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The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

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Day 44

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

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

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, November 20, 2019

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. So may Your kingdom come and Your name be hallowed. Amen.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 21

Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen to speak.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill 21 in Committee of the Whole. It gives us a chance to spend some time on different sections of the bill. Since this government has made a decision to hide most of their legislative agenda by burying very complex and important issues, which they have actually identified as both complex and important, in bills that tie together unrelated acts of the Legislature, it's really good to be in Committee of the Whole, where we can pierce that intent to hide and speak to issues. So I will, if the opportunity allows, be speaking to this bill on a number of occasions this morning and throughout the days ahead.

Previously I've had a chance to talk about the incredible attack on democratic rights that this bill represents with regard to unions and some of their functions in society and the fact that workers in this province have been the focus of repeated and, well, serial assaults by the government in legislative terms.

I would like to turn my attention this morning at first to the attacks on students and again begin with my overall concern and then move into a conversation about some of the particulars that are offensive in this bill. Hopefully, at some point members of the government side of the House will make whatever feeble attempts they have to legitimize this bill before voting for it.

I want to speak about the issue of students here because I think that this is again an issue of democracy. The benefits of a democracy are widely known throughout the world, and many people aspire to participate and contribute to democracies. But a fundamental aspect of democracy is the ability for average citizens to fully understand their role in participating in democracy and to make effective choices when voting. I think that any scholar of the history of democracy will tell you that part of the reason why the Westminster-style parliamentary democracy has done so well is because there has been an adjunct of an increase in public

education, available freely to all citizens, that supported that ever-important democracy.

What we have in this bill is an attempt to decrease access to postsecondary education, where in fact people often spend a significant portion of their time understanding and learning either aspects related to the democracy directly, through political science or other studies of that nature, or various areas of learning in various faculties at the universities and colleges and technical institutions, where they learn about the details of content area that is relevant to our conversations here in the House. Yet we have a government that is dead set on creating barriers and reducing accessibility for many people in this Bill 21.

Now, it's really important that we take the time to recognize how significant education is to the well-being of our society, and it's significant in a number of ways. As I mentioned, it allows people to receive the greatest amount of information necessary to become participants in our democracy, but it also helps to spread democracy outside of the voting booth. It spreads democracy outside of the voting booth by ensuring that no matter what family you're raised in, no matter what unfortunate circumstances you may unfortunately have been born into, you have an opportunity to make better for yourself in society. That means that just because your parents didn't have an opportunity for postsecondary education, it doesn't mean that you will be limited in going to postsecondary education. That means that we have an opportunity for people to move up in terms of socioeconomic position within society, which is a very democratizing aspect of the structures of our world right now.

This is what's been attacked by this government, the ability of people who are from more vulnerable or unfortunate circumstances to make changes in their world and to move on. Now, we know statistically that if your parents did not go to postsecondary education, the chances of you going to postsecondary education are significantly reduced compared to people whose parents did go to postsecondary education. Many of us know that in the colloquial sense.

I happen to be very fortunately blessed in terms of my birth. I was born an individual that has all the privileges a society has to offer, including both parents who are university educated and grandparents who were very highly focused on university education. You know, there's a story within my family about my grandmother on my mother's side refusing to move to Regina when a job offer was given to my grandfather, because they didn't have a university there at the time, but finding themselves eventually fortunate enough to move to Saskatoon, where there was a university, the University of Saskatchewan.

My grandfather, who fought in the First World War at Vimy and Passchendaele, thought education was very important, so much so that although he had three daughters – and daughters were not always educated in families in the '40s, '50s, and '60s – he ensured that all three of his daughters were university educated in the 1950s, so high value on education at the time. That was only possible because education was affordable to him. He wasn't a rich man. He worked for Marshall-Wells, and as was very common in those days, his wife, my grandmother Evelyn, was at home raising the children, part of the community, part of the church, part of society in many very productive ways. One of the things that she had insisted on was that her daughters also get university education, and the consequence was that at a time when not all women had that kind of access, they did have that access because education was affordable at the time.

9:10

Now, I think it's really important for us to realize how much that's changed over the last number of years. For example, when I

went to university, in my first year, 1977, I was able to work at Camp He Ho Ha for the summer and earn very little money, because essentially it was an organization that while they provided us some dollars for having put in eight weeks of work – essentially, they paid me \$50 a week to work at Camp He Ho Ha, but it was an excellent experience. It helped to give me lots of understanding of the universe and the concerns that the disabled community has about some of the barriers that they experience.

But that \$400 turned out to be exactly how much I paid for tuition for 10 full courses that year at the University of Alberta. I was able to be a contributor to society, working in the disabled community during the summer, and then go on to the university and pay my full tuition. Fortunately, of course, I also had parents that were more than happy to have me live at home and subsidize me in that way. Not everybody has that.

Now, with my own children going through university, we're at a place where university tuition is completely impossible to raise on your own. My son who went through law school eventually in the early 2000s was paying over \$15,000 a year. There was no way he could earn that kind of money over the summer. At the time, I was a social worker earning probably about \$50,000 a year and didn't have the wherewithal to completely support him, although he lived at home, so he had to take out student loans but has been able to pay those off. That's fortunate for him.

The issue here is that we have set up a system now where people like myself, who just by happenstance of birth end up in the right family with the resources necessary, can ensure that their children go on to advanced education, but people who come from families that either don't see the value in advanced education or where they may see the value but don't have the ability, because life has not dealt with them fairly and has not given them the financial wherewithal to be able to provide education, are being told now that the barriers that are going to prevent them from making that move from a lower socioeconomic status to a higher economic status are being raised by this government.

The government has made a number of assaults on university tuition here in this bill, and the consequences of them are dramatic and specific, but they're differentially specific; that is, some groups are being hurt more than others. The first group, that I've already mentioned, is people who don't have the dollars to go to university. Tuition will be rising by somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 21 per cent over the next number of years, and that by itself is a barrier for many people. What we will see is that people who clearly have the intellectual ability and the wherewithal personally to attend university will find themselves unable to do so because they simply can't afford that level of tuition in their life.

But on top of that, the government has also made a decision to increase interest rates on university loans and to reduce the tax deductions for university attendance. Now, this is an issue that is passed over by a lot of people but is very critical for a particular group of people. There are a significant number of women that are attending universities at the postgraduate level such that they have finished their bachelor's degree, often with the support or help of family members when that was possible, but then they go on to pursue a master's degree. We have a particular circumstance there that the majority of people going on to get master's degrees or PhDs in the province of Alberta are women. Many of them have multiple responsibilities in their lives. Not only are they going to university, but they're often at a life stage where they're raising children or are part of a family, often taking care of elderly seniors, and really living complex, stressful lives.

One of the things that helps them to do all of this work is that they receive payment from the universities in the form of grants for postgraduate students to be TAs or RAs, research assistants or

teaching assistants, or other functions within the university. Now, that means that their own income is high enough that they need to use the tax deductions to reduce their income to reduce the taxes that they have to pay. They can't pass it on as perhaps a 17-year-old or 18-year-old student might pass it on to their parents because their income isn't high enough to pay for it. But at the graduate level, because of the research assistantships and the teaching assistantships, their income is high enough that they must use that tax deduction themselves.

Now what's happened is that we have an assault not just on people who are most vulnerable from a financial point of view, but we also have an assault on women, who are most often in the position of seeking these sorts of degrees, being told that the tax deductions, which they themselves are using, are not going to be available to them any longer. As well as being in postsecondary education so they can become, you know, our speech pathologists or our OTs, occupational therapists, or our social workers or our nurses, all of those kind of degrees that people are participating in or, of course, the sciences – sorry; I come from the humanities, so I tend to mention those – and become our scientists, our engineers, our lawyers, our doctors, all of those people are being told that as well as dealing with the stressors of being in postsecondary education and being of the age at which they're likely also to have other responsibilities such as caring for children, being part of a family, or caring for elders, the costs of going to university are going to rise dramatically.

I can tell you that the deductions that were available until this government came along were significant in terms of the amount of return to a family. It could often mean the difference of \$3,000 or \$4,000 a year in terms of the money that would be returned to them against their research assistantship or teaching assistantship positions.

I think we have a real problem here. We have an act that is selectively harming people of a particular category and therefore is problematic. It's selectively harming people who are in postsecondary, selectively harming women, and selectively harming people who are trying to change their life circumstances and move forward from one socioeconomic group to another socioeconomic group. I think these consequences are worth paying attention to because if we allow these kind of things to happen, we will end up in a society where we have those that are privileged and those who are not.

Naturally, that's going to happen in any society. It doesn't matter where you are in the world. That's going to happen. But one of the best things about a democracy is that we have ways to reduce the likelihood of that, to give those that have been oppressed or have been neglected or have been forgotten a chance to move into the section of society that benefits from the fortunes of society, people who weren't necessarily born into it but who are willing to do the work to try to achieve it, and this is what this government is attacking.

It is at its core an attack on the nature of democracy. It is at its core an attempt to create a society in which we have the privileged and the nonprivileged, in which we have those that will benefit from the structures of society and the goods of society versus the people who will not. It puts a larger, higher, taller barrier between those two groups so that individuals who are dissatisfied in one aspect of their life can't move over to the other aspect of their life. When you begin to undermine democracy in order to privilege a small few so that you can become part of a richer, more powerful class, then you are acting in antidemocratic ways, which seems to be the underlying theme behind most of the legislation brought forward by this government. They actually seem to dislike democracy, and this is something that we need to stand up and challenge.

9:20

Some bills, like Bill 22, that we talked about do it directly and are a complete and obvious assault on democracy. Bill 21 does it more subtly. Bill 21 does it by creating the circumstance under which democracy will become more fragile. Democracy will have less of the supports necessary to sustain the vagaries of world dynamics. I think that that is very problematic.

I would like to see this government take a very serious look at this and look at the creation of a two-tiered reality, that they are trying to create here in this province, saying to the people on AISH who are living on \$1,600 a month: "You don't get to have \$30 extra a month in order to help pay your grocery bills. You don't get to have that." On the other hand, people who are international multimillionaires will be able to get \$4.7 billion in tax reductions. Now they're talking about reducing royalties, too, which isn't even a tax. It's our money as a government. They're saying that we're going to give away our own value for free to somebody else so that they can become wealthy and so they can export that wealth to another land, another country. What we have is people unable to pay for their groceries here in Alberta being told: there's no money for you, but if you want to build a swimming pool in Texas, here's some dollars so that you can do that.

That's what this bill is doing, and that's why I am objecting to this bill amongst the other things that I've previously objected to such as the assault on unions and the assault on worker rights. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join the debate on this matter? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen to speak.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's always a pleasure to get up in this House and continue speaking to the bills that we have before us. Like my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford, I'd like to focus specifically on how this government continues to undermine the democratic process and democratic institutions within our society.

As the member was getting to, one of the most important democratic institutions that we actually have in our society is unions. Now, I know that members on the other side of the House don't feel that way. They actually appall unions. They know the reasons why. But this actually gives workers the opportunity to organize within themselves and ask for the specific benefits and pay that they think are required under the current economic system. It gives them the opportunity as well to debate these things amongst themselves. I know this first-hand because, of course, I used to be within a union at the University of Alberta, the Non-Academic Staff Association. I remember going through the process by which we democratically decided what things we were going to focus on as we went into the collective bargaining process.

Of course, this government wants to undermine that entire process by centralizing power and making sure that the minister of Treasury Board and Finance, in essence, can eliminate the entire bargaining process if he chose to. This is what is really problematic about this bill.

Of course, so many of the people that are actually represented by these unions, public-sector workers, are people who honestly aren't making that much money compared to a lot of people in this society. Many of them are constituents of mine. My constituency happens to be a constituency that's full of many new Canadians, many, many new Canadians. I've spoken to a number of them. I remember attending an event by the Nepalese community. So many of the Nepalese community are people who are professionals, like many

others from other communities as well who have come from Pakistan, from India, from Latin America, people who are new Canadians and are within these unions and are represented because they're public-sector workers.

Now, these new Canadians come to this country, like all immigrants came to this country – of course, we recognize that we are on treaty land and that we share this land with indigenous people – looking for better opportunities for them and their families. This bill undermines that opportunity. In the same vein, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was talking about how this bill undermines the democratic process by not providing people access to postsecondary education. Well, undermining their ability to bargain for themselves, being public-sector workers, being part of a union, is also incredibly problematic. Incredibly problematic.

I believe that new immigrants have come here – my family was part of this community not too long ago. My parents came to this country because they thought it would be better. We came fleeing political violence back in our country. My parents came here believing that this would be a better opportunity for them and for us, their children. I have three brothers; we're four in total. I'm happy to say that all four of us ended up getting access to postsecondary education but with student loans. We had the same loans that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was talking about. Having to take out student loans in order to pay for our postsecondary education – it took a substantial amount of time in order to pay off those student loans after graduation.

I think that this is something that all members of this House should consider because now we're creating a situation where people actually have to pay more for postsecondary education in the province of Alberta, considering that our government actually put a tuition freeze in for over four years, making sure that people could continue to access postsecondary education. On average an arts or a science student's tuition at the University of Alberta is going to go up by \$371 a year. This first year it'll go up by \$371. Over the next four years students could see an increase of up to an additional \$371 per year, so over a four-year period that would mean an additional \$4,000. Those \$4,000 are \$4,000 that that student will have to take out in additional student loans and then, when graduating, will have to pay for.

As people know, when people are in debt, it puts them in a situation where they can't as actively participate in the economy. Yes, it's helping banks because they have to pay back the student loan and they have to pay the interest on those student loans, but it inhibits people from being able to buy a car, purchase a home for themselves and their families. Many students, once they graduate from university, end up getting married and starting a family. These are people that want to create a home for their future families – right? – for the kids that they're going to have. Being substantially in debt is going to inhibit many of these people who are graduating, many of them new Canadians or the children of new Canadians, that have purposely come here seeking a better future.

9:30

We have to ask ourselves: is this really the kind of Alberta that we want? Do we want to continue to undermine the democratic process, creating a situation where people won't have as much opportunity to actually participate in the economy? It inhibits people.

Getting back to the unions and their democratic institutions, I wanted to cover that in that process, people are elected to represent within the union, and this is something that members on the other side seem to forget or just simply overlook. All director positions within unions: they're elected positions. The members of that union

actually vote for the person that they think is best going to represent them within that union. It's a process. It's a democratic process.

Many times the members from all kinds of unions have the opportunity to actually be consulted by the directors of the union. The president, the vice-president, all the people that make up the core of the directors of the union, then begin a process by which they consult with the members on the bargaining process. So many times, while at the bargaining table, the bargaining team is not necessarily the directors. When I was president of the Non-Academic Staff Association, I wasn't part of the bargaining team. I was the president of the union but still not part of the bargaining team.

There was the opportunity where we created a situation where we went out to the members. We wanted to make sure that members not only were consulted but actually had the opportunity to participate in the bargaining process themselves. Within the bargaining team there were actually members at large of the union, that actually sat on that bargaining team so they could reach out to other members within the union, consult with them, talk with their fellow members within the union, and then bring those issues and concerns not to the president, not to the vice-president, not to the directors, the elected positions, but to themselves, participating within the bargaining process. It was they that decided, "Okay; well, if we can't get a pay increase, then at least we should be able to get some other kinds of benefits when bargaining with the employer," in this case the University of Alberta.

It looks like this government is doubling down on bad-faith bargaining. They want to be able to erode this process, and this is what's substantially wrong with this bill. It's actually taking away the ability of workers within their unions to represent themselves at the bargaining table. It may be pay, or it may be some other benefit like how much coverage they get when they go to the dentist or they take their child to the dentist – I mean, I'm sure that many people here know that it can be quite costly – or what kind of drugs they have covered by their benefit program when their children need any kind of medication because of an illness or anything like that. These are things that are so simple but at the same time so important to these families. By eroding this, it affects people's lives in very, very dramatic ways. People may think it's a small thing, but these are things that end up costing and then coming out of that person's pocket for things that they would normally have the benefit of if they were able to participate in the bargaining process.

All of this is being done, of course, to pay for this \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout. We have yet to see one job created because of this amount of money that's been given to these corporations. In fact, not only have we not seen jobs created; we actually see these corporations taking the money and going to other jurisdictions and investing that money in other places, not only in other places across Canada but also other places in North America, in the United States. So you have to ask yourselves. Here we are taking money from the people who need it most, whether that be through the collective bargaining process and workers, all these Albertans who work so incredibly hard for the public sector or for postsecondary institutions or whatever the case may be, and we're giving that money to corporations that are not even investing it here in the province of Alberta.

The cost is being borne by Albertans themselves, who really now have to reach into their own pocket in order to pay for things such as medication. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talked about the deindexing of AISH and how AISH recipients are now going to receive \$30 less. Now, I don't know if any member over on that side has tried to live on the amount of money that an AISH recipient gets from the government, but \$30 to them is a lot of money. The amount of money that people are going to

have to reach into their own pocket for in order to pay for the things that normally they would have gotten under a benefit program – all those things are going to impact the amount of money that these people have in order to pay for their families, for the needs that their families have.

This is what's so difficult to understand about this bill and why this government is actually reaching into the pockets of Albertans and then not only reaching into the pockets of those Albertans for that money to go to general revenue and even perhaps provide services for more Albertans, not even that. It's actually being taken out to give this \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout, and the money is not even being invested in the province. Where's the rationale in that? This is what we on this side of the House just can't seem to understand. We're supposed to be investing in Alberta and the future of Albertans, making life better for them. Instead, not one job created. In fact, jobs are being lost, continue to be lost here in the province of Alberta, and the money – that is Albertans' money because it's tax collected from Albertans – is actually going to these corporations and is being invested in other jurisdictions.

I have to ask the members on the other side of the House: does this make sense? Does this make, actually, any sense, that this is the way forward to actually improving the lives of Albertans? Getting back to the fact that this is just incredibly undemocratic, why is more and more and more power being centralized with the bills that are coming forward from this government? That is another question that we need to ask. Like the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford actually stated, Bill 22 does that in a very specific way, and Bill 21 does it in perhaps a more elusive way.

9:40

When you take away money from Albertans and their spending power in the economy, you're actually taking away the process of economic democracy, of them being able to participate in the society, in the economy, being able to help prop up and move the economy forward. Less money in the pockets of Albertans means that our economy is going to suffer, that less money will flow, and people will start to say, "Okay; well, perhaps this year I won't make the investment in a car" or "This year I can't make an investment in buying a new house." This is what's going to end up happening. So instead of actually making the economy grow, we're actually going to stagnate. We're going to get into deeper trouble.

Again I state that the money that's being taken from Albertans through tax is actually going to this \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout. We need to ask ourselves: is this really the kind of society that we want to build, that we expect for Alberta to move forward? So many new Canadians in my riding have come to me and asked me: "Why is this government moving in this way? Why is it doing all these things? It's actually making life more difficult for Albertans." So it's really important for me to stand up in this House and actually draw attention to these matters.

I think that having been part of a union in the past, it's also my responsibility to be the voice for those people, who I actually used to work with, making sure that their democratic rights within unions are being respected. Of course, that's what we see here . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Chair, I was sitting quietly, enjoying my coffee here this morning, and I couldn't help but notice the irony in the member's speech. It's interesting hearing an NDP member talking about the problems with incurring debt and having to service it when you're finished school. It's pretty rich coming from a government that put our province \$60 billion in debt, and we're now servicing that debt at \$2 billion a year, the fifth-largest line item in our budget. It's almost laughable to hear him talk like that.

I think that as a government what we should be doing is providing opportunities for our young people so that when they are in university and do get that opportunity during the four months that they get off, maybe they could actually go out and get a job and work their way through. I know a number of young people that actually took advantage of the Alberta advantage when things were prosperous here in the province, and they would go out and work in the oil patch or in a good construction job over the summer and build up enough cash that it carried them through the whole year so that they didn't have to have a second job or incur debt that they had to pay off after they graduated.

It's quite laughable to hear that member talk about debt in that way and the problems of incurring debt and then having to pay it back at higher interest rates when they totally forgot that concept in the four years that they were in government. Shameful, absolutely shameful, that now we have to carry that debt and that our children and our grandchildren will have to carry and pay off the debt.

Ms Pancholi: Talk through the chair. I'm not the chair.

Mr. Hanson: I'm talking through the chair. I'm just looking at you.

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. Don't look at me.

Mr. Hanson: It seems to me I've . . .

Chair's Ruling Addressing the Chair

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I just want to remind hon. members that the concept of talking through the chair doesn't necessarily mean that any individual on any side of the House has to be staring at the chair in order to be talking through the chair. The idea is that third person is predominantly how we like to engage in debate, and the purpose of that is to ensure that this depersonalizes the debate. I think that it's fair to say that members from all sides sometimes veer close to the line on that aspect.

So what I would do is that I would just ask the hon. member to try to focus his comments with regard to ensuring that he's moving through the chair. If he would please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hanson: Absolutely. And through you, Mr. Chair, I obviously struck a nerve on the opposite side there by, you know, pointing out the fact that they did get us into all this debt and into this mess and had us on a trajectory to \$100 billion. And in future years we could be facing \$4 billion a year in debt, which would put the debt servicing as the third- or fourth-largest line item on our budget.

You know, we talk about having to make these changes to get us back to a track of prosperity in this province. And the complaining that we hear from the other side: they're the ones that put us in this position. We're asking for a small, 2.8 per cent decrease in spending in this province, that they drove through the roof in the four years they were in government. The fact that they would stand up here today and talk about how terrible it is for students to have debt and a debt load when they did the same thing to our province is shameful. I think that they should be ashamed of it and stop talking about it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today to express my significant opposition to Bill 21, the Ensuring Fiscal

Sustainability Act, 2019, especially because this bill and all parts of the government's budget actually do nothing to ensure fiscal sustainability. I note that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul stood up and was very excited to speak about debt. He must be deeply, deeply disappointed by the budget that has been tabled by his government, considering that it actually does not reduce the deficit. It increases the deficit and does nothing to address ensuring fiscal sustainability. In fact, what it does do is throw away – that is what it's done so far – \$4.7 billion in a corporate giveaway to large corporations that have not actually created any jobs. In fact, we've seen a significant amount of job losses. So when you put a \$4.7 billion hole into our budget, I guess you've got to make up for it somehow. We look at Bill 21, Bill 20, Bill 22, the estimates we've been considering. Clearly, this government has decided that average Albertans, vulnerable Albertans, all Albertans will be paying the price for that gamble.

I want to go back, actually, and speak specifically to the issue of deindexing AISH, which is a key component of Bill 21, although I should note that it's buried amongst all the numerous other cuts to Albertans in ways that will increase the costs of living for Albertans. It's just one of several, but it does deserve a little bit of highlighted attention because of the fact that it so cruelly targets the most vulnerable in our province.

I'll tell you a little story, if we can talk about beginning my political career. It wasn't necessarily a clear trajectory for me. I actually began when I was an undergraduate student at the University of Alberta. I worked in my local MLA's constituency office. I was working there as a constituency assistant. Prior to working there, I didn't really know much about what MLAs dealt with every day. I knew that I was interested in politics and political science, but I went into that office a little bit green on what the day-to-day activities of a constituency office were. The constituency that I worked in was at that time called Edmonton-Centre. It's now Edmonton-City Centre. It is a very downtown, urban riding, with a high turnover of residency. A lot of new Canadians live in that area, a lot of lower income individuals.

One of the issues that I learned a whole lot about very quickly, working as a constituency manager, was AISH. I actually can say, with a great deal of privilege, which is what I know I had at that time and still do know, that I never even realized that there were so many people in our province who were living on so little every month because of very significant medical disabilities. It didn't even really occur to me that people could live off such a small amount of money. These are people who are there because they can't work or they have difficulties working in a permanent way, so they are some of the most vulnerable Albertans we have.

9:50

I got a very quick introduction to the life that they led because those individuals are so dependent on what at that time and still is quite a very small amount of money, really, to get by. Their stories were absolutely heartbreaking, and at that time AISH was not indexed. I mean, this was 1999, and AISH was quite a bit lower, of course, than it even is now, but it was not indexed. Over the course of the years that I worked in that constituency office, I got to meet many individuals on AISH who were struggling to get by on practically nothing. It completely astounded me every day to see how much they were expected to do with so little.

The other thing that became quickly apparent is that they often communicated a lot with me at the constituency office because they had a hard time managing the system and navigating the intricacies of trying to – it's a difficult process to get approved by AISH. It's a difficult process to survive on AISH. As these are already some of the most vulnerable Albertans, the amount of

self-advocacy they had to do was also astounding, to simply get the pittance, really, that they were getting from the government. As much as I could, I felt it was my job to advocate and support them when I could.

Now here we are, 20 years later. I have my own constituency office now – and I'm very proud of that – and I know that I am still being contacted, my office is still being contacted by recipients of AISH who are struggling. Now we see that this government has cruelly and callously chosen to take money out of their pockets. Now, while that's cruel enough as it is, the part that I am struck by is the fact that so many of the members opposite just a year ago made statements in this House about how important indexing AISH was, simply being a humane, decent thing to do.

I actually was not part of the previous government, as you may know. This is my first term, so I spent a little bit of time going back and looking at *Hansard* and looking at the discussions and the debates that took place in this House around the issue of indexing AISH, as the former government, under the Leader of the Official Opposition as Premier at that time, brought forward.

I want to highlight something first off the bat, because when this has been brought up in question period so far this session, the Premier has stood up and somehow made some kind of statement that implies something, that the government under the current Leader of the Official Opposition didn't bring in the indexing of AISH into legislation until year three of their term, which is absolutely, first of all, not an argument for deindexing AISH. It's an appalling argument to say: well, you didn't do it. But we did do it, and members on the other side did support it. But as the Leader of the Official Opposition has repeatedly stated, AISH amounts were actually increased the first three years of that government's term, and it was in that third year where we also passed legislation to index it to the cost of living because that is just common sense. It is just common sense that we know that the cost of living increases for all of us in every single way. Inflationary pressures exist. The cost of living goes up.

For those people who do not have or have very limited capacity to actually increase their income by working: to say that they are frozen in time at one small allowance which is, frankly, barely enough for anybody to get by is ridiculous. We all know that. We all live in this world where we see our cost of living go up all the time. In fact, I sat in on the estimates for five different ministries over the last few weeks, and consistently I heard ministers talking about increases in small budget items and saying: oh, well, we had to increase that because of inflationary pressures, because we know that cost goes up. The government seems to accept that there are situations where it is very critical that we increase how much we spend on something because – guess what? – the cost of living goes up.

The government has acknowledged it numerous times in its estimates, but yet when it comes to the people who have the least, the people who have the least capacity to actually increase their income, we're saying, "No; your costs have to remain frozen," when we know that the things that they purchase, the things that they spend their money on go up all the time.

I want to go back to the fact that I did find it a very interesting exercise to review *Hansard* from last year, when the former government brought in the indexation of AISH, and I was really struck by some of the comments from some of the members on the government side in support of indexing AISH. Now, there were a number of statements. Some of those members are no longer members of this Legislature, so I'm just going to focus on the comments from members who are currently still members of the Legislature.

In particular, on page 2086 of *Hansard*, which was November 22, 2018, in debate on Bill 26, which was the indexation of AISH, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek stated:

Indexing, I think, is something that is a natural thing to do because we don't want those people on those fixed incomes to be falling behind day by day and year after year to the point where they can't put food on their tables, it's hard for them to make rent, it's hard for them to live a respectable and respectful life and to ensure that they have that opportunity.

This is still a quote from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

So, Madam Speaker, we'll be supporting this bill. I'll be supporting this bill. There are a lot more questions we would like to address I think in Committee of the Whole as well, but I do thank the minister for bringing this forward, for addressing this. It's taken a little while, but here we are, an opportunity for us to do the right thing, and I'll look forward to supporting it.

I wonder how the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has changed his mind in the past year, how he no longer believes that it's the right thing to do. Perhaps we'll see. Maybe he will vote against his government's decision to deindex AISH. Perhaps he will, and I look forward to that because I'd like to know what happened in the last year, where he no longer thinks that indexing AISH is the right thing to do, that in fact it's okay to let these people fall behind year by year by year and day by day by day. I'm interested to hear that.

Also from the previous session of this Legislature, on page 2207 of *Hansard*, November 28, 2018, the Member for Taber-Warner, who is now the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, stated this, and it was a very compelling argument. It was a very personal argument. His quote was:

I believe that it needed to be indexed for some time, and I was never in a position where I could advocate for that. I'm now in a position where I can advocate for it, and I want to be able to do that, because I've seen the face of an individual in our society, a close person to me, my brother, who has been affected.

Now here we are, a year later, and I'm wondering if the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction – he's actually now in a better position to advocate than even where he was a year ago, when he was a member of the opposition. He's now an associate minister within this government's caucus. I'm wondering what steps he's taken to advocate within his government against the deindexation of AISH. I'm compelled by the fact that the member has a very personal affiliation with this. He's got a family member who's affected. Now, I don't think that the Premier has declared that this is going to be one of those situations where there is a free vote – I doubt that there will be; this is a money bill – but I'm curious as to how the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction can reconcile his position from a year ago with the position that his government has taken now.

To me, it is perhaps the most careless and casual way to treat vulnerable Albertans. I believe that, by the government's calculation, this is going to save about \$7 million a year, to deindex AISH; over the course of the term of this government, \$100 million. You know what? That's less than half of the money that Husky has received this year as a corporate handout from this government as a result of the \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout. Husky walked away with \$233 million, and guess what they did with that? Well, maybe they paid down their own personal debt, maybe they gave it out as dividends, but what they didn't do with it is invest it in Alberta. What they didn't do with it is create more jobs. In fact, they cut jobs. They put more Albertans out of work. For less than half of what we just handed away to Husky oil in this province, we could have at least maintained the cost-of-living indexation on AISH for the people who are the most vulnerable in this province. That was an opportunity that this government had, and they made a choice.

One of the things that we need to realize is that every single time, every single item in this bill, in Bill 20, Bill 22, and the government's estimates, represents a choice, a choice by this government as to who they're going to support and who they're not. What we're seeing is that they're choosing not to support vulnerable Albertans, but not only that; they're choosing not to support average Albertans.

10:00

Let me tell you what also struck me when I did my little deep dive into *Hansard* from last year, again, not having been a member of the Assembly. You know, of course as a member of the public I remember some of the debate in the public sphere about the carbon tax, but I hadn't read all of the comments made by members on both sides of the House with respect to the carbon tax. Within the topic of indexing of AISH, as I was reading *Hansard*, what struck me was how many members of the then opposition, now government, railed against the carbon tax on the basis that it took money out of the pockets of Albertans. That's what they kept saying: oh, the carbon tax made life more expensive for Albertans.

Never mind the fact that most of those individuals received a rebate, and the money that was collected by the carbon tax was legislated in terms of how it could be spent. A huge majority of that went back to rebates, so a lot of those low-income Albertans who had to pay carbon tax actually got that money back. The other way that money went was to support the small-business tax decrease. I know it's almost a waste of time to talk about to this government caucus because they don't care about climate change at all, which is evident even by the bill that they presented that's supposed to be their position on climate change, but it also went to things like energy efficiency, innovation, technology, and developing our growing but no longer, now stagnating renewable resource energy sector.

But to go back to the carbon tax, because I don't feel badly talking about the carbon tax, they railed against it because it was making life more expensive, never mind that people got rebates, yet we have seen nothing from this government caucus to stand up for the average Albertans now who are seeing, as a result of this budget, as a result of bills 20, 21, 22, all of the ways life has become more expensive under this government. I mean, honestly, I could probably spend an entire 20 minutes of time going through all the ways it's become more expensive, so let me just highlight.

Even within this bill we see the absolute bottom-line increase to tuition costs. We know that's going to happen. In fact, that's an intention of this bill. Postsecondary students are going to be paying more themselves if they're paying for their own postsecondary, or their families, if they're doing that, are going to get less back in education tax credits, so guess what? They're also paying more. Removal of the cap on electricity rates, deindexing of AISH, deindexation of seniors' benefits, more families being cut off the Alberta child and family benefit: the number of ways that this budget that has been presented by this government is going to increase the cost of living to average Albertans far exceeds anything that the carbon tax was putting on people. Absolutely.

You pile that all up for the average Albertan. Let me tell you, they're paying a lot more, and they're not getting rebates. That's what they're not getting. They're not getting rebates, yet I don't hear any protest. Why do they now not have a problem picking the pockets of Albertans? Some of them are getting paid less than the minimum wage. We know they're not collecting overtime at the same rate. That's all okay for the members on the government side. What's most appalling is that it's perfectly okay for them to be taking them out of the pockets of people who can't actually

collect more money by working more because they are severely disabled.

I am looking forward to going back even to *Hansard* of this session to see how many times individuals like the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, how many times the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction will stand up and argue against the deindexation of AISH. Just a year ago they had strong, strong views against it and deeply held personal views. It seemed to be almost a moral argument from some of them. Now, however, they seem to have no problem with taking money from the most vulnerable Albertans. I find that to be either hypocrisy, or perhaps their self-interest in maintaining their position within their government caucus is more important, but I don't know what that is.

I don't know how people flip-flop on their morals because I certainly know that I don't and the members on this side of the House don't. We've been very clear over and over again. The Leader of the Official Opposition has said it a number of times, and it's absolutely right: "When times are tough, those who can pay more should. It should not come off the backs of those who cannot pay more." Yet this government is giving away money to profitable corporations, part of whom are not even really based in Alberta. Half of them are now investing not only outside of the province but outside of the country. Who is benefiting from that? They are, but we are not. Albertans are not.

Let's go back to the fact that all of that was built on a gamble to create jobs, yet just yesterday we heard about 250 employees being laid off in the University of Calgary. We hear about a hundred employees being laid off from Alberta Innovates. This budget is actually costing Albertans jobs, and that is not what this party, the government party, campaigned on. They campaigned on creating jobs. Not only have they failed to do that so far, but they're actually costing Albertans jobs.

Now, one can assume that that is because the jobs that have been lost are jobs that they don't really care about. Let's be clear. There are Albertans in this province that this government does not seem to care about that much. They don't care about their jobs. I can tell you that in my riding a number of people who were hurt during the oil and gas price drop, which has to be said over and over again because the government likes to blame the NDP – hey, I wish. I wish that our Alberta provincial government had the power to control the oil and gas industry. We can see that the government party can't because they haven't created jobs. All their supposed love for the oil and gas industry has not actually done anything to create jobs here because – guess what? – a lot of that is outside of your control. What you can control are a number of Alberta jobs that a lot of Albertans rely on.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Chair's Ruling Imputing Motives

The Deputy Chair: I do also just want to take this opportunity to again – I think we may have come close to the side of either not talking through the chair or imputing false motives with regard to other members in the House with regard to whether or not people care about climate change. I'd just caution members in order to ensure that we have effective debate in this House.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members looking to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to speak against Bill 21, the so-called Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019. Of course, my caucus colleagues have done a marvellous job of outlining some of their concerns with the bill and why we shouldn't vote in favour of this piece of legislation, and I want to highlight some of the things that I think are wrong with the piece of legislation.

There are two parts to this legislation that I find particularly offensive, and that is the increase, the allowed increase, to tuition for the next three years – up to 23 per cent, I think, is what the Advanced Education ministry has put out in its press releases – and the increase in student loan interest rates. Mr. Chair, this follows a number of other throat punches that this government has given to students in the past few months. Of course, we've seen them reduce minimum wage for students under the age of 18 from \$15 to \$13. We've seen them take away the STEP program, which provides students with valuable opportunities to work. None of those things have achieved any objective other than making life harder for students, which I think is really the true intent of the government.

You know, it was interesting to hear the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul complain about students who are whining about debt and just telling them to go find a job. In fact, this government was elected on a platform of making sure that young people had jobs, but nothing that they've done has actually led to job creation for young people. Unemployment for young people is still stubbornly high. It's in fact higher than it was when we left office. Of course, they've taken away significant job opportunities for students by removing the STEP program. I'm not exactly sure where a young person is supposed to find a job when this government is actively preventing students from accessing opportunities to get work.

Of course, this is not only shifting – it's interesting, Mr. Chair. One of the things that we often hear from government is how we can't saddle Albertans with debt, but they're happy to saddle students with debt, as if students aren't Albertans. In fact, in his comments on this bill the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul certainly suggested that it was more fair for students to bear the debt than all Albertans generally speaking to bear this debt, which is really interesting.

10:10

You know, when we talk about raising taxes to cover the debt, when we talk about raising personal income taxes on wealthy people, when we talk about raising corporate income taxes, when we talk about eliminating subsidies for corporations, you know, the members from the UCP scream bloody murder: oh, we cannot pick the pockets of rich people because they're the ones who already pay the taxes; they pay more than their fair share of taxes, so we can't dip into their pockets any more. When we talk about who should pay for the debt, the members opposite are always there to defend the interests of the wealthy and their corporate donors to make sure that they don't have to pay any more, but when we talk about the provincial debt, well, that's everybody's responsibility, and we sure can't ask, you know, the corporate CEOs in Calgary, who are making out like bandits in this \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway that this government implemented on day 3 of the Legislature, to pay more. We can ask students to pay more, students who have nothing. We're going to make sure that their first days in employment are spent trying to get out from under a mountain of crushing debt, and that's not fair. We have people in this province who can afford to carry the debt and the deficit, but this government is not willing to make them pay their fair share and is instead putting the burden on students. That is wrong.

Mr. Chair, we've all, or many of us, anyway, have been in the position of having to pay off student loans. I was in the unfortunate circumstance of having to go through university during the so-called Klein revolution, when tuition skyrocketed. It was twice as expensive in my last year of university as it was the year I started, and that was four years. At that time I wasn't even eligible to get Alberta student loans because of the circumstances that I was in. I had to scrape together money from all kinds of sources. Fortunately the STEP program existed at that time, and I was able to cover a substantial part of my expenses while being a student through that employment, but now even that's gone. When I graduated from university, there were significant debt reduction programs that were available from the federal government, and I managed to take advantage of some of those. Those have been eliminated. Students who start university this year will graduate four years from now with more student loans that cost them more money to pay off.

What are the economic prospects that they're facing? This government has done nothing to create jobs. This government has done nothing to raise wages, so a student now graduating in the year 2023, hopefully, if they can complete a degree in four years, which is highly unlikely because if they're lucky enough to find a job, they're going to have to work 20 or 30 or 40 hours a week on top of their classes just to be able to afford to go to school, so they might have to spend another year or two or three just to be able to complete their degree – when they graduate, what kind of economy are they going to graduate into?

This government is certainly not creating jobs, and every economic forecast that we see come out about the future economy of Alberta shows unacceptably slow growth. If a student is entering university now in any kind of health care profession or education profession, there certainly won't be a job for them because this government is making sure that public-sector employees are kicked to the street. We've seen 250 people laid off at the University of Calgary this week. We've seen 300 people laid off at the Calgary board of education yesterday. That's just the beginning. Not everybody even knows what their allocated budgets are going to be from this government, so we're going to see thousands and thousands more layoffs. The ones who are lucky enough to keep their jobs, Mr. Chair, are going to have to deal with wage rollbacks that are going to be imposed by this government.

I know a lot of public-sector workers who lead a reasonably comfortable life but are only one or two paycheques away from having to declare bankruptcy. Now this government is going to fire some of them and roll back the wages of the rest. Then they have the unmitigated gall to tell the students who want to go into those kinds of careers that they're going to have to work harder to pay off more debt, if they're lucky enough to find a job, and if they find a job, they're not going to have the financial means to pay off the debt because they're working overtime to make sure that they squeeze the wages of the remaining public-sector workers. It's absolutely wrong. I hope that this weekend, you know, the members opposite take the opportunity to go into their ridings and explain to them, to the young people of this province, why they're stealing their futures.

It's particularly upsetting to me, Mr. Chair, because, as we get reminded of every day in this House, we have no rural members in our caucus. The members opposite like to present themselves as being the defenders of rural interests. Everything that they're doing is going to make it even harder for potential rural students to make it through the doors of a university or college because the barriers that rural students face are even greater than the barriers that urban students face. Not only do they have to face the costs of tuition and books and food; they also have to face the cost of transportation because, Lord knows, there's no public transportation available

anymore in this province from small towns into university or college towns.

They're going to have to face the costs of accommodation, and that's going to go up, too, Mr. Chair, because this government is cutting the budgets of every university and college. And where are the universities and colleges going to make up those cuts? It's going to come from residence fees. It's going to come from student meal plans. So now out-of-town students are going to have to pay more not only in tuition and books and food and transportation; they're going to have to pay more just for rent. There are thousands and thousands of potential rural students who won't even make the trip, who are going to look at the overwhelming costs of going to university, and they're going to say: "You know what? I'm not going to bother. Why bother? There isn't a job for me. Even if I was lucky enough to find a job, if it's in the public sector, which is the largest employer in most small towns, they're going to roll back my wages, and they're always going to be threatening to fire me."

10:20

What rational person going through high school in a small town in Alberta is going to think that there's a future for them going to university or college under the administration of this government? They're not going to, Mr. Chair. I can tell you that the data already supports that. We know that if you live within 100 kilometres of a university or college in this province, you're way more likely to go to a university or college than if you live further than 100 kilometres away. That was under the policies of our government that froze tuition and kept student loans affordable and made sure that we had grants available and maintained the education and tuition tax credits. All of those things are being scrapped, and in service of what?

You know, the title of this bill makes me laugh, Mr. Chair, Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019. Anybody who looks at the budget knows that there is nothing resembling fiscal sustainability for the public finances of the province of Alberta. We've got a deficit this year that's \$2 billion higher than the one that we projected in 2019. We've got a debt that's within the margin of error of the same one that we projected by the end of 2023. We're entering into a recession that's caused by the massive wage cuts and layoffs that this government is intent on seeing through.

So whose fiscal sustainability is this bill ensuring? It's certainly not the province of Alberta. It's certainly not students. I think we know here on this side whose fiscal sustainability is being ensured, and that's big corporations in Alberta, with the \$4.7 billion handout on top of a whole bunch of tax giveaways from municipalities, royalty holidays, a whole other bunch of subsidies and tax deferrals. Big corporations in Alberta are more profitable than ever before. I wish the members opposite would at least be honest when they're talking about ensuring fiscal sustainability as to whose fiscal sustainability they're ensuring. It's not ours. It's not the fiscal sustainability of 99 per cent of Albertans. It's the fiscal sustainability of the Hong Kong billionaire who owns Husky Oil. It's the fiscal sustainability of Murray Edwards, the CEO of one of the biggest oil companies in the country, who doesn't even live in Alberta, can't bring himself to spend his time with the lowly people who have given him so much and asked for so little from him. He spends his time in London, can afford to send his children to any university or college in the world that he pleases.

In the meantime this government is making sure that the same opportunities that are offered to the children of the Hong Kong billionaires and the Murray Edwards of the world, who control capital in this province – our children don't have those same opportunities, and they can't explain why. But it's our fault, I guess. You know, we didn't have the moral rectitude to become

billionaires and be able to afford to send our children to any school that we could want, so we have to suffer.

Mr. Chair, it's incredibly upsetting, and the people of Alberta are not going to stand for this any longer. I was encouraged to see students protesting on the steps of the Legislature earlier this week, defending their own interests, making sure that they have the opportunity to get an education that will make their lives better and, furthermore, making sure that those students who are currently in high school and junior high school, who are looking forward to an education in a university or college, also have those same opportunities.

If there are any students out there who are listening to the speeches – I'm sure many are – I encourage them to do more to make sure that the members opposite hear their opposition to what this government is doing to take away their futures, to what this government is doing to make sure that they have to work harder and longer and get less all in the service of a \$4.7 billion giveaway to the wealthiest here in this province. It's not fair and it's not right, and students are upset. They have the right to be upset, and they should express how upset they are in any way they can to the members of this government so that this government maybe reconsiders its position and stops throat punching the students of this province in service of the masters of capital. [interjection]

I hear the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat taking issue with the language that I've used.

Ms Glasgow: Yes.

Mr. Schmidt: I sure hope that she can go back to her constituency and explain to . . .

Chair's Ruling Parliamentary Language Addressing the Chair

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'm just going to take this opportunity to, with great effort, ensure that all members ensure that they try to ensure that their language that they are using isn't of a type that might be trying to incite some sort of negative decorum within the House and that all individuals on both sides ensure that they make an effort to speak through the chair. There will be ample time, of course, in Committee of the Whole to debate on this matter.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would like to continue, there are 10 seconds left on this one. Otherwise, the option is his. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes. I guess we have to be polite even though this government is intent on making sure that students' lives are harder, and that's outrageous.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members looking to speak to this? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very happy to make some contribution to the debate here on Bill 21 in Committee of the Whole. I had the opportunity to meet with more university student representatives yesterday, and they were very concerned about elements of Bill 21. Let's not forget that it's an omnibus bill that ranges from postsecondary education to health to energy to labour to municipal affairs and so forth. You know, again, I remember yesterday members opposite from the UCP talking about the shortage of alternatives for bus transportation in the rural areas. Well, they have at least created an omnibus that travels through this

Legislature metaphorically and is both cumbersome and, I would suggest, poor drafting of legislation, borrowing from, I think, some very nefarious habits that were developed in the federal Parliament, imported back here, and quite frankly, causing a great deal of confusion and havoc amongst the population that would be affected by this bill.

As I said, yesterday I had an opportunity to meet with university student representatives, and what they wanted me to point out to this government – and I'm happy to do it here this morning – is the fact that the tuition cap being suspended or being lifted will result in thousands of students not being able to afford to go to school. You know, this government likes to point out that it's 3 pennies on the dollar or whatever that they are imposing on Albertans with this budget. Well, a 21 per cent increase over three years for tuition is far more than pennies, Mr. Chair. It represents thousands more dollars that students will have to pay for the privilege to go to school. This is not just universities, but this is trade schools. This is NAIT and SAIT, apprenticeship programs, and so forth.

10:30

I know that this government likes to perhaps cloak their attack on postsecondary education, saying that they are refocusing on the trades. But talk is cheap, Mr. Chair. I noticed and certainly all of the people actually engaged in postsecondary and the trades noticed that there's no money for that. There are some words. You know, you can't take words to the bank. You can't use words to pay for your tuition or your apprenticeship program.

This whole notion that this is a shift to ennoble somehow the trades: well, that's great, and I encourage any efforts to do that that are substantive. But this budget or this bill hasn't anything to do with actually putting money into the trades. You know, it has some small scholarships that have been augmented and changed; for example, putting an additional \$3 million into trade scholarships – or maybe it's up to \$4 million – with two different scholarships.

Let's not forget that this same budget takes out \$600 million from postsecondary education. You know, the percentages: the scale of \$3 million or \$4 million to taking away \$600 million is exponential. Let's not pretend that somehow this is anything but quite a targeted cut on all forms of postsecondary education, including the trades.

Another element that student leaders brought to my attention yesterday was the instability of operating, programming funding that this budget is imposing on schools across the province. We just saw a small but very significant indication of that with the announcement from the University of Calgary, just hours after the Advanced Education minister professed to be, you know, protecting jobs and making investments in postsecondary education: 250 jobs gone from the University of Calgary, just for starters, quite frankly. I mean, there's much more to come.

Another aspect that we had in discussions with student leaders yesterday was how the mental health initiative that was started by the previous government, our government, in postsecondary institutions is in serious jeopardy with this budget. We know that the mental health crisis amongst young people, especially, is even more pronounced in our postsecondary institutions. I know that the pilot, for example, that was offered at the University of Alberta for mental health strategies and initiatives and supports was oversubscribed within the first two weeks of September, when school opened here a couple of months ago. It was a small indication but a significant one of just how much of a need there was for mental health supports at our postsecondary institutions.

Now people are saying, like: "What's the future of this? Can we sustain and continue to hire the people that had been brought in to develop more comprehensive mental health support programs in our colleges and universities across the province, or do we just have

to let that go?" It's a big question mark, and I would venture to say that it exacerbates the instability or the nervousness and tension that students are feeling to know that their mental health supports that they rely on to reduce stress – this, in fact, is creating another source of stress in our colleges and universities.

Another issue that was brought to my attention by postsecondary leaders yesterday is the suspension of the capital and maintenance funding for institutions right across the province. I know that by trying to realize economies in the maintenance of structures in any place, in any time – it could be your own house, or it could be a school or a hospital, university buildings, trades buildings – by trying to save a dollar on maintenance, you end up with an exponentially larger problem down the road, where the structure is compromised. You end up having to pay much more, or you even lose the use of a structure that's not been properly maintained over time as per what the schedule of a building should be – right? – anything from painting to fixing the roof to ensuring the heating systems are being updated. This is an investment to ensure the longevity of a building, and to compromise on that, I think, is short sighted. It's for the sake of showing on paper that you have reduced one ledger for one year or for one time, but in fact you've just deferred that expense down the road.

I saw this very often in the capital assets that our education system had. The maintenance budgets were shortchanged for many years, even decades, by the former Conservative government, and those costs came back to roost by, you know, having to perhaps even put some buildings in mothballs or not being able to use them, right? There's a certain point where if you scrimp and you cheap out on maintenance, eventually all of the money and more that you've saved, perhaps, on one hand comes back to bite you when the building is not usable and/or is compromised in some not fixable sort of way. Again, very short sighted.

I think that Albertans have learned this lesson from before, from previous Conservative governments – right? – by not building the capacity, let's say, in education. Again, I saw it first-hand as minister. Then you have to play catch-up, you know, which is good, I mean, to actually face the reality of what the needs of your population are and build the buildings that you need, build those schools, build postsecondary capacity. But to put your head in the sand and to pretend that that's not a looming issue in 2019 for the students that are currently in junior high school here in this province or elementary school right now is irresponsible, right?

I can tell you first-hand that we have had an enrolment increase in our schools over these last four years at least. I can tell you of, you know, between 2 and 5 or even 6 per cent or even up to 13 per cent in some districts, Mr. Chair. Those students largely, I can tell you, are in elementary or junior high school right now. What happens to those tens of thousands of students in the next five or six or seven years? We hope and presume and we plan and we expect that a large percentage of them should be attending postsecondary education. Do we have the capacity for that looming demographic of young people that are moving through our elementary and junior high schools and high schools right now? No, we don't, not even close. As I learn more about the postsecondary file, it's become clear to me and to the presidents and to the managements of all of our colleges, universities, trade schools, and so forth that we have a looming shortage of spaces in our postsecondary institutions to accommodate the people and especially the young people of Alberta.

10:40

I prefer to look optimistically. You know, we can perhaps correct this measure while we have an opportunity to do so, because just like the seven-year-olds that are learning how to read in our schools

right now, the junior high and high school students that will be ready for postsecondary in a few years' time – time doesn't wait for that. There is a window of opportunity to get people engaged in postsecondary education, to learn a trade, to pick up a degree, but that window opens and closes, and it's time sensitive. If we are tens of thousands of spaces short for postsecondary and trades positions in this province for that population, then they lose out. They don't go, or it becomes so expensive that only the people that have considerable resources get to go, and the rest are left out.

We have the lowest participation rate in postsecondary education in Canada here in Alberta. Interestingly, we also have the highest percentage of population with postsecondary degrees here in Alberta as to the rest of the country. That tells me, I think, and anyone who's listening, Mr. Chair, that people bring the degrees in with them from other jurisdictions, and we are not meeting our responsibilities for our own population to ensure that Alberta's young people, especially, are participating and getting meaningful postsecondary education here in Alberta. Obviously, I think that that's a fundamental responsibility of the postsecondary education minister and of this government, to rectify this.

I know that our government was starting to address this issue by making tuition more affordable, to bring it closer to the national average for tuition so that that barrier for people to go to school was made somewhat easier. Now, in 2019, suddenly is dropped from the sky a budget that is a direct attack on any progress that we might have made or planned to make in the postsecondary file: tens of thousands of new spaces needed, and instead there are cuts, a total freeze on capital building, again, just at the point where we need to start to build our capacity in postsecondary education.

There's a movement away from permanent instruction positions in our colleges, trades, and universities and to sessional instructors – right? – at much reduced rates, much more unstable circumstances, and a real, measurable increase in class sizes, especially in undergraduate and trades programs, that interferes with the capacity for people to learn in those classrooms. Sessional instructors do, you know, I'm sure, yeoman's work to ensure that their students are getting the education as best they can, but that inherent instability of having a sessional position, leaving a sessional position, hiring different sessional positions, larger class sizes, for sure: it all adds up to a decrease in the quality of education that a student will receive in a college trades program or university.

There you have it, Mr. Chair, a toxic combination of a dramatic increase in the costs of a postsecondary education and the reduction in the quality of that same postsecondary education. I don't think that, you know, it's fair, quite frankly, to the hundreds of thousands of students that we have in our postsecondary system now and those tens of thousands more that are just coming up the pipe, that are in grade school now across the province.

We have one of the youngest populations in Canada as well. You know, it's a sign of optimism and hope that people are having families, and with that is the expectation that we can provide a good-quality education that will allow them to thrive and do well economically here in the province. It's obvious that the number one indicator of success and rates of pay for anyone in a society is their education and the quality of education that they have, a direct correlation to the pay that someone brings home and the success of an economy as well.

I would suggest that part of the reason that we have been very successful in, you know, gross domestic product here in this province and per-family income and so forth is the fact that we have a well-educated population. As I said before, we have a well-educated population, people that are bringing their qualification and their education from elsewhere, which is fine. I think that's fair play, and we need our population to continue to grow. We have that

immigration from other provinces and other countries, too, which is, again, a wonderful thing, but we also have a responsibility to move the dial on the participation rates of people, young people especially, in our postsecondary institutions. This budget, Bill 21 specifically, throws a spanner into the works with that ambition big time.

Postsecondary students that I met with yesterday asked me to bring up this issue around student loans and the tax change that's associated with student loans as well. Again, you know, you can play with numbers and talk a good talk by saying that you're increasing this by a small percentage and that people can afford it. But with a student loan, let's say, of \$30,000, you're talking about thousands of dollars more that a student will have to pay over time. I am just getting an education on just how much student debt people are actually carrying, and \$30,000 isn't a lot. I had an individual from another university in my office last week that has not even finished an undergraduate degree yet and has more than \$70,000 in accumulated debt, right? So it's like carrying a mortgage for a property. Another gentleman who was with him expects at the end of his master's degree to have \$125,000 of debt.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise again today to speak on the matter of Bill 21, the Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019. You know, there are so many different parts of this bill that are problematic and that should be of concern and are of concern to many Albertans. I spoke at length just earlier today about my concerns around the deindexation of AISH and how that attacks the most vulnerable Albertans. However, I also would like to speak to another piece of the act. This is actually something that I think the government caucus would be in agreement with.

Perhaps I'll begin by indicating that I would like to table an amendment to Bill 21. I've got the copies here. We're just distributing the amendment right now. Would you like me to wait, Mr. Chair, until it's all circulated?

The Deputy Chair: Yes, if we could just wait until the pages get a chance to run it to the members.

Just for the record, this will be referred to as amendment A2.

Ms Pancholi: Amendment A2. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, if you would please read it into the record and then go ahead and continue with your debate.

10:50

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 21, Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019, be amended in section 13(2) by striking out

“or government initiatives.”

Because Bill 21 is a very large bill, I will give a little context to what this amendment is about. This section refers to an amendment to the Provincial Offences Procedure Act. It is amended by section 13(2) of Bill 21. Specifically, it amends section 14(3) of the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, which currently states:

Where, under an enactment,

- (a) the Crown in right of Alberta collects an amount of money in respect of a penalty, fine or sum of money payable under the enactment or the proceeds of a forfeiture, and
- (b) the amount collected by the Crown does not belong to the Crown in right of Alberta,

the Crown in right of Alberta may, notwithstanding any Act and subject to the regulations, retain a portion of that amount to offset

the expenses incurred by the Crown with respect to the collecting of penalties, fines, sums of money or forfeitures arising under any enactment, and that portion that is retained by the Crown belongs to the Crown in right of Alberta and shall be deposited in the General Revenue Fund.

That's the original section 14(3) of the Provincial Offences Procedure Act.

Bill 21 amends that by adding basically that the fines and penalties that are collected under the Provincial Offences Procedure Act are to be used to fund programs that support or improve the administration of justice or government initiatives.

What I'm suggesting by this amendment, Mr. Chair, is that the words "or government initiatives" be struck out. What that would mean is that any fines, penalties, or sums of monies that are collected under the Provincial Offences Procedure Act can only be used to improve the administration of justice and cannot be used for other government initiatives. That's the intent behind the amendment.

I think, actually, that given some of the comments and what I actually think the intent of this section of Bill 21 speaks to, this should actually be consistent with what the government has stated a number of times. They have referred with a lot of disdain to funds that go into the general revenue fund as a slush fund. Specifically, they applied that term to the collection of funds under the climate leadership plan despite the fact that the legislation was very clear under the climate leadership plan as to how funds collected through the carbon tax would be used. Even as recently as, I believe, yesterday or maybe it was the day before, on Monday, the Government House Leader spoke very derisively of the use of the general revenue fund as a slush fund. This is ironic, too, by the way, because we know that there are other measures put forward by this government. Just as an example, the lottery fund has now been dissolved, and all of that money has been put into the general revenue fund. We are supposed to trust the Minister of Finance when he says that that won't actually result in a reduction of monies going out to nonprofit organizations that rely upon lottery funds to conduct their work. In that case, apparently, the general revenue fund is not a slush fund; I guess it depends on, in the government's view, who is in government.

Given the freewheeling spending that we've seen from this government of late with respect to expenses and cronyism and pancake plane parties, I'm not really sure who should be wearing the moniker of slush fund, but I certainly don't think it's the members in the opposition or when they were formerly the government. Those accusations were never levied against us.

In any respect, I appreciate that the Government House Leader, in particular, but many government members have been clear that they don't believe that money should go into the general revenue fund to be a slush fund. Therefore, I suggest that monies that are collected under the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, which are specifically collected through fines and penalties under that act, should not go to government initiatives generally. I think that that actually means that they would be using those funds to basically compensate or make up for the \$4.7 billion corporate no-jobs handout that has already been done by this government. Really, those fines and those penalties should only be used for the administration of justice, to improve the administration of justice. In fact, that is consistent with what the wording of Bill 21 includes. Section 13(2) does seem to be that the government is also of the view that there should be some parameters around how monies collected under these fines and penalties should be used.

It is actually the government's suggestion in 13(2) of Bill 21 that it only be used to "improve the administration of justice or government initiatives." I would say that if they're trying to fulfill

a certain intent, which is making sure that the money gathered under these fines is used for the purpose for which it's intended, they actually should not want the money to be used for other government initiatives. In that respect, it just really could be anything. Government initiatives is a pretty general term. We know that any activity by the government could certainly fall within that description. Really, it's saying that the money could be used as part of the general revenue fund for any purpose. You know, I'm going back to some of my legislative drafting training, but the intent, certainly, behind 13(2) of Bill 21 seems to be to prescribe some limits on how that money can be spent. Therefore, I would say that it's undermining the intention of that provision to also allow this money to be used for other government initiatives.

My hope is actually that the government will take this as a friendly amendment. Really, I think I understand what their intent is behind this section of Bill 21, and we're helping them out a little bit to be very clear that the money collected under these fines should really only be used to improve the administration of justice and not for any other purpose because that's what the money is paid into. It's paid under the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, and it should be used for improving the administration of justice.

Just yesterday I had the distinct pleasure of sitting in on the estimates for the Ministry of Justice. I heard the minister speak at length about his commitment and objectives around improving the administration of justice but also speak at length about, you know, the tight financial times we're in. Really, if he's looking to make some significant measures and progress with respect to streamlining and improving the administration of justice, here's an opportunity to make sure that the funds that are collected under these fines and penalties only go for that purpose.

Again, I view this as a friendly amendment, and I assume and I am hopeful that the government caucus will view it that way as well. I look forward to having some further debate on this.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chair's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Prior to hearing from any other members, I just want to remind the House that although we're in Committee of the Whole and, you know, there's the opportunity for a few more discussions, et cetera, perhaps even between the aisles, members should not break the line between the speaker and the chair as they are wandering about the House. I think it happened twice with the last speaker. Just a reminder on that point.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members looking to speak to this amendment A2? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-West has risen to speak.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I thank, certainly, the member for bringing forward this amendment. However, you know, this is something that I think our government certainly would be more than happy to engage in these types of conversations with members of the opposition. I appreciate it being a reasonable amendment, but not having heard from the Justice department with respect to this particular amendment, the way I am reading this – when I look at page 47 of Bill 21, Mr. Chair, 13(2) states:

Section 14(3) is amended by adding "or to fund programs that support or improve the administration of justice or government initiatives" after "arising under any enactment."

I think government initiatives are important in ways that are enhancing the community. These are initiatives that are to provide value to the community. I think that by removing “government initiatives,” that would certainly cause, you know, concern in regard to possible good deeds that these government initiatives may be doing.

That being said, I certainly appreciate the friendly amendment that was provided by the member opposite. However, at this time we cannot support this amendment. Thank you.

11:00

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The individual who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. One of the things I appreciate about committee so much is that we have the opportunity to bat things back and forth and to rise to speak to these matters as many times as necessary. I think that with this one, certainly I would propose, then, that perhaps the Government House Leader consider taking this amendment to Justice. He said that he hasn’t had the opportunity to discuss this with the actual officials in the Ministry of Justice. I think it would be, then, beneficial for the Government House Leader or the Acting Government House Leader or the designate or the Justice minister, for example, as well as for all members of this Assembly for the member to do so, to actually take this back, consult with the officials, make the proper determination once having garnered that additional information before addressing this amendment here today.

I think that if there was a motion from the government side to potentially adjourn debate on this matter to have the opportunity to engage in those discussions before rushing to make a decision on this amendment, that would be beneficial. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members . . .

Ms Hoffman: Oh, sorry. I can move that.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. I didn’t hear that it was actually moved.

Ms Hoffman: I didn’t actually move it myself. I was gesturing that maybe somebody else would, but I’d be happy to move that we adjourn debate.

The Deputy Chair: On this amendment? Just for clarity, you’re asking to adjourn debate on this amendment?

Ms Hoffman: Let’s do it first on the amendment, yeah.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. All right.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Ellis: I ask that we rise and report, Mr. Chair.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has risen.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 21. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 23

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2019

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen to speak on this matter.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to move this morning on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General third reading of Bill 23, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2019.

Mr. Speaker, if passed, this act will address a number of issues concerning our courts. The first involves the name of the Court of Queen’s Bench. When Queen Elizabeth II ceases to rule, convention dictates that the name of our superior trial court is changed out of respect for the new monarch. Renaming the court will require a significant number of changes to signage, seals, and forms as well as other official documents and websites bearing its name.

This bill proposes re-enacting the section of the Court of Queen’s Bench Act that would automatically change the court’s name to the Court of King’s Bench. This section was repealed during the fall 2018 session of the Legislature. It’s our belief that automatically renaming the court to the Court of King’s Bench recognizes our constitutional monarchy and honours the heritage of our legal system. This decision would also be in keeping with similar naming conventions in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

The provisions of Bill 23 cover two additional matters. First, it would reduce the age at which masters in chambers and Provincial Court judges may request to be appointed for part-time service. As the Court of Queen’s Bench Act and the Provincial Court Act currently stand, these officials are eligible to serve for part-time service at 60 years old. Bill 23 would lower this threshold to 55. This change would create greater work flexibility for judges and masters. It may also create a small amount of savings for the province.

Approval of these requests would not be automatic. The Chief Judge of the Provincial Court or the Chief Justice of the Court of Queen’s Bench have the authority to deny a request if they feel it could create difficulties for the court. In this way, Bill 23 would balance the needs of judges and masters against the demands on court resources.

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 places undue pressure on the provincial budget and the allocation of the same for these two judicial branches. Bill 23 would allow justices to access federal funds beyond the current \$500 limit by authorizing their attendance at meetings, conferences, or seminars related to the administration of justice, with the approval of their Chief Justice. This change would allow these justices greater freedom to travel and carry out their duties.

Taken together, the provisions of Bill 23, while small, will help make the justice system more efficient for us and for the province of Alberta. It’s my hope that members of this House will continue to support this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to speak to this matter?
Seeing none, the hon. Member for Grande Prairie to close debate.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise again on behalf of the Minister of Justice and close debate on Bill 23.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

11:10 Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 24 Appropriation Act, 2019

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance has the floor.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 24, the Appropriation Act, 2019.

This is a budget that will enhance Alberta's competitiveness by enshrining the job-creation tax cut, adopting the accelerated capital cost allowance provisions, and cutting red tape. When these measures are fully implemented, we will have the most competitive overall corporate tax regime in Canada and lower corporate taxes than 44 of 50 U.S. states. Once again Alberta will be the destination of choice for investors, and we feel very optimistic about Alberta's prospects. However, we're not assuming a fast recovery by Alberta standards. We need to be cautious and focus on the things we can control, and this includes getting our fiscal house in order by bringing spending in line with comparative provinces and eliminating our deficit while creating the conditions for businesses to thrive in Alberta.

Budget 2019 lays out a plan for government to live within its means while protecting the front-line services that Albertans depend on. It includes a moderate operational spending reduction of 2.8 per cent over four years to get our budget back in balance. This is essential to bring our province's debt under control and prevent our children and grandchildren from bearing the burden of paying for services that we use today.

Taxpayer-supported debt now stands at \$62.7 billion, and Alberta taxpayers paid \$1.9 billion to service these debts last year. That works out to \$5 million a day, money that goes to bankers and bondholders instead of projects that Albertans care about like roads, schools, and hospitals.

The MacKinnon panel found that Alberta spends more per person on many key government services than comparable provinces do. Worse still, the panel demonstrated that our service delivery is no better than in comparator provinces, and while these findings were troubling, they present an opportunity for us as government. If other provinces can deliver high-quality services for less money, so can Alberta. Budget 2019 will bring our spending closer in line with other provinces, and it will thoughtfully reprioritize our spending to ensure that we keep our platform promise of maintaining or increasing funding to vital public services.

We are investing \$20.6 billion per year to provide health services. This includes increases of \$100 million for a mental health and addiction strategy, \$40 million for the opioid response, and \$20 million for palliative care.

We are also providing \$8.2 billion for education services. The budget keeps our promise to maintain current education funding and fund enrolment growth of 2.2 per cent.

Budget 2019 does not make cuts to the social programs vulnerable Albertans depend on. In fact, we're increasing funding to Community and Social Services to address human trafficking and sexual exploitation, rising caseload pressure, and to undertake a comprehensive review of programming.

We're also increasing funding to Seniors and Housing to maintain overall benefits for seniors.

Children's Services will see a 15 per cent increase over four years so we can continue to provide the tools necessary to support healthy families and communities.

Budget 2019 makes good on our commitment to stand up for Alberta's interests. Albertans told us loud and clear that they want a provincial government that is willing to defend our energy sector and stand up against unfair federal policies. Standing up for Alberta is more important than ever given the results of the federal election, and we're committed to defending our world-class energy industry. Budget 2019 commits \$30 million for the Canadian Energy Centre, which will promote Alberta's responsible energy practices and combat misinformation. This is on top of the \$2.5 million we announced in July for a public inquiry into foreign funding of anti-energy campaigns. We're also pushing back against prejudicial federal policies that force Albertan taxpayers to pay more than their fair share to Ottawa while receiving fewer federal services than other Canadians. Our government is committed to working with the federal government and all provinces and territories in a review of the major federal transfers to ensure these transfers do not discriminate against any one jurisdiction. Mr. Speaker, federal fiscal transfers must be fair. We are in the process of reviewing all federal fiscal programs and are pushing to both cap the size of the equalization program and exclude nonrenewable resource revenues from the program's calculations.

During the election it was clear that Albertans wanted change, they wanted jobs, and they wanted a government with a real plan to bring investment and prosperity back to Alberta. What they didn't want was to carry on the legacy of debt that had become too commonplace in Alberta or to pass that debt on to their children and grandchildren. I believe that Budget 2019 is a thoughtful and measured budget. It will end the overspending that has plagued Alberta for almost 20 years and puts us on a credible path towards balance.

I along with my colleagues look forward to implementing Budget 2019, a plan for jobs and the economy, and I urge you all to support this bill today. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member.

Are there any members looking to speak to this? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-West has risen.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. Thank you to the minister for bringing up those important comments, but at this time, Mr. Speaker, I ask that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen to speak.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had some good, lively debate here this morning. We've made some progress, and as such I move that we adjourn the House until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:17 a.m.]

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