are being currently investigated by the Election Commissioner. It is not okay in a democracy to offer an inducement to undertake any sort of activity within the electoral system.

There are no provisions regarding unauthorized use of the list of electors. Well, I imagine our constituents will be quite surprised to learn this, that our list of electors, then, can be used by dark money influence, by corporations, by foreign-funded actors to contact us using political messages in a never-ending stream of campaigning, in a never-ending stream of negativity to target individual members.

While I, too, quite enjoy the opportunity to go and talk to my constituents – I am well known for loving canvassing – and I, too, enjoy that constant check-in with my constituents, I do not enjoy, Mr. Speaker, the prospect of having this much dark money sloshing around our democracy.

Now, we do realize that this is very clearly a backdoor way to flout election finance laws, which has, in any case, been accomplished by the senatorial election. But there might be, if we could engage in a thought experiment – oftentimes in debate scenarios, if I recall my high school years correctly, one might engage in analogies or hypothetical situations to make a point in the debate, so let's perhaps try. I'm going to try to put myself in the place of the hon. members opposite to think of some instances where recall might be appropriate. Our colleagues have indeed shared some of their ideas with us around when recall might be appropriate, so let me try some, too.

Certainly, down south we've seen that some people believe the President of the United States ought to be in a form of recall, even before this latest round of hearings, for firing an FBI director who is doing an active investigation into how someone rigged an election. It's interesting to me that we could potentially have a member or series of members recalled for firing an Election Commissioner who has an ongoing investigation into how someone rigged an election. Perhaps it may be appropriate to indeed recall someone if a member was raided by the RCMP. Perhaps it may be appropriate to recall someone or initiate a recall – indeed, there is no requirement for an application to provide a reason, but we could imagine some of the reasons. That's what we will do right now.

Perhaps if a member was linked to a scheme to funnel money to an adjacent campaign for another candidate and people linked to that member then furnished donations to another person, which is an offence under the Election Act but then also potentially triggered

the income tax act if indeed those funds that were provided to someone then turned around and provided those donations and received a receipt, an income tax receipt, for them, that would then be both an unlawful contribution underneath the Election Act but also a contravention of the income tax act potentially. That might be a reason. If a member knew of such a scheme involving tens of thousands of dollars and knew of those unlawful contributions, that might be a reason to recall someone.

Perhaps if someone were under active investigation and took steps to in law obstruct that ongoing investigation and used their power as a lawmaker to obstruct that investigation, that might be a good reason to recall someone. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, other reasons might be, for example, a member who stands accused of forgery, bribery, or fraud. That might be a reason to recall someone. Perhaps a member who was fined for firing someone for sexual harassment, perhaps someone who was caught hunting on private land, perhaps someone who ran a voting station for a particular leadership contestant and is now being interviewed by the RCMP, perhaps other people who have had multiple RCMP interviews: those could be reasons to recall someone.

Or perhaps simply a group of people campaigned on one thing and then did another. We've had some of these examples already. One of the ones I thought of was Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall. He campaigned. He won a mandate. I believe it was in 2016. By 2017 he had turned tail and ran. Why? He had raised taxes on everyone through deindexing the income tax brackets. He had raised the PST on things like children's clothing and other essentials, raised the cost of construction by 6 per cent by adding the PST onto those things, ran a huge deficit, all kinds of things. He left before people could rise up, but that is a – we had some other examples of other provinces. So there is one for people.

Perhaps one might want to recall a member or series of members for contravening promises around indexing benefits for the severely handicapped, for example, taking one position and doing another.

Perhaps one might want to recall someone for raiding our only pension security for those of us who do not have a six-figure pension, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps it might be that if someone wanted to go in and take away those monthly contributions that we make under CPP that is in fact our money, perhaps if there was someone who wanted to make a play to the 80 per cent of us who don't have a public-sector pension, certainly don't have a six-figure one.

4:20

Perhaps one might want to recall a member who takes a particular position around LGBTQ2S rights, for example, such as the right to immediately and confidentially form a GSA, and says one thing during a campaign and then immediately at their first opportunity turns around and does another.

Perhaps one might want to recall a member who says, "No, no, no. We will not attack women's fundamental freedoms and our section 7 personal security rights. We will not legislate on these matters," and then at their second-most convenient opportunity does exactly that, Mr. Speaker.

So there are many reasons why one might want to recall an MLA. I certainly think that the existence of ongoing investigations and then the attempt to obstruct those investigations – as we're seeing south of the border, there's quite an appetite for consequences around that. We shall see if there are consequences anywhere else where hypothetically this may be occurring.

Now, of course, the recall legislation hasn't worked anywhere it's been tried. It increases red tape, which, of course, accomplishes the goal of misleading Albertans given that they didn't campaign on any of it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was jotting down a few notes here, but I guess the last member had made a great argument for voting in favour of it. I'm not sure if she'd finished or not, but it sure sounded like it would be one heck of a good idea based on all the potentials for that and giving folks the democratic right to yank someone or some person if they weren't fulfilling their needs or obligations or acting in an unduly manner or not in the job description.

You know, we've heard lots about the bogeyman. Quite frankly, there's an old adage that thee who lives by the sword should surely almost die. In our neck of the woods we favour that. Absolutely. The folks that we talked to, we campaigned on having one of these key elements and items. One of the reasons why it's so important that a private member would bring it forward is because even private members believe in what we campaigned on. It's not just a government promise; it's a promise of every UCP member that was out there. We had a platform. We didn't campaign on being a minister. We didn't campaign on being the government, ministers. We campaigned on being a candidate for those areas, and it went over with great success. Obviously, there's a strong majority government of UCP members here, and that's something that we strongly believe in: being representative, being accountable.

I can understand if the bogeyman was out there and I only won by the skin of my teeth – some of the members in the opposition may have – I think that yeah, they would be concerned. They would be concerned about that. But from what I've seen, NDP supporters are in favour of this. This is their Hail Mary. My wife brought to my attention that there were lots of folks applauding this, asking the loyal opposition leader, literally, on their Facebook feed: when is this coming through? Well, hallelujah. We're bringing it in. This is a great thing. It keeps everyone on all sides of the fence on their toes and responsible.

There was an interesting thing. When you held yourself accountable and responsible, when you are truthful in what you say and you can remember that – and also people's memories over 18 months: they're a lot more acute than every four years. Guaranteed on some of the things that happened with the carbon tax that Albertans had a really good memory after 18 months. They were chomping at the bit to wait for four years to make their decision. I can see why there would be some hesitance, but again, this is something, Mr. Speaker, that's so important to us as Albertans to bring this through.

There's an old adage in the patch sometimes they, you know, say when we're talking about dollars and cents and costs. The question goes – and it's a bit of a joke, tongue in cheek – why are divorces so expensive? Because they're worth it. Why would it be worth spending money in a by-election? Because it would be worth it. If that individual was not representative of their constituents, if they were not keeping their word, if they were not being truthful, if they were not following through with those promises, it definitely would be worth it. It would definitely be worth having that individual recalled, having the folks out in those constituencies having their voices truly heard in the democratic process. It would definitely be worth it.

The other thing that some of the members had mentioned, too: you're only as good as your last job. A lot of us that worked in industry understand that. Every year you go for a job interview. That's how I campaigned, Mr. Speaker, that this was a job interview to me. Once I got that job, that was the intent. It's a performance review. Most of us have those yearly performance reviews and some organizations quarterly because it's made to make sure the

process is better. It's made to make sure that you are actually keeping your commitments during getting that job. That's what this is. It's a performance review, so you'd better have your little running shoes around your neck as in the little adage in *Who Moved My Cheese?* where there were, you know, a couple of mice there. There were a couple of Hem and Haw characters. The whole adage behind that was: be on your toes, be ready for change, and be accountable.

Accountability and responsibility: those are things that the UCP believes in. I think that every politician should. As we've seen in history – and if we want to start citing some of the examples that the Member for Lethbridge-West just spoke about, she pointed out perfect examples of why someone should be recalled if that were the case. The Alberta people will make those decisions, and if we're bringing that forward to keep us all accountable, well, that works.

Here's a theory. Some of the folks that protest against this might be the ones that are the most concerned because maybe their skeletons haven't come out yet or maybe there are issues that they haven't taken account of. Myself, personally, I didn't really enjoy the door-knocking part of it. What I enjoyed were the forums. What I enjoyed in my area, being rural, were the cafés. What I enjoyed was meeting different organizations at events, going where there was a bunch of people and hearing that mass support. That was really important to me. Of all of the platform items we had, this is one that I'm so proud to see one of our private members bring forward. It resonated with him as well and his constituents, and it represents all of us. We didn't have to wait for the government to bring it forward. Potentially, maybe that's why there are some fundamental differences between our parties.

I'm in full support of this. I think that most people should be, and given that the folks I've seen that are of the NDP persuasion in my area also support it, I am truly speaking for all the constituents in my area. I think we should be in favour of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen to speak.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Okay. That was something.

I've been listening to some of the comments, and I just wanted to say, you know, that you don't get to pick and choose which campaign promises or things you said before the election and then say: "See? Look. Look what we're doing." I remember a lot of conversation around a lot of issues before the election. Certainly, what I'm going to say might support this legislation according to what you just said or not. Let's take a trip back and remember. When asked specifically about AISH, about indexing AISH benefits so that people with severe disabilities in this province would get a yearly increase of, like, \$30, we heard: "Oh, no. We're going to protect that. We would never do something like that." Okay. What about women's rights, accessing reproductive health care? "No. No. We're not going to do anything about that."

Yet still they allow private member legislation or they support private member legislation to show up in this place, and their response to everything is: well, we have a great big mandate. You made a lot of promises that you didn't keep, so if this turns around and bites you and you get recalled, I guess that would just be fair. You don't get to do these things and then just say: we have the right to do it because we won; we got all of these votes. What you continuously forget is that not everybody, not every single Albertan, voted for you.

What is immensely frustrating is that it feels like it has been a systematic attack on democracy in this place, in this place that is a symbol for democracy in our province. It started off slow – right?

– something really simple like: well, there's no need to pound the desks because we don't like it, so let's clap our hands. All right. Well, we don't like the fact that private member bills should be debated and voted on in this place without being censored by a committee where the government has a majority. Step two. Let's just chip away at democracy. Let's look at recall legislation that is so loosely written that it allows dark money to once again find a loophole to make its way into our democracy when we worked so hard in an all-party committee in the last sessions to look at ways to make this fair, to make it about that every single Albertan had a voice, had an ability, that their vote would mean as much as their neighbour's regardless of what their income was or what political action committee they belonged to. This is a systematic tearing down of those rights.

Like it or not, and I might not like all of the results of the last election – that's maybe an understatement – but I respect our voters. I respect what they said. I respect the people that showed up on election day and who voted early and who made those decisions, you know, by voting. This just takes us to another place, but it's almost like we're getting numb to it because it's happening so quickly. I can't remember which of my colleagues said it, but he said that it's like trying to take a drink from a firehose. Maybe that's the intent.

4:30

You know, some of my other colleagues have said this. I think this is just a blatant attempt to Americanize our democracy so that it's a constant campaign. We already expend enough during campaigns. We don't need to do this. We need to focus on our jobs while we are here, when we're in our constituencies. I think all of us would agree that we have an incredible amount of work to do when we're home in our constituencies and when we're in this place. We don't need to add another aspect of: let's just continuously campaign now because there's a backdoor way for money to get injected into our democracy. That's what I see this private member's bill doing.

You know, my colleague touched on this. There are some simple things that a caucus can do if your members have engaged in activities that are serious enough that the RCMP are investigating and that an independent Election Commissioner has fined – I think that it's over a couple of hundred thousand dollars now. You would think that a caucus would look at that and say: this is serious enough that this person should at the very least not be in our caucus until the investigation is concluded in one way or the other. But, no, let's support a private member's bill that looks at bringing more dark money into this process so that we can target individual people. It's not about individual members being intimidated by this; this is an overall intimidation.

Let's think back to the last election. I know that people on the other side like to say: well, you know, we don't have anything to do with people like Rebel media. I don't believe that, but whatever. Why was it that it was only in a couple of constituencies where this ridiculous electronic billboard showed up over and over and over again spewing garbage? This is dark money showing up in our democracy, and this private member's bill is opening yet another door. This is a systematic chipping away at democracy in this place, which is the biggest affront of all.

You know, the other member talked about what's going on in the United States. Certainly, our countries are very different, and I'm extremely thankful for that. But if we don't learn some of the lessons from our neighbours of some of the things that are happening there and do our best to protect our democracy – this isn't about our party memberships. This is about democracy for all

Albertans. If we don't do everything to protect that, then shame on us.

This act, of course, is brief, short in comparison, not super surprising. There is nothing to deal with political action committees, third-party political parties, the use of data that's collected. I think that we can all agree that that's a problem. This bill, once again, gives enormous power to cabinet and a lack of transparency to design regulation that works for them.

When you hide in the shadows and you make rules in the shadows, that's an affront to democracy, especially when it is something like recalling – it's more than recalling an MLA. This is about saying to Alberta voters: we don't trust you; we are going to launch this campaign to change the results of that election. As I said earlier, did I like or agree with – I mean, I have no business agreeing with the election results because I'm not a voter in those constituencies. But like it or not, the people of Alberta spoke. They didn't speak as loud as you think they did, and I think that you will find that out very soon. This, in my opinion, is just a systematic chipping away at democracy. It is a way to put more money in, when we all worked so hard.

I know that there are members across the way that sat on that all-party committee, the Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, that looked very hard at election financing and looked at: what are the best ways to close the loopholes that are here so that we do our very best to ensure that it is Albertans that speak out, not dark money, not political actions committees, but Albertans? This does the opposite. When you make these decisions and regulations and you hide them in secrecy, you are doing the very opposite of what you were sent here to do. You represent tens of thousands of people. They sent you here. Your job is to protect democracy, not to chip away so that you make it easier for your political party to do well in an election.

The members opposite can talk all they want about that this was a platform promise, but you blow a big hole in it when you pick and choose your platform promises or the promises that you made before the election. You can say that, yes, this is a platform promise. Okay. You made a lot of other promises, and not one person from the other side has stood up and said publicly, "You know, I don't agree with this piece of legislation; this goes against what we said we would do," one of those things being reproductive health care rights or access to health care for all people or access to an appropriate, timely referral, which is part of that process in health care.

I seem to remember many, many people – I can remember it from forums before the election. I can remember it from posts. I remember from what people said: no, no; we're not going to do that. You're doing it. Once again, Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed in the fact that – maybe that's the intent – people are getting numb to the fact that you are chipping away at this democracy instead of building it up, making it more transparent so that we know where every dollar that goes into this process comes from. You know, you're very intent on having your little secret war room . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen to speak.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 204, the Election Recall Act. I will echo many of the sentiments brought forward by my colleagues in the NDP caucus because I, too, am very concerned about what we're seeing in this legislation.

Most importantly, as I quickly look through this Bill 204, I see the mention of the Chief Electoral Officer quite often and the role

that they will have in ensuring that this legislation is moved forward and that recall is taken forward when a constituent or a person in the community tries to bring it forward. That leads me to my first but possibly most important concern.

Earlier today we saw the introduction of Bill 22, effectively the firing of the officer, and now we see Bill 204 coming forward with increased responsibilities and obligations of that very same person. I'm very concerned – not to spend too much time, I suppose; of course, we will have a chance to debate it further – about Bill 22, what those implications and consequences are of removing this person from a position, first of all, as has been stated earlier in this debate, that is actively investigating a leadership contest where there are alleged wrongdoings to the fullest extent. We've seen fines laid to Albertans, so that's very concerning that now this government is going to fire and potentially rehire someone else that maybe has a vested interest in protecting their interests.

Once again, with Bill 204 we are extending their ability or their need to be involved. On one hand, we're getting rid of this person who has been working very hard to uphold our democracy. You know, we're talking about replacing them, and what that means to Bill 204 is very concerning to me.

Of course, there have been many points about the fact that this bill really does seem to be a distraction from the fact that the budget that has been delivered by this government that's currently under discussion is not popular by any stretch of the words. The fact that we're giving \$4.7 billion away to large corporations while telling seniors that they should be able to live with less, while telling people with severe disabilities that they should be able to live with less is very concerning. I think that this government caucus is concerned with it as well, so they are looking for any opportunity to deflect from the fact that their budget is so unpopular.

Once again, as has been mentioned by my colleagues in the NDP caucus, this really does seem to be moving towards a more American-style political system in terms of the constant campaign and fundraising that will be expected not only from Bill 204, as the private member brought forward with the Election Recall Act, but also in the discussions that we had earlier around the quote, unquote, Senate elections legislation that came forward and the fact that there were massive loopholes in the ability for, specifically, parties to fund raise to get these Senators – well, not elected but elected in Alberta. Of course, it's up to the federal government and the Prime Minister to make that final decision, whether they actually listen to that or not.

4:40

We are seeing a constant move towards, once again, an American-style political system where it's just a free-for-all. You can campaign at any time of the year; it doesn't really matter if it's an election year or an election cycle or not. That's very concerning to me because, as the Member for St. Albert brought forward, in the previous election we saw organizations like Rebel media targeting people that are deciding to put their name forward to run for election. It's really not fair. It's very concerning that we see these organizations that very well may be funded from outside of our own jurisdiction, outside of our province, and possibly even outside of our country. I would say most definitely funding coming from outside of our country. Really, this bill is opening up more loopholes to do just that, and that's very concerning.

The fact is, as the Member for St. Albert mentioned, the UCP doesn't really like to make public their relationship with Rebel media, but on election night in the last election Rebel media was sitting at their main election night event to celebrate their win. On one hand, we have a government saying, "Well, we don't make friends with people like this organization," but they save them a

couple of seats and let them televise their stream from their event. That's very concerning. Yes, it's a concern that we are opening up loopholes for organizations such as Rebel media.

Myself and people in my constituency are constantly inundated with text messages from organizations like Alberta Proud or Alberta Strong or whoever it might be that day, Sue or Shirley. I don't know. It depends on the day. That's concerning to me because we have these organizations where we really don't know where they're coming from or where they're funded from, and they are actively data mining people in our communities.

Of course we're concerned about funding coming in from other jurisdictions, but we're also very concerned about what is going to happen with the data from those text messages that are sent out and also the repercussions of data mining that might happen under Bill 204, which has been brought forward. Money is power, but so is knowledge, and having that data is just as good, if not maybe even better, than having the dollars. If you know how somebody is going to vote, which is all that these organizations are going after, whether you say yes or no, the fact is that they're getting what they're looking for. That should be of concern to all Albertans.

Now, for a government that wants to cut red tape, who says that that's in their mandate, this legislation really seems to be dead set on creating more bureaucracy and more red tape. The introduction of recall legislation, I believe, has been shown in a 2003 report by the B.C. Chief Electoral Officer to require increased bureaucracy to ensure that people are available to administer the legislation, just like the Bill 204 that we see before us. That's very concerning. Once again, at a time when this government is talking about getting rid of such an important position as the Election Commissioner, we're also introducing more bureaucracy to their position.

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood also raised the point that Corbella, in an article from February earlier this year, when this discussion was happening, essentially stated, I think quite rightfully, though I don't agree with this person very often, if ever, that this legislation should be recalled. I would agree with Corbella on that fact. It went on to detail the discussions that Member Richard Starke had brought forward, and I also agreed with the points that he was making.

The fact is that recall legislation, at the end of the day, leads to public servants fearing doing the right thing because sometimes doing the right thing isn't always the popular thing. Sometimes it is unpopular to do the right thing, especially as we talk about taking action on things like climate change. It's quite clear that the government today does not agree with the decisions that we made. There were, of course, as the election showed, many people who also didn't agree with the decisions that we made. The fact is that we saw the writing on the wall that action had to be taken to combat climate change. We made those decisions. Once again, they're not always the popular decisions, but we believe them to be the right decisions.

Sorry; I lost my train of thought here. Let me go back to the 2003 B.C. point. Now, when we looked at the recall legislation there, there was an estimated cost of administering nine recall petitions, which all failed, I think it's important to note, that cost over \$550,000. They didn't even get to the point where a by-election was called because these petitions did not reach that threshold, yet it cost the system over \$550,000. That's very concerning, once again, for a government who's talking about reducing red tape and ensuring efficient spending of public dollars. Well, that doesn't seem to really go with that same message.

Once again I think it's important to point out the fact that the prevalence of global forces trying to influence our democracy is at an all-time high right now, going back to the point I was trying to make, whether it's an organization fighting to elect people who are

pro oil and gas or the exact opposite. I mean, it's a concern on both ends that radical environmentalists might try and unseat people. That's a concern just as much as it going the other way in terms of foreign influences on our democracy.

It's really not just a one-sided issue. The fact is that with the passing of this legislation and with actions that this government has undertaken under the, quote, unquote, Senate elections legislation, there will be a further prevalence of foreign influence in our democracy.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I'll be brief. Bill 204 has been something that – when we were in opposition, I think we brought this forward a couple of times as a private member's bill. This is something that is not going to be a surprise to this Chamber, that this is something we feel very strongly about. The concept of recall is obviously in other jurisdictions. It is in B.C., that's for sure. The value of recall is to allow individual constituents to keep their MLAs honest.

The reason, I think, that we're hearing from the members opposite a rejection of this principle is because they recognize that had we had recall in the last four years, when they were in government, they would not have been in government for four years. Albertans rejected especially the carbon tax, which is interesting when the member who just spoke talked about how doing the right thing isn't always the easy thing, that it's the hard thing sometimes, but it's the right thing, and then he talked about the carbon tax. They still haven't recognized that that concept was rejected wholeheartedly by Albertans.

Now, this is the value to Bill 204, that if the hon. members in the NDP caucus really believe that they are representing Albertans, they should never be afraid of allowing recall legislation because they would know that the majority would be in their favour. The truth is that no matter the rhetoric, how much they spew in this House, they know deep down that they do not represent the majority of Albertans, which is certainly the case, as we've seen in the last election, on April 16, 2019, when the UCP received over a million votes, and 40 per cent less is what the NDP received.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is a way for Albertans to have the accountability that they're looking for. Now, whether this actually gets enacted or not, just the threat of an MLA not being able to vote his or her conscience, vote the way that he or she believes that their constituents would want them to vote is enough for this bill to have real efficacy and real importance in this House. I am very much in favour of this.

4:50

Paul Hinman, who used to be an MLA in this House, passionately spoke about the need for this and how this is a check and balance on power. Now, it is a private member's bill, but it is something that a private member on the government side has brought forward, recognizing that it is important to have checks and balances on power. I don't believe that the NDP subscribe to that kind of belief, that you should have checks and balances.

They've spent a majority of this time talking about how we should be careful of this because it's dark money. Well, I would remind these members that I just decided to take a look at the 2015 contributions that the NDP received, and I was surprised to see that they received a substantial, six-digit figure from the Ontario steelworkers' union. What's interesting about this is that they talk about never receiving any kind of contribution outside of this jurisdiction, yet they have received that themselves. Now, I don't know whether or not that member knew. There were actually two

members that just spoke about how that was so bad, yet their own party has received a six-digit contribution from the Ontario steelworkers' union. Now, they talk about dark money. In reality, if that's not dark money, I don't know what is.

From the way they described dark money, they're saying that other jurisdictions are starting to gerrymander Alberta politics, yet they have no problems receiving a six-digit contribution from the Ontario steelworkers' union. You know what? When I took a look at those things, Mr. Speaker, there were actually other contributions as well, and the gerrymandering was happening in this province not just in 2015 but also in 2019 by the NDP and their allies. I think that this is a smokescreen, and it's sad to see how disingenuous these members are in their attack on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be able to stand in this Chamber and support this bill knowing that for over four years now I have been a big advocate to be able to have this kind of check and balance, checks and balances that we're willing to place upon ourselves, checks and balances that we're willing to say: "You know what? We want to be held to a higher standard in this House." This is what Albertans are looking for. If they believe that we are going to deviate from what we campaigned on, the 375 campaign promises, they have the full right to fire us.

We're going to give the power back to the people, which is what democracy is all about. I was surprised to hear the member say that we were trying to strip away democracy. Mr. Speaker, there's nothing stronger than a recall bill to empower the people and then empower democracy. There's nothing stronger than this kind of measure. This is a fantastic tool. I get that they're in opposition. I get that they are concerned that this could actually affect their numbers of 24 MLAs. In reality, why don't they just focus on representing their people, representing their constituents to the best of their ability? Then they don't have to worry.

This allows us, all members, to be able to vote our conscience, Mr. Speaker. This allows us to vote the way that our constituents want us to vote. This would allow us to be able to make sure that if there's a bill that comes forward in this House that is not in harmony with the way our constituents want us to be moving forward, then we could move forward the way that we think we should, the way that our constituents think we should. There's no problem with that. I don't understand the arguments against this.

I am in full support of this bill, and I applaud the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon for bringing it forward.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to raise some of the issues that I have with this piece of legislation as it currently stands and to clarify some of the things that the previous speaker just said, amongst others, in this House.

First of all, checks and balances exist in that every four years there is an election. That's when members of this House are held accountable for their actions and words, through our regular elections.

What previous members have said as far as: well, this doesn't really cost that much. Actually, I challenge the members to bring forward the additional costs of having recall legislation.

Now, it is interesting that there are members who are currently sitting in this House who voted against recall legislation. In fact, you know, with all respect, there are two members, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and the Member for Calgary-West, who voted against recall legislation in the previous Legislature and now are in

favour of this. Now, I'm not sure if they've had a change of heart or a change of mind or if that's how they have to vote.

I mean, to the previous minister who was speaking: this does nothing around free votes and voting how you want and what he was saying.

Mr. Speaker, the issue that I have with this bill as it's currently written – and I don't have an issue with recall legislation. I do think that, again, Albertans every four years – you're not elected for life. You have to win an election every four years, so if you do a really poor job, chances are that voters are going to send you a strong message and send you out of office altogether.

The challenge I have with this piece of legislation – and it's been said by those that have had a chance to look at it – is that it does nothing to deal with PACs, with third-party advertising, with the use of data that is collected, that can be used or misused. If the members opposite are adamant that they want to bring forward a bill or their private member, then this bill should be amended to ensure that we close any loopholes that currently exist. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that in other jurisdictions that have recall legislation, they have closed those loopholes. These ones are gaping wide.

I also find it interesting that, you know, jurisdictions have tried to bring this in and changed their mind. In fact, Bible Bill, William Aberhart, brought in recall legislation and then was threatened to be recalled and quickly changed the legislation so that he couldn't be recalled.

You know, I appreciate that the UCP campaigned on this. This is a campaign promise. I do think that that argument is used when it's convenient because I don't recall you campaigning on raising personal income taxes or on legislating on women's issues or conscience rights or other things when, actually, their leader had said specifically that there wouldn't be those types of legislation being brought forward. Now, having said that, it was in the platform. That's fine.

But if you look at B.C. as an example, Mr. Speaker, they do have parameters on how third parties can act and advertise during a recall petition. Again, what we don't want are third parties who have a hate on for a member to, you know, do everything within their power, including raising huge sums of money, to oust a member because they disagree with a position that they took and to unduly influence voters as opposed to it being based on the behaviour of the actual members themselves.

I can tell you that we talk about how this government has set up a war room to go after foreign-funded campaigns, yet this bill, as it's currently written, allows for foreign-funded campaigns to influence and take over elections within the province of Alberta. I hope other people see that this is a huge problem and a little bit hypocritical, that in one way there are actions to try to stop foreign-funded influence, yet through this current piece of legislation it allows for that. Now, I appreciate that government members may say, "Well, this is a private member's bill, not a government bill," but I would hope that it does raise concerns for them and that it gets addressed, Mr. Speaker.

The reason that I'm opposed to this is that it's a waste of taxpayers' money, having multiple elections between terms. Again, four years, although some days feel like a long time, pass by very quickly, and Albertans have the right to exercise their electoral rights on whether or not a member returns to this Legislature or whether a member is elected in the first place. This legislation, even though it exists in other jurisdictions, I don't think does what these folks hope that it will do. I honestly think that the reason that this is being brought forward is really to change the channel on what's really happening.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, but seeing the time, 5 o'clock, the time limit for consideration of this item has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Walleye Fish Stock

509. Mr. Hanson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to enhance the biodiversity, health, and economic value of Alberta's lakes by utilizing the Cold Lake fish hatchery and other tools at the government's disposal in order to increase Alberta's walleye fish stock.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand today and introduce Motion 509. This is an issue that comes up quite often in my riding, and I'll refer to some of the coffee shops around the area that refer to the local senate. One of the questions that often comes up, because a lot of these folks are retired, is lack of fishing opportunities up in northern Alberta.

Now, we've got a wonderful facility, the Cold Lake fish hatchery, that's been around for upwards of 30 years and has a capacity – that is my understanding – to rear a hundred million walleye fry a year. Even if we take into consideration mortality rates, we could still be looking at easily 60 million-plus fry being raised there per year. Now, over the last 10 years how many walleye have we produced at the Cold Lake fish hatchery? Zero. We haven't raised a walleye there in 10 years. They've been raising trout for fish ponds in Calgary, Edmonton, and other surrounding areas for community fish ponds and not utilizing the fish hatchery for what it was designed for back in the '80s.

Now, we look at lakes up in my area that have been closed to fishing for upwards of 20 years. The lifespan of a walleye is about 15 years. So we're actually hatching them, and the fish go through their whole life process and actually die of old age in our lakes, yet our residents aren't allowed to take their kids out and have a fish fry around the lake. That's one of the big things.

On top of that is a wasted economic potential. We have a loss of tourism. We have a lot of our local provincial parks, some of the MD parks that are up in that area that go underutilized because folks are – guess what? – going to places like Saskatchewan, where they can actually catch and keep fish. So we're losing, you know, revenue to our parks, revenue to municipal parks, hotels, motels, local sport-fishing shops, gas stations. It kind of goes on and on. For instance, just in 2018 over 24,000 Albertans purchased fishing licences in Saskatchewan rather than Alberta. Over the period between 2015 and 2018: \$1.5 million in lost revenue to the province of Alberta in fishing licences alone, nothing to do with the local impact to tourism or the life there.

You know, we've got municipalities that are willing to invest in tourism, that are willing to help out with raising the awareness on this, and we've had many, many town halls where we've had very robust conversations with local fishermen and guides that are asking for us to reopen these lakes. I'll give you one example. The town of Lac La Biche has been holding what they call Lac La Biche Pow Wow Days for upwards of 50 years. Over the last five years, when I was their MLA representing them, they've had an event called the Seniors' Fish Fry. Over the last five years at least and prior to that they've had to import walleye from Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Meanwhile you can go out onto Lac La Biche, right outside the facility where they're having the fish fry, and you can

catch upwards of a hundred walleye in an afternoon, and the mortality rate, depending on how deep the water you're fishing in, can be anywhere from 5 to 20 per cent.

It's very popular for the pelicans because they like to follow the fishing boats around. They know that out of every hundred fish that get caught, anywhere from five to 15 are going to come popping to the surface, and they get a free meal. So we're actually causing more damage by restricting fishing than by just allowing people to go out there and catch and release. It's very, very frustrating for the folks up in Lac La Biche.

One of the things I would like to see: even though I'm not their MLA, I'd like to be able to go up next summer and enjoy the fish fry up in Lac La Biche with locally caught fish. It's one of the things I'm trying to work with our department to promote.

We also need to look at the environmental balance that comes from the overpopulation of the walleye. Now, you talk to local fishermen. They were quite adamant at the town halls we held, and they spoke to the ministry staff that were there and the biologists that were there about mortality rates. They talked to them about, you know, long skinny fish with big heads that had no bodies because there are so many of them that they've eaten out all of the smaller fish and are basically starving to death. I said that most of them die of old age, but maybe a lot of them are starving to death as well.

Also, I'd mention, you know, that we've had a couple of lakes up in our area that have winter kill. Rather than allowing people to go and catch these fish, it's quite acceptable to have thousands of them die over the winter or on a hot summer day, when the lack of oxygen, because of the overabundance of fish, is causing these big die-offs.

Going on, like I said before, we are missing the good opportunities, the fishing opportunities. The seniors that I talk to tell me that, you know, when they were kids, they'd go out and enjoy the fishing experience with their grandparents. A lot of people are just saying: we'd like to be able to go out to our lakes, catch a couple of fish, take our grandkids, have a fish fry on the beach, and just have that experience as a family thing. I don't think it's too much to ask, especially with the overabundance of fish that we're seeing in our lakes up there.

With that, like I said, we've got the Cold Lake fish hatchery. The capacity is there. We'd be looking at utilizing that fish hatchery to rear some fish and stock some lakes. You know, some of the lakes maybe should be fished out a little bit to allow for some of the other natural species like whitefish and perch and northern pike to develop. There are some of those lakes that used to be fantastic perch fisheries. Now you go out and you can't even catch a perch. But guess what? You can catch a walleye on a perch hook. Or you're out fishing for northern pike in the traditional way that you'd be fishing for northern pike and you're not catching northern pike. But guess what? You're catching walleye. Again, we're seeing a lot of these lakes that have an overabundance. We're looking at just getting some balance back by utilizing the fish hatcheries.

We also have another tool at our disposal. Bill 206, that was passed back in May 2002, that was put forward by Mr. Ray Danyluk, the MLA for the area at the time, deals with the control of predators like cormorants. Now, we have statistics and video footage of thousands of cormorants landing on a lake. My understanding is that they can eat up to three pounds or three kilograms of fish, depending on what size of bird they are, every day. So as well as utilizing the Cold Lake fish hatchery, we also need to control some of the predators that are feeding on not only the small walleye that are in the lakes and hatching in the lakes but the perch and jackfish, or northern pike, as well.

Like I said, there has to be a balance. We're trying to promote fishing up in our areas, to increase the tourism and access to our lakes, to increase access to our public parks, and at the same time to rear the fish in a facility that was designed for that and bring some economic development and tourism back up to our area.

With that, I will step down and allow some other folks to stand up and speak to, hopefully in support of, Motion 509. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

5:10

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by thanking the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for bringing forward this motion. I've had the opportunity to have a couple of conversations with the member about the importance of recreational fishing to the province of Alberta. It attracts tourists not just from other provinces; it attracts tourists from all over the world to come here. We know that regardless of the reason a tourist comes, when they come, they're spending money. They're supporting our economies, often our local economies. In this context, I have had the opportunity to talk to the municipality and the council in Cold Lake as well as in Lac La Biche, that rely heavily on tourism.

We know that protecting our ecosystem is absolutely critical, Mr. Speaker, but I can tell you that just this March – March 1, 2019 – there was a new regulation that came into effect. In the past one pike out of Lac La Biche could be kept if it met a certain slot size. As of March 1 no one can keep any pike out of that lake. I can tell you – I know the member probably has the stats – that the impact alone this summer on Lac La Biche has been significant.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

We have a beautiful provincial park, Winston Churchill provincial park, right down the causeway in the middle of Lac La Biche. Beautiful. If you haven't gone, Mr. Speaker, I encourage you to do so. I've camped there many, many years. I've heard that the reservations were down significantly, that it was a ghost town. You know, for the town of Lac La Biche and the county, again, tourism is the lifeblood of many industries, of many small businesses. They've asked for government to come up with a solution. We know we need to protect our ecosystem, but we also know that tourism is significant.

I myself, Mr. Speaker, will be the first to disclose that I love to fish. I love to fish in Alberta lakes. So any opportunity that we have to say to the government, "Hey, this requires your attention; let's look at some creative solutions" – I like what the member has proposed. As far as using our fish hatcheries to help restock these lakes so that we can continue to not only hold fishing derbies, which, of course, bring in a significant number of people and revenue to our local communities not just on those weekends but overall – I know that fishing is a huge attraction, especially for our friends down to the south of us. Again, we are competing with other jurisdictions in western Canada: in B.C. and, of course, in Saskatchewan.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, some people believe that walleye are the best-tasting freshwater white fish. Now, I will contest that. I do love walleye. And before people start getting angry, I do love walleye, but I also love northern pike. For anyone who has never had the opportunity of catching a pike and within an hour it goes from the

water to the frying pan, you're missing out, quite frankly, because it is absolutely delicious.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to put forward an amendment. I consider this a friendly amendment. I have the requisite number of copies. I will wait a moment for our friends to bring it up to you.

The Acting Speaker: Once you see that the pages have essentially managed to hand out all the amendments, then just feel free to read it into the record and then continue along.

Mr. Bilous: Our pages are working diligently to get this to all members. I will read it for those members that haven't received it yet. I move that Motion Other than Government Motion 509 be amended by striking out "walleye fish stock" and substituting "walleye and northern pike fish stocks." This is, of course, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we do attract people who fish who are interested not only in walleye or pickerel but also who are interested in jackfish, or northern pike. I have been assured by the mover of this motion – and I appreciate that – that Alberta's hatcheries do have the ability to produce both walleye and pike. I think, obviously, this would be done in concert with the very bodies of water and folks under Environment and Parks.

Again, my hope, Mr. Speaker, is that by us debating this motion today in the Chamber, we will signal to government that action is needed. Again, I hope to hear from other members on their assessment of our current situation and this idea as far as how we can help to support our industries. I do want to acknowledge as well that this is another way to support our indigenous communities who do rely on fishing for sustenance. Really, I think this is a win-win-win all around to ensure that we are safeguarding our natural resources but still promoting and encouraging tourism and, of course, promoting our province.

I don't want to take up too, too much time other than to encourage all members to vote in favour of this friendly amendment to strengthen the motion that the hon. member has put forward. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Just for the record, going forward with regard to the debate on this amendment, we will be referring to this as amendment A1.

I see the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has risen to speak.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. Just to be clear, I am in favour of this amendment. I did check with the local fish hatchery in Cold Lake, and they assure me that they can raise multiple species at that facility. They just have to keep them separate. They said that the only hard part is, you know, keeping your fingers safe when you're getting the eggs from a northern pike.

The member mentioned, you know, having caught a fish and getting it into the pan within the hour. That's exactly the experience that the folks around my area are talking about, getting out there with their kids or with their grandkids. I would just ask to make sure that the member actually measured that fish before he cut it up and put it in the pan.

Mr. Bilous: Always.

Mr. Hanson: Okay. Make sure you fall into the slot size there. Thank you very much.

I will of course be supporting this amendment, and thank you very much for bringing it forward. I've got no problem with adding northern pike to the hatcheries as long as it helps to get some recreation and tourism back up into our northern areas.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other hon. members looking to debate on amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to Motion 509? I see the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has risen.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. I would like to speak in support of Motion 509, to enhance the biodiversity, health, and economic value of Alberta's lakes by revitalizing the Cold Lake fish hatchery and whatever other tools actually can be added there, thereby to increase Alberta's fish stocks, walleye and others.

This is an important piece for Alberta for a number of reasons. I can see economic value here, I see recreational value, and quite honestly I see food value, if I can put it that way. The economic value of Alberta's fishing, hunting, and trapping: the only figures I could find were from 2014 to 2016, but the GDP value of that sector has declined by 75 per cent over those three years. This is an area that Alberta should be actually enhancing and developing. There's a tremendous resource that we have here, and in times of economic difficulty we should be growing this industry, not curtailing it.

By increasing the fish stocks of our Alberta lakes, I think this has great economic value. That's the first thing I'd like to say. There are many, particularly American tourists who love to come up here for hunting and fishing. Fishing is a great thing for them to come to, and they bring with them not just the fishing experience itself, but they stay in hotels, they buy meals, they have travel expenses, they engage in other forms of entertainment when they're here. So I think this is truly something that we really should be growing, and we can do that by enhancing the fishery work and by actually expanding fish hatcheries across the province, truthfully. I admit that there can be a lot of demand on the fishing, so we need to make sure that we take care of that resource and we restock it on a regular basis. Even in my area there's a lot of demand. There have been some declining results in terms of fishing, and it just simply needs to be restocked. My question is: we can do that, so why wouldn't we?

5:20

I also have to affirm the huge recreational value for Albertans, especially when, you know, people are under stress, when things are difficult. The ability to go out there and just have a peaceful, quiet morning or afternoon or whatever it is, to be there when the sun starts to set is a beautiful experience. For me, when my children come to visit with my grandchildren, we always take an afternoon, we go out on the lake, we set up there, we have a campfire, we have food. The kids play games, they make snow angels, they make ice forts. It's a great opportunity for adults to visit when you're standing around the holes. It's an incredibly exciting thing for kids when they catch a fish and they pull it out and you help them. They learn things.

There's a social value for the community as well because people meet each other on the ice. Friends meet each other. I know churches that have planned special events out there. I know that one time a group took out a group of 30 Filipino immigrants, first time ever, to fish on the ice. They could not believe that they were driving on water. Incredible experience for us to share with all Canadians. There's a community, social experience that happens out on the lake. People who may not have been there have no idea how amazing this is. It's like a town square in Mexico. Everybody meets there and visits and socializes: huge recreational value for Albertans and part of our culture, quite frankly. We need to support it, not let it die.

Lastly, I do want to say that I think there is a food value to it for Albertans and especially – I know some of the Albertans that are out of work and that are struggling. I know some of them that actually go out, and they catch their fish, and they take it home, and it's a good, solid meal for them. It comes out of clean water. It's local food. It's not shipped in from Asia or someplace. It's a sustainable resource for families.

So for those reasons – economic, recreational, and even food value – I really think we have to support this kind of motion and, more broadly, throughout the rest of the province along the same direction. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley has risen to speak on this matter.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to stand and speak to Motion 509, talking about enhancing "the biodiversity, health, and economic value of Alberta's lakes by utilizing the Cold Lake fish hatchery and other tools at the government's disposal in order to increase Alberta's walleye and northern pike fish stocks." It was interesting to see that amendment come forward to add northern pike. Of course, if I had my way, we would add perch and many other species of fish, too, that we could be enhancing in Alberta here.

I think it's a great idea to be able to use this Cold Lake fish hatchery to its full potential and use it for potential that Albertans would like to see it used for because, of course, Albertans love to fish. They love to eat those fish that they catch: the walleye and pike and perch and whitefish, all those types of fish, even the trout in the western slopes and, of course, the trout that are stocked in lakes across Alberta.

I think that one thing Albertans like to do is that they not only like to catch fish, but they also like to keep fish. Of course, we have a situation in Alberta where there seems to be more opportunity to catch than there is to keep, and maybe that's like anywhere. But when fishermen can go out all day and catch fish and not be able to keep one, I think that kind of adds to a level of frustration. It shows that in some lakes the populations are plenty high enough for the actual fish in the lake, but for some reason the laws and regulations keep them from actually keeping some of those fish. In other lakes you could fish all day and maybe catch one fish, and it might not be legal.

Of course, if there's a way to enhance that opportunity going forward, I think that that's what the fishermen and fisherwomen in Alberta would love to see because right now many of them are travelling out of Alberta to go fishing. Of course, that's a loss of opportunity right in our own communities. When we think of rural Alberta and we think of some of the challenges they face with agriculture – you know, in the last few years in agriculture there have been some crop problems there that have caused losses to farmers, and we know that the oil and gas industry has been not in great shape for the last couple of years either. When we think of rural Alberta and the opportunity to have some economic development within those communities, I think that fishing would be great.

You know, in certain parts of Alberta there are very few lakes, so there are a lot of fishermen concentrated on just a few lakes. That's why it's so important to have this opportunity to enhance those lakes so that the fishermen that go to those lakes will have an opportunity to catch a fish, to keep a fish, and eat a fish. We stock trout in many lakes in Alberta, and for some reason we've been a little bit hesitant to stock some of these other species, and I think we need to be able to take advantage of these opportunities. We

have a fish hatchery, that I understand is a world-class fish hatchery, that can provide those opportunities to rear fish and stock some of these lakes. I think that if we take our world-class fish hatchery, we could create a world-class fishing industry or a fishing opportunity for the people here in Alberta.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview mentioned that, you know, fishing attracts tourists from all over the world, all across Canada, and he's correct to a certain extent. But there are provinces around us that have better fishing or seem to be perceived to have better fishing and have a lot more opportunity and a lot more tourism going to those provinces. We need to be able to be in on that market and be able to take some of that opportunity and have it here in Alberta. Of course, like I say, this fish hatchery exists right now. It's sitting there. If we could just utilize it for developing our economy here, attracting the fishermen and fisherwomen who want to come from around the world right here to Alberta, we can do that. They want to come. There are tourists that already come to Alberta, some for fishing and some for other things.

Even if they're coming for something else, if they know they have an opportunity to go fishing also, that'll help to extend their trip. I know that when I travel to different places, if there's an opportunity to do some fishing or some hunting there, then I'm likely to stay a little longer because that opportunity is there. I think we need to have that opportunity for people that are travelling rather than having that opportunity lost to other provinces.

I think we can't forget, of course, that – it was also mentioned about First Nations but also residents of Alberta. We talk a lot about the economy and the benefit of jobs and tourism coming into Alberta for fishing, but obviously it's a recreational opportunity for Albertans, and it's an opportunity for the people of Alberta to put a fish on their plate that they've caught locally. There's obviously a lot of pride and a lot of satisfaction that goes into catching a fish, cleaning the fish, putting it on the table, and serving it to your family. A lot of people actually rely, to a certain extent, on that as a food source to help provide for their family.

Again, I think it's important for multiple reasons that we take advantage of this fish hatchery that we have and use it for more species than just the trout that it's been used for, recently anyways.

People don't fish just to fish. You know, I think if you sat there all day fishing and never caught a fish, that could be kind of boring, actually. It's nice to be out on the water, it's nice to enjoy the outdoors, but at some point you want to catch a fish, and at some point you want to eat a fish. I think that's something that we need to provide, not just an opportunity to throw a hook in the water and tour around the lake on a boat or sit on the shore and fish; we need to provide that opportunity to catch a fish and keep a fish. I think we've noticed recently that fishing licences declined, the sales declined. There aren't as many fishing licences being sold, so people could say: well, maybe fishing isn't as popular as it used to be; maybe it's something that's on a downward trend. Of course, if you go out fishing and don't catch a fish and you don't have an opportunity to catch a fish, the chances of you wanting to go back next year and go fishing decline.

I guess it's that adage that if you build it, they will come. I think that if we build a fishing industry here in Alberta and a fishing opportunity here in Alberta, the people will come. They'll come from outside the province – they'll come here for tourism, to fish – but also the residents will want to fish, too, because they'll have that opportunity to catch a fish. I think that a lot of times you see people out in the winter ice fishing and everything, and it's no fun if all you catch is ice. You need to be able to catch something and be able to take it home and have that opportunity to serve that to your family.

So I think this is a great motion, and I encourage everybody to support this motion. I think it's something that's been long in coming, and I think it's a great opportunity to put to use this fish hatchery that we have to produce the fish that Albertans would love to go out and catch and put on their table.

Thank you.

5:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Getson: I'm going to make it really quick. I support this. I think it's an Alberta rite of passage. There are so many fond memories growing up in rural Alberta on this, and it's just been wonderful. To hear that we're actually going to start using the environment to bring more people in and promote it – because as young kids learning how to fish and catch your own food and the whole thing of learning how to build a fire in the wintertime is also a survival skill. A lot of that's being lost with folks in urban areas and otherwise.

I'm glad to see the members of the opposition – this is something we can all agree on. It's something that is very valuable and vital, and I really thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for bringing it forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen to speak.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise in this place and speak to any motion that's brought forward. To see a private member's motion which is actually something that we can all agree on in this House is, frankly, astounding to me. It's something that I myself have fond memories of, actually, when I was younger. I say younger. It was just a few years ago, but I have fond memories of having long drives with my father. We'd drive north, and then we'd drive north, and it felt like we were driving north forever, but then we'd get to this lake. We'd go out and cast some lines and we'd see what we got, because that's what we were going to eat for dinner that night. It was going to be something that we did together because our family wanted to have an outing that weekend.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's something that so many people in this Chamber, so many people in my riding and across this province are able to relate to. Alberta's lakes and using our lakes and using the outdoors and having access to these amazing facilities and natural resources are something that we should honour and we should protect and we should preserve. It's so great to be able to hear what so many of the other members of the House are saying, because having the opportunity to increase the fish stock in all these lakes means that we have more opportunities to share these experiences with others, more opportunities to share these experiences with Albertans, and, as we heard from members of the government caucus, it could be opportunities to share this with new Albertans as well, whether they're new by being born here or having immigrated here.

That's something that I think is very, very exciting. It's something that I think we should all be encouraging. I think it's something that we can bring back and say that every single member of this House, I believe, is going to be voting in favour of this motion, so we can go out and we can talk about how this is something that we agree is valuable for us. It's so important because we know that lakes are an important habitat that contribute to our environment. They contribute to our economy. They contribute to everything in this province, and it's something that is so vital to the lives of people like indigenous peoples and Métis communities and

the recreation opportunities and things we've been hearing about in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker. Those recreation opportunities are fundamentally something that we know we need to encourage and we need to support.

Fundamentally, it's something that makes us human. It allows us to connect with ourselves, with our friends, with our family, and with nature, Mr. Speaker. That's something that's exciting, because having to learn how to gut a fish for the first time when you're nine or 10 years old is something that I think a lot of people, perhaps, in this room remember. They remember that first time when you're handed the knife, and they go: well, what do I do now? You learn pretty quickly that it's not so bad. You learn pretty quickly that it is a cool experience, that you are able to actually, from the lake to your dinner table, see the entire process of how food works. I think that's something that we should continue to try and strive to make available for future generations, for future Albertans, and for all Albertans that are currently enjoying that as well.

It's something that – who doesn't enjoy it when you're trying to get away from it all? Maybe members here in this Chamber remember over the last summer or, hopefully, over the next summer they will be as well able to get some time off and go to one of the great lakes here in Alberta and have that opportunity. Perhaps even, Mr. Speaker, my caucus members will chide me for this, but perhaps one of those lakes you go to fish at may even not have cell reception. That would be a real shame, that you wouldn't be able to get your cellphone going, but it would be something that certainly would be possible here.

I believe that that's why we need to support these healthy lakes. We need to support having these lakes that provide important environmental, economic, and recreational benefits for every single person across this province, because every single person deserves to have that chance.

I'll admit, Mr. Speaker, not every single Albertan will want to or will have the opportunity to go out and enjoy these lakes and enjoy using them for fishing while they live here in Alberta, but it's something that we should preserve and we should protect. We should give them that option because it's one of the great things that we can share. It's one of the great things that I believe this motion speaks to, how it can be prudently used to have these types of conversations and share how amazing our province is and how if we do this properly and if we protect these lakes properly, we'll be able to minimize impacts on things like natural habitats. It's something that I think is very interesting.

I think it's great to see that this motion also speaks to things like biodiversity, speaks to things like utilizing a local fishery, and all of those types of programs, Mr. Speaker. It's something that I think we on this side of the House agree with wholeheartedly. I think it's something that we would be happy to advocate for on behalf of Albertans because it's something that we know is something that Albertans enjoy. It's something that Albertans would like to continue to do.

We know that when we look at some lakes across this province, we do need that little bit of help for the biodiversity. We do need that little bit of work to make sure that they are sustainable. We do need that little bit of work to make sure that we have vibrant, thriving fishing opportunities, Mr. Speaker, because that recreation is something that we need to cherish. It's something that we need to foster. When we try to foster something, it means that we do have to go out and work with our local hatcheries like this and ensure that there are tools like that at our disposal and at the government's disposal to have that fish stocked, to have those opportunities, to have that recreation. It's something that I'm very proud that I'm going to be able to support. It's something I'm very proud I'm going to be able to vote in favour of.

It's something that I'm very excited about – again, Mr. Speaker, I know I spoke about this a little bit at the beginning – that we're able to find something that every single member of this House can agree on, that actually nobody is getting up here and having an argument over the merits of this. I think it was the member across who had spoken to how he wished we'd added more types of fish to this motion. That's something I think is exciting as well because it's simply more opportunity, right? Who couldn't advocate for more opportunity, more biodiversity, and more fun for Albertans?

We talk sometimes in this House about how one side or the other is trying to wage a war on fun, Mr. Speaker. We can see here today that that's not true, because every single person is going to vote in favour of trying to have that recreation available, trying to have recreation available for families, for communities, and have those conversations. We know that whether you're nine years old or whether you're 90 years old, you can get out there on a lake, and you can go fishing, and you can have a great time.

I'm really pleased that I'll be able to vote in favour of this. It seems like every single other member of this Assembly will vote in favour of this. I'm looking forward to hearing what other members of the government caucus and the opposition caucus here will have to say as well. I think it's something that's really so important that every single MLA has the opportunity to talk and every single MLA takes the opportunity to talk, because we deserve to speak on behalf of our constituents when it comes to issues like this.

With that, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to support this, but I hope we can hear from many of my colleagues as well. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am quite excited, maybe not quite as excited as the last member to speak to this motion but excited nonetheless. I do thank the member for bringing it forward. I think it sounds like we all agree to the fact that we should be enhancing the biodiversity, health, and economic value of Alberta's lakes. I would never venture, as some members have this evening, to choose a favourite fish, with the prospect of recall legislation before us. I would not want to alienate, say, my walleye-loving constituents, but either way, once again, I do appreciate that the member brought this forward.

As has been said, Alberta's lakes are an important natural resource to our province and need to be protected and preserved. They are an important habitat, and they also play an important role in the lives of indigenous and Métis communities as well as recreational opportunities, as has been stated.

Now, I will just point out the fact that while I do support this motion and I will vote in favour of it, I do have concerns with the overall picture that this government is painting for us. While we're talking about enhancing biodiversity and working to increase the economic value of our lakes, we're also seeing cuts to environmental monitoring through the environment ministry. We're seeing cuts to Alberta Innovates, when we talk about collaborating between industries. That's a concern for the future of adding economic value to this important industry.

5:40

When we look at cuts to postsecondary education and what that might mean for training opportunities in the future for our students, where on one hand this motion is talking about increasing economic opportunities but on the other hand we have a Minister of Advanced Education who's talking about reducing opportunities for people to get trained in this important industry, whether it's, you know,

environmental protection officers or conservation officers or the like, that's a concern to me. The overall goal of this government and the cuts that we're seeing don't necessarily go along with this motion.

Of course, on the other point, increased costs across the board, whether we're looking at the income tax changes that this government has made, bracket creep, it's going to leave less money in the pockets of Albertans. We talk about increased insurance costs and also the prospect of increased education costs now under this government because of the choices that they've made. Really, at the end of the day, all of those choices to increase the burden on Albertan families will mean fewer people are in a position where they can take the vehicle for a weekend and go fishing in these communities or at these lakes, so that's a concern.

With that being said, I do support Motion 509. I do thank the member for bringing it forward, and I believe it's something that we should be working towards all together.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Are there any other members wishing to speak on Motion 509?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul to close debate.

Mr. Hanson: Well, thank you very much for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker. I thank everybody for their points, well taken, and for the friendly amendment that we've all accepted, and I would proceed to the vote.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 509 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 23

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2019

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Energy and Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to move on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General second reading of Bill 23, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2019.

Mr. Speaker, if passed, the act will address a variety of issues facing our courts. The first of these issues involves the name of the Court of Queen's Bench. When Queen Elizabeth II ceases to rule, custom dictates that the name of the court is changed out of respect to the new monarch. This bill proposes re-enacting the section of the Court of Queen's Bench Act that would automatically change the court's name to Court of King's Bench. This section was repealed during the 2018 fall session of the Legislature. It's our belief that automatically renaming the court to Court of King's Bench best reflects our constitutional monarchy and honours the heritage of our legal system. This decision would be in keeping with similar naming provisions that have been enacted in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Bill 23 would accomplish two other matters. First, it reduces the age at which masters in chambers and Provincial Court judges may request to be appointed to part-time service. As the Court of Queen's Bench Act and the Provincial Court Act currently stand, these officials are eligible to be appointed to part-time service when they're 60 years old. Bill 23 would lower the threshold to 55 years of age. It would create greater work flexibility for judges and masters. It will also create a small amount of savings for the

province. Approval of these two changes would not be automatic. The Chief Judge of the Provincial Court and the Chief Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench would have power to deny a request if they felt it would create difficulties for the court.

Finally, Bill 23 would give justices of the Court of Queen's Bench and the Court of Appeal greater access to federal funds. Currently when these justices attend certain meetings, conferences, or seminars, the federal Judges Act places an annual \$500 limit on the amount of money available to pay their expenses. This limit places undue pressure on the provincial budget allocation for these two judicial branches. Bill 23 would allow the \$500 level to increase by authorizing their attendance at meetings, conferences, or seminars relating to the administration of justice with the approval of the Chief Justice. This change would allow these justices greater freedom to travel and carry out their duties. Taken together, these provisions, while small, will create a more efficient justice system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members wishing to join debate on this matter? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. I am pleased to rise and speak to this bill. Obviously, there are sort of three main components that we're dealing with here. One of them is eligibility for part-time service. I don't think I have any concerns per se about that. It just lowers the age from 60 to 55 so that a judge may go part-time sooner. I think my only concern is that in light of the budget and in light of the forthcoming 20 per cent cuts to the court services, I'm a little concerned that this is just another method to reduce the number of judges available in the provincial court to hear matters. Of course, the reason that that concerns me, the reason that I'm concerned about a decrease in the number of hearing days available to the public, is that the justice system is fairly strained. I don't think that this is a surprise to anyone. It's been the case for – well, it's probably been getting worse for at least the last 20 years.

That was creating increased concern, and then in 2016 the Supreme Court of Canada came out with the Jordan decision, which is now a fairly famous decision, which basically said that matters could be stayed if they didn't reach court in a timely manner. It set limits, very firm limits, on what those matters were. We had challenges with Jordan here because when the decision came down, the court system had been slowing down, like I say, for a couple of decades. It was very difficult to turn that very large ship, but we worked diligently to do it, and we saw average lead times to trial in provincial court coming down significantly and average lead times for matters coming down significantly.

We saw less movement on that front, unfortunately, in the Court of Queen's Bench, and that's because those are federal appointments. Despite the fact that our current federal government – still current, I guess – had made some moves and allowed Alberta to have more judges, it was still the case that they weren't appointing sufficiently quickly. Unlike in provincial court, where the province had a lot more ability to move and to change things and where we saw lead times coming down a lot, we didn't see nearly as much happening in the Court of Queen's Bench. That's why it concerns me that we're going to have potentially fewer and that this could be used to have fewer provincial court positions, because it means that matters will take longer to get to trial again, and that means matters being stayed. That's bad for everyone.

It's incredibly challenging emotionally to be a victim of crime. I have talked to a lot of people over the years who have had

devastating experiences, and their experience with the court system itself is incredibly challenging. To go through all of that and to not even get your matter adjudicated, to not even get your day in court, to have the person you have accused of doing what may be the worst thing that's ever happened in your life go free without a trial: that's pretty awful. I don't think that anyone in Alberta should have that experience. That is my concern there.

When we talk about matters before the court, the criminal ones are obviously important, but there are a number of other things. Civil matters are important before the courts. Family matters are important. Sometimes these people come in before the courts, and they're coming a couple days before Christmas and they're literally arguing over who gets to have the kids on Christmas. The stress of that, not just on the families but on the children who are experiencing that, is incredibly challenging. The longer that conflict is allowed to draw on, the more negative experiences those children have, particularly in high-conflict cases where you're arguing over custody and access. It's a huge concern to me that this may be used as a way to decrease the number of sitting days, decrease the number of appearances available to Albertans. That is my major concern with this bill.

5:50

I'm actually quite supportive of allowing judges and justices to travel to attend federal conferences. I think that that's incredibly important. We certainly know that there's been a lot of attention recently around ensuring that judges are appropriately prepared to deal particularly with sexual assault cases in light of some very unfortunate things that have happened in the court system. I have to give them credit. The Provincial Court of Alberta, you know, after that happened, after I had the experience of having to complain about a sitting judge, which was a difficult decision for me, and his comments to a sexual assault complainant, the Provincial Court did go out and immediately bring in experts to assist them with that training. I do know that they were concerned about it, and I'm glad that they were. I think that we all ought to be, so that piece is quite important in terms of judicial education.

I think that the last piece of this, obviously, changes the name back to the way it was. Obviously, by way of miscellaneous statutes, so with the consent of both sides, both the previous government and the now government, who was then in opposition, had agreed that we ought to give the Lieutenant Governor in Council, so basically cabinet, the jurisdiction to change the names of the court if that was seen fit. It's a bit peculiar to me that they were in favour of it then and are against it now, but I don't think that this is a huge concern. I mean, the changes that we made at the time were made after multiple conversations with stakeholders who felt very strongly that the names of the court needed to be more reflective of everyone in Alberta, sort of more reflective of what they felt the courts should look like. Obviously, minds have been changed in that case. I certainly haven't had people banging down my doors to suggest that this is a concern for them, so I think that mostly that isn't a major concern for us. I don't think that the change that we made was bad. I think that giving cabinet the ability to make that decision was fine. I don't think that's sufficient to oppose it.

I guess to sum up, overall I think that this is mostly fine. My main concern, again, arises around Jordan because we've made so much progress. We've made so much progress on that issue, on ensuring that cases of serious and violent matters are not being stayed, and I'm really concerned that this is one step in reversing that progress.

With that, I will end my comments, and thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen to speak.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 23, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2019. I share a lot of the comments from my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, in particular, even as myself, a practising lawyer, who practised for some time before running for my current position, I actually had not given much thought prior to this about the fact that our courts are named the Court of Queen's Bench and what would happen when the Queen was no longer the Queen. I can honestly say that this is probably the first time I've actually turned my mind to that, to think about the fact that perhaps the current Queen has been the Queen for so long, my entire lifetime, so I had not really even thought about that.

While I was at first surprised by the change, of course, it does make sense. It does fit within our Constitutional monarchy system, and certainly we know that there are many symbols and traditions that we draw from the fact that we are a constitutional monarchy, so I can appreciate that that does need to change when the Queen unfortunately passes. I do have to say that I'm slightly concerned about the impact that that will have financially because, of course, there are so many ways that the Court of Queen's Bench – and even just terms of vernacular. Lawyers are quite, you know, familiar with calling it QB, which is Queen's Bench. Certainly, I can imagine that there's going to be quite a cost associated with making a name change, but that's just the reality, I suppose, of the system we have.

I had not heard the concerns raised by stakeholders that my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View expressed that perhaps the courts should be more reflective of the diversity of our province. I think that's a fair comment. However, I will say, you know, that I think we have the system that we have. That's been in place for some time. There are significant tradition and values that go along with that. I think that perhaps there's a bigger conversation that could be had around how we make sure our courts do reflect all of our diversity. I note, for example, we recently brought eagle feathers into the courtrooms, which I think is a fantastic tribute and recognition of reconciliation but also the value of our indigenous peoples. So, certainly, there are ways that our courts need to better reflect the diversity of our province.

I do also want to comment on the change in Bill 23 that will lower the age of eligibility for part-time service for judges to age 55. Like my colleague, you know, I share a concern. Well, I acknowledge and am respectful of the fact that judges have usually by the time they're appointed to the bench served for quite some time in the legal fields and are usually prestigious. I certainly am somebody who supports flexible work environments, particularly to accommodate individuals and families and whatever the case may be, but while I do understand that more and more judges might be seeking that sort of service and may be more willing to take the appointment were they to get that, I share a concern that it does cause a delay at a time when we are constantly talking about how to move our justice system to be more expeditious and to deal with concerns. My colleague rightfully pointed out the decision of the Supreme Court and Jordan, which actually created an imperative on our systems to move more quickly so that we are not staying charges in violent criminal cases in particular.

I do worry that with fewer judges working full-time, more judges working part-time, that does increase the demand that we need to make sure that we are actually appointing and working with our federal counterparts to ensure that more judges are appointed so that we do not see a slowdown in how our cases go through the court system because I think that's a significant concern to all Albertans. We talk a lot in this House about the administration of justice and

making sure that it is proper and fair, and part of fairness, of course, means making sure that it is handled expeditiously both for the accused but also particularly for the victims.

I'd be curious to know whether or not an assessment has been done as to how this could impact the number of appointments and the ability to move cases through the system and whether there's a plan of action should there be fewer judges available to hear cases because they're now part-time. Has there been an assessment of how we're going to make up for that by either appointing more judges or working with our federal counterparts to do so?

With respect to the change in Bill 23 that would allow for more judges to access federal reimbursement for travel to take conferences and to do that professional development, I think that's critical. Even as legislators we know – I recently attended a conference where I got to meet legislators from other provinces, and it is such an invaluable experience, not only because you get to learn a little bit more about what's happening in other jurisdictions, but it hones your own skills as well. That does not stop when you're in the legal profession. I know that professional development is a key part of my obligations. As a member of the Law Society we are all as professionals required to maintain that professional development, and so too should our judges. So I think that that is a fair and reasonable expectation, especially since we're looking for reimbursement from the federal government for that kind of travel. Certainly, we do want our judges to have opportunities to hone their

skills and to learn from the experiences of their colleagues in other provinces.

I'm mindful of the time, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, I will reserve any further judgments for any further reading of this bill. I do want to say that I think there are some relatively – they seem innocuous, but they're important changes and good changes. I am curious a little bit because I do think we need to answer these questions about the impact of the system as it goes through, particularly with reducing the number of judges potentially.

I'd be very interested to know about the cost implications about changing the name from Court of Queen's Bench to Court of King's Bench. There will be costs associated with that, and how will that be accounted for? Of course, we don't know precisely when Her Majesty will no longer be with us and the name change will be happening, but certainly I would hope that there is some planning that's being put forward into the system to make sure that we are prepared to make those changes clearly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but seeing the time is now 6 o'clock, the House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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