



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 20, 2019

Day 44

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

First Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 20, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of guests and visitors with us today, including two school groups. It's my absolute pleasure to welcome, from what is, in my nonpartisan opinion, the most outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the students from Prairie Christian academy as well as, from the excellent constituency of Edmonton-Meadows, grade 6 students from Julia Kiniski elementary. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, as some of you are aware, you had the opportunity to attend in the lower rotunda and meet representatives from the Stollery children's hospital visiting today. I'm pleased to welcome some very, very special guests. I believe that they have arrived in the gallery: Emma and Cameron Nagel, Jacob Martens, and a special shout-out to the folks from Airdrie-East, Payton and Easton Langenau. Welcome and thank you for joining us.

Hon. members, this afternoon in the galleries are guests of the Member for Livingstone-Macleod from the organization for scleroderma.

Also in the galleries are guests of the Minister of Health: representatives from Alberta Health Services and Covenant Health here in observation of World Wide Pressure Injury Prevention Day.

Visiting as guests of the Member for Highwood: Mr. Brent Nelson, Chad Hughes, and Sean David.

Also, guests of the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: members of Alberta's Hutterite community as well as MNP Alberta.

Last but certainly not least are guests of the Member for Peace River: the Wiebe family and their eight children.

All of those who are able and would like to, please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Stollery Children's Hospital

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, the health of our province starts with the health of its children. The Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation has a great vision to transform children's health care so that every child, no matter where they live, can get the best possible care. That's why we're proud that the Stollery is being hosted today at the Legislature. This is an opportunity for our Legislative Assembly members to celebrate this amazing, world-renowned expertise that exists right here in our own backyard and in backyards across Alberta, to help kids like Payton and Easton Langenau from Airdrie, Jacob Martens from Grande Prairie, Emma and Cameron Nagel from Leduc, and Emily Gordon from Sherwood Park. I'm proud to say that almost all of these Stollery kids and their families are here with us today in the members' gallery.

As the second-largest children's hospital in Canada the Stollery sees more than 293,000 patient visits every year, and nearly one-half of those kids come from outside of the Edmonton region. The Stollery children's hospital is one of the busiest and most specialized children's hospitals in Canada, performing more than

11,000 surgeries per year and providing care to some of the most complex health care cases anywhere in the world. The foundation is committed to investing in the best people, programs, equipment, and research to make sure that the Stollery has what it needs to care for kids for generations to come. It's the primary funder of pediatric research, \$40 million over 10 years through the Women and Children's Health Research Institute at the University of Alberta. With donor support the foundation is helping to give the sickest kids the best chance anywhere in the world for a long and healthy life.

Stollery day is a chance for all of us to reflect on the tremendous impact this hospital has had on the quality of health care in our province. On behalf of Emily, Emma, Cameron, Payton, Easton, Jacob, and their families, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: If you might indulge me as a father of two who have both spent time in children's hospitals, I too would like to voice my thank you to the Stollery and to those who do great work for our children.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Holger Petersen

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to pay tribute to a great Albertan, a long-time resident of Edmonton who has made enormous contributions to the music scene in our province and, indeed, across Canada and around the world, Mr. Holger Petersen. Holger started his career as a drummer, playing with bands like Hot Cottage in bars across Edmonton. He earned a diploma in radio and television arts from NAIT and in 1969 became the host of *Natch'l Blues* on CKUA Radio, a program which now stands as Canada's longest running program dedicated to blues music.

Not content to simply play records, in 1976 Holger founded Stony Plain Records to support and promote some of the amazing artists he'd had the fortune to meet, interview, and eventually produce records for. In the 45 years since, Stony Plain has gone on to release over 400 albums by a wide range of artists, which have won over 30 maple blues awards, 11 Junos, and been nominated for six Grammys. Holger himself has earned multiple awards for producer of the year, a Canadian country music award for record company person of the year, lifetime achievement awards from no fewer than five prominent blues associations, a Queen's golden jubilee medal, the Order of Canada, and honorary doctorates from both Athabasca University and the University of Alberta.

As if that wasn't enough to cement him as a force to be reckoned with in the provincial, national, and global music industries, Holger also helped found both the Edmonton Folk Music Festival and the Alberta recording industries association, now known as Alberta Music.

Holger's ongoing success is rooted in his endless curiosity, unerring ear, and genuine warmth. He's a deeply knowledgeable blues evangelist, a tireless champion of good music, a community builder, and the consummate fan. This Saturday I look forward to joining Holger's friends, family, and peers as they gather at CKUA Radio to celebrate his remarkable 50-year achievement in broadcasting in addition to his many contributions to the Canadian music landscape.

Congratulations, Holger, on 50 years. We look forward to many more.

Holodomor Memorial Day and Political Discourse

Mr. Schow: This Saturday is Holodomor remembrance day, the solemn day when we recognize Communist dictator Joseph Stalin's

genocide of Ukrainians through a deliberate, co-ordinated famine. Soviet propagandists claimed that the famine was of natural causes, that some bad weather resulted in poor crops, but it was anything but that. In order to achieve his political ends, Stalin and his thugs confiscated food and let Ukrainians starve to death. The Ukrainians were resisting Soviet socialist collectivization, so Stalin devised a famine. Through his terror famine Stalin murdered upwards of 10 million human beings. Think about that for a moment. The Holodomor is undoubtedly one of the greatest atrocities in human history, an atrocity we should never forget. Holodomor is especially solemn in Alberta, where hundreds of thousands of Albertans trace their Ukrainian roots.

Now, I recognize that those of us in this Chamber have diverse political views, and sometimes we strongly disagree on matters of public policy. That's healthy. These disagreements and the debates ensure that we have a strong democracy. But we should not minimize crimes such as the Holodomor for the sake of convenient political argument. I was frankly shocked and stunned when the Member for Lethbridge-West invoked the Holodomor last night when debating Bill 22 before this House. This spring 55 per cent of Albertans voted for the United Conservative Party; over 1 million votes cast for us, the highest voter turnout since '82. There is absolutely no valid comparison. While I'm not optimistic, I sincerely hope that the Member for Lethbridge-West will apologize. There is no excuse for invoking Joseph Stalin when speaking about the democratically elected government of Alberta.

We must ensure that future generations remember the evils of Soviet Communism, including the Holodomor. That includes not minimizing those crimes by comparing them to contemporary debates in modern politics.

1:40 Lead in Drinking Water

Mr. Schmidt: I've now risen a number of times in this House to raise the issue of lead in our drinking water. Earlier this month it was reported that our drinking water contains unacceptable concentrations of lead. I and many Albertans were extremely concerned that more than 10 per cent of Alberta's daycares and a quarter of all schools tested in the Calgary Catholic school board and Elk Island public school board had drinking water exceeding the maximum allowable concentration of lead. This is extremely concerning as lead is a neurotoxin that impedes children's brain development. It can cause behavioural problems and results in loss of IQ.

However, there is hope. There are solutions we can commit to right now. They are straightforward. We have already taken lead out of gasoline and paint, and we can take it out of our drinking water as well. We can replace all lead plumbing. Like Ontario, we can make testing for lead mandatory in all schools and daycares. I think this is a straightforward solution that we should commit to as soon as possible. To prevent this issue from ever occurring again, we should implement an outright ban on all plumbing fixtures that contain lead. These fixtures should not be sold or installed in Alberta. The government can commit to this right now and start taking action this afternoon. We've heard from this government that they're willing to implement federal standards and support schools in testing their drinking water, but that's not enough. We need to be decisive.

We need the government to take action on the solutions outlined. The government cut municipalities and cut school boards in their budgets, which leaves them at the mercy of the government to be able to finance taking action against lead. That's why I'm calling on this government once again to replace and ban lead plumbing and make testing mandatory. The government found money to

finance a \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway. Now it needs to find the money to protect our drinking water and our children.

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

National Child Day

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured today to rise to acknowledge November 20 as National Child Day. It's especially exciting to see so many children here sharing it with us today. I know that you and all members of this Assembly will agree that there is nothing more important than our children. We may often be at odds on questions of policy or priorities in this House, but one thing we have in common is that we want the best for our children. We recognize that our commitment to them now and supporting their well-being and development will have a lasting impact on generations to come. National Child Day serves as a reminder that everything we do, every choice that we make impacts young people in this province now and into the future. It is a reminder that children in Alberta and around the globe have a right to high-quality education, health care, protection from abuse and neglect, and a voice in this society.

Last month the South Sudanese community in Calgary shared with me the struggles of their children. These struggles, including addiction, mental health, violence, and isolation, are shared by every community across this province. These challenges must be faced head-on by our families, community organizations, and government. Together we can equip our children and give them the help that they need to reach their full potential. It is why we work to leave things better than we found them, because one day Alberta will be in their hands. When all in this Chamber are long gone, those whose lives were touched by our actions will stand in our place. Our government is committed to a path that will give Alberta's children the opportunity and the means to build a bright and happy future. We all have a role to play. Mentor a young person, coach on a local team, donate time or money to a community organization, and take an interest in young people.

I want to thank all members for sharing their commitment to Alberta's children and for the excellent work that you all do on their behalf. To mark this occasion and on behalf of my colleagues in this House, it is my great pleasure to stand here today and recognize this day.

Budget 2019 and Teachers

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, members of our caucus have continued to be inundated with e-mails and letters from our constituents as a result of the budget currently being debated by the House. Whether it's classroom sizes, school fees, insurance rates, pensions, collective bargaining, public servant job losses, the termination of the Election Commissioner, loss of tax credits, increases to tuition rates, corruption, honestly, the list is exhaustive.

Recently a constituent reached out to my office regarding the government's ill-conceived grab of the teachers' pensions. She was concerned, to say the least, stating: pensions belong to teachers, not the government; with that, we respectfully ask that MLAs take their hands off our pensions. Unfortunately, since that e-mail I have received an update, and I would like to share Ulana Soletsky's story with the House today.

Since my last e-mail I have been informed that I might lose my position with the school board because of the last budget. I have been a classroom teacher since 1983, and now I have held the position of math consultant in my school district for the last 11 years. I have also been offering professional development in math

education for 11 years. To hear that my position might be eliminated has been absolutely frightening and frustrating.

In the last few days I have also heard that the UCP government might be tabling a voucher approach to education. Our education system is one of the best in the world, let alone Canada. I have worked with teachers in the private school systems and can tell you honestly that what we have in the public-separate districts in Alberta is a much superior learning environment. What sense does this make, and how can we stop this? I am so frustrated and frightened that I am having great anxiety about the future of education in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this anxiety that Albertans are living under is a direct result of the government's ongoing sacrifice of the well-being of families and individuals to support a \$4.7 billion giveaway, and it's shameful.

Weed Notice Appeals

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, on October 31 I attended the northeast regional agricultural service board conference. There were many issues important to rural Albertans discussed. One that caught my attention was an issue that related to red tape reduction. Our government has found inefficiencies in the way in which growers can appeal a weed notice. Growers in Alberta are subject to the Weed Control Act, and when an inspector finds that someone is noncompliant with the act, they will provide an inspector's notice in writing.

Inspectors make mistakes from time to time, so of course the act allows for an appeal process. You see, Mr. Speaker, the appeal process has been known to take at least 110 days, and in some cases it has taken over one year. I'm sure that even my colleagues from the urban areas could understand that in 110 days these noxious weeds have matured, dropped their seeds to spread across the countryside, making the problem worse.

What could possibly cause such an important decision to take this long, and what can be done about it? Previously the government lawyers would review documents, prepare briefings, go back and forth with the ministry and the producer for an unknown length of time. This would delay the decision into the winter and the decision would be revisited in the spring and the process would start again. The ministry has changed this process. Using existing legislation in section 9 of the Government Organization Act, our government will be appointing one or more people to oversee the review process and conduct in-person hearings, with all evidence present. With this new process a written decision will be issued within 30 to 45 days of the hearing. This gives plenty of time to take corrective action and control the weeds before the problem gets worse.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the producers and growers in our province, including many in my own riding, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank and congratulate the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry for all their efforts in reducing red tape and efficiently managing problems. Thank you.

Government Policies and Women

Member Irwin: Women make up over half our province, yet Alberta women continue to see the lowest participation in the workforce in Canada, experience higher unemployment compared to men while working in the province with the nation's largest gender wage gap. Under four years of an NDP government our gender-balanced cabinet worked tirelessly to apply a gender lens to policy decisions, including when introducing budgets, with a goal of ending gender-based violence and finally closing Alberta's deep economic gender gap.

Yet instead of continuing the push for gender equality, the UCP is hurting women. I'll say it even if it hurts this government to hear

it. Before you say I'm exaggerating, let me explain with some facts, and, wow, do I have a lot to cover in two minutes, so here we go.

In only six months the UCP have: gutted the status of women ministry with a 42 per cent cut and many millions gone as well; slashed supports for child care while creating uncertainty for those in \$25-per-day early learning and child care centres; deindexed the Alberta seniors' benefit, affecting thousands of senior women across our province; kicked off 46,000 dependants from the seniors' drug plan, disproportionately affecting women; cut and froze the minimum wage, of which two-thirds are women workers; hiked tuition for postsecondary students, again affecting a lot of women; attacked collective bargaining rights and public pensions and announced a rollback of wages for our hard-working public-sector workers who are, again, mostly women; abandoned the 52 dedicated health care workers in Vegreville who were, you guessed it, mostly women; and introduced the dangerous Bill 207, which attacks the fundamental rights of women and LGBTQ2S-plus Albertans to access the health care and services they need. I've shared a list, and something tells me that this isn't exhaustive.

Now I throw it back to you, Mr. Premier, and your government: what will you do to start improving the lives of women now? Asking for 2 million or so friends.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Election Commissioner

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the House leader for the government said: nothing is changing; the Election Commissioner can keep doing his investigations the same as before. The bill, however, says in black and white that the commissioner is "terminated." Let's be clear. The government is bringing forward a law to fire the person who has issued more than \$200,000 in fines against UCP campaigns because they keep breaking the law. To the Justice minister: do you really want to go down in Alberta's history books as the guy who fired law enforcement to conceal the truth about his party and his boss?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, nobody has fired law enforcement. What I said yesterday was that the Election Commissioner's office continues going forward under the structure if Bill 22 is adopted by this House. In fact, the structure that is proposed brings us in line exactly with how it is in Manitoba and with the federal government. And for every other province inside this country, they actually do not have an Election Commissioner. The point is this. Every other system in this province, the entire system is run under one office. In fact, the current Election Commissioner has even advised other governments that that is the best way to structure these types of systems.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the bill terminates the Election Commissioner, who is charged with investigating fraud into the minister's party. The commissioner says that he has 800 investigations – 800 – many of these still ongoing. The commissioner reminds all members of this House that, quote, his office prevents the emergence of a culture of corruption within the political and electoral process. To the keeper of the Great Seal: isn't that what you want to be known for instead of the keeper of great secrets, who brings corruption back to Alberta?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, the Election Commissioner's office remains in place if Bill 22 is adopted by this Legislature. It will fall under the Chief Electoral Officer. Any and all investigations that

are being undertaken will remain in place and be able to be completed. Elections Alberta have governed our election system in this province for over a century very, very successfully. This simply takes our system back to where it was before 2018. It protects the integrity of the independent officers of this Legislature but brings us in line with the system that's all across this entire country.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, no one believes the tired spin.

Former Conservative MP Monte Solberg says, quote, the optics are pretty bad. Mount Royal Professor Duane Bratt says, quote, it's a cover-up, plain and simple. And Rick Bell says that he's seen the ghost of Alison Redford wandering the hallways of the Legislature. Does the Premier really think he has a mandate to bring corruption back? That's what he's doing in Bill 22.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm excited that corruption will continue to be investigated in all ways by the Chief Electoral Officer and the Election Commissioner's office under Bill 22. [interjections] The investigative process will remain in place, the office of the Election Commissioner will remain in place, and the Chief Electoral Officer will remain in place, protecting the integrity of our election system. That's important to this government. We are taking the system and bringing it in line with the exact recommendations that the current Election Commissioner has provided other governments. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Calgary Board of Education Layoffs

Ms Hoffman: The Premier printed the word "jobs" on poster board during the election, but today 300 teachers are being laid off in Alberta's largest school district, Calgary public. Three hundred teachers, Mr. Speaker, in one district in Calgary. This government said that there would be none. The Minister of Education said, "Our government and I are very committed to keeping teachers in front of students." What does the minister have to say to the 300 teachers who were just fired and the thousands of students who relied on them to help them with their learning?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do sympathize with those teachers, their families, the students, the parents, all who are affected by this rash decision. You know, I just don't understand it. I'm struggling to understand how this happened. I have been very clear from the beginning that teachers in front of students has the greatest impact on student learning, and the reckless mismanagement of tax dollars by this board is not going to go unaccounted for. I will be ordering an independent financial audit and governance review of the Calgary board of education.

Ms Hoffman: The minister won't take responsibility. She only knows how to distract. I have warned this minister for months that giving \$4.7 billion away in a no-jobs corporate handout would mean teacher layoffs. Parents warned her. The ATA warned her. The CBE warned her. Everyone knew this was coming. So how can the minister claim to be surprised and divert responsibility when this is exactly what everyone knew was going to happen with her budget?

Member LaGrange: I am surprised. I have a board with a budget of \$1.2 billion that services 130,000 students whose first option was to go cutting teachers. That is unacceptable. Unacceptable.

Therefore, that is why I am calling forward an independent financial audit and a governance review to determine what is going on in that board.

Ms Hoffman: Well, the CBE says that they could fire all of their HR, their legal, their senior management, and it still wouldn't add up to the amount that this minister has cut from their budget.

The minister's mismanagement means that thousands of schoolchildren in Calgary classrooms are losing their teachers mid-year. They will be in bigger classrooms with fewer supports. Districts right across Alberta are facing the same deep cuts, and kids are paying the price for this minister's mismanagement. All this government has left are excuses. How many more Alberta students are going to have to get ripped off before this minister decides to audit herself and her own bad budget, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be quite honest, I offered the CBE the expertise of my department to assist them with their finances, and they chose not to take us up on that offer. On Monday I met with every single board chair from the four metros, their CFOs, and their superintendents, and at no time did they mention any massive layoffs. There is a history here with this particular board, with this particular division, of mismanagement. I will get down to the bottom of it. There will be an independent financial audit, and there will be a governance review to see . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has the call.

Government Policies and Nurses

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, if the Minister of Health had just gone outside today, he would have met hundreds upon hundreds of registered nurses rallying on the front steps of this Legislature. Nurses are the front line of health care. They're at the bedside in emergency rooms, in surgeries, in long-term care facilities. They support new mothers and seniors and Albertans struggling with opioid use. How does this government thank them? By taking away control of their pensions. To the Premier. Albertans trust nurses with their lives. Why can't you trust them with governance of their own pensions?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is being disingenuous with Albertans. The fact is that in Bill 22 we respect and will continue with joint governance with our public-sector workers relative to their pensions. We are making changes to ensure that we see competent individuals on the boards of these pensions, pension boards that manage billions of dollars on behalf of their members. Bill 22 strengthens public-sector pensions.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that this wasn't in their platform, there were about a thousand nurses here today that don't believe this minister. The Premier's attacks on nursing don't stop at pensions and wage rollbacks. His broken-promises budget practically brags about cutting \$100 million worth of funded RN hours from Alberta's health care system. Why is this Premier so eager to take front-line nurses away from the bedside and from people in the community in order to pay for his \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout?

2:00

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

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue we've been asked about before in question period. This is an attack on our expansion of the scope of practice for LPNs in this province. I'd just like to point out that attacking the expansion of the scope of practice for LPNs is really trying to attack, actually, patient safety. The goal of our government is to make sure that there are fewer transitions in the care of our patients. Whether it's an acute-care hospital or continuing care, we want to make sure that our LPNs are practising to the full scope of their clinical knowledge and skills.

Mr. Shepherd: Bill 9; attacking pensions; wage rollbacks: why should these nurses trust anything this minister has to say? This minister could have heard some of those nurses today, some real human stories from the front line, if he had just taken the time to go outside and meet with them. If he understood that health care was about human beings and not corporate handouts, he might make some better choices.

What exactly was this minister doing this morning that was more important than actually speaking with the people who deliver front-line health care for the people of Alberta?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to be able to continue to engage with all of our health care professionals throughout the province, to be able to listen to all of our different health professionals, nursing health professionals in the province, to be able to listen to our RNs and to listen to our LPNs, as I did earlier this year when I listened to the LPNs and did what the previous government refused to do, which was to expand the scope of their practice to allow better patient care in this province.

Election Commissioner

(continued)

Mr. Feehan: Mr. Speaker, we've learned today that the Election Commissioner has been investigating more than 800 complaints, including many we know of that involve voter fraud in the UCP leadership race. We also know that the commissioner was going to go before the legislative committee next week to detail the contents of many of these investigations and to request additional funds for those left outstanding. Now this government is rushing to fire him. To the chair of the Public Accounts Committee: will the committee schedule a meeting to hear from the Election Commissioner?

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you to my hon. colleague for the question. I share his concerns about the role of the office of the Election Commissioner. It is a matter of urgent public interest to scrutinize the public accounts and activities of the Election Commissioner for 2018-2019. As such, as the chair of the Public Accounts Committee I have written to all members of Public Accounts this morning to request an emergency meeting.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm concerned that part of this government's rush to pass Bill 22 is a direct result of them wanting to silence the Election Commissioner before he presents his annual report next week. I have to wonder if the UCP government cabinet is using the House now to suppress the findings of his investigations because they fear the damage that it would do to the UCP and the current Premier. To the chair of Public Accounts: what would be on the agenda of such a meeting?

The Speaker: All members of the House will know that *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at 512, 513 addresses this very issue. The only issue that is able to be discussed is around the

scheduling of a meeting or the agenda. As such, this question would be in order.

The hon. the chair of PAC.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to my hon. colleague. Certainly, the Election Commissioner himself expressed concerns yesterday, and I believe that our Public Accounts Committee has a role to play in ensuring that democracy is upheld. The committee does have legislative oversight over the commissioner and how he has used the resources provided to him during the 2018-19 fiscal year and what contingencies and protocols are in place to ensure those funds do not go to waste if he is indeed fired. In the interest of accountability and upholding the rule of law, I am seeking support from all Public Accounts members for an emergency meeting.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you to the chair.

Mr. Speaker, I worry that the UCP cabinet will actively work to stop this emergency meeting of the Public Accounts Committee. We have seen that this government does not believe that the rules apply to them on repeated occasions. To the Government House Leader: will you now rise and commit that you will not block the efforts of the Public Accounts Committee chair to hold an emergency meeting with the Election Commissioner before Bill 22 passes?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, as a member of Executive Council I am certainly not a member of a standing committee of the Legislature, nor do I have a say or any control in the schedule. However, as the hon. member is well aware, the committee as a whole decides its scheduling matters, and I suggest that they continue with their process and have a conversation amongst committee members to be able to schedule the next meeting and agenda items as per our system.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Camrose is rising with a question.

Rural Crime Prevention

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in my constituency a woman and her dog were shot and killed. My constituents are afraid. Criminal activity has skyrocketed in our province and has become increasingly violent, with individuals being targeted numerous times. Law enforcement is frustrated. They go to great lengths of time and often endanger themselves to arrest these criminals. To the Minister of Justice: what is our plan to address rural crime?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. It was a privilege of mine to go to Camrose and hear directly from people in the community about their frustrations with rural crime. I'm proud of the fact that we made a significant announcement earlier this month to make sure that we have enhanced boots on the ground with our RAPID force announcement. We also need to make sure that we start changing precedents in the judicial system. That's why we brought in community impact statements. I'm hoping that the stories that I've heard in my town halls across Alberta can now be conveyed in a thoughtful way to our judiciary so that we can start having stronger penalties. It's time for the justice system not just to work for downtown Toronto but to work for rural Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government has made this announcement but rural Alberta in particular has not yet heard a timeline and given that rural Albertans deserve to feel safe in their homes and in their communities and given that this is currently not the case, what is the government's plan to give rural constituents, especially in my riding of Camrose, some assurances of safety not only for themselves but for their property?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the community impact statements that I mentioned will be starting to be available in January. We also just introduced Bill 27. It is going to respect property rights in our province. Albertans deserve the strongest property rights possible. That's what this bill does. It makes sure that law-abiding Albertans can't be sued by criminals committing a criminal act on their property. That's common sense. That's what we heard from Albertans on the road. We're taking concrete steps now to help make sure that rural Albertans can feel safe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that law enforcement and citizens have let me know that we are suffering from a catch-and-release program and given that my constituents believe that the same criminals keep repeating the same crime on the same people and given that we need help to combat the rural crime crisis in our communities, what is being done to help the constituents of Camrose and all rural Albertans?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. We're hiring 50 more prosecutors to make sure they have the time and resources to make sure they can have the caseload to go after repeat offenders. We're also making sure we provide additional training to our RAPID force, our sheriffs, our fish and wildlife officers to make sure that they can help contribute with our police on the ground to catch these repeat offenders and keep people safe. These are concrete steps. We're taking them now because rural crime is at a crisis and we have to act.

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

Canadian Energy Centre and Premier's Adviser's Expense Audits

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One week ago the members for Edmonton-Manning and Lethbridge-West and I wrote to the Auditor General. We requested that he audit the travel costs of the Premier's principal adviser, David Knight Legg, and I'm pleased to report to the House that the Auditor General will be proceeding with this audit. Can the Minister of Energy state clearly, after so much confusion, whether the Premier's friend and personal adviser, David Knight Legg, was on official war room business when he stayed at five-star hotels at taxpayers' expense in London?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the NDP are playing with misrepresenting facts to Albertans. What the Auditor General did in fact say is that that is routine. Every three years they move through ministers' offices and the Executive Council for audits, and it happens to be that we are in the cycle portion where Executive Council is up for an audit. That's what the

Auditor General said. Of course, we want the Auditor General to continue with all routine audits. But what we also want and what Albertans want is for the NDP to stop misrepresenting facts inside this House. It's not doing anything to help Albertans.

Mr. Sabir: I'll table the response later today.

Given that we also asked the Auditor General to audit the entire budget of the war room and given that I can report that he is proceeding with that audit as well, does the Minister of Energy regret trying to conceal the war room budget from Albertans, especially given the repeated abuse of taxpayer dollars that have come to light in the Premier's office and in the Attorney General's office?

2:10

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

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have said from day one that the Canadian Energy Centre, also known as the war room, will always be subject to audit by the Auditor General. It was set up that way, to be transparent and accountable, and that's the way it will operate.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the Election Commissioner uncovered dozens of illegal acts by the Premier's associates and was still actively investigating a member of the UCP caucus when this government decided to fire him and given that the government has chosen to hide the reason or any form of accountability when it comes to David Knight Legg's shady London trips and given that the government is also hiding all the details of how its so-called war room is spending its \$30 million budget, does the Premier also plan to fire the Auditor General before he can complete these two investigations?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's so outrageous to see the NDP continue to misrepresent facts. Of course, as we said, this is a routine audit that goes through every three years. We welcome the Auditor General to continue his important work. What this really comes down to is the NDP's ongoing war against the war room. This is the party that, when they were in power, put Tzepporah Berman in charge of our oil sands, a person who is dedicated to shutting down the energy industry. [interjections] I promise you that this government will continue to defend the energy industry inside this province despite the NDP trying to take them down.

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Lowe's Hardware Store Layoffs

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Lowe's Canada announced it was closing six big box hardware stores in Alberta. This means significant job losses in Calgary, Edmonton, Airdrie, St. Albert, and Sherwood Park. It's yet another consequence of this government's failed economic policies. The total number of people laid off likely or should have been reported to the minister of labour. I know that he has this information, so can he rise in this House and tell us how many Albertans lost their jobs at Lowe's today, or is he too embarrassed to say?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, any time there are job losses we recognize the hardship that creates with families and individuals, and we certainly acknowledge that today. But in October there were over 20,000 new private-sector jobs created in this province. We are confident that the policies that we're implementing will turn the tide from the investment loss the previous government created in

this province. We will see investment come back to the province and, with it, jobs and opportunities for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's not all bad news, at least if you're a shareholder of Lowe's and not a worker, and given that Lowe's earnings per share and cash dividends are both up, which is good news for the traders in Toronto, for sure, but another loss for Alberta workers, can the Minister of Finance say how much of the \$4.7 billion corporate handout was given to Lowe's in exchange for them laying off Albertans?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, when we hear the members opposite talk about a fiscal and financial policy, it leaves me with no doubt why investment fled this province by the billions when they were in government. They continue to be antibusiness, which equates to antijob, anti economic prosperity, and anti-Albertan.

Mr. Bilous: Given that Amazon, Google, RocketSpace, Cavendish all made investments in Alberta under our government and given that Husky, EnCana, Lowe's, and many others have all happily taken this Premier's \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout and then laid off Alberta workers or relocated outside of Alberta or invested in other provinces with Albertans' tax dollars, how does the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism explain her failure to even keep the jobs that she started with?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, all we have to do is listen to the University of Calgary School of Public Policy, where research has demonstrated that every time corporate taxes are lowered, it results in a point – one dollar of lowered corporate taxes results in 95 cents gained for employee wages. [interjections] Our policy of reducing corporate taxes will result in investment, increased job opportunities, and higher wages for Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. I heard you heckling all through the question. Perhaps you could not heckle while the Speaker is on his feet.

Dialysis Service in High Prairie

Mr. Rehn: Mr. Speaker, my constituents were led to believe that there would be significant upgrades to health care services in the town of High Prairie. While my residents understand that there are many health care needs all around Alberta, they are frustrated because they have a pressing need to access dialysis services in High Prairie that has not been met by previous governments. To the Minister of Health: will this government support the High Prairie health care centre so that my constituents can access the high-quality care they deserve?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not just High Prairie. The NDP spent four years making empty promises on health care to all Albertans while they watched access get worse and waiting lists get longer, yet according to the latest CIHI data they increased health care spending faster than the government before them. They promised a dialysis unit for the new hospital in High Prairie, and they committed capital funding to build it but no money to operate it. So it's been on hold because our government, unlike that previous government, does not make empty promises. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake is the only one that has the call.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there is a significant need for a new dialysis clinic in High Prairie and given that High Prairie residents in need of dialysis must travel to either Slave Lake or Peace River, both over 100 kilometres away, or Edmonton, nearly 400 kilometres away, to the same minister: will this government fully fund the dialysis unit in High Prairie so that my constituents do not have to travel hundreds of kilometres to access the dialysis services that they need?

Mr. Shandro: Well, the member is correct. The capital dollars have been flowed to AHS but no operating funding. I've consulted with my department and AHS, and we've determined that with the savings anticipated from the AHS review, we can ask AHS to fund the operation. So, to the hon. member through you, Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. I am proud to announce that today we can advise that we have told AHS to move forward with the construction of that new dialysis unit and to open it as soon as possible. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister.

Given that a staged rollout of obstetrics in High Prairie began in January 2019 and given that the High Prairie health care centre has experienced staff shortages and given that the government repeatedly promised in the election to push resources in health to the front lines, to the same minister: what will the government do to address these staff shortages in High Prairie so my constituents can access the health care they need in their own community?

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

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recruitment and retention continue to be challenging for dialysis and all services in northern communities. The new dialysis unit will help by adding capacity in the area so there are more jobs and more centres to share the demand. A big part of the recruitment challenge is the cycle of underresourcing in the north and other remote areas in the province. It's hard to attract people to work in places that are already short-staffed. We're going to break that cycle, and we are going to do so by adding capacity across the system, especially in primary care. We're going to strengthen the system in the north for all Albertans.

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

Calgary Cancer Centre

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For decades Conservative governments have played games with the Calgary cancer centre – they announced it, they cancelled it, they moved it, they reannounced it, they recancelled it – in a vicious cycle that hurt the people of Calgary. Our government ended those games and started construction to ensure that Calgarians would finally get the centre they deserve. But in their first budget, the UCP has returned to that tried-and-true Conservative strategy and delayed funding for the Calgary cancer centre. Can the Minister of Infrastructure guarantee right here and now that despite the delayed funding in his budget, the Calgary cancer centre will still open on time and be fully staffed? Yes or no?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, none of this is true. The member has, respectfully, completely misunderstood what a construction schedule is. Once we had a construction schedule, we aligned our

funding to align with that construction schedule. We are still going to be funding another billion dollars to be able to fund that centre. It's going to be a total of \$1.4 billion. That funding is just aligned with the construction schedule. I regret that the hon. member does not understand that.

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

2:20

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister cannot answer whether it's going to be on time and fully staffed and given that the UCP delayed funding by \$184 million this year and given that they plan to delay funding by a further \$114 million next year and given that this government plans to cut funding for nurses by \$100 million over the next four years and given that the government is standing proudly beside a \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout, will the Infrastructure minister please explain why he's removing almost \$300 million from the cancer centre over the next two years? Have you leveraged this project to pay for your failed corporate handout?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, as we've said many times in this House and just recently with the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and the minister of labour, who attended with me at the cancer centre: on time, on budget. Again, another day, another opportunity for the caucus opposite to continue to perpetuate made-up numbers about the job-creation tax cut, because it's a continued attack on job creators in this province, and it's shameful.

Mr. Dang: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that it becomes apparent that the Health minister hasn't read his own budget and given that this government's budget cuts both funding for this cancer centre and nurses to pay for a \$4.7 billion corporate handout and given the Conservative track record of delaying and cancelling this project in the past and given that the UCP's commitment to this project was represented when their Infrastructure spokesperson dismissed this project as a "fancy box," to the Minister of Infrastructure: will the cancer centre open fully staffed, or will the needs of Calgarians come second to a \$4.7 billion corporate handout?

Mr. Panda: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I ask that the member, instead of jumping up and down, listen to me one more time carefully. There is no \$4.7 billion corporate handout, number one. Number two: the Calgary cancer hospital will be built on time, on budget. I hope we'll put an end to that question one more time.

Support for Transgender Albertans

Member Irwin: Today is the Transgender Day of Remembrance. This day honours those whose lives were lost because of acts of violence against trans, nonbinary, and gender-diverse people, and it's also an important opportunity to raise visibility for trans and nonbinary people and address the issues the communities face. I was so proud of our NDP government for taking leadership on trans rights. To the minister of status of women: what specific actions do you plan to take to support the trans community?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of status of women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, and thank you so much for the question. We are honoured to stand with the transgender community today, especially to honour the murders, the bigotry, and other inhumane acts that have been perpetuated against this community. We proudly fly the flag both here and at McDougall in Calgary.

Member Irwin: Given that a number of organizations that serve queer and trans populations are facing funding shortfalls and given that these organizations have historically relied on grants from Status of Women and as well through the human rights education and multiculturalism fund, both of which have been eliminated by this UCP government, to the minister. I'm not exaggerating that without funds to support vulnerable trans-supporting organizations, lives are at risk. What can I tell these organizations that are worried about how they will provide critical supports and services without funds?

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much for the question. Well, I'm actually proud to say that through the ministry there's actually been an increase of dollars towards Multiculturalism and Status of Women. There are multiple dollars that are going out to vulnerable people through Community and Social Services and other priorities that are in this province. We developed the multiculturalism portfolio and mandate in order to have that intersectionality. To just be clear, the GBA plus within the Status of Women is for that lens to make sure that we adequately fund and make sure that we're helping out as much as possible with these things.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Irwin: Thank you. Given that one of the major barriers trans folks face is access to timely health care and given that Bill 207 further threatens trans health care access, allowing health professionals to deny essential health care, and given that we know that delayed or denied health care can mean the loss of trans lives, to the Health minister. You've not yet shared your position on Bill 207. I hope you've had some time to learn about it and reflect on it. Will you be supporting this terrible bill, and if so, why?

Mr. Shandro: Well, as I said previously to the member opposite when she asked, one of my greatest concerns is to make sure that all Albertans have access to health care, especially the trans community. I'm very proud that our 29 health professions in this province have in their standards of practice prohibitions against discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation. I'm very proud to say that I will, as Minister of Health, continue to make sure that access for the trans community will continue to be there, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to make sure that we continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has the call.

Red Tape Reduction for Small Business

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we heard that our government launched the red tape reduction small-business industry panel. The stated goal of this panel is to identify and cut the red tape that is holding back members of the small-business community and would-be Alberta entrepreneurs. We made it a priority to listen to and work with Albertans to find the right solutions that will help get Albertans back to work and to make their lives a little easier. My question is to the associate minister through you: what is the impact of red tape on small business, and how will seeking their direct input help us achieve our red tape reduction targets?

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member. I know that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, before

he actually entered into the tumultuous realm of politics, was a small-business owner himself, so he recognizes that small businesses are disproportionately affected by red tape. What we've done is that we've struck this panel in order to be able to receive good submissions from people who are in the trenches that are having to deal with these hoops that they've got to jump through, that oftentimes take away their ability to actually free up their hands and do what we ask them to do, which is to create jobs. We're going to make sure that these guys can do what they do best, create the jobs.

Mr. Reid: Mr. Speaker, given that the associate minister has been meeting with the small-business panellists and given that he emphasizes the importance of supporting small business in Alberta and given that as a former small-business owner myself I saw the impact of excessive red tape on everything from lost productivity to increased costs and given that these burdens hurt not only employers but also employees, my question to the same associate minister: what sorts of problems are small businesses telling us they're encountering most, and how can this government help them?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct; 2 out of every 3 new job hires actually come from small businesses in any robust, strong economy. So if we're to help those small businesses, we need to do one thing: we need to get out of their way. We need to make sure that we actually free up their hands and unclip their wings so that they can do what we need them to do, which is soar in this economy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the associate minister. Given that small businesses are often where young Albertans receive their first work experience and given that youth unemployment in Alberta is unacceptably high after four years of NDP economic neglect and given that excessive and restrictive red tape hinders employment in key areas of my riding of Livingstone-Macleod such as hospitality, agriculture, and health care, once again to the associate minister: how can we reduce red tape and make sure that small businesses are able to again hire young Albertans and also that young Albertans wishing to start their own business can do so?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. You know, the youth are our future, and what's concerning is that when we actually provide them with the opportunities that they need to be able to start a business and become an entrepreneur, they will get into it, and they will actually see a great life because of it. I've been an entrepreneur since I was knee-high to a grasshopper, and I can tell you that it was a great life. The problem is that under the NDP they continued to heap all sorts of red tape onto those job creators and those innovators, and in the end they drove business out of this province.

Lois Hole Provincial Park Management Plan Environment and Parks Ministry Budget

Ms Renaud: The Lois Hole provincial park is located on the western edge of St. Albert, Edmonton, and is bordered by Parkland county to the southwest and Sturgeon county to the northwest. This urban provincial park is almost 2,000 hectares of lake and wetland ecosystem. Appropriate oversight of the Lois Hole park, lake, and wetland is vital to flood management, conservation, management of recreation pressures, and urbanization. To the minister of

environment: will you continue to fund the Lois Hole provincial park management plan as is, and will there be any reductions?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we continue to invest in parks all across the province. I don't know specifically the parameters around the park the hon. member is referring to, but I'm not aware of any reductions in spending when it comes to that park. I will be happy to check and get back to the hon. member on the specifics.

2:30

Ms Renaud: Given this minister is responsible for cuts to water management, wildlife management, fisheries management, parks conservation, air quality monitoring, environmental emergency response, and so on, to the minister: if you're not a climate change denier, why don't you believe the warning of more than 11,000 of the world's climate scientists, who warned us that we clearly and unequivocally face a climate emergency that will cause untold human suffering? Plus, can he give us a parks' breakdown of the funding in writing?

Thanks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP managed to be nice for a whole 30 seconds. I think you should note that on your calendar. Here's the reality. Our government takes climate change seriously, has just passed the TIER legislation in this place this week. We'll continue to move forward on that. What the difference between us and that party is, when it comes to this important file, is that we will continue to work on innovation and technology to move Alberta forward in a positive way while not destroying our economy in this province like that hon. member did when she was part of a government that caused \$50 billion to flee this province with her ridiculous carbon tax.

Ms Renaud: Given that I'm not very nice, I'd like to ask one more question. Do you believe it was a responsible decision to cut programs and activities in the ministry of environment in order to give a \$4.7 billion handout to corporations and fund a \$120 million war room/snitch line instead of investing in emission reduction and climate change mitigation? Try to stick to answering the question for once.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we are investing significantly inside the emission management file inside this province, and we're proud of that. Again you see the hon. member continuing to attack the Canadian Energy Centre. We have the opposite approach. We are proud of the men and women who work inside the energy industry in this province and their contribution to both this province and to this country. Unlike the former government, who aligned themselves with both the federal NDP, who are antipipeline, and their good friend Justin Trudeau, who's anti the oil sands and the energy industry in general, this side of the House will stand with Albertans, will stand with our largest industry each and every day. That side will sell them out.

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

2019 Harvest

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very difficult year for Alberta farmers: poor harvest conditions, trade disputes, and business risk management programs that are not equipped to handle these issues. Team Alberta, representing the Alberta wheat and barley commissions, Alberta Pulse Growers, and Alberta canola, has called on this agriculture minister for financial assistance, but he has failed as of yet to act to support our farmers and ranchers.

Can the minister of agriculture tell me and the House what it will take for him to provide concrete actions, real action to help farmers instead of the lip service he's been giving them lately and why his government happily hands over \$4.7 billion in tax dollars to profitable corporations but closes its ears . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Numerous times in this House we would highlight the devastation, the very difficult harvest that happened this year. Again, I would reiterate to farmers – I was actually at the Alberta Milk AGM this morning and told farmers in the audience that the province of Alberta will be there to support them, whether it's through the suite of BRM programming. I've had meetings with AFSC in Lacombe, where we actually talked to the leaders there to show that we need to act as fast as we can. A lot of the unharvested acre benefit program – they can get a cash advance to crops that are out in the field right now covered in snow. We're on top of this, and we take this situation very seriously.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This crop year is very serious. Given that the latest crop reports give an example of the difficulties that our farmers and ranchers have had and given that 17.3 per cent of the canola crop, nearly 15 per cent of the potato crop, and a whopping 45 per cent of the sugar beet crop have not yet been harvested and given that this is around \$778 million in unharvested crops, what more evidence does the minister of agriculture need to stop passing the buck and provide assistance to our farmers? We heard he's started to talk about things that might be available. Four point seven billion dollars in tax dollars were handed out on a platter to corporations, but the cupboard is bare for our farmers.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. At the end of the day, farmers need to get their products to market. We actually had unanimous consent. We actually asked the opposition to have unanimous consent here in the province of Alberta to the federal government to recall Parliament early and to actually have back-to-work legislation for the pending CN strike, that's ongoing. Unfortunately, the opposition had an opportunity to actually support farmers. Instead, they chose to sit on their hands and vote against it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this country we support farmers as well as those who work in the railway transportation industry and their right to collective bargaining, and we'll leave them to do so with the counterpart in the federal government.

Given that the difficulties faced by farmers in this disappointing crop year mean that farmers will face delayed insurance and access to funds needed for next year and to provide for their families and given that rather than platitudes and talking points farmers are looking for leadership and action and that farming should be a nonpartisan issue, as nonpartisan as it comes, will the minister of agriculture tell this House how much longer he wants farmers to wait and why . . .

The Speaker: Perhaps if the hon. member didn't use such a long preamble, he would have been able to get his entire question in.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, Mr. Speaker, through you to the opposition: you had your chance. Yesterday you could have given us

unanimous consent to send a strong message to Ottawa that we needed Parliament to reconvene earlier and to actually have back-to-work legislation in this pending CN strike, which has a disastrous effect to our farmers. The backlog of rail contracts will pile up, all that cost being borne by our farmers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North is rising with a question.

Daylight Saving Time

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Service Alberta announced that the government is reopening the discussion on whether or not Albertans should keep changing their clocks twice a year or should stay on daylight savings year-round. He's encouraging Albertans to register their opinions in an online survey. Since Albertans just talked about this only two and a half years ago, to the minister: why are you doing this survey now?

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

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. The reason we're having this conversation now is because more and more regions across North America are having this conversation right now. B.C., in fact, just tabled legislation to consider stopping the practice of changing their clocks twice a year. A private member in Yukon just introduced legislation for the same thing. Legislation has been passed on this recently in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Nevada, Oregon, Tennessee, and Washington. North America is starting to move in this direction, and we think it's time now for us to have this conversation with Albertans and to hear from them.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta has been observing standard time for the past two and a half weeks and given that regular standard time is the time Albertans followed before daylight saving time was ever introduced or adopted, can the minister tell me why there is no option on this survey to stay on standard time year-round?

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

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's an important question. As I said before, more and more governments are starting to have this conversation and tabling legislation on this. Most of these jurisdictions are choosing to stay on daylight saving time, which we would call summer hours, all year round as opposed to standard time. What we need to be mindful of is that it's important to consider what our partners from other jurisdictions are doing and that we are not proposing to act in a different direction. That said, I'm very interested to hear from Albertans on this. That's why we're bringing this survey forward, and I encourage everyone to participate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the survey ends on December 10 and also given that there is no information on what the government will do with the information it collects or receives or what their next steps are and given that Albertans, including me, want to see action on this and not just more conversation, can the minister tell us what is in his next steps after the survey?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. What I would say is that this survey is just a first step in the process. We've had a lot of interest in this in the first couple of days, almost 100,000 views on our survey website so far. This clearly is something Albertans are interested in talking about. I encourage everyone to participate in the survey. I don't want to presuppose what Albertans are going to say on this, so at this time it's just important to hear from Albertans. Once the survey has concluded, we will determine our next steps.

Calgary Commercial Vacancy Rate and Nonresidential Property Taxes

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, in 2014 and 2015 Calgary's downtown vacancy rate exploded; 6.7 million square feet of downtown office space became unoccupied as businesses downsized and abandoned leases they could no longer afford. This trend never turned around as the NDP predicted. The loss of this tax revenue caused city hall to ramp up property tax, which only further burdened the businesses who are and, unfortunately, in many cases were trying to weather the storm. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is our government plan for nonresidential property tax in the coming years?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that question. Although the numbers are beginning to improve, the commercial vacancy rate in downtown Calgary, which at its highest was around 30 per cent, is one of the most disturbing legacies of the previous NDP government. As we have all seen, city officials chose to deal with this issue by relying on massive property tax increases, a decision that has threatened the viability of hundreds of Calgary businesses. I've been clear that this is not an acceptable solution going forward.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we are talking about prime office space in the heart of Calgary's downtown core going unoccupied and given that vacancy rates are still hovering around 25 per cent by most estimates and given that NDP policies only further pushed businesses further into distress, can the minister please explain what our government is doing to attract businesses back to Alberta?

Some Hon. Members: Nothing.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can understand why the members over there would like to continue to heckle, but our government is doing so much to show investors that our province is once again open for business. In my own department we took emergency action to support the shallow gas industry, which is now on the rebound. Whereas the NDP imposed the largest tax increase ever on Calgary, we imposed the largest tax reduction. We scrapped their failed carbon tax.

Mr. Milliken: Given that the city of Calgary has increased their property tax levy on businesses by 37.8 per cent since 2014 and given that over that same period the NDP provincial property tax levy on businesses rose by 20.8 per cent and given that municipalities have an important role to play in making Alberta open for business again,

can the minister explain what our government is doing to ensure that municipal taxes do not become unsustainable?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Municipal taxes have already become unsustainable for too many people like Kelly Doody, a small-business owner who saw her property tax bill go up by a whopping 427 per cent. I have had the pleasure of touring many Calgary businesses, some that have been in the same family business for three generations. My friend over there who has done nothing for these businesses but raise taxes would let this continue. I am saying that enough is enough, and I'm glad the city has taken steps towards reducing taxes. [interjections]

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

Members' Statements (continued)

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Fentanyl Use Prevention

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Drug use, addiction, and overdoses are a real and dangerous problem in our province. Our province has been plagued with abundant drug use, trafficking, and manufacturing. Last year alone the annual deaths linked or directly caused by opioids exceeded 700. That is the biggest number of overdoses since the crisis began, a nearly 6 per cent jump from the preceding year.

The biggest culprit is the synthetic painkiller fentanyl. Fentanyl is a derivative of morphine, but it is around 100 times stronger. Three milligrams of fentanyl looks like a couple of grains of sand in your hand. That is why accidental overdoses can happen in the blink of an eye. While alternative drugs come with a litany of other problems such as addiction, dependence, and loss of bodily control and function, fentanyl is the number one lethal and accounts for an astounding 81 per cent of all deaths from drug use. The death toll is around two a day in our province. Calgary has been hit particularly hard. It has the most accidental deaths related to fentanyl in all of Alberta.

Our government must put an end to this crisis. Our law enforcement should focus on targeting producers and distributors to choke off the supply that is holding Albertans hostage. Addicts should be treated at health facilities and not thrown in jail for their addiction. In order to suppress the opioid crisis, we must properly filter the real culprits that are perpetrating and benefiting from the crisis, not the Albertans that are caught in a hard place and are now being strung along in this scheme.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to table the committee's final report on Bill 206, Workers' Compensation (Enforcement of Decisions) Amendment Act, 2019, sponsored by the hon. Member for Livingstone-

Macleod. The bill was referred to the committee on November 7, 2019. The committee's final report recommends that Bill 206 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 206.

Thank you.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Introduction of Bills

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Bill 26

Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill that finally repeals and replaces Bill 6. I'm proud to introduce the Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019.

After extensive consultation, Madam Speaker, at over 25 different stops across the province – I've personally put over 8,000 kilometres on my own truck – we finally came to a place with practical, common-sense changes to Alberta's labour relations, occupational health and safety, worker insurance, and employment standards. I'm very proud to introduce this bill.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you. My constituency office has been flooded with letters regarding the Alberta teachers' retirement fund and the concern about . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Wrong spot.

Ms Sigurdson: Wrong spot? Okay. I'm sorry, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. Tablings? My apologies. There is a ton of confusion right now.

We are going to do tablings right now. Are there any members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you. As I was saying, my constituency office has been flooded with letters from teachers, retired teachers about the Alberta teachers' retirement fund and just concerns about the government moving all the assets to AIMCo. I have the requisite number of copies, and I'll table them today.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of news reports featuring quotes from pundits and columnists, that I referred to in my leader's questions earlier today, about the Premier's decision to fire the Election Commissioner in the middle of the investigation of fraud in the party. I have five copies of the column by Rick Bell where he compares the Premier to former Premier Alison Redford, five of the tweet referencing Mount Royal professor Bratt calling it a cover-up, and five copies of the CBC story where former Conservative MP Solberg says that he can't defend it and that it's bad optics.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I, too, have received lots of e-mails and concerns about Bill C-71. I have the requisite five copies of Ten Myths about Gun Control.

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

2:50

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. My office has received to date about 200 e-mails from concerned teachers around the ATRF and the impacts of Bill 21. Today I'm tabling 31 of those letters received at my office.

Thank you.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know what big fans these guys are of Greta Thunberg, so I have a really interesting article. It's entitled Here's How Climate Pollution in Provinces Greta Marched in Compares to Sweden's. Kind of interesting. Five copies.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today and would like to record the requisite number of copies of a large pile of e-mails that I've received in regard to Bill 207 from many constituents in my riding and all across Alberta who are quite alarmed by Bill 207 and would like it to effectively be killed.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 24 Appropriation Act, 2019

[Adjourned debate November 20: Mr. Ellis]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise today and speak to Bill 24, Appropriation Act, 2019. I'm going to focus most of my comments, actually, on one particular ministry and hope that my colleagues will perhaps join me and speak to the other ministries.

As you may know, I'm the critic for two areas, Community and Social Services and francophone issues, but I'm going to focus on Community and Social Services today. Just last week, I think it was, we spent about six hours in committee asking questions, getting some answers but asking a lot of questions about the budget specifically for Community and Social Services. I would like to highlight some of the issues or some of the concerns that we identified during those six hours of questioning.

It's really quite a large ministry, as I'm sure everybody in this Chamber knows, and it includes a number of different areas, programming areas, that are absolutely vital to the survival, well-being, and thriving of Albertans. Those include things like FSCD, which is funding for families that have children with disabilities; PDD – the acronym stands for persons with developmental

disabilities – which is funding that allows people with developmental disabilities to live and work and recreate in their communities; and then, of course, AISH, which is assured income for the severely handicapped.

Income support for people with barriers is not a step below AISH, but it is in terms of eligibility, so people not quite able to qualify medically or for other reasons for AISH benefits will often go on income support with barriers. There are income supports for people who are expected to return to work. There is also funding for homelessness initiatives, homeless shelters, also shelters for women fleeing violence. So you can imagine that this is an enormous ministry, I believe, tasked with incredibly vital supports for Albertans.

Moving right along, we spent about six hours asking questions, and we learned some really disturbing things, which is why, again, I will not be supporting this budget because I believe this budget, contrary to what we hear every single day – there are no cuts; it's just fear and smear; everything is just great; the \$4.7 billion we're going to give to profitable corporations will trickle down, and life will be wonderful: that's not exactly how it goes.

In the Ministry of Community and Social Services, certainly, I first want to talk about AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, an old name for it. I hope one day we get to the place where we rename it. But all of that aside, assured income for the severely handicapped allows people with severe handicaps to receive a monthly income of about \$1,680; I think it's a little bit more than that. That also includes medical benefits, and these medical benefits are vital for people living in this kind of poverty. Now, I understand that over \$1,600 a month is better than income supports, better than abject poverty with nothing, living on the street, but it still requires that people that get this live in poverty. That's the reality. That's just how it is. Medical supports are important. That covers dental care, vision care, things like that. It also helps pay for the maintenance cost of service dogs, let's say.

Now, while this government did not cut AISH benefits – you know, if I'm going to give them kudos for something, they didn't roll this back like they rolled back the minimum wage; they didn't roll this back, so I am grateful for that. Just before the election – well, actually, it was about a year ago – we actually indexed AISH. That means that, every year, AISH benefits would be indexed to inflation; they would go up. We also caught AISH up for the time that we didn't index while we were in government, so that was about – I don't know – a \$90 increase. So we did that. The government didn't cut it: good job. That is one good thing. I will give you that.

What you did do was that you removed something that the community has been asking for for decades. For absolute decades they have been asking for this. The way it goes in Alberta for people with disabilities: you know, they're busy trying to live, trying to live in poverty, too, so for them to mobilize and advocate for a raise, for an increase is really, really tough. It has been our experience that over the four decades of a Conservative government, really the only time they got an increase was when oil and gas prices were high. There looked to be a lot of revenue, there was a lot of room to move, and then sort of as an afterthought AISH was increased. So what we did, although it isn't very much every year – it's about \$30 – is that we assured severely disabled Albertans that they don't have to do that anymore. Although this isn't going to lift them out of poverty, because – let's be honest – this is like poverty wages, it will help. It will help defer some of the costs that go up every single year.

Now, thanks to this government – you know, you have removed caps, so insurance rates are going up. I have no doubt whatsoever that the cost of the carbon tax, that is no longer transparent thanks

to your legislation that you're bringing in, will be passed on to consumers. Believe it or not, people on AISH are consumers, and they will pay that increase. This government has deindexed that, saving about – what? – \$10 million. Now, let's put that in perspective. This government has a war room, a secret war room, where we really don't know what they're doing other than acting on reports of un-Albertan activities. This war room is, like, \$30 million, \$120 million over four years. Indexing AISH was, like, \$10 million. I am hugely, hugely disappointed that this government wouldn't make that commitment. Hugely, hugely disappointed.

The reason that I'm spending so much time on the indexing is because it's not just AISH. Let's say that you're an Albertan that has a disability of some kind – you have a chronic mental health issue, whatever it is – but you don't yet qualify. For whatever reasons you don't medically qualify for AISH benefits. You're on income support for people with barriers, significant barriers to employment. That means you are living on just over \$800 a month. Eight hundred dollars a month. Can you imagine? I believe that is \$845 a month. Now, sure, if you have a child, you might get a little bit extra for child care or transportation or something like that, but it's under \$900 a month.

You chose to deindex that. That is a choice you made. You chose to give \$4.7 billion to profitable corporations, and you chose to stop indexing these benefits for people with severe disabilities, people with significant barriers to employment. I don't know about you, but if you've ever known people trying to live on AISH or income support, talk to them. Go meet them. Ask them what it's like. Ask them what a \$30 increase per year means to them, and then show up here and vote on this. I guarantee you that you might change your mind. That sounds a bit funny: to guarantee that you might change your mind. I would hope that you would change your mind.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, just a reminder to speak through the chair.

3:00

Ms Renaud: Yeah. I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. I will absolutely speak through you.

The other things that I noticed in – I'm going to move a little bit and talk about PDD, which is another huge programming area in this ministry. Persons with developmental disabilities provides supports for people who are over 18 who have significant challenges, disabilities, to living, working, recreating in their communities. PDD supports allow people with disabilities to pay for staff. Madam, what that would mean is – let's say that you live with your folks, and your folks go to work. You have a job, and you need to be supported in that job. You might need a bit of assistance with personal care, whatever that might be. PDD would fund those hours, and you would hire someone to do that work. All good.

Some people use community service organizations or service providers. The service providers will hire staff for you. Sometimes you live with a roommate; they'll help co-ordinate that. They'll do the training, the oversight, all of those things. The vast majority of these organizations are nonprofit although there are some for-profit organizations. I believe there are around 150 of them providing service in Alberta. I'm not a hundred per cent sure about that number.

This year – fabulous – that program didn't get cut. One more point for this government. Actually, I applaud that because an immediate cut like that would have done damage that I can't begin to describe. So I am grateful for that.

What I'm very worried about are the out-years. If you've looked at your own budget, in the out-years AISH and PDD now do not keep pace with intake growth, the number of people that, let's say,

turn 18 and are eligible for supports or perhaps move to Alberta for work or have sustained a significant injury of some kind. The numbers go up. That's just the way it is. Just like education, that's just the way it is for disability supports. The numbers go up. Certainly, we do lose some people, whether they move out of the province, they pass away, or they no longer require supports. That's often the case for employment support, which is fantastic. But the numbers go up every single year.

In your budget, in the out-years it does not keep pace with the growth. That, to me, is very concerning. That is the same case with FSCD support, and that is support for children with disabilities. Madam Speaker, you can imagine that I was very concerned when I saw these out-years, although this current year: all good, no problem. Out-years: there's a problem.

What is also a problem is that we spent quite a bit of time reviewing PDD. I think the disability community is very used to having things reviewed for them or having things reviewed internally. What was new about the way that we did it is that we actually opened it up for everybody to participate. That was the second time that we did that. What we saw were recommendations from all over the place about all kinds of things. I think that's the unique part of this process, that nothing is not considered or talked about or looked at or deliberated.

Now, we heard while we were in estimates that the Minister of CSS, or Community and Social Services, was very clear about the way that the review would be done and that it would be done internally. I asked numerous times: are you saying that this will be done internally? Yes. Will there be any self-advocates involved in this? That would be a person with a disability that advocates for themselves. No; this would be done internally. That's worrisome when on their radar for review are things like: let's look at changing the IQ for eligibility for this program. Do I think that's a good idea? Absolutely. I think that IQ number is as ridiculous as any standardized assessment that tries to measure a human being. That being said, you have to do this properly; otherwise, you will harm people. If you try to dilute a service so much that you harm other people, you're not doing any good.

The internal review coupled with the cuts in the out-years coupled with the lack of information about where they were going is very, very worrisome. When I look at these numbers, I can breathe a little sigh of relief for right now, but I'm scared to death about the next few years. I don't see a plan. I see an internal review looking at squishing a bunch of people into a little box, and the box needs to be fixed. Those are some of my concerns there. I have grave concerns.

Also in this ministry are supports for homeless shelters and homelessness prevention, which are absolutely vital in this province. We have a problem. I actually think that if we have one homeless person, we have a problem. Although we do have our challenges, we are an incredibly wealthy, fortunate province in an incredibly wealthy and fortunate country. Every single day I'm proud to be Canadian, and I'm proud to be Albertan. I know that if we decided that this was something that we could end, we could end homelessness, but that requires investment, and this budget doesn't do that. One of the most general questions I asked the minister during estimates was: is this government committed to ending homelessness? A simple question, really, because that determines your intent. Is this UCP government committed to ending homelessness? The answer: hmm, no.

Okay. Moving on, we looked at one specific example of that in Fort McMurray. Sadly, I've only been to Fort McMurray a couple of times, so I don't know what the shelters are like in Fort McMurray. I don't know what the homelessness struggles are. I can imagine that in a northern community there are difficulties just

given the location, given the temperature, all of those things. As I understand it, there are two shelters in Fort McMurray. The Salvation Army is one. The other one, I believe, is called Marshall House. In estimates I verified this information and asked for some clarity, and I understand that the decision by this government was to close one homeless shelter, that being Marshall House.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I guess I had a number of questions for the hon. Member for St. Albert. She clearly has a breadth of knowledge around income supports for Albertans, and I was just hoping that she might be able to let myself know and Albertans as well, through you, of course, about where the best value investment is for Albertans with severe disabilities or AISH recipients and what structure we can put in place.

I find her last comments intriguing, that we do have the capacity to eliminate child poverty here in this province, but what mechanisms do we need to put in place to ensure that that's achievable? We saw a significant reduction in people living in poverty in Calgary while there was an economic downturn, which I found to be very reassuring news, that we learned about recently. Then earlier this spring we learned that, in fact, during, again, a significant economic downturn over the last four years we managed to cut child poverty in half. The burning question, I think, in the hearts of all Albertans who care about other human beings is: how do we finish the job?

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague. As I know that he knows, ending child poverty, I think, is something that is possible. I think that, just like ending homelessness, it's absolutely possible if you focus on it.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I think that just the work that we did: in a short period of time we were able to bring down the number of children and families in poverty significantly. But it's not just one thing. There is no one magic answer; it was all kinds of things. It was increasing the minimum wage. It was investing in affordable child care. It was all of those things. What we've seen in this budget, particularly in this appropriation bill, is a systematic tearing down of all of the investments we made that contributed to bringing people out of poverty. Now, keep in mind that this took decades to get us here. It will take a lot of time and investment to get us out.

3:10

But let me give you an example of why community and social service supports are so important. When you review, it's vitally important that you have people that use these supports to guide you, because we don't have all the answers in this place, believe it or not. One woman called my office. She's a single parent of a child with severe autism in, I think, the first grade. Of course, she qualified for FSCD supports so she could have respite for her child and so she could have after school care with qualified providers. The deal was that she had to pay for her staff and then submit receipts and then be reimbursed. Every time she paid out her staff, it was about \$800, okay? She worked full-time to support her child; she actually had two children. She couldn't afford to pay the \$800 and then wait a couple of weeks to be reimbursed. That's what poverty looks like: you can't even access supports that are available to you because you can't afford them.

Trying to change that a little bit so that billing was a little bit different or maybe she could get an advance of some kind: none of those things will happen without a review that is done and guided by people that use the supports. During estimates I repeatedly heard this minister say that the review is going to be done internally. I can pretty much guarantee you that that's going to be a fail as far as the people with disabilities, the people that use those supports are concerned unless you involve them in the review.

Going back to the comment about child poverty, I think sometimes people have a stereotype in our heads about what a family in poverty looks like. I'll tell you that the vast majority of people that live in poverty – actually, let me flip that. The vast majority of people on AISH and people that receive PDD supports live in poverty. I'm not just talking about how occasionally you have to go to the food bank at the end of the month, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking about poverty. I'm talking about poverty that doesn't give you choices. I'm talking about poverty that is also sometimes a barrier to employment because you can't do the things that you need to do.

On that, I'm going to end my comments for today. Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen to speak on this.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much. I won't speak a great deal of time, but I did want to get up. I listened earlier to the Finance minister move second reading of Bill 24. I took some comments down with regard to what he was saying, and I'll start with what I agree with. The capital cost allowance was something that, when I was the Finance minister, the federal government was endeavoring to get provinces to sign on to. We certainly heard that, and I remember us working towards that in the planning that we were doing as a government. Other provinces have done similar capital cost allowance policies within their fiscal plans and the way they allow relief to corporations around their capital investments. Good plan.

What I don't agree with in what I heard the Finance minister talk about is the job-creation bill. He's taking an approach to bringing that down from 12 per cent to 8 per cent over four years. We know that where Alberta was, at 12 per cent, was in the middle of the pack of all provinces and territories across this country. It wasn't the highest, and it wasn't the lowest. It was the middle of the pack. I don't agree with that. I think it's significant. We have repeatedly said – on page 144 of the fiscal plan, it's right there, Mr. Speaker – that it means that \$4.7 billion won't be coming into this province to address the many necessary programs and services that Albertans rely on.

We're starting to see the reverberation of that bad decision throughout the province in the education sector. We heard just today the critic for Education speak to the minister and say that that was a negative impact on not only the CBE in Calgary, but there was Sturgeon; there were other places. There were a significant number of layoffs happening as a result of the lack of appropriate resources coming in because of policies like the job-creation tax bill, which will avoid \$4.7 billion from coming into the treasury, and being left without the necessary funds to address the health and education and postsecondary school education needs this province has. That's not something I support, and I think it's a bad idea and one that will continue to have negative impacts around this province not only this year but in subsequent years, and we will be left with a social and economic infrastructure deficit akin to what happened in the mid-90s here. Why would we want to repeat something that everyone believes is in the wrong direction?

Mr. Speaker, I heard the Minister of Finance, certainly on this fiscal plan, over and over again talk about the MacKinnon panel. We had, when we were government, our own fiscal policy expert come in and address the needs of this province as we were going into the deepest recession and longest recession, over two years, that this province has gone into in generations. That fiscal expert was David Dodge, former Bank of Canada governor. Mr. Dodge came in and talked about the right size of our capital infrastructure plan, and he recommended an increase of 15 per cent over the previous government's budget with regard to the capital infrastructure. That put it from about 6 to about 7.5, 7.8.

We followed that recommendation, and we were able to ensure that in the depth of the recession Albertans who were working for Alberta companies and who were struggling got the necessary public investment to keep working. Schools were built, Mr. Speaker. We were assisting municipalities across this province to address the infrastructure needs they had, and they spent those monies wisely on improvements in their municipalities that would make roads safer, make facilities more environmentally efficient and on and on and on. It kept Albertans working. That was the point of it, to make sure that the companies in Alberta and Albertans continued to work. That was the capital infrastructure recommendation that David Dodge gave us, much different than the work of the MacKinnon panel, I can tell you, because at this point in time I think the economy in Alberta is about half a per cent in terms of nominal growth. That is flat, essentially.

The job-creation bill, the direction of the MacKinnon panel, is not having any measurable improvement effect in this province. That is what this fiscal plan is doing. It's not having any impact at all in this province. When we were government, the first two years were very challenging, as everybody knows. In '15 and '16 there was a retrenchment of the economy, but in '17 and '18, as the former economic development minister will tell you, the province of Alberta grew faster and stronger than any other province in this nation. It led the nation in terms of GDP growth. What we hear from the Minister of Finance is that, you know, the recovery has not been fast. Well, no kidding, Mr. Speaker. It is not happening. It's not been fast. It's not happening. Though he didn't say this – I'm kind of putting words in his mouth – he urges us just to wait and be patient. Wait and be patient, and it will happen: well, I don't buy that.

3:20

The other area that he talked a lot about is with regard to, as he called it, the unsustainable debt servicing. I think it was \$1.971 billion in the '18-19 year. That's nowhere close to accurate. It's not unsustainable in terms of being able to be serviced by the province of Alberta. Just to put it in context, when we look at the total number of assets and total number of liabilities, this province's net assets at the end of the year of 2018-19 were over \$23 billion, Mr. Speaker. When we look at the net debt to GDP in this province, we continue to enjoy the lowest net debt to GDP of any province, including the federal government. It is somewhere around 8 per cent if you look at the net debt to GDP, and with our path to balance that the previous government, that I was part of, sketched out, we would only top out at 11 to 12 per cent net debt to GDP.

Now, yeah, it's a growth in the net debt to GDP from 8 per cent to 12 per cent, but when you compare Alberta to other provinces and the federal government, we had the lowest net debt to GDP, and we'll continue to have the lowest net debt to GDP of any province. The next closest net debt to GDP higher than us would be currently in the 13, 14, 15 per cent, and they go all the way up to 33, to 40 per cent. Now – I agree – that's too high. But Alberta will never get that high. We're at 8 per cent now, going up to 12 per cent with the path to balance. Mr. Speaker, it's hyperbole for the Finance minister

to say that we had unsustainable debt in this province and we couldn't carry it. We could carry it. We're the lowest in the nation in terms of net debt to GDP, and we have the best balance sheet of any province still to this day.

Mr. Speaker, those are the things that I wanted to communicate to correct the record, because it was part of that government's narrative, I guess, that Alberta needs to get its fiscal house in order. We have the best balance sheet. We have the lowest net debt, and we will still have that when the balance occurs.

I do note that the government of the day is increasing the deficit by \$2 billion from where it was left by our government. That, obviously, is in the wrong direction, and they need to answer for increasing that deficit. It's got to go in the other direction, and we were taking it in the other direction. Now, they'll say that it's a result of the bad policies on this side. Mr. Speaker, I don't buy their financials in terms of what they think about our policies. We were given a highest grade by the C.D. Howe Institute in terms of our processes two years running, and that is a fact.

We do need to get this province going in terms of its growth, and I'm fearful that the policies put in place by the current government are going to take us in the opposite direction. Certainly, access for our oil products in this province is critical, and we were endeavouring to do that on a short-term basis with crude by rail, and that has been struck out. That's unfortunate. Mr. Speaker, the pipeline situation was markedly improved by the previous government. Of course, the federal government has purchased the pipeline and has put money towards the expansion of the pipeline. All of those things will in time – in time – benefit this province, in the 2023-2024 time frame.

Mr. Speaker, I look at the fiscal plan, and I see some numbers that say balance in the 2022-2023 year. That's dependent, of course, on a significant uptick in bitumen royalties. I really wonder if pipelines are going to be happening by 2022-2023 when we see the significant challenges that are out there. Rest assured that the people on this side will continue to push for pipelines so that our balance sheet can get healthier on the revenue side.

You know, I just think, as my colleague who spoke just before me was saying, that it's really problematic that the most vulnerable in this province are paying, essentially, for policies put in by the government on the other side. Mr. Speaker, that is a moral problem that I think needs to be addressed by the other side.

I listened to the other side. They say, "No, we're not reducing the benefits to those most vulnerable," but when you take away indexing, then going forward, you are reducing it, Mr. Speaker. They're not changing the original amount, but they're saying: it's only going to stay there. As we know, with CPI and inflation the purchasing power of that original grant amount will get smaller and smaller going forward. Now, that's the difficulty that the Leader of the Opposition raised when we listened to this on the other side. It's not accurate, but they hide behind the fact that they're not changing the grant amount. But they are taking away indexing, which means that it'll get smaller going forward. They never say that, so it's wrong to stand up here on the other side and to say, you know: we're addressing the needs. They're not.

Those are my comments about the appropriation bill, Mr. Speaker. There is a lot of good work, of course, done by the bureaucracy to put this all together. I noticed there are missing areas that were in our budget, the last budget; namely, the net debt to GDP graph is gone because they don't . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen to speak.

Mr. McIver: Under 29(2)(a)?

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), yes, because it is available.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened with some amusement to the remarks that were just offered to the House. I'm quite interested. It's actually refreshing to see the former Finance minister now take concern about the amount of debt that Alberta is in. Oh, how Albertans wish that the former Finance minister showed any bit of care and concern about that issue when he had the power to do something about it, when he actually not only didn't pay attention to it but actually floored it, if you will, and put the debt clock to the mat. Now he's complaining because it's not slowing down.

Well, Mr. Speaker, when you're going as fast as you can running Alberta into debt, including borrowing money for this week's groceries, even if you slam on the brakes, it takes a little bit of time to stop that forward momentum. We are trying to hit the brakes in such a way that we can still look after Albertans and do it in a gentle way, 2.8 per cent over four years, and get the incredibly irresponsible and reckless spending momentum of the previous government under control while looking after Albertans' best interests.

It was also interesting to hear just now the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo talk about how AISH was being cut. I would ask him to refer to the remarks from his colleague from St. Albert, who about 20 minutes before said that those benefits were not being cut.

Member Ceci: Deindexed.

Mr. McIver: I see him now trying to correct himself, so I'll help him out.

The Acting Speaker: I would just remind hon. members to speak through the chair. There will be ample opportunity for debate, and if the individual who perhaps really wants to speak has already spoken at this stage of debate, there will still be 29(2)(a) available as well in the future.

The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought I listened patiently while the previous member spoke. Though I didn't necessarily agree with everything, I did listen, I thought, quite quietly to all of the comments regardless of how irresponsible I thought many of them were.

Mr. Speaker, I'll continue. As I say, the hon. Member for St. Albert – and it was actually quite refreshing to hear her say that because I'm pretty sure that that hon. member said something quite different in previous days. I thank her for this, by the way. She did say: I thank the government for not reducing the actual benefits that AISH recipients are getting now. And she did go on to say that she would prefer it if the indexation would be there in the future. But my point, Mr. Speaker, is that's a departure from what the last speaker said. I would refer the last speaker to his . . .

3:30

Mr. Eggen: You can't make stuff up.

Mr. McIver: He still can't stop, Mr. Speaker.

But the point is . . .

The Acting Speaker: Order.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will try to hear my own thoughts while I carry on. I'm trying.

Here's the thing. The hon. member is talking about how we ought to reduce the level and the rate at which we're going into debt. I agree with that. I will reiterate the fact that the former Finance

minister should have shown a little bit more care and responsibility about that during the four years that that hon. member had the maximum amount of control over that issue, yet was completely reckless and irresponsible with it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we are working hard to undo the damage that was done in those four years. That's why this budget is before us right now, including this Appropriation Act, 2019. We need to deliver the services. We need to do it responsibly and carefully and with a great deal of forethought, restructure the way government happens so that we can continue to deliver the services that Albertans most need and want in a responsible way while turning around the economic fortunes.

Again, it's interesting to see members on the other side today talking at different times about how debt was a bad thing for students. Well, debt is a bad thing for Albertans, Mr. Speaker, when it's irresponsibly put in place. Debt is a tool that can be used to build infrastructure if it's done in a responsible way, but when it's left to run out of control, with no demonstrable efforts in place to pay the debt back, it's completely irresponsible. That's what the previous government did, and we will not.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise. Actually, the timing couldn't be more perfect to talk about or speak or respond to comments that the Minister of Transportation just made, which – I don't know, I mean, I'm sure it's not unbeknownst to him. He's been talking about debt and how it's bad and how much, you know, our government was running up. I will notify the minister, who I'm sure is completely aware, of the fact that the very budget that we are debating, this bill, is putting Alberta \$2 billion further into debt than the proposed budget by our government. The deficit in this budget is over \$8 billion. Under our government it was \$6 billion. That's black and white. Members can get up and, you know, try to change history, but the numbers are right in front of us in this appropriation bill.

Interestingly, as well, this government likes to talk about the campaign promises they keep. They don't like to talk about the campaign promises that they break. There's a list of them, Mr. Speaker, but one of them is the fact that during the election they campaigned on a path to balance a year earlier than what we proposed. Now they are on the same path: '23-24 is when they will balance. The other thing that's interesting is, you know, they try to sound like they are these slayers of deficits and everything else, when under our government, at the rate that we had proposed, yes, Alberta's debt would have been about \$95 billion. Under the UCP, \$93 billion. It's definitely misinformation, but it's not factual that they're going to pay it down much faster than we would.

The difference, Mr. Speaker, lies in the fact that they're giving away \$4.7 billion. That's \$4.7 billion that could've been used to fund classrooms, to fund teachers. Just today we learned that Calgary, the CBE, is firing 350 teachers because of their budgets. What floors me is that instead of this government owning up to their bad-news budget, they turn around and deflect and blame others. I mean, I don't know if that's now their thing. It's kind of been that way for the last – I don't know – hundred years, at least the last few weeks. I can tell you that that's been the approach that they've taken, to blame the school board for mismanaging their funds as opposed to – you know, you get the Justice minister, the Minister of Municipal Affairs blaming cities for not using their money appropriately when this government is downloading services to the municipalities and then forcing them to have to look at the only tool

they have, which is property taxes, which is a terrible tool, which needs to be retooled.

In fact, we did that. At least, starting with Edmonton and Calgary, we had city charters in place, Mr. Speaker, that would give them the ability to participate in revenue sharing. The great thing about that – and I give a shout-out to the mayors of both cities, who said: "We want a share of the revenues, but we also understand that you can't have it both ways. So we will also be with the province in years where our revenues are down, when their funds will go down, so that, you know, they're in the same situation that the province is. That's fair, and they were willing to do that.

I mean, again, municipalities deliver, I believe, somewhere around 90 per cent of the services that individuals rely on. [interjection] Well, I know that municipalities get less than 10 cents per tax dollar to deliver a bulk of the services.

Some of the issues that I have with this budget, Mr. Speaker – you know, there are a number of things. This government didn't campaign on increasing personal income taxes. Again, for a government that supposedly is so antitaxes, I don't know how these folks look themselves in the mirror to say: I'm opposed to taxes. Okay. What about the personal income tax increase? "Well, that doesn't count." Oh, okay. I see. That's how you justify a raise of personal income taxes. I don't recall that during the election, the UCP campaigning on raising personal income taxes.

You know what? You can wordsmith and massage the language and words as much as you want, but removing a tax bracket is tax creep, and it's an increase in taxes. Their very leader – their very leader – used these exact same arguments in the federal House of Commons. Apparently, there are two different sets of rules: one you play by when you're in Alberta, and one you play by when you're in Ottawa. I think it's ridiculous. If you want to increase personal income taxes, well, then you should have run on it. You can't have it both ways.

This budget has a number of issues, Mr. Speaker. I mean, we see cuts to education. We see nurse layoffs. Again, there was just a protest today of nurses. You know, folks over there like to distract and try to talk about: oh, we're opposed to something else. No. We're in favour of funding front-line health services. This government promised that the front line wouldn't be affected. We knew that that wasn't the case, and now we're seeing the results of this very budget coming forward.

We see that AISH has been deindexed. Okay. Again, we can play the wordsmith game. It's a cut, Mr. Speaker. Find me a year since we've had currency where inflation was zero. Find me a year in the history of the world, of any country that has had currency where inflation has been zero. I see that one of the members may be looking to take on that challenge. Inflation is real.

I mean, the other thing that's interesting about inflation is that, you know, your cost of food and energy are not part of the actual inflation formula, which seems kind of counterintuitive considering those are the two things that drive costs, for sure.

But the point, Mr. Speaker, is that by deindexing AISH from inflation, it is a cut. Maybe it's not a cut this year, in 2019, but it'll be a cut next year. It'll be a cut the year after and a cut the year after. I mean, it's the same as freezing funding to schools. Fifteen thousand new students entered the school system this year. There'll be 15,000 next year, the year after, and the year after. Not increasing funding to be indexed with inflationary costs or, in this case, the growth of schools, is a cut. There are no two ways about it.

I think that there are other issues that I have with this budget. We're seeing an attack on teachers. Again, you know, later on we'll be debating Bill 22, which places the government's hands all over teacher pensions. I haven't met a single teacher that asked for it.

3:40

We see cuts in this budget to Alberta Innovates. In fact, we just learned yesterday that they're firing 125 of their staff. Mr. Speaker, this is my plea to all of the rural MLAs in this room. Alberta Innovates has people on the ground throughout this province who help support small businesses to prototype, get their products to market. You know, the government likes to talk about cutting red tape. Well, you know what you did? You just layered on red tape by cutting all of these positions that would actually help businesses get their ideas off the ground. Alberta Innovates has an incredible ROI. For every dollar that they invest, there's a \$28 follow-on investment. For those that are unfamiliar with that term, it means that for every dollar that Alberta Innovates invests in a company, the private sector is investing an additional \$28. That's huge.

This is how we grow our own companies here in Alberta. The next Google, the next Facebook, the next Amazon can be here, but when you stifle these supports and you choke them out and you have this naive mindset that a single corporate tax cut is the silver bullet, you either have to get out of your offices and talk to small businesses or something because the corporate tax cut does not help these very businesses. It doesn't because they don't pay taxes. They don't have retained earnings. I mean, will it help other companies? Yes. Companies have said that. Now, unfortunately, it's helped companies like Husky say: thank you very much; we're going to take our couple hundred million that you just saved us, and we're going to go spend it in Saskatchewan. You know, if that's not a slap in the face, I don't know what is, Mr. Speaker.

But, you know, in addition to cuts to Alberta Innovates, there are also cuts to artificial intelligence. I mean, the government says that they're in support of it. Where? Show me. Show me the line items of where you're supporting it, because I believe that AMII is actually getting a cut, which is ranked third in the world, Mr. Speaker. They help companies to develop technologies that use artificial intelligence to support oil and gas. So even if you folks think that there is no other sector in Alberta other than oil and gas – and, yes, oil and gas is important, but as Albertans, our economy, there are many more sectors – artificial intelligence and technology support oil and gas. By making cuts to AMII and Alberta Innovates, you are effectively cutting and hurting the oil and gas sector. Think what you want. That is the reality. These companies develop technologies that ensure Alberta is on the cutting edge. Where did SAGD technology come from? Alberta. Fracking? Alberta. These are technologies that were developed here because of investments.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you're well aware of this, but the oil and gas sector in Alberta never would have gotten off the ground back in the '60s and '50s if it wasn't for help from the provincial government, so this idea of, "No, any government support is just wrong," well, either you don't know history, you're naive, or you have your facts mixed up, because governments have supported the oil and gas sector in order to kickstart that industry. Companies were going broke trying to drill, unsuccessfully. They weren't finding anything in the ground, but they were going broke because of it, so the government stepped in. There is a role for government.

This government talks about the four or five different tax credits that our government introduced as boutique and unnecessary, yet in the next breath introduces a film tax credit. You just refuted your own argument when you said that they're not necessary, because the film tax credit is a boutique. Mr. Speaker, I'll be the first to say that I'm in favour of the film tax credit, just as I'm in favour of the investor tax credit, the digital media tax credit, the capital investment tax credit, SRED. These are all critical to helping small companies grow, and the reason it should be government is because government can derisk so that the private sector will then invest in

these companies. That's the role and the power of the provincial government.

You know, folks over there talk about how bad debt is. Now, we know that you can't be in debt forever, but I will ask any member in this House to tell me if they know anyone who paid for their house without taking a mortgage, who just went to the bank with \$500,000 from their savings and said: buying a house. Not all debt is bad debt, Mr. Speaker, and the rates that the government can borrow at are better than anyone else's. There is a place and a role for government. I'm not arguing that government should take on debt in perpetuity, not at all.

Again, what's interesting is that the folks over there don't like to look at their own leader and the deficit budgets he put in place when he served in Ottawa. Mr. Speaker, one year his deficit budget under Stephen Harper was over \$100 billion dollars. One year. To talk about how you're the champion – and I hear somebody say: well, that's one year. Debt is debt. You can't argue: oh, it's bad if the NDP does it in Alberta, but it's okay if the former minister of immigration does it in Canada. I'd also remind the members that your own budget is an \$8 billion deficit budget right now, that you're tabling. Ours was \$6 billion; yours is \$2 billion higher. Like, you keep arguing in circles.

Other areas that I have concerns with in this budget: cuts to programs, again, that were working. The community and regional economic support program was helping local communities diversify their economies. They came up with the ideas, not the bureaucrats, not the people in this room. It was designed and developed by local communities, business organizations who said, "Hey, province, we need a little bit of financial help," so we said, "We'll go in fifty-fifty." The dollars have supported incredible projects in every single riding of every member in this room, and it's shameful, Mr. Speaker, that that program is cut. It was pennies on the dollar.

It was a very small sum of money that had a huge impact, similar to entities like Alberta Innovates. Some of their most successful programs are \$10,000 vouchers, but the \$10,000: you talk to the small businesses – and I encourage members in this room, of this House to go speak to those businesses – and they will tell you that that was the difference between them going bankrupt or going under and them being successful. A small sum of money but a critical support system and critical support that the government could play. "Unfortunate" is not the right word, Mr. Speaker.

Another program that's been cut is the Alberta export expansion program. That program helps companies access new markets.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Member Ceci: Could the member – I was listening to the member talk about: basically, you're not going to support the budget. What would make this a budget you could support? I think everybody would be interested in that.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen to respond.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question that was warm and fuzzy. You know, to answer the member or to respond to the member, I mean, it's tough. Obviously, we recognize that there is a way to get the deficit to zero without having to make massive cuts to our education and health care systems. Now, I know that the members opposite will say: we're not. But you are, though. It's black and white. It's in front of you. Calgary board of education would not be laying off

300 teachers if they didn't have a cut. They're not just going to do that for giggles. There is a way to do it.

I think that the corporate tax cut going from 12 per cent to 8 per cent: if you look at other jurisdictions that have tried it – and there are many U.S. states that have – it actually backfired, and it didn't work. What it did was that it gutted government revenue so that they had to cut back or cut out the services they were providing.

Yet the corporate tax cut is not creating the jobs that it was supposed to. What was, Mr. Speaker, are some of the programs that were introduced. The tax credits were creating jobs. We were attracting and retaining companies here in Alberta. We've heard from a number of digital media companies who have said: we were going to relocate to Alberta; you've now told us that you're not open for business and we're not welcome here, so we're going to stay in other provinces. Here's the funny thing. The Alberta interactive digital media tax credit was in the middle of the pack. In fact, in Quebec theirs is 37.5 per cent. Ours was 25 per cent, and I can tell you that the province of British Columbia has one as well.

3:50

When companies are looking for a level playing field – we had that here, Mr. Speaker, so for me what's so disappointing is that the other side, the government, has politicized these tax credits. It appears that the Premier and his government are throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Because the credits came in under our government, they are somehow bad. You know what? Talk to the private sector. They don't care who brings them in. They've been advocating that a government bring them in; we happened to. They're good ideas. The return on investment is there. The investor tax credit has a 3 to 1 return on investment. Don't take my word for it. Talk to the companies that are saying: you've now disadvantaged Alberta. Again, I get that the talking points are: the corporate tax cut. It doesn't help these companies. For me to support the budget, I would have looked for, again, better tools to help get the economy on track.

I've yet to see how this government has furthered the Trans Mountain pipeline. It was under the former government that we forced the federal government to purchase the Trans Mountain pipeline so that it wouldn't fail and regulators wouldn't have to start from scratch. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that under, you know, the leader of the government when he was in Ottawa federally, because of failures to adequately consult, projects like Gateway were torpedoed and were shot down. I mean, the Premier, when he was in Ottawa, did not get any pipelines to tidewater, so we are in a position where now we are behind the eight ball and it is a challenge to get our products to tidewater. It's frustrating that previous governments didn't work hard enough to get them done.

I mean, we've seen construction resume on the Trans Mountain; that's great. We see line 3 has resumed; that's fantastic. This government had nothing to do with it. Did we? No, we didn't. I'll call a spade a spade. But it's good news that that project has started.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that in 2016 4 in 10 Canadians supported the Trans Mountain pipeline, and because of the work that our government did, we got that number to 7 in 10 Canadians. We raised the level of understanding and consciousness on the need for pipelines. What I don't see moving the needle is jumping up and down and screaming, picking fights with every province and telling them that they're all wrong.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen to speak on this point.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest to speak to the Appropriation Act, 2019, here, the budget for this new, UCP government. I certainly appreciate the scope by which any budget is constructed. I know from building five, at least, that it's a formidable task, and you can certainly see a lot of hard work by our public service here to deliver this 2019 budget for the province of Alberta.

The areas that I want to focus on here this afternoon are the ones which I am responsible for as the critic for the Official Opposition here in the Legislature, which is Advanced Education, and then I would also like to make some comments on the K to 12 education budget as well because, of course, I have a vested interest in that as an Albertan and as a former Minister of Education as well.

First off, then, Mr. Speaker, in regard to the Advanced Education budget I know that people were bracing for a reduction in grants and in capital and changes to tuition and so forth, but both the scale and the scope of the cuts directed at postsecondary education here in the province of Alberta, I think, came as a bit of a shock to those hundreds of thousands of people that are involved in advanced education and to the general public as well. I think we've seen a history of Conservative governments in this province making cuts to Advanced Education when they're delivering budgets like these.

But the scope and the scale of this particular attack on Advanced Education, I think, was both an incorrect decision and, I believe, was quite mean-spirited and misdirected as well because when we start to look at the larger things we need to do here in Alberta to help diversify our economy, to help to train a 21st-century workforce, to look for new technologies that we can own or be uniquely showing some leadership on in regard to the economy, all of these ambitions and goals reside in advanced education institutions. That's where you have research and development that gives us things such as nanotechnology and artificial intelligence and, you know, advances in biomedical technology – right? – with the work that's done here at the University of Alberta around kidneys and so forth and diabetes.

I mean, there's an infinite list of value-added products if you want to look at them that way. They're things that help humankind to advance and to create a better world for everyone, but you can make money off them, too. You can make lots of money off these things, and the research and development element of advanced education, you know, just suffered a significant body blow with the reductions in the grants to the universities, especially the large universities in both Edmonton and in Calgary. I mean, that's a mistake, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly.

We know that postsecondary institutions are economic generators unto themselves anyway, right? They help to mitigate the negative effects of economic downturns in other areas. We don't have to look any further than places like Lakeland College and its positive effect on the town of Vermilion, Alberta, allowing stable jobs and sort of a place to, you know, grow that town. You have colleges like Keyano in Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie. Each one of these – Lethbridge is a very good example of how postsecondary institutions literally help to stabilize the economy and rough off the edges of economic booms and busts, because these are stable jobs that are providing an essential service that makes investments into communities. So making cuts: it really just doubles down on the negative effects of an economic downturn to direct cuts to our postsecondary institutions.

Let's not forget that, of course, postsecondary institutions include the trades, right? I know that this government has put forward an interest in investing in the trades, which I think is an honourable and very positive idea. I certainly would support that in all ways. We know that we will have a generational turnover of trades professionals here in this province over the next number of years,

and we need to make sure that we are directing both money and support to people that are interested in acquiring a trade, both young people coming from our K to 12 education system but also adults, young adults or even older people, to make choices in changes to careers. All of those are honourable and reasonable goals.

We know that we have a strong industrial base that requires quite a large population of trained professionals to get the job done, but you don't do that, Mr. Speaker, by cutting those very training programs and reducing the spaces and the opportunities for people to acquire those trades. Where do you get that? You get that through apprenticeship programs. You get that through dual-credit programs. You get those through our polytechnic schools and our trades colleges like NAIT and SAIT. You don't cut those same places and expect to get any result besides a negative result coming from those places.

As well, we know very well – the facts are irrefutable – that we have a very large contingent of young people moving through the K to 12 education system now that are perhaps in elementary or junior high school, but what's going to happen to those young people when they finish grade 12? They will need postsecondary positions to continue on with their training, be it a trade or university degree, any kind of professional training.

4:00

So, Mr. Speaker, we need to build capacity in our postsecondary institutions to meet those future needs, not reduce those same places and make them more expensive. I mean, that's just the worst combination possible. We know that there are tens of thousands more spaces that we need to start building immediately, both the capital infrastructure that's associated with that and the professionals and the professors and the support staff that would support tens of thousands of new positions. I've been told by university presidents around the province that we need to start building the equivalent in capacity of another University of Lethbridge here in this province immediately, to meet the needs of the growing demographic of young people that are coming down the pipe and will require postsecondary education.

You know, when I look at a budget like this, where it's providing cuts to advanced education and not making those investments, I see a very short-sighted exercise that has been chosen to reduce the balance sheet but to reduce the balance sheet at the expense of the essential services in advanced education that we require now and in the immediate future as well.

The Advanced Education budget here as presented also has basically eliminated capital maintenance and infrastructure for advanced education. Again, to my previous argument that we actually need more capacity and space, that's a wrong-headed view. In regard to maintenance and deferred maintenance, it's even just as bad or even worse, right? We know very well that if you fail to make the investment in maintenance in aging facilities, then you exacerbate the problem, where you literally lose those structures. There are places at the universities of Alberta, Calgary, Lethbridge, and so forth where you literally will not be able to function without following a proper maintenance schedule.

Again, this is a way to move some dollars off a ledger for the optics of trying to reduce spending, but then you end up with a deficit, a material deficit, that someone is going to have to build and do in the future. I was faced with that very thing in K to 12 education, where we literally had to build almost 200 new schools over the last number of years because previous governments chose to not build the schools that we knew we needed for young people and families here in the province of Alberta. You know, maybe people can come up with those big plastic cheques and show paid in full and all that kind of stuff. Absolute nonsense, right? If you

have, let's say, an infrastructure deficit, someone is going to have to build those things sometime, and good for a responsible government to make the choice to do so.

Again, I have my concerns around the advanced education element of this appropriation budget. We know that decisions that are made to reduce the tax credit for students paying tuition and so forth are making postsecondary education more expensive. I know that this is being sold as not a consequential increase in expense, but it is if you're a student, right? I mean, every dollar counts, and one of the obstructions to even getting people to consider going to university or to trades college or so forth is the expense. I know that the hon. minister opposite likes to argue that that's not the case, but it's blatantly and obviously and commonsensically true that if something is too expensive, people are not going to do it. If they don't see a material advantage or perception of advantage, then you are not going to have people choosing to engage, quite frankly.

It's a responsibility of a modern state to have affordable postsecondary education available to all people, not just to people that have the money to do it, not the people that come from, let's say, a lineage of families that already went to university and their parents before and their grandparents before that, but for everybody to have an opportunity and to equalize that opportunity at every juncture possible. I certainly don't profess to be a conservative by any means, but it's on the very conservative line of thought to look at your population at least as a potential economic unit that you want to maximize.

For budgets like this, heading in the wrong direction with advanced education, making it more expensive, more inaccessible for individuals, you're literally cutting off your economic potential for people based on their ability to pay for training, right? You get the smart kid, you know, that just can't quite afford to go, can't get that trades ticket, and you're underperforming that person as an economic entity, potentially for the rest of their lives. These are all things that I think we know in here as conventional wisdom, but this appropriation budget sort of flies in the face of conventional wisdom, common sense, I would say, particularly in advanced education specifically and in regard to the responsibilities of a good government generally.

Another area that I find considerably of concern is around K to 12 education, where this government swears up and down that they're not making a cut, that every student is funded, and so forth, and so on, right? Well, I happen to know the budget that they were using up until today, and what they did was simply move money around. The key element to a successful K to 12 education budget in the province of Alberta is to make sure you're funding for enrolment. More kids are showing up at the schools every year, and you want to make sure that they're getting a high-quality education, meet their educational needs at every step along the way, have a rigorous curriculum and highly trained teachers and good facilities in which to do those things, right? This K to 12 budget: lo and behold, the secret missing ingredient here is that they simply took money from one place and put it into another, right? They liquidated the class size improvement fund, and they took the classroom improvement fund as well. You move the money around. It's like the hokey-pokey: you take two steps forward and one step back.

An Hon. Member: Is that how you do the hokey-pokey?

Mr. Eggen: That's how you do the hokey-pokey. You know, that's why I learned how to play in a band, because I could never dance, right? In the hokey-pokey you would take one step forward and two steps back, and that's what this K to 12 education budget is. We know it because we have school boards that are now having to lay off teachers. I was shocked to see that the Calgary board of

education is looking at 300 positions right now being gone, probably more as they start to add up the true effects of the budget. I just find that very disturbing.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody be looking to make questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there any other hon. members looking to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's Calgary-McCall . . .

The Acting Speaker: McCall.

Mr. Sabir: . . . a very vibrant and diverse constituency. It's home to people from many different cultures and backgrounds and also home to many newcomers. In general, I think, the income of the people in my constituency is relatively lower as compared to the rest of Calgary. I think this budget will impact them in significant ways, and I have had the opportunity to talk to many of my constituents about this budget, and they have shared many concerns in this regard.

I think I will begin by saying that this budget is cutting everything to the bone. At the same time, they came up with a policy of handing out the \$4.7 billion gift to corporations, and they want all Albertans to believe that somehow that policy will fix every issue this province has ever faced or will face in the future. Certainly, we disagree with that. Certainly, economists disagree with that. Trickle-down economics doesn't work. Even this year a Nobel laureate for economics said that these kind of tax breaks do not create jobs; they do not spur investments. So it's a completely failed policy.

4:10

If we look at the different areas of the budget, like, it's cutting from every single ministry, every single service that people in my constituency rely on, people in Alberta rely on. It's cutting grants to postsecondary students, postsecondary institutions, as my colleague mentioned earlier. It's raising interest rates on student loans. It is hiking tuition fees for students, and there are many, many young Albertans in my riding who do go to the University of Calgary, who do go to these postsecondary institutions. And because of this budget, they will be paying more.

It's also cutting supports for children in care, cutting from the child care pilots that we started, essentially making it difficult for those children to get ahead, making it difficult for women to participate in the workforce.

It's deindexing AISH and income support. Earlier the Minister of Transportation said that they're not cutting AISH. In fact, AISH was due to increase on January 1, 2020, and yes, you are cutting it. You are cutting it by \$30 per month. It's almost \$380 per year, so you are cutting \$380 from AISH every year until you start indexing it again, for which you haven't given any date. Yes, you are taking away from Albertans with disabilities. You are deindexing income support programs. You are taking money away from those who are most vulnerable.

You are deindexing seniors' programs. You are taking money away from the seniors. You are taking them off the drug program.

CFEP, CIP grants, that are from culture, tourism: you are cutting 35 per cent from CFEP grants; you are reducing CIP grants that availed my constituents, many newcomer organizations quite frequently. So they will have less support because of this budget.

Also, it's ending all the tax credits that were helping us attract investment, that were helping us diversify our economy. As a result, people will have less opportunities to invest. People will have less opportunities to get jobs.

They are cutting from municipal grants. The Calgary police chief has been saying for a while now that they are cutting \$13 million from Calgary police grants. We in the northeast have seen a spike in crimes, and we were at this point looking for more supports, not cuts to the police, cuts to law enforcement. They won't be able to do their job effectively if they don't have the resources they need. This budget is cutting grants from the Calgary police and police and law enforcement in general from all across the province.

It's also cutting from education. Today we heard that there are 300 teachers who are let go, laid off from the Calgary board of education alone. I think that will have a real impact on our youths' education. That will have a real impact on the families in my constituency and across this province.

Then they are raising insurance rates for everyone. We have kept it at 5 per cent. Now that cap has been removed, and Albertans, everyone, will be paying more in their insurance costs.

Similarly, if I come to the Energy ministry, which I'm the critic of, all they are telling us is that the war room and their inquiry will fix everything this industry is facing. We asked in question period, we asked in estimates how the war room will work. There is no business plan so far. There is no strategic direction whatsoever. Same thing with the inquiry: all we know so far about the inquiry is that a \$900,000 sole-source contract was given to a firm where the inquiry commissioner's son is a partner, and the Justice minister formerly used to work at that firm.

They are removing the cap of 6.8 cents that we brought in on the electricity bills, and yesterday in estimates the minister stated that that program will cost somewhere around \$380 million in four years. That means that Albertans were saving \$380 million, were better off by having that cap. Now that cap has been removed, so Albertans will end up paying \$380 million more in their electricity bills. That's a lot of dollars every month on their electricity bills. I'm sure those people who pay these bills do live in your constituencies as well. It will impact them as well.

In short, this is a budget that will adversely impact families in my riding and across this province. I think that when times are tough, we do not turn our back on our youth, our children in our education system, or those who are coming out of foster care. We do not ignore those who are sick and needing support. We do not ignore newcomers who are needing supports and services. This budget is doing exactly that. In good conscience I cannot support this budget. This budget will hurt Albertans all across this province.

This government should not impose this kind of budget to further their ideological agenda of austerity and trickle-down economics, which has failed all across the globe every time that it was experimented. I think that at this point this government needs to take these concerns seriously. Albertans are crying out loud against these cuts. There are protests and rallies on the Legislature steps every single day. They need to take their earplugs out and listen to these Albertans' concerns and reverse these cuts because they will hurt Albertans all across this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't be supporting this at all.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available to anyone should they choose to make any questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen to speak.

Mr. Dach: Thank you. It's a pleasure to rise today to give brief remarks and add to the debate surrounding Bill 24, the appropriations measure, the act that the government relies upon to bring forward its budget. I'll tell you what, Mr. Speaker, the hounds are unleashed on this one. It doesn't matter what ministry we spoke

to in estimates; the axes were out. The government claims that the budget measures they've taken to reduce public services and make cuts were way, way less than what you might have seen in the Klein years, but I'll tell you what, the pain they've been causing certainly reminds me of the Klein years.

The amount of correspondence that I've gotten in my constituency regarding things like the deindexing of AISH is heart-rending to listen to. When you look at what's actually happening to individuals who are on AISH, they will be receiving about \$30 less per month as a result of the loss of deindexing plus the other measures that the Member for Calgary-McCall just referred to. It's going to end up being even more than that. Those are our most vulnerable people, who are living close to the edge of not making it. Indeed, none of us, I think, in this House would have any desire to live on that type of an income. It's difficult to imagine how in cabinet the decision to come to this deindexing measure was made. I don't know what they were thinking. It is not a very appetizing thought for anybody who is on AISH right now, having just had their income indexed by our government previously, to face the fact that they're going to be going backwards again. They're wondering what the heck they ever did to deserve this.

Once again, with the Education ministry we've constantly been told by members opposite in the government, particularly the Education minister, that the cuts wouldn't result in layoffs. Well, the Minister of Education today rose in the House to say how surprised she was, how upset she was that indeed 300 Calgary teachers were getting the axe. Her response, her reaction was to blame the Calgary board of education, suggesting that it's somehow a governance issue and it's the board's fault. We begged the government to reconsider. We prognosed exactly what was going to happen, and we hoped that we would not have to come forward and say, "We told you so," but indeed that's what's happening. It was very predictable. This Calgary board of education round of cuts is only the first big one we're going to hear about. There are going to be lots more coming. The blame lies squarely at the foot of this Minister of Education and this government, and it goes on through to every ministry that one can think of.

4:20

But I'll focus, Mr. Speaker, on Bill 24 and the ministries which touch on my critic role in particular, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. You may recall that over the past few weeks I've spoken quite passionately about the Alberta Beekeepers Commission and their efforts to lobby the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry for help right now, and what they got was sweet nothing for beekeepers who were at risk of going under. The claim, of course, is that the cupboard is bare, yet we had a \$4.7 billion gift going to major corporations that was on the wing real quick, and I don't even know if they were demanding it.

Believe me, the ideology that is just across the way is determined to fail again by proving that corporate tax cuts don't get reinvested into the economy. They go to pay down debt. They go to buy back shares. Time and again we've seen, even with this \$4.7 billion gift to corporations, that corporate tax cuts are out the window and forever lost for Albertans to use and invest in their livelihood and welfare and their social services and perhaps advancing their economic interest in things that we really need over time, especially right now, in this province.

For example, we had another really very bad crop year, and it's still ongoing. This agriculture minister – it's the third year in four that we've had a bad crop year – is basically suggesting to the agricultural community, to farmers, to producers to rely upon existing insurance mechanisms, yet they've been telling him time and time again that those instruments aren't sufficient. They're not

satisfactory. They don't meet their needs. Yet he's unwilling to come forward with urgent assistance, once again saying: "The cupboard is bare. We can't afford it. Sorry. There's nothing there for you." There was \$4.7 billion for large corporations, and \$4.7 billion is, like, 10 per cent of our budget out the window, out the door, forever gone, invested into something that will have no return whatsoever, and hardly a thank you from the corporations who received it.

Another instance of the cupboard being bare, Mr. Speaker, in Agriculture and Forestry is the rapattack firefighters, 63 absolutely dedicated, highly trained men and women who rappel down from helicopters into forest fires that are relatively fresh and new in an attempt to stop them before they get larger than a hectare if at all possible. They cost about \$1.4 million on an annual basis, these 63 firefighters. That investment has a return on it that is exponentially returned because of what they do in terms of minimizing forest fire damage, keeping many, many fires – I'm talking hundreds of fires – each year from growing bigger than a hectare and keeping them from growing beyond 24 hours in duration. They contain fires to less than a hectare. They also get down and they cut helicopter pads for other helicopters to land so that larger crews and more equipment can come in, and they spot equipment along larger fires as well so that they can have multiple attack centres on these fires.

The alternative that the minister is suggesting as a new technology, a basket with a long line to bring in crews, is something that these helitack crews will tell you is absolutely more dangerous and not an adequate response. They will end up having fires get larger as a result, and the cost that they will cause in actually being a less effective method is way, way more than \$1.4 million, than these 63 well-trained, highly fit, very energetic, and essential spearhead of our forest firefighting attack team will ever have cost. It's a very, very bad move that the minister, so far, seems to be making.

I've managed to arrange a short meeting with the minister on this issue, and I believe, my understanding is that they were going to meet again. I hope – it's my sincere hope – that the minister will be convinced by his discussions, if indeed they take place, directly with these rapattack firefighters to change his mind, to realize that his \$1.4 million budget item is something that should be maintained and probably even added to as a means of making sure that in a time when our forest fire risk is getting higher and higher, we do everything possible to minimize the size of fires as they are ignited.

Those three items within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry reflect a pattern of telling Albertans that in many ministries the cupboard is bare. In fact, there's money to give away to corporations, to the tune of \$4.7 billion.

I also asked in estimates, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Service Alberta about the real estate industry real estate assurance fund and why that fee was increased to \$1.50 per \$5,000 of a mortgage that was registered on land titles from a dollar. We're talking millions of dollars that will be added to the real estate assurance fund as a result. He indicated that there was no problem with the assurance fund. It wasn't underfunded. It didn't need the amount of money that it was getting as a result of this increase, yet it's being increased.

So my query was: what in the world is this money going to be used for? Is it going into general revenue, or will it actually be dedicated to the assurance fund? I didn't really get an answer about that yet, but I'm going to be very much alert to what type of uses this money gets put to because his indication was that it goes into general revenue. But it's a dedicated fund, and it could be a slush fund that ends up getting used for things other than the real estate assurance fund as a means of sort of a hidden tax, a generation of tax that the government claims they weren't going to make, just like

the \$600 million they're generating in added tax that Albertans would pay as a result of bracket creep.

Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering what it will take for this government to get the message from Albertans – it doesn't seem that they're willing to talk about democracy or involve themselves in any way – to deter them from their absolute blind goal to go ahead and marry themselves to the idea of corporate tax cuts as a way of inciting the economy rather than helping people who need the help, who will actually spend the money in our economy, to end up getting our jobs created.

I could go on for a whole lot longer, but I think many of our other speakers have covered lots of the other subjects, and what I'll do right now is move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

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

Alberta's Oil and Gas Industry

28. Mr. McIver on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly express its support for Alberta's oil and gas industry, for the continued responsible development of best-in-class energy resources in accordance with the highest ethical and environmental standards, and for individuals who show their support by wearing their pro-Canadian oil and gas apparel, including when visiting the Alberta Legislature, and urge the government to continue its efforts to advocate for the reversal of federal and provincial policies that have negatively impacted workers in Alberta's oil and gas industry.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my good friend the hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and the Government House Leader I'd like to move Government Motion 28. May I speak to it?

The Acting Speaker: Please.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Folks, this is a motion that we're putting on the table. I think it's self-explanatory, but because some folks at home that are watching may not be as familiar – this is really important. The energy industry certainly isn't our only important industry, but it is by far the largest one, the one that employs the most people. Actually, it's not only Alberta's most important export industry; it is far and away Canada's largest and most important export industry.

4:30

Folks, it's been under attack. It's been under attack from a whole number of fronts. It's been under attack by, amongst other things, federal policies like Bill C-48, the tanker ban. While our country every day, just about, takes in hundreds of thousands of barrels of foreign oil, some off the east coast, somehow our oil, Canadian produced, highly responsibly produced, ethically produced, with high environmental and human rights standards, is not allowed to be shipped. Yet oil comes into this country with much lower environmental, human rights standards every day, and somehow that's okay. We are under attack: people that even just wear T-shirts in support of our industry getting told they can't visit the Parliament Buildings.

Our industry is under attack from other provincial governments that are opposed to our pipelines getting our product to the coast,

which is really interesting because, through the great efforts of the women and men that work in the energy industry, Alberta contributes to Canada through equalization, most years, above \$20 billion per year, which other provinces get to enjoy the benefit of. Albertans have been generous and would be okay to remain generous like that if we were allowed to just ship our products and get them to market, to get the best price.

In fact, what's happening right now is not just costing Alberta money. It's costing Canada money, it's costing the other provinces in this country money because when we are selling at a discount of sometimes \$23 and more per barrel, that amounts to millions and millions of dollars every week, every month, and every year.

Mr. Bilous: It's \$18 right now.

Mr. McIver: Yes. Thank you. The Opposition House Leader says "\$18," and I don't doubt him. I'm just saying that that's not atypical: sometimes lower than that, sometimes a lot higher than that.

Folks, this is something that – I would feel better if we had unanimous support of this motion. I think it's support for anybody in this House that claims they do care about Alberta jobs. Last time I counted, we all claim to care about Alberta jobs. This would be a good way to actually say that we care about Alberta jobs, by saying that we are in support of our industry, we're in support of those who show support of our industry, we are in support of the men and women that work in the industry, and, by golly, we are in support of all of the schools, hospitals, roads, and social programs that the profits and the royalties from the energy industry bring to Alberta, bring to Canada, and bring to each of our communities and, in many cases, to our families.

It's my sincere hope, Mr. Speaker, that this motion will receive favourable support from the House, and I would respectfully ask for that support at this time. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I think I should have probably been more clear at the very start, when you asked if you could speak to it. I should have noted that it is, under I believe it's Standing Order 18(1)(a), a debatable motion, allowing for debate in the House.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this motion. I do want to thank the minister for his comments and his words on this motion, especially because I appreciate that although he could have chosen to attack the previous government or criticize the previous government, he did not do so, and that was noted. I will keep my comments to the positive as well, looking at, again, the importance of the oil and gas sector to the whole Canadian economy.

You know, for me, what's frustrating in provinces like Quebec, especially, is that there is a failure to acknowledge that there are hundreds and hundreds of Quebec and Ontario companies who benefit from Alberta's oil and gas sector. It benefits Canadians across the country not only through things like equalization, because, as we all know, that's based on personal income, and because Alberta is the economic engine of the country, we pay more than our share. I also agree that the equalization formula is broken. Alberta pays a disproportionate amount as a have province. Four provinces in the country contribute to the equalization formula, I do believe, and I understand and appreciate the role of that, that we want to ensure that Canadians have a similar standard of living no matter where they live in the country. I agree. We are one country.

But, again, Mr. Speaker, what is frustrating is when you have other jurisdictions or parts of this country that are choosing to bring in their energy from countries that are run by dictators, that have no environmental standards, that have poor working conditions, and that are shipping their crude across the ocean. I don't know what could be more damaging to the environment than that, should those tankers spill.

We know that pipelines are the safest mode of transportation, Mr. Speaker. We know that we need market access, and we need pipelines. That's why we unequivocally support not only the Trans Mountain pipeline. I've stood in this House on many occasions and talked about the importance of pipelines in every single direction. I'm proud that our government did commit 50,000 barrels per day to the Keystone XL pipeline in order to help that pipeline move forward.

You know, I'll mention briefly the discount. I was just watching on BNN this morning that it's up to \$18 per barrel, which is significant. This is \$18 a barrel that Canadians are losing because of lack of market access. Back last fall we had actually a clock, so to speak. It's like the debt clock except it was a clock showing the lost revenue to Canadians because of the delay of the Trans Mountain pipeline. The clock had started, I think, on August 31, 2018, and within a couple of months it was already at \$15 billion, Mr. Speaker. I don't know where it's at today, but I'd imagine that it's north of \$30 billion if not even higher than that. So it's critical.

We know that we have an incredible industry. It's good jobs for the men and women of this country. We're very proud of it, and we're proud to support this amendment. Now, having said that, Mr. Speaker, in addition to allowing members of the gallery to wear their oil and gas T-shirts, I think we should be showing unequivocal support for the other sectors that are drivers of the Alberta and Canadian economy, including agriculture, forestry, technology, you name it. For those reasons, I have an amendment that I would like to share with the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We'll just give the opportunity for the pages to pass it around, and then I will make another decision.

I was just actually checking to see how long it was. Looking at the length of it, I would ask if you could please read it into the record and then continue with your comments.

Mr. Bilous: Absolutely – thank you, Mr. Speaker – with pleasure. I move that Government Motion 28 be amended (a) by adding “agricultural industry, forestry industry, renewable energy industry and technology sector” after “express its support for Alberta's oil and gas industry” and (b) by adding “and other clothing supporting Alberta's industries” after “pro-Canadian oil and gas apparel.”

Now, Mr. Speaker, again, the purpose of this amendment A1 is not to detract from the oil and gas sector; in fact, it's to highlight the fact that there are other sectors that are absolutely critical that are also especially hurting right now. We know that the agricultural sector has been hit hard because of weather over the last couple of years. In fact, I believe that many crops in Alberta – farmers have struggled to get their crops off the field. We have challenges with market access and getting them to market. We know we've had challenges with trade, not only tariffs but trade barriers, you know, whether it's canola and getting it to China or other products.

4:40

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the forestry sector employs, I believe, over 18,000 men and women in this province. It is absolutely critical to the Alberta economy. They have had challenges, especially in the last couple years and even currently,

while we still have an ongoing softwood lumber dispute with the U.S., who, of course, is our largest market. You know, despite efforts in trying to increase market access in other countries, they too need our support.

Quite frankly, this is about allowing Canadians or visitors, really, to wear apparel that supports our oil and gas sector but also the other sectors critical to Alberta's economy. While we do support this motion to show and allow visitors who visit this Chamber the ability to wear a T-shirt to support our industry, I firmly believe that we should support all of the industries that drive the Alberta economy. I mean, I'd imagine that members opposite, as we have, have been contacted by members of other industries saying: yes, we support oil and gas, and people should be allowed to wear those shirts, but what about our sectors? What about the people that are raising the best beef in the world here in our province? Should they not be able to wear a shirt that says, “I love Alberta beef” or the other sectors?

Really, this is meant to broaden it to show unanimous support for all of Alberta's sectors that are absolutely critical to driving the Canadian economy. For those reasons, I strongly urge all members to support this amendment. I hope all members will support this amendment. My fear, quite frankly, folks, is that if we don't support this amendment, it sends the message to the agricultural sector, the forestry sector, and other sectors that they are not as important or as critical to this province. I know that members would say: no; we support all of these sectors. I urge members to show that support by accepting this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members wishing to join debate on amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to lend my support to this debate and move other members, hopefully, to vote in favour of the amendment. I concur with the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in bringing forward this amendment to very much make clear the importance of other sectors in our economy, particularly the agricultural and forestry industries, which are often seen as the second cousins to the leading light, our oil and gas industry, in Alberta.

That can no longer be because as we see the transition, a generational shift from fossil fuels over time, over the next couple of decades, our agricultural and forestry industries are going to have to take up a lot of the economic space in this province that right now is occupied by oil and gas. We should do everything possible to make sure that the prominence of agriculture and forestry is brought to the forefront as we promote the industries that they are in terms of extraction of renewable materials, in terms of trees and growth in agriculture, but also in value-added processing and artificial intelligence and developing new genomic structures, whether it be in crops or in cattle or hogs or other forms of animal husbandry. There's unlimited potential in our agricultural and forestry industries, which I think should be heralded at every opportunity.

This is one small way, in adopting this amendment, Mr. Speaker, that we could demonstrate that we see agriculture and forestry as industries that are on an equal footing and share equal prominence in the minds of, certainly, the opposition but hopefully also government members and that we should always take the opportunity to elevate agriculture and forestry and other industries on top of our oil and gas industry. I think that including them specifically in this amendment is an important step in that direction, and I fully encourage all members to actually go ahead and adopt the amendment because we don't want to be leaving out industries

as an afterthought that really are going to become more and more important over the next two or three decades.

They are important now – I certainly agree with that – but they are going to be increasingly important over time, and we should take every effort to make note of that and herald their prominence because more and more Albertans are going to be relying upon jobs in the value-added component of agriculture as well as in forestry, Mr. Speaker. Both are definitely at the forefront or on the verge of lots of innovation and technological advancements that will spring forward new products and innovations, that will hopefully result in new markets being opened for Alberta products.

I think that if indeed we play our cards right and don't continue doing some things that this government is doing, such as axing 51 full-time equivalent positions from the Agriculture and Forestry ministry, we can actually maybe develop some of these products in collaboration with the private sector but also maintain our scientific capacity within the ministry. There are some things that this government is doing that are basically dumbing down ministries by cutting budgets to scientists within the ministries, that I don't agree with because it diminishes the capacity of, particularly, our agriculture and forestry industries to collaborate with the private sector, and that's a wrong direction to go in.

I think that with this amendment, we correct another small wrong-directional step that this government is making so that we can draw attention to the prominence of our agricultural industry, our forestry industry. They should be in lockstep with the oil and gas industry in this province so that we don't lose sight that all of these industries are a team, that they're in tandem. Ministries and this government should be collaborating so that one benefits the other at all times.

With that, I'll encourage all members in the House to support the amendment. I hope that we see shirts of many colours, of many industries, hopefully made with Alberta hemp, worn in this House whenever the occasion is permitted by the Speaker's office but certainly, though, not displayed in the windows of the Legislature, which are sacrosanct and nonpartisan, flat spaces to be left alone.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? I see the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to speak on the amendment. Let me say that the amendment seems reasonable. I would imagine that all members of this House support our agricultural industry, our forestry industry, our renewable industry, our technology sector, and are happy with clothing that expresses those sentiments, and though it's not mentioned here, I'm sure that we also support the growth of the hemp industry.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to support this. We're going to support this because basically we agree with the words in it. If there's any hesitation that we have, it's because to some degree – I think you might even agree, and maybe even the mover might agree to some extent – it could be seen as watering down the message of the government motion. But in the spirit of hoping to have a unanimous vote of support for our energy industry and now our other major industries, we think that's an important message.

4:50

It's an important message to send on behalf of Albertans, and it's an important message to send on the day that a new cabinet is sworn in in Ottawa, a message from the Legislature in Alberta to that new cabinet, with a new mandate. Even the old ministers are new

because they have a new mandate, so in that case all that's old is new. The government is of the opinion that a message of this nature, of solidarity, to our federal government and all Canadians is a positive message and one that we sincerely hope will get – one should never presume the vote of a Legislative Assembly of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, as you know. I think that we actually have rules against that. Nonetheless, let me just say that I currently live in hope that we will get a unanimous vote on this because it is a message that very much needs to be sent to Ottawa and all across Canada on this day.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody be looking to take that opportunity.

Seeing none, are there any other members that wish to speak to amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Acting Speaker: Moving back to Government Motion 28 proper, are there any members wishing to speak on this motion? I see the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has caught my eye.

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to just take a few minutes here to talk about the benefits of this motion. You know, coming from Drayton Valley-Devon, I have the privilege of being at the heart of the oil industry in Alberta. It's where Leduc No. 1 first came in, and it's the area of Alberta that first exhibited the boom that we have in our modern oil industry today. So I wanted to speak to this just for a few minutes.

"Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly express its support for . . . [the oil industry]." Mr. Speaker, I don't think it takes much to be able to see that the oil industry has been the foundation of modern Alberta. It's created prosperous communities, prosperous business communities like Acheson in my constituency. It's the oil and gas industry that has created the need for drillers and welders and operators and electricians. It's the oil and gas industry that has provided the incentive for entrepreneurs to create the companies that have helped to harvest this wealth that we have in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we should with great pride be able to stand up and speak to this motion, everyone in the House. We understand that when we wear a T-shirt, when we wear a hoodie that proclaims the oil and gas industry, this is something that should be encouraged. When we look at the policies of the federal government and the nation, as we look at this oil and gas industry, we need to double and redouble our efforts in this Legislature and as Albertans to support the oil industry and all of the industries that are in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to stand today to say that I support this motion and that I will be voting in favour of it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak on this motion? I'm seeing no one. Oh, I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems there's a little bit of confusion, but I'm happy to rise and speak in support of this motion. Also, it's lovely to see the Assembly agree today. That's a nice, refreshing change. I can envision us all in a Team Alberta T-shirt or something.

Anyway, I do want to speak specifically to the oil and gas industry although I certainly appreciate the comments from the member opposite with respect to the other industries that are hurting, in particular agriculture. I know that in my area of the province there are some real challenges with respect to crops

wilting in the fields under the heavy, wet snow. I certainly appreciate those comments and would stand in agreement that the agricultural industry at this time in our history is struggling, but I will focus my comments on the oil and gas industry this afternoon and the importance of oil and gas to Alberta and for my constituency of Grande Prairie, certainly a foundation to our economic stability and the wealth generation of my region.

We are blessed in the city of Grande Prairie and the surrounding area, the Peace region, to enjoy a diversified economy, with oil and gas, forestry, and agriculture as the primary pillars. Through development and investment in these industries Grande Prairie has become a northern hub for our province, creating further expansion and affording our residents an average wage-earning that is significantly higher than the provincial average. The city of Grande Prairie, located in the heart of the Montney and Duvernay oil and gas formations, has become the central hub for housing, health care, recreation, shopping, and services that are needed to support and retain the labour force of this expanding economy. Indeed, there have been multiple times since 1997, when my family settled in Grande Prairie as entrepreneurs and job creators, that our economy grew so quickly that access to the labour force required for expansion was critically short. I can tell you that in light of the times that we're experiencing now, that would be a lovely problem to have again.

Mr. Speaker, my generation has enjoyed the best quality of life that any generation in Canada has been afforded. I believe Canada is truly the greatest country in the world, bar none. As a proud Canadian I believe it is my duty to stand up for Canadian oil and gas, and as a proud Albertan I certainly stand up today for Alberta's oil and gas sector.

Energy scarcity creates significant lack, Mr. Speaker. Without access to sufficient energy you don't have clean water, reliable food, shelter, schools, hospitals, critical infrastructure. I just wanted to highlight – I pulled up some facts on oil and gas for Canada – that in 2018 the oil and gas industry employed more than 269,000 Canadians and indirectly supported over 550,000 jobs in the Canadian economy. That's 550,000 families with employment. Canada's energy sector accounts for over 11 per cent of our gross domestic product. Government revenues from energy were \$14.1 billion in 2017. That's an astounding number. I could go on, but I don't think we need to hear the statistics or just the messages.

Alberta and Canada have an abundant endowment of resources, and our nation has built its standard of living on creating value by delivering resources to the world through our fish, forestry, grain, potash, electricity, fertilizer, food, and so much more. Resource-export economies rely on efficient transportation to reach markets, between provinces, to the U.S. and overseas. Canada's energy industry has been built on supplying Canadians and Americans with reliable, affordable energy. We need to continue to build new transportation facilities, pipelines, and other production facilities to serve those markets in an open and competitive way. I rise today to stand up for our energy industry and to speak out one more time against the destructive policies of the Trudeau Liberals such as bills C-48 and C-69.

Beyond North America, the strongest growth market in the world is Asia, where Canada and Alberta can play an important role in providing responsibly developed natural gas and oil. Alberta and Canada need to create the conditions to efficiently and safely build the pipelines, LNG plants, and ports to ship to overseas markets. By supplying responsible energy to Asia, Canada can grow our economy, create prosperity in the communities where energy is produced, along the transportation routes, and at the export communities as well. This development will also greatly help indigenous communities build the capacity of their youth as

valuable contributors to society and as potential owners of Canada's energy production.

I could go on and on and on, but I just wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, that even in this economic downturn I've had the pleasure of attending many different fundraisers in my community. Over and over and over again the oil and gas sector has come to the aid of our community, has donated significantly: last year, at the hospital foundation gala, \$750,000 from CNRL – that's remarkable – in support of the hospital foundation, which is a legacy gift. When you give to the hospital foundation, AHS then continues that service or that equipment in perpetuity. I think that's incredible. Without prosperity in our communities, whether it's from oil and gas or agriculture or forestry or other industries, we don't have additional, abundant funds to give to other initiatives to support our communities. I wanted to give some examples.

5:00

Another company that operates in Grande Prairie and Calgary, Seven Generations, in 2018 alone gave over 5,000 volunteer hours in the communities where they operate. They contributed over \$1,228,000 to different initiatives. I could read the list. It is a staggering list: initiatives like women's shelters, the SPCA, the hospital foundation, so many interesting ones, indigenous veterans day, Hythe Minor Hockey, the Humane Society, on and on and on it goes. That's the kind of thing that happens when our economy is working properly.

So I stand today in support of oil and gas. I stand today primarily in support of Alberta. I stand firmly on Team Alberta, and I hope our federal Liberals and their new cabinet are listening to the needs of Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen to speak.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of this motion as amended urging our support for the oil and gas industry. I think that there is no question that it's one of the most important industries that we have in our province. It has generated wealth and prosperity for all Albertans, for all Canadians for decades, and it continues to play an important role in our economy, in our prosperity, and in the services that we enjoy and, I guess, the standard of living we have in our province.

I think that there are two things that I want to say. The government side always wants to say and portray us as if we don't support our oil and gas industry and that they are the champions of this industry. What I want to say is that as an Albertan, like, personally I'm a part owner of this resource, and those whom I represent are part owners of this wealth and this resource, and collectively we all represent Albertans, who own this resource. We can disagree on how best we can develop these resources. We can disagree about policies, but one thing is for sure, that as owners we have a vested interest in making sure that our resource sector or resources, this wealth, is managed in a way that is sustainable and generates prosperity for Albertans today and for generations to come.

One thing that I wanted to get out of the way is that we as Albertans, we as owners, we as representatives of the owners support this industry, and we have a vested interest in developing these resources in a sustainable manner so that we can all benefit from this resource and this wealth. That's why we are supporting this motion.

We also brought forward an amendment that reflects that we also support other clothing supporting Alberta's industries, all other

industries. We do know that oil and gas is an important industry, but we do have potential. We have other industries that with the right support can thrive as well, and they are thriving. Agriculture supports our daily living, food, and generates a lot of employment as well. We have an emerging tech sector. We have other industries as well that we need to focus on and that are also important for many reasons, including that we need to diversify our economy as well so that we are not reliant on one industry at all times.

Third, I want to also mention that I think these symbolic gestures are important, but in order to support our industry, we need to take concrete steps in addressing the issues facing our industry. What I have heard so far from industry, from my colleagues, from my previous experience in government is that the number one issue that our industry is facing is market access and takeaway capacity. Even right now our industry has enough production capacity that without additional investment we still produce more than what our takeaway capacity is. When we were in government, we supported this industry. We focused on issues; we focused on concerns that industry brought to us. That was the reason we supported the Trans Mountain pipeline. We supported line 3. We supported Keystone XL. In fact, when we started, there were 4 in 10 Canadians who supported the Trans Mountain project. The then Premier and now Leader of the Official Opposition went coast to coast to build a case for the Trans Mountain pipeline. As a result of that advocacy, now there are 7 in 10 Canadians who support that project. It was because of our stance on this project that the federal government ended up purchasing this project, and now we are seeing construction on this project. Same thing with line 3. So nothing can be further from the truth, that we don't support the oil and gas industry. We have a vested interest in supporting this industry as representatives of the owners of this resource and as part owners of this resource.

I'm glad to support this motion, but at the same time I would urge the government to move beyond these symbolic gestures and focus on issues that are facing our industry. Work with industry to find new markets. Work with industry to build takeaway capacity. When we were faced with takeaway capacity issues, we worked with industry, and we brought forward oil-by-rail contracts that would have increased our takeaway capacity by 120,000 barrels per day, that would have generated \$2 billion in revenues. What this government did because somewhere in the campaign they said that they would reverse everything that we were doing: without thinking, without consulting anybody, they cancelled those contracts as early as May. Because of that ideological decision, now Albertans are on the hook for \$1.5 billion in penalties. We haven't seen any takeaway capacity that has been created under this government, so they need to focus on those issues. All we are seeing is the Energy Centre, which we have asked about. How will it help us with the issues that our energy sector is facing? We have not heard anything. That centre does not have a business plan. That centre doesn't have any employees, no strategic plan whatsoever.

I'm supporting this motion and urging this government to focus on issues that our energy sector is facing. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see that the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has risen to speak.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just got back from doing some other business across the way and was a little out of breath but had a chance to catch my breath and hear something that was fantastic. It looks like we're agreeing to a motion, both parties, to support the oil and gas sector. In addition, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has put an amendment that we've accepted here, and it includes other industries. To me, this is

fantastic. Honestly, this is fantastic despite some of the language that might have pulled us into the ditch and got us scrapping again and fighting back and forth about who did what and when and ideological statements. I think the public record is clear on that one. I think the Alberta population voted well in favour of a group that actually does what they say, not just wearing T-shirts once in a while but backing it up. But I don't want to digress and go into that, either.

I was really happy with the agriculture industry because I was a farm kid. That's what I grew up with. That's the first thing that we started on, obviously, raising cattle and doing that. The supplement that we had for diversification: a little family sawmill. In the winter time we'd get a small forestry permit, we would log off those areas, and by doing that as a small business, we employed a bunch of the local folks as well, and then we'd saw up that lumber. So that ties in exactly with what I grew up doing.

5:10

Renewable energy? While I was at Enbridge, we actually put up 350 windmills, so we had renewable energy as well tying into the power sector. Again, that was driven there. Technology? Well, I happened to work for another local company that put in the first lease road to Leduc No. 1. That was their history. Ledcor started out from that, and that company ended up growing and branching into pipeline divisions, industrial divisions, electrical divisions, road maintenance. They also had this one thing that we were putting in, fibre optics, so again understanding technology and dealing with that.

I'm actually really, really happy to be able to stand up and support the amendment that was put forward and to be able to actually show our support for that sector. There were over 180,000 people that lost their jobs, and unfortunately the radio and media play that we got at that time was down in Ontario with 2,500 people working in an auto plant taking priority. Obviously, sending this clear message as a group from this Legislative Assembly, that we are standing together, that we are standing up for those folks – we're proud to say that we produce the best, ethical energy in the world, not just wearing T-shirts once in a while but actually saying it and meaning it out there, so walking the walk as well.

I appreciate it, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Two minutes and 50 seconds left under 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to Government Motion 28.

Seeing none, I'm prepared to ask the question. I will give the opportunity to the Minister of Transportation to close debate on behalf of the Government House Leader if he should so choose.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. On behalf of the Government House Leader and Minister of Environment and Parks I just wanted to say thank you to all members of the House for what I can't be sure but am hoping will be a positive vote all the way around. I will just reiterate that this is an important day to do that. There's a new cabinet in Ottawa. This is a good message for us as a Legislative Assembly to send to Ottawa and across the country.

I will stop talking now and hope we achieve what I just talked about.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Government Motion 28 as amended carried]

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 20
Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019

The Deputy Chair: Currently, we have before us amendment A2 as brought forward by the hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. Are there any questions, comments, with regard to this amendment? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen to speak on this amendment.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my absolute honour to rise this afternoon in the House to speak to the amendment to Bill 20, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019. This amendment, I think, is something that we absolutely can be in favour of. I think it's wonderful that government has listened to industry, has listened to myself as the critic for culture as well as many members on this side of the House. It's been something that we've been asking for for quite some time, and I believe that this is a good first step when it comes to supporting the incredible film industry that we have here in the province.

I do, Mr. Chair, worry that it might not go far enough. We have heard from industry that they weren't consulted prior to the introduction of the tax credit, either about the transition from the grant or about the grant itself, despite many claims from government that they had had robust consultation. During estimates we were here and going through the culture budget, and we had over 50 members from the film industry that came to watch the estimates. I have to say that it was absolutely an honour to be able to be the representative and the voice in that meeting. I was able to meet with many in industry, from all over the province, well before the budget was tabled, hearing their concerns, hearing what they felt were absolutely necessities to be included in the budget.

Then to see the budget and to see that what was being proposed would have completely destroyed industry – like I said, I'm happy to support this. I think it's a good first step, but it's something that I think still needs to actually have ongoing consultation with industry. We've heard a lot of fear from industry. Part of my job I see as being able to be the voice of industry. I had so many come to me expressing concern about being penalized by government and just being completely fearful of putting their name to any of their remarks or any of their comments out of fear of some sort of consequence or being punished, because the system that's available right now is a juried system, so that directly could impact their production. If they submitted an application, there was a real fear, I would say, of being denied that process. We were accused of spreading unnecessary fear, but now we know that those fears the industry had, that there would have been no money, were founded.

This amendment allows for changing of the dates for immediate applications through a new intake process, the Assembly was told last night by the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. Previously, under the way it was written, there would have been no new applications until at least April 1, 2020. We heard very clearly from industry that this would completely destroy the progress that has been made in this province. We heard over and over of producers, productions that were leaving the province. They were going to provinces like B.C., where they have a wonderful system in place that supports industry. As this was happening in estimates, people were on social media, people were in the next room talking about this, that people were physically leaving, making decisions to leave the province while the estimates were occurring. I was accused of causing fear. It wasn't based on my comments; it was based on the responses from the minister.

It's an unsettling feeling, knowing that you've been reaching out and you've been desperately pleading for an industry that has such an incredible impact here in our province, not just with the sharing of stories about the beautiful people of Alberta, our history, the use of our incredible landscapes throughout the province but the jobs, Mr. Chair. I think that's something that is essential when we're talking about what the film and screen industry means. There are so many employment opportunities. I spoke yesterday in the House in my member's statement, comparing one person's experience of working in the oil field on a rig to working in a production. It really can be a wonderful opportunity for those that are seeking to diversify their employment to come work with the film industry.

5:20

Some of the jobs that the screen industry creates: if you would grant me the opportunity, I would just like to list a few that are impacted. Jobs are employed in this industry. We have electricians, accountants, drivers, chefs, mechanics, environmental scientists, photographers, lawyers, hair and makeup stylists, clothing designers, carpenters, editors, sound designers, heavy equipment operators, project managers, logistical co-ordinators, paramedics, gardeners, animal trainers, of course actors, CGI artists, interior designers, security guards, students, visual effects artists. Mr. Chair, those are just simply a few of the jobs that are available and created by the screen industry, and I know that something that Albertans are looking for is jobs. We want to be able to create an economy that is working, and we want to have a diversified economy, and they're already doing it.

To see that there's been an amendment proposed that is going to support the film industry, I think, is incredible, and it's definitely a good step forward. It's a show of good faith, if you will. It's a little bit discouraging to know that yesterday in the House the minister had indicated that she was so pleased that her colleague the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism was meeting with industry after the budget had been tabled. This all could have simply been avoided had they been actually meeting with the industry prior to the budget. I know myself as the culture critic, as soon as I was appointed to this role, it was something that I did immediately. I had people reaching out to me from all over the province, from many different industries, not just in film, wanting to be able to share their story and share their concerns.

Mr. Chair, they have an incredible story to tell. There are so many different projects that are happening in the province right now, like *Ghostbusters*, a project that is impacting rural Alberta. It's hotels. It's food. It's the sets, the building of the sets, the crews that are world-renowned. We have them here in Alberta, and if those people leave the province, they're not going to come back.

To be able to maintain our screen industry here in the province is absolutely essential, and I think that this amendment is a wonderful first step to do that. I think it gives a message to industry that they're heard, that our fighting on this side of the House as the Official Opposition has an impact when community, like this industry, comes together and has their collective voice heard and we're able to share it in estimates in this House. Whenever we're talking to people, it has an impact.

For everybody that came to me and shared their story, whether they were wanting to do it anonymously or whether they wanted to be proud of their story and put their name to it, I am so, so grateful. I want to thank them because without their words and their story, we wouldn't be here today. I'm only effective as opposition when I have people reaching out to me, telling me their stories, and despite the fear, so many were able to come forward and share that.

I sincerely hope that this is a first step of working with industry and that there is a commitment from this government to move

forward in consultation with them. When we're looking at the policies and the regulations that they're referring to, I believe that we need to go to the experts, and those experts are industry, and they're more than willing to help provide information and solutions. You can do a cross-jurisdictional scan to look at what some of the other provinces in the country are doing, and it speaks volumes with the success of those screen industries.

I think that when we looked at what the concern was with this plan, there was not a lot of communication that was happening from government to industry, so seeing this as a signal, I think, is a really great thing. I know that part of my commitment and the commitment on this side of the House is to continue to monitor to make sure that there's progress in this and to make sure that government is meeting with many from industry, not just a select few. There are so many that I've heard from that have said that they want their voice shared, and they have a lot of value to add to this conversation. There's a lot of experience here in the province, with incredible people that love Alberta, and they're pleading. They want to be able to stay in the province, and I hope that this government is taking that seriously.

When we look at all of the impacts that the screen industry has in the province when it comes to our economy, when it comes to creating jobs, good, mortgage-paying jobs, I think it's absolutely essential that we continue the conversation. I know that this side of the House is going to be holding the government to account and paying attention with this credit as it moves forward. I know that so many are going to continue to reach out and let us know if they're not being heard because this is something that is an expectation of Albertans. When you're making decisions about their industry and how it's going to impact them, they absolutely should be consulted in that process. Seeing this, I think, is a good step.

I'm very, very proud of the advocacy that industry has done when they've come together and held town halls and information-sharing sessions. They're working on educating about what the industry means to Alberta. There's an organization called Keep Alberta Rolling, and they share amazing stories about the impacts that film has in this province, and it's something that is shared world-wide, Mr. Chair. Alberta is known for some of the most striking scenes in the country. People from all over the world want to come here and film here, not just because of the scenery, which is spectacular, but because of the crews that we have here. They know that when they have a production in Alberta, we have world-renowned crews that are there. They're of the utmost professional standing, and they're committed to this industry. They love their province just like we do, and they want to stay here.

I think that knowing that government is taking this seriously and moving this amendment – I would hope that all members of the House would support this, and I would encourage government to continue to advocate for the film industry and all of the many benefits that it has across many different industries in the province. It's not just the film. Like I mentioned, all of those other working professions that work within this industry have a huge impact.

We know that it's important that as we're moving forward with however this rolls out, because there is reference that ongoing consultation is going to need to occur, and they need some form of flexibility because they understand that industry has many different needs – to me, that means working with industry itself and continuing to listen to the people that work in this field and offer solutions. They come to us with solutions about what's best for their industry, and I think that as elected officials the least we can do is to listen to that and to do our best to make sure that that's something that's happening, which would keep us competitive and keep film coming to our province. It's essential.

I'm very, very honoured to be able to stand and say that we had a part in this, that our side of the House kept asking those hard questions that industry wasn't getting answers to and kept telling those stories of the so many that have been impacted by this budget and just the freezing of the money that was flowing. I'm very proud of the work that we've done, and, Mr. Chair, I'm very proud to say that I'm going to continue, as I know many colleagues on this side of the House are going to continue to do, to keep Alberta rolling.

With that, for now I think I'll wrap up my comments. I would just like to encourage industry to continue to share their voice and to continue to reach out to government and ask to be consulted with, demand to be consulted with. We're paying attention, we're watching, and we're here to fight alongside them. Overall, I would really encourage that everyone in this House support the film industry and support the amendment to this bill.

Thank you.

5:30

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to this amendment? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my honour to rise and speak to this amendment. I'll make some general comments, and then I want to respond to some comments the minister of culture made yesterday evening in regard to this amendment. Now, the amendment fixes some of the problems that are in the bill as it currently exists. The minister knows that this came from two places; number one, comments that we've made as far as the challenges. We heard directly from industry as far as the limitations of the film tax credit.

Now, I do just want to share – you know, I've said this before in this Chamber – that I am supportive of a film tax credit. I can tell you that our government had debated and discussed the film tax credit and were close to being able to get it over the finish line. The reality is that we didn't, and I wish that we would have, but I will give credit where credit is due. I'm pleased that this current government has introduced a tax credit.

We signalled very early on and in estimates especially the challenge with no intake. The intake has been paused since the election, Mr. Chair, and the problem is that until this amendment came forward, new applicants wouldn't be considered until after April 1 of 2020, so there was a gap. The problem is that industry has said that with this gap it's not just a small pause or delay. It basically is the difference between films coming to Alberta or going to another jurisdiction. That interruption has huge consequences. Industry has been incredible, incredible advocates. I want to thank my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, who's been a very vocal champion for the film industry.

I'll give a little bit of history on this, Mr. Chair. The program that was in place for many, many years had some challenges with it. It was a grant. It was meant for small cultural film industries and projects. It had a few challenges. Our government tried to – we increased the amount of funds that were available because there was a backlog of projects. Now, a backlog of projects is actually a good problem to have. What it means is that there's a significant demand for projects to come to the province of Alberta. We know that these are good jobs. We know the impact the film industry has, especially on small communities, rural communities: hotels being booked up and full, restaurants being busy. I mean, the amount of money that comes to the province through the filming of a series or a show or a feature film is significant, and Alberta has trailed behind other

jurisdictions for many years. Again, we talk about levelling the playing field. Why? You look at the film industry in British Columbia, and it is massive, a massive contributor. It is one of the pillars of their diversified economy. I believe that Alberta can compete but with the same or similar and the right tools.

The film industry had asked us to keep the cultural grant that's used for smaller productions but also to introduce a film tax credit. Now, the way that this was first introduced by this current government was: get rid of the cultural one; bring in the film tax credit but at the same level as a small cultural grant. Well, Mr. Chair, that didn't solve either problem. That actually created a new problem because the larger shows, whether it's *The Revenant* that was filmed here in Alberta or other shows that are, you know, Time Warner, Hollywood movies, require a much larger tax credit or break to level the playing field, to make Alberta competitive compared to, again, other jurisdictions and what they offer.

You know, in hindsight I wish our government could have got it over the finish line, but we didn't. Happy to see this move forward. Again, for me the challenge with this amendment – and I'm glad that the government is amending this piece of legislation before it goes through. I can tell you stories, Mr. Chair. Before most members were in this Chamber, there were examples of the previous government from 2012 to 2015 that would make amendments to a piece of legislation, the House would vote it through, and six months later they would bring back a different bill amending the same piece of legislation. Once, it happened three different times, which tells me that there wasn't an adequate level of consultation to solve the challenges or fix the existing legislation all in one shot. I appreciate that we haven't voted this through and now in spring go: oh boy, here are some challenges.

Now, I do want to talk a little bit about some of the comments the minister of culture had made last night that, quite frankly, are incorrect. I have the Blues. I don't have *Hansard* at the moment, Mr. Chair, but talking about how the minister made a comment that "The previous government was not listening to the industry and severely mishandled the previous grant program, leaving our government . . . a mess to clean up." Well, that's not true. We did listen to industry and consulted with industry significantly. I can tell you that this amendment is coming now, after the film industry blasted the current government based on estimates when the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and I talked to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism over and over again about this film tax credit and the flaws or the challenges that existed with it in its current state.

I do appreciate that the minister did say that since the budget was tabled, the minister of economic development and trade has been meeting with industry. Great. My request is: please meet with industry before you bring in pieces of legislation that impact that industry. Since it was introduced, they started meeting with the film industry. Well, ideally, I think, Mr. Chair, the industry said: "No. Meet with us before you plan to make sweeping changes, not after." Thankfully, their voice was loud enough and they were persistent enough to be able to get the minister's attention and say: here are some challenges with the bill.

Now, I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that I was very proud on one of my trade missions. In fact, in November 2016 I was proud to lead the largest trade delegation the province of Alberta has ever led in its history. There were over 86 different businesses and business organizations that accompanied me to Asia. A number of companies came from the film industry. Again, one of the roles, in my opinion, of government is to act as a convener or a way to bring people together. A number of film crews, along with AMPA, sat down with the minister of film and trade and television in the Guangdong province. Now, that individual has now been elevated

in the Chinese government. He's actually now the minister for the country in charge of all film, radio, and television. It was incredible to work with him, a gentleman full of life who loves Alberta. He loves Banff, and he loves Canada. Alberta is his favourite province.

We worked together to develop a sister partnership between Alberta and Guangdong. In fact, that's Alberta's second sister partnership in the country of China. For context for members, the province of Guangdong is responsible for one-fifth of China's GDP, similar to Alberta and its relation to Canada. Guangdong is one of their economic engines. It's a powerhouse in the country and actually an absolutely beautiful province. I recommend to all to visit there, but I digress a little bit. The meeting happened between the minister and the film industry, and they were very interested. They signed MOUs that came from that meeting looking at ways to collaborate. I believe the highest number of tourists in the world come out of China. There are a significant number that come to Canada. We want to encourage that and grow that even more.

Mr. Chair, I mean, my point is that we've been working with the film industry to look at what they present as far as opportunities: an opportunity to help diversify the Alberta economy, an opportunity to strengthen the Alberta economy. They employ many men and women throughout the province. This change, this amendment to the bill, is positive in that it fills that gap.

5:40

You know, my hope is, as the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs had also said, that this consultation now, this dialogue that is happening between the government and the film industry will continue and will continue so that the minister and this government will continue to monitor what is going on in the film industry and make changes.

Now, I appreciate some of what the minister of culture said. There's going to be much in the regulations. I know that legislation sets out a framework, and I appreciate that having some of the details and regulations just means that if tweaks need to happen, it's more expedient. I get that. I mean, I have challenges when, you know, legislation is paper thin and everything is in a regulation, but in this case, to be able to be a little nimble: that I do appreciate.

With this, I can tell you, again, Mr. Chair, the different changes that this makes, the two – and I appreciate that. We're not going to have this gap in funds for the film industry between the election here, in 2019 to 2020, which was one of the issues the film industry had, the message that that sends. That will be amended in this amendment, which I appreciate and so does the film industry. The second area that this amendment helps is removing the cap. There was a maximum cap of 22 per cent that will now be what's prescribed in the available circumstances for the film. That's what I believe was used in the original grant program, but that's what industry also was asking for. Now, what I'd like to see is the tax credits to be ongoing but also to increase their amount because, again, in order to compete to bring the really large blockbuster films to Alberta, we need to be able to compete with the other jurisdictions and their film tax credits.

Again, for me, I would have loved to have seen a continuation of the grant program, but you narrow the amount and the scope so that it's available for those smaller cultural films, which are really, really important, but also allowing Alberta the opportunity to attract those big film sectors. So, Mr. Chair, with that, again, I encourage the government to continue to engage with industry.

Now, what's interesting and my final point here, Mr. Speaker, is that once again there is a little bit of doublespeak going on in the sense that the film tax credit is okay, but the investor tax credit and the interactive digital media tax credit, well, those ones aren't okay.

They're boutique. I mean, unfortunately the message that this government has sent to those industries is that: "You're not important. We're not interested in the tech sector. We're not interested in attracting Albertans to invest or derisk Albertans investing in companies in their own backyard." You can't say that boutique tax credits are not good because they're boutique and then at the same time support one of the boutique tax credits. You either support tax credits that are working and provide a return on investment like those others ones – the investor, the capital investment, and the interactive digital media – in addition to the film tax credit, but picking the film over the others is exactly what the government says it doesn't do, which is picking winners and losers.

The investor tax credit was sector-wide. It was open to every single sector of the economy, not one specific sector or another. If anything, the film tax credit is more boutique than the investor tax credit. So my hope, Mr. Chair, is that the government will look at the film tax credit, see the value that it's going to provide, how it's going to help level the playing field, attract investment to Alberta, and then look at the investor tax credit and the interactive digital media, and my hope – and I will continue to press this government – is to bring them back in some form to tell the tech community and start-ups that we support homegrown Alberta companies. We also want to attract investment into Alberta companies, and the best tool to do that is an investor tax credit.

So I urge the government to look at the success of this program, at other tax credits that will help diversify the economy, attract investment, grow our Alberta companies, which will in turn create jobs, support the GDP, and get Alberta back on track. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to speak to amendment A2?

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to Bill 20? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: It's the Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview show this afternoon. As the hon. Minister of Transportation knows, brevity is not my strength although, you know, this is the time to talk about the benefits and challenges of different legislation.

My comments on Bill 20. Again, I appreciate that we did just unanimously pass the amendment that amends the film tax credit. I want to outline some of the concerns I have with the removal of other tax credits that were working, Mr. Chair. We know, for example, the investor tax credit: a 3 to 1 return on investment in the province over the past couple of years. This is a new thing, to stand up the investor tax credit. Other jurisdictions like British Columbia have had one since 1985. It's helped diversify the economy.

Mr. Chair, here's how it helps. Start-ups and small companies are riskier investments than, say, you know, looking at a blue-chip company that's been around for a significantly long period of time. They have a larger market capitalization. They'll have everything from retained earnings to significant cash in the bank. Hopefully, the companies don't have too much debt. But for start-ups, when they're first getting off the ground – I mean, most entrepreneurs will start with their own funds and then go to friends and family.

The challenge, Mr. Chair, is that once a company has exhausted those funds, they now need to look at raising money through, well, the market or going to a broader circle. At that point a lot of angel investors won't necessarily look at a company because they're in between being – well, they're often too small at that point, and they'll struggle to get an angel investor. The other thing is that the

companies at that point don't need massive amounts of new investment. I know angel investors that won't look at companies that can't use a million dollars or more. They're not at that place where they need that sum of money.

Mr. Chair, what happens is that there's a gap between, you know, using your friends and family, equity that you've raised, and going out to do your series A. What the investor tax credit did was fill that gap so that a company could very easily, despite what some members opposite have said – the information is not accurate when they say that it was cumbersome and burdensome to fill out an application for the investor tax credit. We got it down to I believe it was two pages, a simpler process.

Now, part of the reason why there is an application process: there has to be oversight. In fact, I don't think anybody on the other side would say: "Yeah. You know what? For any company that claims they're an Alberta company, that is incorporated, that doesn't have to prove that they have any Alberta employees, sure, we should just give them money." I think we would see ourselves in a position where we'd be taken for a ride by individuals that would claim that they are an Alberta company and wouldn't be. So there needs to be some oversight. But I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that when we first introduced the investor tax credit, one of the challenges of the program – and this was brand new – was that the application process was a little bit slow, and we heard that from industry. I'm very proud that we in very short order amended the investor tax credit. We simplified the application process because we listened to companies who said, "You need to make this more simple," so we did.

5:50

That investor tax credit, Mr. Chair, enables companies to go out and try to raise equity but offer an individual like you or I or any member in this Chamber or any Albertan a 30 per cent tax credit on the money that they invest in the company in addition to whatever equity stake they get. Knowing that you're getting 30 per cent of the money you invest back automatically, regardless of the outcome or the future of that company, makes it more enticing to invest in that company.

Now, we know that Albertans work really hard for their money. Whether you're saving in a tax-free savings account or your RRSPs, you want to be prudent with your money. You don't want to make risky investments. The challenge with a lot of start-ups is that they are riskier because they aren't established and they're new, but these are where all of the best ideas come from. Being able to support Alberta companies through an injection of investment because we had an investor tax credit: that's significant.

We know that that has helped hundreds of companies to grow at a much quicker rate. Isn't that what we want? Aren't we trying to help support the economy and support entrepreneurs and businesses? Well, that tax credit did just that, and I know that the government has access to the information to see that it was a 3 to 1 investment. Around \$95 million from the Alberta investor tax credit attracted close to \$300 million of investment. Sorry. We conditionally approved about \$30 million of investor tax credits that leveraged close to \$100 million of follow-on investment. A 3 to 1 return on investment is significant.

You know, Mr. Chair, I have an issue when the minister of economic development and trade makes the comment: well, that only helped a couple of hundred companies. I'm sorry, but if we can help a single company to grow and expand, that's good news. To say that the investor tax credit is not as valuable as some other tool I think is insulting to these very companies. It sends the message that if you want to start a company and grow here in

Alberta, we're not going to help you; we're going to make it more difficult.

You know, for a government that claims that they want to reduce red tape and grow the economy, here was a tool that was in place that was working and, again, a little bit newer. Part of what takes time, Mr. Chair, is getting the word out to Albertans, "Here is a new tool available at your disposal to invest in Alberta companies" and to spread the word to the Alberta companies that you can now go out and raise capital or raise equity easier, which is, I think, a good thing. For me, the challenge here, one of the challenges with Bill 20, is that it's removed the very tax credits that were working and that were helping grow and support the economy.

I know that the clock will automatically kick us over into the evening, but, for me, I have other points. I mean, that was just the investor tax credit. Part of the investor tax credit was the community economic development corporations, or CEDCs. Now, Mr. Chair, those are corporations that can get set up that provide a social benefit, so for-profit social benefit, which I think is incredible. Within the investor tax credit we consulted heavily with that sector, companies like Momentum and others that would help use that tool to, again, raise equity for companies and clusters of companies under the one corporation that could then raise money to go out and bring a social good in addition to turning a profit for investors.

Mr. Chair, that exists in the province of Nova Scotia. Those tax credits exist in other jurisdictions that we modelled ours on, that were, again, just starting to take off. Unfortunately, I mean, you want to talk about clipping wings? Well, this government just clipped the wings of these tax credits, that were just starting to take flight.

Mr. Chair, the capital investment tax credit: this is a tax credit that helps companies pull the trigger on making investments today and helping the economy recover. What we've seen in the last couple of years is, unfortunately, a number of examples where companies are sitting on their cash reserves and are hesitant to make the decision to invest in either a new facility or an expansion or new equipment. So this capital investment tax credit did that. It was a 10 per cent nonrefundable tax credit that a company could use any time in a 10-year window, up to \$5 million.

We conditionally approved \$200 million for the capital investment tax credit, that leveraged \$2.2 billion of new investment. I know that the government can look at those – they can't refute those numbers because those are the numbers, and they have access to that information. Mr. Chair, \$200 million leveraged \$2.2 billion, thousands of jobs in communities around the province. That tax

credit was working. Again, you know, one of our intentions, had we continued to govern the province of Alberta, would have been to extend those two tax credit programs because they were successful.

For me, what's frustrating is when you have a tool that is helping Alberta businesses and job creators and it gets thrown out or eliminated. For what, Mr. Chair? The province has the funds. I mean, they've chosen a \$4.7 billion corporate tax cut over programs that have a track record of supporting companies. Again, the corporate tax cut does not support your small businesses that aren't withdrawing earnings, that are keeping every dollar and putting it back into the business. I know that they know that. Then why? Why eliminate tax credits that are working? It is only by and because of ideology: because they were brought in under the NDP government, therefore they are bad. Well, I think that's naive. I think it's short-sighted.

Again, I appreciate if the government wanted to put its own spin on them, but here's the part that I can't understand, Mr. Chair. They've agreed that the petrochemicals diversification program, that our government introduced, is good and is working. Again, it has attracted investments: you know, Inter Pipeline, investing \$3.5 billion northeast of Edmonton; the Canada-Kuwait joint venture, that's attracting \$4 billion of investment. For those programs, the government has admitted: "Yes, it's a great program. It's effective. It's doing what the NDP said it was going to do." Again, happy to have those numbers scrutinized. But they attracted investment. Why? Because they levelled the playing field, which is what we said when we introduced them, and half that side voted against them when we were government. Now that they've had a chance to crack the books open and take a look at it, they've decided that these are good.

What I don't understand is how some programs that we introduced you're continuing, yet the tax credits, that were successful, that were just starting to get a significant uptake, you're deciding to eliminate here. You know, Mr. Chair, I'm quite disappointed for those reasons, and this is why I really struggle, even with the film tax credit, to support this bill.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. It seemed like perhaps he had notice of finishing a sentence there.

Pursuant to Standing Order 4(4) – obviously, it's 6 p.m. – the chair will leave and return at 7:30 today. From this point until 7:30 today we are recessed.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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