



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, February 27, 2020

Day 3

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

### The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UCP)  
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,  
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UCP)  
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)  
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Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)  
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)  
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)  
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Horner, Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)  
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., Taber-Warner (UCP)  
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Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UCP)  
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UCP)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)  
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

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United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Barnes  
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Sabir  
Singh  
Smith  
Yaseen

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 27, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

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

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we have very special guests of the Minister of Transportation visiting today. The CFO for Kids Cancer Care in Calgary, Debra Osiowy, and the founder of Kids Cancer Care, who happens to also be the minister's wife, Christine McIver, are here. Welcome.

A very warm welcome to guests of the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. His Worship Colin Derko, the mayor of Boyle, Alberta, is here today with his daughter Shayla Ellen. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Also, visiting the Member for Peace River, welcome from Mackenzie county Reeve Josh Knelsen, CAO Len Racher, and Carol Gabriel, executive assistant.

Also in the galleries today are special guests of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Welcome Brock Blakely and Emily Brand.

And, last but not least, hon. members, guests of the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul: Kevin and Judy Hanson.

Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has a statement to make.

### Education Budget 2020-2021

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While today is budget day, it is also my son's seventh birthday. Through you, Mr. Speaker, and because I promised him that I would do it: happy birthday, Bodhi. I am so proud to be your mama. [some applause] He'll appreciate that.

I spend a lot of time thinking about the world in which my kids are growing up, and there is no doubt that the budget today will have an impact on them. My son, who is in grade 1, and my daughter, who will be starting kindergarten this September, are entering an education system that is under attack by their own government, a system that the Education minister is dragging backwards with an outdated approach to learning that focuses on standardized testing rather than fostering students' abilities to think critically. My kids will go to school in classes that are already getting crowded and will only keep getting more so since this government has cut funding to classrooms.

With the government's new funding model, distributing money based on previous years' student numbers, funding will absolutely not keep up with the growth that we're going to see in our schools. Even my seven-year-old, Mr. Speaker, understands that if there are

more kids getting a piece of the birthday cake but the size of the cake stays the same, every kid gets a smaller piece. My son's understanding of math is already better than the Minister of Education's.

I want my kids to fulfill their ambitions and follow their skills after completing high school, whether that means being a pipefitter, a teacher, a chef, an artist. Whichever path they choose after high school – trades, college, or university – it's all postsecondary. All are valuable, and all are being cut by this government. Supporting the trades requires more than creating a hall of fame or a nice story in the throne speech. It means putting your money where your mouth is.

When I asked my son what he wanted for his birthday, he said that he wanted ice cream to fall down from the sky like rain. It sounded pretty improbable but no more improbable than the idea that this government will put aside its failed ideological experiments and do what's actually right for Albertans and our children in today's budget.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, I too would like ice cream to fall down from the sky. A very happy birthday to Bodhi.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has the call.

### Infrastructure Blockades

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have had enough. Illegal blockades aimed to cripple our economy must come to an end. Last Friday the Prime Minister held a press conference where he called for the blockades to come down, yet nearly a week later our rule of law is met with contempt. When will the Prime Minister actually listen to the Wet'suwet'en First Nation, that wants this Coastal GasLink and voted in favour of it? Canadians are fed up with being held hostage by urban green-left zealots who have no or little connection to First Nations, let alone the Wet'suwet'en. First Nations don't want government handouts, and they certainly don't want self-righteous protesters acting and speaking on their behalf. Instead, they want jobs. They want industry, economic sustainability, and prosperity for their communities. They want the Coastal GasLink project. By standing idle, the Prime Minister has put Canada's entire economy in jeopardy and has weakened all efforts for a meaningful reconciliation with First Nations people. True reconciliation is to listen to the Wet'suwet'en people, act against the illegal blockades, and call for the acceleration of this project to help First Nation communities break the bonds of perennial poverty.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government's failure to act and resolve this issue is an insult to the wishes of First Nations people as well as the hard-working men and women of our energy sector and transportation sectors, who have been left stranded. There is no doubt that the blockades played a definitive role in the withdrawal of Teck's Frontier mine project, and Trudeau's continued weak leadership – emphasize "weak" – only discourages future investment in Alberta and Canada. It's time for the Prime Minister and the federal government to do what is right. It's time for the federal government to stand up for Albertans and all Canadians. It's time for these projects to move forward, and it's time for the wishes of these First Nation communities to be heard.

Today I stand in support of the overwhelming majority of the Wet'suwet'en people and the hard-working men and women of our energy sector, who don't want to be held hostage anymore by these illegal blockades, now or in the future.

### Choice in Education

**Mr. Walker:** Mr. Speaker, children receive a world-class education in Strathcona county, and the foundation of our educational success rests on school choice. In Strathcona county we have public, separate,

francophone, charter, and home-schooling. Elk Island public schools serves approximately 18,000 students in 43 schools. Within our public system there is great choice, including an alternative Christian program run by the Strathcona Christian Academy, or SCA group, which has an elementary school and a secondary school. Francis Poole is the principal at SCA elementary. Jaime Peters is the assistant principal at SCA elementary, and Mr. Jon Elzinga is the principal at SCA secondary.

Elk Island Catholic schools has approximately 4,000 students in 18 schools. I have enjoyed attending Archbishop Jordan Catholic high school events and am aware that ABJ, as it's known, has a world-class robotics program.

Mr. Speaker, our charter school is New Horizons School, which is a K to 9 school that enables academically gifted students to achieve excellence. Established in 1995, New Horizons is Alberta's oldest charter school. I had the honour of touring New Horizons School.

École Claudette-et-Denis-Tardif is our francophone school, which is K to 6, and promotes excellence for their students while giving appropriate services to build a strong connection with the francophone culture at home. The school opened in 2015 and today has more than 150 students. I enjoyed touring this school and attending a corn boil event there, too, last fall.

Mr. Speaker, Strathcona county's education system serves as a great example of how school choice ensures excellence in education for Alberta's children. I am so proud to be part of a government that supports school choice.

Thank you.

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

### Capital Plan

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday this government proudly proclaimed in the Speech from the Throne that the capital plan will be cut by \$200 million. Conveniently, the previous capital plan was then immediately removed from the government's website to hide this cut. That \$200 million cut could have paid for nearly 10 new K to 9 schools and created hundreds of jobs within the trades and construction industry. Instead of investing in our communities and creating jobs for Albertans, they would rather continue with their failed no-jobs corporate giveaway. While we wait for the upcoming budget, I would like to recap some of the infrastructure cuts that have hurt not only my constituents but all Albertans.

**1:40**

Terwillegar Drive here in Edmonton is a crucial roadway for constituents in my riding as well as Edmonton-South West. This government defunded the provincial portion of that freeway, and now there is going to be downloaded cost right on the city and its taxpayers. This government also recklessly chose to postpone the new hospital in south Edmonton until 2030. Edmonton has not received a new hospital since the Grey Nuns was opened in 1988. That's shameful. The Minister of Infrastructure is also bringing back the failed P3 funding model. P3s have failed right across this country and right here in our communities. I've witnessed this failure first-hand from the dangerous conditions at schools in my riding and across Edmonton.

These cuts are harmful for Albertans. When will this government choose to stop cutting needed infrastructure projects to fund their \$4.7 billion no-jobs handout and invest instead in crucial projects within our communities that will create jobs and which will actually get Albertans back to work?

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

### Debt

**Mr. Guthrie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last several decades personal and government debt around the world has escalated. In Canada household debt exceeds \$2.1 trillion, and personal savings rates are declining. It is reported that nearly half of Canadians are within \$200 of being unable to pay their bills. Economic pressures felt in Alberta over the last five years have led to substantial job loss and increased insolvencies. Apathy towards debt has developed due to strong economic times and a long period of low interest rates.

Governments continue to borrow heavily regardless of economic conditions. Under the NDP Alberta's debt increased by over \$50 billion, and the Trudeau deficit now stands at \$26.6 billion, with all of Canada's debt exceeding \$1 trillion. Policies of sustained deficit financing will fail. We live in a time when we have watched countries go broke. Greece, Spain, Italy, Brazil, and Argentina have all had serious financial difficulties. In Venezuela socialist policies caused financial collapse and moved the country into a period of hyperinflation. The region has become extremely volatile, plagued with civil unrest, starvation, and crime. Countries under debt restructuring lose autonomy. Decisions are made for them on social programs, pensions, and public-sector funding as finances are approved by foreign debt holders. If Canada were to experience a period of rising interest rates, our reliance on debt would place us in a vulnerable position.

Mr. Speaker, it is imperative we get off the unsustainable spending trajectory that we are on. It is time we treat government money with more care and attention. This UCP government has a plan to balance by 2023. Once this is achieved, it will be essential to build surpluses to pay back our debt and secure Alberta's financial future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### AISH and Income Support Payment Schedule

**Ms Renaud:** I think we can all agree that all of us in this Chamber are paid fairly well. I also think most of us, likely not the millionaires in the room, would agree that a change to our pay schedule would entail some work for us like reorganizing payment dates and other household budget adjustments. Now imagine you're one of the 127,000 disabled and low-income Albertans trying to get by on what AISH and income support pays. For those of you that don't know, people on AISH and income support live well below the poverty line. Disabled and low-income Albertans are struggling with these payment changes. This ridiculously short notice is adding to the confusion and harm.

Two nights ago a disabled Albertan sent me a private message online and described a little bit of what life is like. It went like this. The rent is \$1,000 per month, which, thankfully, includes electricity. Since this person doesn't live in an urban centre, transportation costs are high. Add to that the cost of a cellphone, medical expenses, and this person is left with almost \$250 for food and other expenses every month if they're lucky. There's nothing left over. Food security becomes a problem. And because this person has already used the food bank more than the three times that they're eligible to in 2019, they're now only able to get emergency baskets.

Now think about our Premier's comments when he was asked about the decision to cut AISH by indexing. He said that people wouldn't find it onerous. That is not true. We've heard from constituents, all of us. We all know they're struggling. Do the right thing. Tell your boss, this Premier, to reindex AISH and income support, and then commit to consulting Albertans before you make changes that hurt them. Make Albertans more important than shareholders and profitable corporations.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Leduc-Baumont has a statement to make.

### Education Funding Framework

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Education in Alberta is finally getting a new funding framework after 15 years. Inflation accounted for 55 per cent of increased costs while total spending increased by 80 per cent, with student outcomes generally remaining the same. By cutting red tape and capping administration spending, the new formula will be putting funding back into the classroom.

Under this new formula school boards will have more flexibility and predictability when it comes to their annual funding. This upcoming school year they will all be receiving a funding increase. We continue to meet our campaign commitment of maintaining or increasing K to 12 education funding.

By instituting a framework focused on yearly enrolment totals, many schools which were losing students to transfers or new schools were left with the potential of losing portions of their funding. Changing to a three-year weighted moving average allows this funding model to assign value to enrolment from recent years into funding considerations. This will ensure that school boards minimize the need for mid-year funding requests. In rural schools there is a potential for high turnover. Resources can be scarce. This is why the three-year weighted enrolment will benefit rural schools. Ensuring foreseeable funding promotes their long-term viability.

In addition to funding assurances and stability, the new formula simplifies school grants by consolidating the number from 36 to 15. It continues to recognize and utilize program unit funding, ESL and FSL, refugee, and First Nations grants. These are the supports that students will continue to need and will continue to receive.

We are spending over \$8 billion a year on K to 12 education. Our responsibility as a government is to ensure that those funds are used appropriately to achieve better student outcomes, and this new funding formula will help ensure that that happens. Mr. Speaker, as a father of two young daughters, a well-funded education system is important to my family and the families in my constituency.

### Teck Resources Frontier Mine Project Cancellation

**Mr. Barnes:** Mr. Speaker, the news that Teck withdrew their Frontier mine application was absolutely devastating news for Albertans and our communities. This decision came on the cusp of what was great news regarding the progress of the project. All 14 proximate First Nations had confirmed their support. However, only mere hours later the news became irrelevant.

The decision made by Teck was unequivocally the direct result of the federal government's complete failure to ensure investor confidence in our nation, and as a result billions of dollars of investment and thousands of jobs have been lost, and Albertans are once again left to feel alienated and forgotten in their own country.

Albertans are sick and tired of this. Does Mr. Trudeau really think that Albertans are just going to stand idly by while opportunity after opportunity pass us by due to the incompetency of his government? Instead of calling a spade a spade and denouncing the disastrous actions of the federal government, this NDP blamed our government for the decision after all the progress we had made. They didn't blame Mr. Trudeau and the federal government for undermining investor confidence and our economic interests or moving the goalposts repeatedly and politicizing a 10-year review process by demanding that Alberta stop our challenge against the carbon tax. They've been silent on the radicals who have been blocking the economic arteries of our nation as well.

We also saw that they didn't stand up for the best economic interests of our province during their brief tenure. Instead, they blamed us, even after we had just secured support for the project from all 14 proximate First Nation communities. Mr. Speaker, no, the blame doesn't fall on our shoulders, and it certainly doesn't fall on the shoulders of Albertans. It falls on those who have repeatedly undermined our economy and degraded our province's way of life.

Mr. Speaker, this unfortunate decision has only strengthened our government's pledge to all Albertans. We will continue to support the oil and gas sector, more now than ever, and we will fight for a fair deal for all Albertans within Canada.

### Road Conditions in West Yellowhead Constituency

**Mr. Long:** Mr. Speaker, in West Yellowhead we are proud Albertans who contribute immensely to our province's success, mainly through agriculture, energy, forestry, tourism, and the public sector. In return for our contributions, we don't ask for much. We want our safety to be a priority for government. We want government to understand the role that it is meant to play. In that context, we ask that our taxes not get too high and for the taxes we pay to be used responsibly. This has not been the case.

Simply put, successive governments have spent beyond their means and neglected to provide the vital services my constituents need. Those governments have chosen to allow the roads in my constituency to deteriorate to unacceptable conditions. Every day I drive through my constituency, dodging pothole after pothole to avoid severe damage to my vehicle. Sometimes my constituents are not so lucky. Too often their vehicles are damaged, and they are left to pick up the repairs, sometimes to the tune of thousands of dollars.

1:50

West Yellowhead is a main thoroughfare for travellers from the west to enter our province and for travellers from the east to visit the magnificent splendour of Jasper. These visitors, too, are vulnerable to the condition of our roads. They drive through hoping for a nice weekend of skiing or sightseeing and enter a nightmare of sometimes severe damage to their vehicles. And I'm not just talking about back roads. This is highway 16, highway 40, and highway 32. The conditions I'm talking about are potholes many inches wide and deep and several metres long. Mr. Speaker, these potholes are not just big enough to cause severe vehicle damage; they also have the potential to be a serious safety threat.

The legacy of irresponsible governance and neglecting important infrastructure projects must end. I hope our government will make it a priority to get these desperately needed projects completed in a timely and fiscally responsible manner.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, now for what you've all been waiting for.

### Oral Question Period

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

### Provincial Fiscal Policies and Economic Growth

**Ms Sweet:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Finance said that his government is, quote, on track, and to symbolize his efforts, he dusted off the same old cowboy boots he wore for last fall's budget. But let's get something straight. This government has lost 50,000 full-time jobs since they handed over the \$4.7 billion to big corporations. Fifty thousand jobs. To the minister: how can you possibly claim that you're on track? I'd hate to see what track you're on and what it looks like.

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is, I'm sure, always welcome to go and visit the Minister of Finance at his ranch up north and see how regular rural Albertans work hard and get the job done, as this Finance minister is, continuing on the path towards balance through a responsible fiscal policy that will reduce overall spending by 2.8 per cent while focusing on growing the economy and creating jobs, unlike the NDP, that wants to raise taxes on job creators, that wants to punish Albertans with a carbon tax, and that wants to raise income taxes. We're not going to let them get away with killing jobs again.

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

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's 50,000 job losses and personal income taxes going up.

In the last year's budget the government projected Alberta's economy would grow in 2020 by 2.7 per cent. Even at the time those numbers seemed overly optimistic. They were higher than every single private-sector forecast. Since then most of those forecasts have been downgraded. Does the Premier still believe his unrealistic projections from the last budget? Why was he so wrong?

**Mr. Kenney:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it's true that the NDP left this province in a recession, left this government to inherit a recession. That has been confirmed today by the Conference Board of Canada, the leading economic think tank in the country, which said that last year Alberta's economy shrunk by .2 per cent thanks to the NDP's policy, that left us with higher taxes, higher debt, and killing jobs. That was irresponsible. Happily, the Conference Board, their projection fresh off the printer, projects that this year Alberta's GDP will grow by 2.2 per cent, the second-highest growth in the Dominion of Canada.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Sweet:** Fifty thousand job losses under your government, Mr. Premier.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this House the Premier claimed that the banks were predicting that Alberta will lead the country in economic growth. However, as the Premier just said, that simply isn't true. Since the last budget TD, National Bank, RBC, and Scotiabank have all downgraded their growth projections, and not one bank has Alberta leading the country in growth this year. So again to the Premier: why do you not understand how to read the real numbers, or are you simply trying to cover up your failed economic record?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, once again, the most reputable and independent economic think tank in the country, the Conference Board of Canada, has just published its projections for this year of 2.2 per cent growth, exceeding that of eight other provinces, and that's after we've had to crawl out of the hole into which the NDP dug this province.

But what is their plan? They were against us deleting their carbon tax. Then they didn't like us challenging their friend Justin Trudeau's carbon tax. We scrapped the NDP carbon tax, we've won against the Trudeau tax, and we will not let the NDP bring back a carbon tax, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

### Climate Change Strategy

**Mr. Schmidt:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta will warm faster than the rest of the planet because of human-caused climate change, causing

profound impact on Alberta's economy, our infrastructure, and the health of our citizens. This is the conclusion of a well-researched scientific report put together for this UCP government. What did they do with that report? They buried it. They don't want Albertans to know the risks because that would require them to do something about it. To the Premier: when will you stop the cover-ups and start taking real action?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Environment and Parks.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're very proud of the work that we're doing when it comes to emission reductions in this province. But what I really want to talk about is that that opposition party continues to support Extinction Rebellion when it comes to the conversation when it comes to emission reductions in this province.

**Mr. Feehan:** Cover-up. Cover-up.

**Mr. Loewen:** Point of order.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** In fact, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has said that they want Extinction Rebellion to be able to present in our classrooms. That is an organization who downplayed the Holocaust, calling it an almost normal event. As a father of three children in this province, shame on them.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, a point of order is noted at 1:55.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Let's be clear. The only thing that's at risk of extinction are horses in Sundre.

They had the report. They refused multiple freedom of information requests . . .

### Speaker's Ruling Improper Inferences

**The Speaker:** Order. Order, hon. member. Everyone knows what you were implying in the Chamber. You can apologize and withdraw it before you continue.

**Mr. Schmidt:** On behalf of the horses of Sundre, Mr. Speaker . . .

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Schmidt:** . . . I apologize and withdraw.

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Not on behalf of the horses, sir. On behalf of you.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I apologize and withdraw.

### Climate Change Strategy (continued)

**Mr. Schmidt:** They refused multiple freedom of information requests for it, and then they tried to sneak it online by falsifying the date that it was posted. I'm not sure what the minister is afraid of, but I'll tell you what he should be afraid of: extreme high and low temperatures, the serious impacts on our farmers and ranchers, and the high risk of devastating wildfires in our communities. Premier, are you seriously going to ignore this report and ignore the . . .

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that in this situation the researcher in question was told to submit data before



the full data set could be published. The paper was published as open-source data by the government of Alberta.

That member just did a drive-by smear against the Government House Leader based on a case where this member was completely acquitted, Mr. Speaker. To come up with specious and disproven allegations against an honourable member of this Legislature is beneath this place and beneath any member of it.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Mr. Speaker, if they won't believe the scientists, perhaps they'll believe Alberta businesses. The Business Council of Alberta says that today's budget should include "further . . . efforts to address climate change" and that "Alberta can become the preferred destination for low-carbon capital investment." They also go on to say that creating "a new age of opportunity and prosperity for Albertans" is possible and that this will be "every bit as powerful as the last." Teck, the Calgary Chamber of commerce, the Business Council of Alberta: Premier, who do you need to hear it from before you're willing to take real action?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, we're proud of the work that we're doing on emission management in this province. We're proud of our industry, who's taking a leading role and has all the way. The first province who worked on emissions in this country is the province of Alberta. That side of the House continues to support anti oil and gas extremists, activists that are working to block railways, even block ambulances trying to get patients to health care, and they're being supported openly by those members. In fact, those members across the way have stood on the very steps of the seat of democracy in this province and protested with them to stop our oil and gas industry. Again, through you to them, shame on them.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has a question.

### Postsecondary Tuition Fees

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In their rush to hand out more than \$4.7 billion to profitable corporations, this government is leaving our postsecondary students in the dust. Only days ago Mount Royal University reported to their students that their tuition would be rising by 7 per cent in this coming year. Seven per cent in one single year. To the minister: can he explain to the students at Mount Royal University how they're supposed to afford such drastic cost hikes to their tuition?

2:00

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is confused, but perhaps I can help him. There's no \$4.7 billion giveaway to corporations. I'm not sure where he's coming up with that.

He wants to talk about Mount Royal and tuition hikes because he wants to deviate from their government's record when it comes to tuition. They implemented a tuition freeze, and they said that doing so would increase enrolment and accessibility. Look at the numbers. Enrolment is down from when the freeze began. They should look at the science behind tuition policy and tuition freezes before they make decisions.

**Mr. Eggen:** What is clear, Mr. Speaker, is that this government only prioritized their no-jobs corporate handout and increased tuition right across this province.

There's more. Students at NAIT and SAIT and trade colleges will also receive tuition increases and cuts to instructors and support staff. Is this minister proud of the legacy that he's building for

himself, where students are forced to pay more and get less for their education?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Mr. Speaker, again, just trying to deviate from their failed record when it comes to postsecondary education. Over the last four years under their tenure we saw nothing come out of that ministry, no developments. We are moving forward on a plan to ensure the sustainability of our postsecondary system and at the same time develop a new funding model that will help ensure that our graduates are ready for work when they've completed their postsecondary studies. We have the highest youth unemployment rate in decades, and we are working to fix it. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Eggen:** Mr. Speaker, this is the Minister of Advanced Education. He is responsible for advanced education. I would suggest that he start doing his job. He doesn't seem to care about that, and neither does his staff. His press secretary took to Twitter just a few months ago claiming that students actually wanted a tuition increase. Minister, do you stand by this claim today that students at Mount Royal University, NAIT, SAIT, and many other trade colleges actually want to pay hundreds of dollars more in their tuition every year? Where do you come up with this stuff?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, talking to students is an important priority of mine. It's something that I do on a very frequent basis, and I'm very proud of our student organizations, who have been able to provide some very practical and real feedback to government when it comes to a variety of different policies. Of course, as you know, Mr. Speaker, we're moving to build a new performance-based funding model and have been engaged in extensive discussion with our students and with many other stakeholders to help inform that decision. Again, the members on the opposite side of the aisle, or Extinction Rebellion lite as I like to call them, are just trying to avoid the circumstances and just trying to gloss over their record when it comes to support for our energy sector. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order. Hon. members, I don't think we need to be ordering other members of the House to sit down and do their job. Every member of this House has the opportunity to rise and speak.

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

### Medical Diagnostic Imaging Test Wait Times

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since last summer wait times for CT scans and MRIs have exploded because this Health minister chose not to renew funding. I repeatedly warned the minister in this House about the crisis in diagnostic wait times that he was causing. He wouldn't listen. So I was relieved to hear news on CBC Radio this past Friday that he is finally starting to draft an action plan. The question is: why did the minister wait so long to act, and will he present his action plan to this House today?

**Mr. Shandro:** Mr. Speaker, the fact is that CT and MRI scan wait times have increased for five years. They increased every year under the NDP. They increased every year while Edmonton-Glenora was the Minister of Health. It was a shame. They're expecting us to fix in one year what they couldn't do in four. They ignored the problem. We're not going to ignore the problem. We're going to fix these wait time problems we have in Alberta, make sure that all Albertans have access to MRI and CT scans as quickly as they can.

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

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This minister ignored the problem for a year. We heard the throne speech promise that Albertans wouldn't have to pay out of pocket for medically necessary procedures, but I've got news for this minister. It's already been happening on his watch. Julie Michalichyn needed two MRI scans to find and treat a tumour on her brain. Thanks to this minister's negligence, she was told to wait six months' time or pay \$1,600 out of pocket to have them done privately. Why did this minister force his American-style health care model on Julie, a working Alberta mother with two children and a tumour on her brain?

**Mr. Shandro:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans do not need to pay privately for CT scans to have their cancer diagnosed and treated. The hon. member knows that. He knows that that is false. That is not how we treat cancer in this province, and it's completely unacceptable.

I have recently directed AHS to take steps to address CT wait times. They've taken action immediately. But throwing money as the NDP did when they panicked in the fourth year of their mandate – they panicked, and they threw money at the problem rather than actually taking the time and sitting down and making the tough decisions to fix this problem. They failed to do it. We're not going to.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Doctors have confirmed that the dollars we invested brought down the wait-list and protected patients like Julie. Patients in Edmonton are now waiting up to a year. Family physician Dr. Ernie Schuster said, and I quote: it can't go on like this because people are going to die. This minister was warned by me, he was warned by doctors, and he was warned by patients. He was told by AHS that they were increasing because of his lack of continued funding. He knows he's created a crisis. Will he give Albertans' lives the same priority he gave the \$4.7 billion corporate handout, immediately reverse these reckless cuts he made to diagnostic imaging funding, and do it today?

**Mr. Shandro:** Mr. Speaker, we cut nothing. We cut nothing. We are continuing to increase our spending in health care. We're going to continue to make sure that we are going to address the problem that the NDP refused to deal with when it came to MRI scans, when it came to CT scans. They refused to make the tough decisions. We've developed an action plan to be able to do this. We have the staff, we have the equipment to be able to meet our clinically recommended wait times, and we're going to do it by making the decisions they refused to deal with.

### Red Deer Regional Hospital Expansion

**Mr. Stephan:** Mr. Speaker, for years residents of central Alberta have been pleading for support for the Red Deer regional hospital, and for years former governments dithered and wasted time and money with half-baked measures. Yesterday I stood with my colleagues to announce a \$100 million investment in our hospital, but there is an urgency here. Health outcomes are not improved with planning and replanning; it requires action. To the minister: what steps are you taking to expedite the expansion of the hospital?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Health.

**Mr. Shandro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member notes, I was thrilled yesterday to stand with the Premier to announce this

much-needed expansion in Red Deer. The member is absolutely correct. Red Deer and central Albertans have waited far too long for this. I'm proud that our government has been the first to listen. The capital funding of \$100 million is in addition to the fact that we're spending on health care the highest ever in our history in this province and the highest per capita of all provinces. This announcement is great news. Thank you to the member for his advocacy. Thank you for the advocacy of the Minister of Education in being able to get us to this point.

**Mr. Stephan:** Given that the Red Deer regional hospital is, on average, at 108 per cent occupancy rate and given that apathy and political games by the former government exacerbated wait times, lack of capacity and, of most concern, poor health outcomes for central Albertans and given that central Albertans have waited too long, to the minister: what timeline can be expected for the completion of this expansion to the hospital?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Shandro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This initial \$100 million commitment to phase 1 is our promise to Red Deer that we'll get it done right and we'll get it done as soon as possible. The business case for the project has been expedited, from a typical completion time of 12 months being brought down to seven months, so we can get work as soon as possible. This funding is intended to expedite the work to finalize the project's scope, the construction schedule, and the operating budget. Building health infrastructure provides good jobs for Albertans, and we're committed to getting the front-end work of this project done right so the people of Red Deer and surrounding areas have a hospital that meets their needs.

**Mr. Stephan:** Given that the former government was incompetent when it came to the stewardship of taxpayer dollars and given that the former government would not hesitate about spending in Calgary and Edmonton to buy votes while ignoring the rest of the province, to the minister: what will you do to ensure that residents of the rest of the province, including central Alberta, are treated in a fair and equitable manner?

2:10

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Shandro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residents of Red Deer and central Alberta were ignored by the NDP; that's correct. That won't be the case for our government. We're listening, and we're acting. We're keeping our promise to maintain health care funding while providing a universally accessible, publicly funded health care system. Red Deer regional hospital represents an important hub for acute-care services in the central zone. [interjections] We hear members of the NDP heckling because they're upset that we are continuing to maintain a publicly funded, universally accessible system. They're angry that we're going to provide what they couldn't.

### Surgical Procedure Coverage

**Member Irwin:** One week ago I joined our leader and several brave women to stand against this government's attack on women's health care and the plan to eliminate surgical procedures of "limited clinical value." These include breast reduction, tubal ligation, and carpal tunnel surgeries, that disproportionately impact women and gender-diverse folks. This plan in the minister's AHS report is wrong, harmful, and it needs to be rejected immediately. Will the

Minister of Health stand in this House right now and commit to ending his planned attack on women's health?

**Mr. Shandro:** That hon. member knows that that is false. It is false. It is false. It is false, Mr. Speaker. They are twisting information in the EY report when we did a performance review of AHS. They have twisted that information to scare patients, to scare Albertans. It is inappropriate. It's time for them to cut it out and stop scaring patients. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. I think it might be helpful if the Minister of Health speaks through the chair.

**Member Irwin:** Given that the actual recommendation in black and white calls for the elimination of these procedures and to push them off to private, for-profit surgical clinics and given that the minister accepted that recommendation, asked AHS to implement it, then told Postmedia that he's ordering AHS to tell doctors to reduce the number of these procedures, will the minister stop telling doctors how to treat their patients, stop telling women what to do with their bodies, and retract his comments right now? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Shandro:** I'm not going to retract, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to repeat it again, as I've done on social media, as I've done in traditional media. They continue to take a part of a recommendation that quoted a list that was from the National Health Service. That the NDP doesn't even know the difference between a National Health Service in the United Kingdom and the Alberta Health Service in Alberta is embarrassing. That they don't know what the NHS is and that they are continuing to twist that fact and trying to scare Albertans is completely disgusting. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Member Irwin:** Given that the minister, given all his actions, clearly doesn't believe that physicians are pursuing the best course of action for the women that they treat – he clearly doesn't believe that women have a right to pursue their own choices about their health, noting that he won't reject these dangerous recommendations, saying that it's not a gender issue – will the minister at least admit that he maybe doesn't have a clue about women's health care and maybe stop giving media interviews about something he clearly knows nothing about? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Shandro:** Again, false. False, Mr. Speaker. It is false. They are continuing to scare patients in Alberta by twisting, by misrepresenting, by misleading. Those procedures will not be delisted. They will not be defunded. They will not be uninsured. It's time for the NDP to start telling the truth to the patients of Alberta. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

#### Automobile Insurance Rates

**Mr. Carson:** After meeting with their lobbyist buddies behind closed doors, this UCP government moved without warning to end the 5 per cent cap on automobile insurance rates last fall. The result, Mr. Speaker: rate hikes of up to 30 per cent. Absolutely shocking. My first question today is very simple. Does this minister actually believe that annual increases of 30 per cent on insurance rates are fair, and if not, why won't you end this gravy train and reinstate the cap immediately?

**The Speaker:** I see the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen.

**Mr. McIver:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What the hon. member is failing to disclose to this House is that under the 5 per cent rate cap Alberta drivers were very negatively affected. They had to pay a full year's premium up front instead of paying monthly. Many were denied collision and comprehensive coverage, and many were not able to access coverage through their broker as insurance companies severed contracts with the brokers. Mr. Speaker, they are hiding the damage they did to the insurance industry and now trying to make excuses for it after the fact. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Carson:** Mr. Speaker, all the consequences that were just listed by that minister are happening as a result of them lifting the 5 per cent cap on insurance.

Now, given that big profitable corporations get a \$4.7 billion handout from this government while residents like Edmonton senior Don Belanger are forced to come up with \$600 more dollars a year just to keep his car on the road and given that Don joined us at the throne speech this week to send a message to this government that removing the insurance cap is absolutely not okay and his household budget is suffering as a result, to the minister: why won't you listen to Don's message and those of so many others across our province who are seeing their bills rise? Is it because you only have time for donors and party insiders?

**Mr. McIver:** Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that they want us to listen to Albertans because that's exactly what we're doing, that the NDP government failed to do. We're addressing the issues that they wouldn't address. The fact is that the automobile expert advisory committee is currently listening to Albertans, collecting evidence, and meeting with stakeholders to develop recommendations and will report back to government this spring. If the previous government had the courage to do the right thing, they would have had that conversation when they had the chance.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Carson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to see from this government that they take action and consult after the fact. It's very concerning.

Now, given that when confronted with the size of insurance hikes, 30 per cent in some cases, the Minister of Finance's press secretary could only suggest that unhappy Albertans should, quote, shop around, to the minister: will you apologize for the comment made by your staffer, and to make amends, I'm asking once again, please do the right thing and reinstate the 5 per cent cap on insurance?

**Mr. McIver:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP wants to stick Albertans without being able to get comprehensive insurance, having to pay the whole year's bill at once instead of doing it month by month. The same people that seem to care about people that have a hard time making ends meet are actually making it harder. We're going to fix what they refused to fix. We're talking to experts right now, and as I've said, we will report this spring.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

#### Medical Diagnostic Imaging Test Coverage

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chiropractors are valuable medical practitioners who provide a wide-ranging number of services to Albertans. They do this despite not having been a publicly funded or insured service since the formation of AHS in 2008. In recent

negotiations with AMA, Alberta Health put forward an initiative that involved taking away the right of chiropractors, among other uninsured practitioners, to refer patients for diagnostic imaging. Can the Minister of Health explain the reasoning behind this proposed change and whether the review done by Ernst & Young supports making this change?

**Mr. Schmidt:** It's false.

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. Minister of Health.

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, although it seems that Edmonton-Gold Bar is really excited to come jump up and answer the question for me.

We're acting, Mr. Speaker, to make insurance coverage consistent across providers and across provinces. I'd like to note, though, that the scope of practice for these professionals or their ability to order diagnostic imaging services is not going to be affected at all. It only affects who pays for the service. I should also clarify that the decision was made by my department, not by AHS. It does align with the MacKinnon panel report and the EY review, which both say that changes must be made in order to make sure that our health care system is sustainable.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that this change was suggested by Ernst & Young and fulfills a campaign obligation to bring Alberta's government spending back into check and given that this decision puts Alberta's policies more in line with other provinces, can the minister please explain what he and his department are doing in order to make sure diagnostic imaging is still available in a timely manner for those who need it?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health.

**Mr. Shandro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. CT wait times increased every year under the NDP, and AHS's total cost per CT scan is up to 50 per cent higher than it is in other provinces. I've directed AHS recently to make any changes required to their payments for DI services to find the efficiencies and reinvest the savings in order to increase services. The Alberta surgical initiative will require, of course, increases in scans, and those costs will be funded through the savings from the EY review. We're making changes to bring our costs in line with other provinces, and every dollar we save will stay in the system.

2:20

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister of Health. Given the scale of this change to our system, including the prospective impacts on access to a professional who can refer diagnostic imaging should that be required, and given some of the backlash that has come from the opposition, can the minister please explain what consultation was done prior to proposing this in negotiations as well as informing all of us what kind of consultation is still ongoing?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. After the MacKinnon panel report was tabled in August, we notified the AMA that we wanted to begin negotiations in September. We gave them a few

months. In November those negotiations began. That included consultations on 11 proposed changes primarily related to a schedule of rates that physicians are able to charge. I've been meeting with physicians since those consultations began. I got great feedback. I continue to get great feedback. We'll continue to work with the AMA. We'll move forward on a new physician compensation framework, and that new framework will prevent \$2 billion in cost overruns and improve services for patients.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

### Parenting and Family Resources Programs

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Airdrie, High River, Fort Saskatchewan, Edmonton, Sturgeon county: these are just some of the communities impacted by the chaos created when the Minister of Children's Services decided to abruptly cancel all parent link programs and implement a confusing new process with unclear outcomes. As a result of the uncertainty, some organizations have been forced to lay off staff, some have announced they'll be reducing programs, and some have even announced that they're closing. Why has the minister intentionally created anxiety and job loss to early childhood and parenting programs that these communities rely on?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Children's Services has the call.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What our government is undertaking is continuing to implement the well-being and resiliency framework that was actually introduced by the members opposite. It is based on brain science, best practice. I will not continue to do things the way we've always done them because we've always done them that way. We owe it to vulnerable kids and families to strengthen those support services for them.

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

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that local newspapers in Medicine Hat, Ponoka, Rocky Mountain House, Crowsnest Pass, Wetaskiwin, Rimbey, Stettler, Canmore are all reporting that local programs are absolutely being impacted by this uncertainty and the budget cuts that this minister has created and given that the Minister of Children's Services has stated that the final decisions on whether funding and programming will even continue will only come two weeks before the programs end, why is the minister adding uncertainty and chaos by leaving these critical community organizations and families hanging until the literal last minute?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that change is difficult, but this is change that is very necessary to ensure that children and families across this province who are in vulnerable situations are getting the supports that they need, that build on their strengths, and that help keep their kids safely at home with their families.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you. Given that the Sturgeon community resource network, which had been operating for over 20 years, was told that they did not meet the requirements for the new model and given that the Western Rocky View Family and Community Resource Centre in Cochrane reported that they will certainly lose out on at least \$350,000, resulting in far fewer services for families

and children, and given that centres that have been providing services and supports for decades are closing and anticipating deep service cuts, what does the minister have to say to Alberta families who are left in limbo wondering about the fate of their programs as a direct result of her reckless decisions?

**Ms Schulz:** Mr. Speaker, these decisions were based on the recommendations from our community partners who told us that this was necessary work to ensure that kids and families are getting the supports they need. I would ask the member opposite: is what we have been doing over the past two decades working when the number of kids coming into care, 1.7 per cent of the Alberta population, has not been reduced? We owe it to kids and families across Alberta to do better, to be better, to build on their strengths, and to build up their families.

### Rally on Drug Policy at the Legislature

**Mr. Dang:** Yesterday Albertans gathered at the Legislature to call on this government to show support for evidence-based harm reduction initiatives and to stand with those families struggling with addictions and coping with the tragic loss of life. The group had the permission that they needed, but when they arrived, they were told that they needed to take down crosses built to commemorate the lives of those tragically lost to addictions. The Minister of Infrastructure was responsible for this decision. Will he explain to survivors, families, and friends of the opioid crisis how he could be so heartless?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's disappointing. Again, this is not a question about government policy.

But I am happy to talk about government policy. This government is proud of the work it's doing when it comes to addictions and mental health. We're proud of the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. As you know from the throne speech, that just came to the House this week, we are on our way to bringing in 4,000 new addiction beds, Mr. Speaker. This side of the House is committed to working hard when it comes to addiction management in this province and to finding real solutions. That's a significant contrast from the former government, who did absolutely nothing to help Albertans.

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

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that, apparently, it is this government's policy to take down crosses from grieving family members and that this group's peaceful and moving demonstration was disrupted despite them having permission to hold a rally here and given that the repeated comments from the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions showed the lack of respect that he has for Albertans and this group, will the Minister of Infrastructure confirm again that this will not happen under his tenure? Or is this how the UCP treats the freedom of speech and assembly for groups they don't agree with?

**Mr. Panda:** Mr. Speaker, our United Conservative Party proudly stands behind all Albertans' Charter freedoms, to peacefully assemble and have freedom of speech. I'll look into the issue and will ensure that those things won't be repeated.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that after the assembly had gathered to mourn the loss of thousands of lives, the

associate minister of addictions tweeted a statement describing supervised consumption sites as "aiding and abetting criminal activity" and given that after tweeting this cruel statement, he had the audacity to claim that he had heard those who attended and that he respected them, will the associate minister stand now in this House and apologize for his thoughtless and callous acts that occurred at this very Legislature yesterday?

**Mr. Luan:** Mr. Speaker, instead of an apology, I'm so proud to stand in this House. Our government supports a full continuum of care that supports people for prevention, intervention treatment, and recovery. Our government committed \$140 million and has dedicated this ministry to work solely on mental health and addictions.

Mr. Speaker, that previous failed government with a one-pillar approach completely failed Albertans. We're going to be different. We're going to focus on a comprehensive strategy, make life better for Albertans.

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

### Economic Development

**Ms Glasgo:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Brooks-Medicine Hat in southeastern Alberta is home to a diverse economy and a highly skilled workforce. We are fortunate enough to be a home to job creators such as Hut 8 Bitcoin mining, Aurora Cannabis, CF Industries, Methanex, JBS meats, Big Marble Farms, and the Red Hat Co-op. Since the Industrial Heartland, north of Edmonton, got its designation as such in 1998, over \$40 billion in investment has been realized. To the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism: how is such a designation created, and could a potential southern Alberta industrial zone for my region have a similar effect?

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

**Ms Fir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The Alberta Industrial Heartland is an association that was a creation of partner municipalities. The five municipalities have collectively agreed through a usual area structure planning process to designate specific areas of land for industrial purposes. Our government is continuing to work with areas like the heartland and the tri-municipal partnership in the Peace region to find ways to enable more efficient regulatory approaches for cluster development. Our government is also introducing an investment and growth strategy, which will work to attract investment back to Alberta's key sectors.

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

**Ms Glasgo:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers is a leader in raw material production for petrochemical feedstock and given that the NDP's burdensome regulatory and taxation regime led to that company's decision to move their feedstock processing to B.C. and given that this caused the loss of \$1.2 billion in investment from the Alberta economy along with an estimated 800 jobs, to the same minister: what is our government doing to attract such jobs and investment back to Alberta?

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

**Ms Fir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working hard to bring investment back to our province after it fell by tens of billions of

dollars under the NDP. Between 2014 and 2018 foreign investment in Alberta fell by over a third. It is time for us to reverse that trend. That is why we are introducing an investment and growth strategy which will focus on key pillars of our economy, including energy, agriculture, and tourism as well as aerospace and aviation, technology, and financial services.

2:30

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Glasgo:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her answer. Given that there is interest by several job creators to expand their operations in my constituency and given that several businesses in my community are looking to market their products across Canada and further given that these companies' successes would not only lead to diversifying our economy but also create much-needed jobs, to the same minister: given this government's commitment to reducing interprovincial trade barriers, how can your ministry assist these companies to create jobs and diversify our economy?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Fir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for her question. It's true that interprovincial trade is a massive barrier to economic growth. Internal barriers to free trade cost Canada's economy between \$50 billion and \$130 billion every year. Our Premier has shown bold leadership on this file by removing most of Alberta's exceptions under the Canadian free trade agreement, taking us from the thirdmost exceptions to by far the lowest. The Montreal Economic Institute ranked Alberta first on interprovincial trade. We encourage other provinces to follow suit, and we're already seeing encouraging signs.

**The Speaker:** The Member for Edmonton-City Centre is rising.

### COVID-19 Response

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, at last count there are confirmed cases of novel coronavirus in 44 countries around the world, including China, South Korea, India, Italy, Iran, Brazil, the United States, and many others, more than 80,000 cases worldwide, 11 cases in Canada, though thankfully none to date in Alberta. Federal public officials are warning Canadians, however, to prepare for a pandemic. Can the Health minister inform this House on what he's doing to prepare for such a possible pandemic?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health.

**Mr. Shandro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Both the ministry and AHS have taken steps to make sure that we have the procedures within our facilities as well as throughout the province to make sure that we're going to be protecting health care workers if and when somebody does come to Alberta with COVID-19. As well, on top of that, we've been taking steps to make sure that we have the materials and supplies available to us to be able to deal with any situation that might come to Alberta.

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

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that Alberta is home to three international airports, six international land border crossings, and numerous transportation links to other communities across Canada and given that early coronavirus symptoms can appear to simply be the common cold or the flu, can the minister

tell this House what screening or surveillance measures have been put in place to ensure early detection in the event that the virus should arrive in our province?

**Mr. Shandro:** It's actually a fantastic question, Mr. Speaker. It involves working with our federal partners because a lot of that work has to be done by them with our international airports. The federal government has taken steps, and Dr. Tam, through – I'm sorry; I can't remember the acronym – the public health advisory council, has taken steps. All the chief medical officers of health for the provinces and three territories and the federal government have been working together to make sure that those international airports here in Alberta and throughout the country have taken steps to be able to make sure that there is screening in place.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that the spread of the coronavirus is a continually developing situation and given that there's understandably somewhat of a concern about the coronavirus amongst my constituents and indeed, I think, those of all members in this House and many Albertans, will this minister commit to continually updating the public on the coronavirus situation and efforts to prevent it, and will the minister commit to hold briefings specifically for the media and this Official Opposition as the situation develops?

**Mr. Shandro:** Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I have been trying to do that through social media. Folks can follow me through social media, either with Facebook or Twitter. We do have websites dedicated – [alberta.ca/coronavirus](http://alberta.ca/coronavirus), I think, is the website that's available for people to get updates every day. The chief medical officer of health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, is also continuing to be able to provide briefings to Albertans on the steps that both the ministry and AHS are doing. AHS also has their own website to be able to continue to brief Albertans. We have also provided that to both the ethnic media and traditional media.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has a question.

### Electric Power Prices

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in question period the Minister of Energy suggested that it was consumers who were to blame for the 19 per cent electricity price hikes in Calgary and 20 per cent hikes in Edmonton rather than her senseless and harmful decision to lift the price cap. This morning I heard from Bruce, who shared with our caucus that his most recent electricity bill doubled. Will the Minister of Energy acknowledge the hardships that the skyrocketing electricity bills are causing Albertans like Bruce? Does she even care?

**Mrs. Savage:** Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned yesterday, there are over 30 providers of independent contracts that will allow for an electricity rate lower than the rate cap. Those processes are available. The consumer advocate is available to talk to people about that. We put information out on every single electricity bill. We care about the cost of electricity. They didn't, because they took a lot of steps imposing their ideological processes on electricity, running up the cost.

**Mr. Sabir:** Given that another Albertan, Dan, told us that since the price cap was lifted, he's paying three times as much despite using less electricity and given that when asked about these huge increases in electricity prices, the Minister of Energy stated, "There

is no reason that Albertans have to pay more than 6.8 cents,” is the minister somehow suggesting that Albertans like Bruce and Dan no longer need to heat their homes or keep the lights on? Why are you so out of touch with these Albertans?

**Mrs. Savage:** Mr. Speaker, in the year since it was implemented, the rate cap has cost Alberta taxpayers over \$90 million. If it carried through until 2021, it would cost an additional \$283 million. That is taking Alberta's taxpayer money from Albertans and then returning it to Albertans, the same Albertans, as a subsidy on their electricity bill. The solution to this is keeping electricity costs down. The solution to this is to take their ideology out of the electricity system so that we can provide Albertans with affordable electricity.

**Mr. Sabir:** Given that the only subsidy Albertans received was that \$4.7 billion to the wealthiest corporations and that we warned the minister that these massive price spikes would be the result of her lifting the cap in December and given that at the time the minister claimed that the decision to end the rate cap was made after she had received overwhelming feedback from consumers, Albertans, and given that neither I nor any of my colleagues have heard from any constituent demanding their electricity bill be hiked by 19 to 20 per cent, does the minister really still stand by her ridiculous claim that consumers actually want to . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Energy.

**Mrs. Savage:** Well, Mr. Speaker, do you know what Albertans see on their electricity bill every single month? It's called the Balancing Pool adjustment, and it's a charge on each and every bill every single month to pay for the NDP's ideological meddling in the electricity industry. It's to pay for the return of the PPAs and the cost of the Balancing Pool, now running up to \$2.7 billion that Albertans are going to be paying off every single month. That is what's causing electricity to be high.

#### Education Funding Framework

**Mr. Yao:** Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Education announced a new K to 12 funding model, which ensures rural schools are able to deliver programs in an equitable way. Many school boards across the province have expressed optimism about these changes. In Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo the Northland school division expressed that they were pleased that funding for high schools was changing to a single-base instruction rate. To the Minister of Education: will this new funding model fulfill the commitments we made to Albertans and help support our rural schools?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Education has risen.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question. Absolutely, this will help support our rural schools to deliver equitable programs. I am pleased to say that we have honoured our commitment, and I'm very proud to say that the new funding model includes a grant that would help ensure that rural schools with declining enrolment are able to deliver programs to their students in an equitable manner. I'm looking forward to sharing more of the details as we bring forward the budget.

**Mr. Yao:** It is given, Mr. Speaker, that it's been over 15 years since the K to 12 funding model was last updated, and since then education spending has grown by 80 per cent, substantially outpacing inflation and enrolment growth. The new funding model

is supposed to reduce red tape and streamline the grants in the education system. Can the minister please elaborate on these changes that school boards will see in this upcoming year?

2:40

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you. Yes, absolutely. Our new funding model reduces red tape and gives more flexibility to school divisions so that they can determine how to best invest our taxpayer dollars. By simplifying the number of grants to 15 from the current 36 while still maintaining record levels of spending, school authorities will be able to better direct funding to support the unique needs of their students.

**Mr. Yao:** It's a given, Mr. Speaker, that across the province there have been many rural, urban, and metro schools that have come out in support of this new funding model, and many have appreciated the consultation process provided by the Minister of Education. Can the minister explain how this model was created, and who exactly did she consult with?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Staff in my department met with every single school division and engaged with education system leaders as we developed this new funding model. Collaboration was key in this particular format, and the priority of mind throughout the entire process is to advance the work of this framework because it is so necessary. It's what people wanted.

#### Natural Gas Industry

**Ms Issik:** Mr. Speaker, our natural gas industry faces the same issues accessing world markets that have plagued our province's oil sector, including the spread of misinformation. The U.S. has placed emphasis on energy independence, creating lower demand for Canadian products; therefore, Alberta must seek out new markets for our natural gas products. Meanwhile protesters in B.C. are attempting to block our natural gas from reaching international markets. To the Associate Minister of Natural Gas: what is the government doing to support getting our LNG off the west coast?

**The Speaker:** The Associate Minister of Natural Gas.

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the members opposite had their way, they would still be on this side of the House, side by side with Extinction Rebellion protesting the Coastal GasLink. Well, I know two things. One is that it will be 45 years before Albertans ever forgive the members opposite for the damage that they did to this province, and the second thing is that in this administration we stand beside the energy industry, and we stand alongside our indigenous allies in true reconciliation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

**Ms Issik:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that communities like those surrounding the Industrial Heartland rely on the jobs and economic benefits that come from industrial innovation and continued growth from our energy sectors and given that Alberta's low natural gas prices have created an opportunity for natural gas products to add value to industries like the petrochemical sector, to the associate minister: what is this government doing to encourage corporations like those in the petrochemical sector to consider Alberta a viable jurisdiction for long-term investment?

**Mr. Nally:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta is home to high-quality, low-cost feedstock. We've got a skilled workforce in place as well. We are a destination. We are currently having the largest, most robust consultation that has ever happened in this industry, and we're building both a brand and a vision that is going to make this province a destination not just for natural gas but for petrochemical as well.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Issik:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it can take up to four times longer to have a natural gas project approved in Alberta than in Texas and nearly twice as long as our neighbouring province of Saskatchewan and given that our province's regulatory red tape creates unnecessary financial burdens on our already struggling natural gas sector and given that too much industry regulation serves as a proven barrier to investment, to the associate minister: how will this government reduce the costs of our regulatory regime and make us competitive with jurisdictions like Texas?

**The Speaker:** The associate minister.

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By the end of our first term we're going to have cheaper taxes than 44 U.S. states. That's going to make us competitive with Louisiana and Texas. Now, we all know that the tone-deaf decision-making on behalf of the previous administration resulted in tens of billions of dollars fleeing the province. That's a shame. Now, it begs the question: is that the reason why the Member for Calgary-McCall has sat in this Legislature for 54 days and has not asked a single natural gas question? That's a shame.

### Introduction of Bills

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Finance.

#### Bill 4

#### Fiscal Planning and Transparency (Fixed Budget Period) Amendment Act, 2020

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** That is correct, Mr. Speaker. Let's see what we're doing today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave on behalf of my colleague the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to introduce Bill 4, Fiscal Planning and Transparency (Fixed Budget Period) Amendment Act, 2020, which is proposing to establish a fixed budget period for the month of February of each year.

A fixed budget period aligns with one of the recommendations of the MacKinnon panel, and it will help enhance transparency and accountability in government financial reporting.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

#### Bill 201

#### Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act

**Mr. Gottfried:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is intended to bring together a broadly representative council of aviation and aerospace sector experts from across our province and to be reflective of the great diversity and diversification opportunities within a growth industry. After two decades in the aviation industry myself, I speak from a position of

deep understanding of the opportunities that lie ahead and of the importance of our connectivity to the world with respect to the movement of people, goods, and capital.

But I am humbled at every turn by the entrepreneurial, pioneering, and innovative spirit that reflects our rich aviation history and proud legacy of leadership in the bright blue skies above our province. From the history of Edmonton's Blatchford field as the gateway to the north as early as 1927 to our proud contribution to the victorious outcome in the Second World War of over 130,000 aviators through the British Commonwealth air training plan, we have much to celebrate and embrace with respect to past accomplishments and future opportunities for global leadership in aviation and aerospace.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members of this House to reach out to me to ensure that we engage all relevant players across this great province in what I believe can be an exciting, innovation-driving, job-creating, and investment-attracting initiative. I can assure all members of this House and Albertans that we won't just be winging it as we work hard together to ensure that Alberta's first-ever strategic aviation advisory council takes flight.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** I think we can all agree on one thing: it's probably the best dad joke of the day.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, is there anyone with a tabling today? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

**Mr. Carson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to table the requisite number of copies of a CBC document titled New Numbers Confirm Alberta Drivers Facing Higher Auto Insurance Costs.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

**Mr. Hanson:** Well, a new session and a new opportunity to remind the House of the NDP's Leap Manifesto, that seeks to shut down our oil and gas industry in this province. From the Leap Manifesto to Extinction Rebellion.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the point of order from 1:56, I believe it was, has been withdrawn.

Hon. members, to allow appropriate time to prepare for the Budget Address by the hon. the President of Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance this afternoon, the House will recess until 3:15.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:50 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.]

**The Sergeant-at-Arms:** Order!

**The Speaker:** Please be seated.

### Orders of the Day

#### Transmittal of Estimates

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, I've received certain messages from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

**The Speaker:** All rise, please. The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.



The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the 2020-21 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2020-21 government estimates. In addition, I wish to table the 2020-23 government of Alberta strategic plan and the Budget 2020 ministry business plans.

## Government Motions

### Budget Address

4. Mr. Toews moved:  
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the government's Budget 2020-23 fiscal plan.

Mr. Speaker, it's a great honour to rise today in this House and table this government's budget for 2020. This budget continues the responsible four-year fiscal plan that started with Budget 2019, a plan to get Albertans working, to make life better, and the pledge to boldly stand up for Alberta. Albertans overwhelmingly endorsed our commitment to eliminate the largest deficit in our province's history and bring government's finances back into balance. I am pleased to share that we are on track to eliminate the deficit. In fact, our deficit is \$1.2 billion lower than we projected in Budget 2019. This means that Alberta taxpayers will pay \$35 million less in debt-servicing costs.

Getting to a balanced budget will provide a solid fiscal foundation from which Albertans can confidently face the future and seize its opportunities. A balanced budget means that millions and then billions of dollars in interest payments to bankers and bondholders can be diverted into the services that Albertans need. In short, my goal as Finance minister, my motivation, is to lay a strong fiscal foundation for economic prosperity for this generation and those to come.

To eliminate the deficit by 2022, this budget continues the plan to reduce government operational spending by less than 3 per cent. More importantly, it includes modernizing the way services are delivered, ensuring that Albertans are getting full value for their tax dollars. It includes reprofiling expenditures to ensure that we're providing for our most vulnerable, and it will ensure the sustainability of public services into the future.

Since 2014 many Albertans have been out of work. Today's unemployment rate is over 7 per cent, and there has not been a business, a community, or a family that has been untouched by this crisis. From the very start, even before we were elected, we made jobs the number one priority and not by growing government. Albertans know that government does not create wealth or prosperity. Government policies can either support growth or impede it, but they cannot create it. A robust economy is wealth created that's built on the effort and investment and ambition of its citizens and businesses. Government's role is to provide a business environment that is nimble, predictable, and one where there's a high correlation between effort and risk and reward.

3:20

Alberta's history is full of remarkable stories of innovators, mavericks, risk takers, and determined hard-working people from all walks of life drawn to the boundless opportunities our province offers. The freedom to pursue dreams and the common-sense work

ethic of the people is how Alberta became a magnet for entrepreneurs and investment and earned the reputation as the wealth and job-creation engine of the nation.

I'm pleased to present in this budget a blueprint for jobs. This blueprint will support our key sectors of energy and agriculture and forestry, where we're naturally strong, and leverage our advantages to support sustainable economic diversification, innovation, and business attraction in technology, aviation, and the financial and tourism sectors. Our government will move quickly to evolve as goals are met and new opportunities emerge. This plan will form the basis of a relentless crossgovernment focus to support economic growth and job creation.

In Budget 2020 we're continuing to take a broad-based approach to taxation, where government doesn't pick winners and losers but instead creates a competitive business environment, where capital flows freely without government prejudice or bias. To that end, we're cutting business taxes and red tape, balancing labour laws, freeing up interprovincial trade, and refocusing Alberta's international offices on investment attraction. Alberta now has a 10 per cent corporate tax rate, down from 12 per cent when we took office. That's the lowest in the country, and when we reach 8 per cent in 2022, we will be one of the lowest jurisdictions in North America.

CNR cited the job-creation tax cut and the curtailment exemption for new drills from the conventional basin as reasons for planned drilling activity increases in 2020. Alberta's credit unions support our decision to lower corporate taxes as these reductions allow them to increase investment in their local communities and lend more to Albertans seeking to build the province. Economists have consistently shown that tax reductions combined with regulatory certainty lead to economic growth and job creation. Budget 2020 continues with this approach, and we expect more positive investment announcements to come.

We've brought back common-sense labour laws that provide balance to both employers and workers, but we're not done yet. We will use public input from online engagement last fall to revisit how Alberta's labour laws should address vacation time, holiday pay, youth employment rules, and where and how employment standards should apply.

Expanding our economy starts with expanding trade, and that starts right here in Canada. Alberta is leading by example in opening provincial borders to trade, and so far we've removed more than 80 per cent of our exemptions under the Canadian free trade agreement. We continue to call on all other provinces and territories to make Canada a true economic union and show the world that Canada is open for business and investment.

Like provincial borders, red tape is also a barrier to economic growth, one that we're tackling head-on and with real economic benefits. We're clearing the backlog of grazing leases waiting for approval by extending 20-year leases for ranchers who go above and beyond environmental standards.

We passed the Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019, which cuts red tape and provides common-sense exemptions from the labour code while ensuring basic safety standards on all farms and ranches.

We've reduced delays for forest management agreements that support forestry jobs and ensure the best environmental and resource management outcomes.

And our work is being recognized. In January of this year, nine months after taking office, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business gave Alberta a B minus, up from an F, on red tape reduction, and while we have a good start, a B minus is not good enough. Much work remains. Budget 2020 continues the commitment to cut red tape by a third.

Budget 2020 allocated \$75 million over three years to focus the work of Alberta's international offices on investment attraction, cross-sector co-ordination, and focused marketing. We need the world to know the many business opportunities that exist in Alberta and that our actions back our claims that we're open for business.

Indigenous communities have tremendous potential as they take their rightful role in our economy. Budget 2020 provides up to \$1 billion to the new Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation to backstop indigenous equity investment and ownership of major energy infrastructure projects.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a world-class energy resource and an industry that reflects the value of that asset. We are global leaders in energy exploration, production, transportation, and environmental technology. Our energy industry has been the primary driver of our economy and the economy of the nation. Getting energy to market is key to our prosperity, and while we're pleased that work is under way on the Trans Mountain pipeline, we are pressing the federal government to get firm guarantees on the completion date and assurance that the rule of law will be swiftly enforced in the event of illegal protests. Trans Mountain is not the only pipeline at play. With plans to optimize existing pipelines, the anticipated completion of Enbridge's line 3 and TC Energy's planned resumption of Keystone XL, additional export capacity is inching forward.

Speaking about pipelines, I want to be clear. This government will do everything in its power to ensure pipelines necessary for economic growth and job creation are built as quickly as possible. Until then, we'll be looking for increased crude shipments by rail. We have off-loaded to the private sector all of the crude-by-rail capacity the previous government irresponsibly committed Albertans to, and we're expecting rail shipments to exceed 500,000 barrels per day in the near term.

Since forming government, we've fought hard for the natural gas sector, working with industry to improve co-ordination in shipping and maintenance protocols, which has led to increased prices and price stability. There remains great growth potential for energy. The world will need fossil fuel energy for decades to come, and Alberta, with its energy sector committed to environmental and social excellence, is the rational place to produce it.

To that end, we will highlight to the world Alberta's best-in-class environmental, social, and governance credentials through initiatives, including those of the Canadian Energy Centre, to maintain the confidence of investors and ensure jobs in Alberta are defended. We are seeking federal approval of flow-through shares or other tax instruments to further increase job-creating investment in environmental activities. This would create jobs by increasing reclamation of abandoned oil and gas wells. But we're not sitting on our hands while we wait for a federal response. Our government will increase our loan to the Orphan Well Association. This investment is expected to create hundreds of jobs in regions where they're badly needed and will result in a significant increase in the reclamation of abandoned sites.

Mr. Speaker, while this government is a staunch supporter of our energy industry and believes it has great potential for additional growth, we're also on track for continued economic diversification. Diversification starts in the energy industry itself. Budget 2020 continues government's \$1.1 billion commitment to the petrochemical diversification program that turns ethane, methane, and propane into plastics, fabrics, and fertilizers. Continuing the program encourages a sector that has a great future in Alberta with low-cost feedstocks, a talented workforce, and essential infrastructure.

Alberta energy is more than oil and gas. Renewable energy is a growth opportunity, and industry is responding. Two companies, Calgary-based BHE Canada and Suncor Energy, are investing half

a billion dollars in wind and solar projects. In fact, after we returned Alberta to an energy-only market, private companies have announced more than \$2.7 billion in various electrical generation projects.

Further to the environment, our government will work with industry to continue reducing the environmental impact of our energy production. Our technology innovation and emissions reduction program, or TIER, puts the cost of reducing emissions where it belongs, on large industrial emitters, instead of on the shoulders of families and seniors. More than that, the TIER program will support new GHG reduction technologies that have real potential to cut global emissions.

Agriculture in this province has been an integral part of our history and heritage. George Lane, one of Alberta's most distinguished and innovative cattlemen at the turn of the 20th century and a founding member of the Calgary Stampede, had an unshakeable confidence in the future of western Canada and a vision of Alberta as the greatest farming and ranching region of the world. It's said that his vision had a considerable effect on immigration and investment, and I would echo his unshakeable confidence today. Our farms and ranches are global leaders in innovative, productive practices and the use of technology resulting in high-quality products, products which are produced with less energy, less water, fewer acres, and lower emissions.

**3:30**

Food and beverage processing provided jobs to more than 26,000 Albertans in 2018, making it the province's largest manufacturing employer. A blueprint for jobs seeks to attract \$1.4 billion in investment to grow agriculture and food exports over the next four years. This will create 2,000 jobs and grow the sector by 8 per cent per year.

Technology is increasingly a foundation of Alberta's economy. Our primary sectors, such as energy and agriculture, have driven technological advancements and are in turn sustained by ongoing innovation. Alberta is home to one of three Canadian artificial intelligence hubs, and the AI ecosystem has seen an incredible upswing in growth with the attraction of research labs and an increased number of AI start-ups. We know that the start-up companies of today are the job-creating industries for tomorrow. To that end, Budget 2020 provides more than \$200 million to support research, innovation, and commercialization to develop and advance talent and to help drive global investment. This funding will support growth in AI and machine learning, aviation and aerospace, and the finance and fintech sectors. We will work with our entrepreneurs and those with a bold vision for Alberta's future to ensure that government programs, including this funding, are supporting commercialization, attracting talent to Alberta, and establishing long-term jobs for Albertans.

Another industry with immense potential is tourism. In fact, tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world, with global traveller expenditures expected to double in the coming decade. A blueprint for jobs includes development of a 10-year tourism strategy to support our goal of doubling tourism spending in Alberta to \$20 billion by 2030.

A blueprint for jobs also includes an infrastructure approach that puts a focus on long-term job creation. Over the next three years we will invest an average of \$6.4 billion per year building schools, health care facilities, roads, and other infrastructure Albertans need. To accelerate job creation, government will work with industry and municipalities to identify and prioritize strategic transportation corridors for development, that will improve productivity, attract investment, and support economic growth. Analysis is under way to identify investments that support job creation, both in their construction phase and into the future.

While there's much work to do on the jobs front, there are reasons for optimism. Canada has a new free trade agreement within North America, and we call on the federal government to ratify the Canada-US-Mexico agreement as soon as possible. Economic uncertainty in Europe is easing with Brexit clarity. Trade relations between the United States and China, which stoked fears of a global recession, are improving.

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers is projecting a \$2 billion increase in Canadian energy investment in 2020, which signals the first increase in oil sands investment since 2014. Alberta is on track to lead the country in economic growth over the next two years. Real GDP growth is forecast to rebound to 2.5 per cent in 2020 and average just under 3 per cent between 2021 and 2023.

But we know that there are still risks out there, and as the coronavirus is affecting communities across the globe, we're seeing the impacts of decreased economic activity in the financial markets. That is why we're focused on what we can control, creating an attractive business environment and restraining spending.

While we work to expand our economic capacity to increase job opportunities for Albertans, we're also making overdue changes to modernize and streamline the delivery of public services. The MacKinnon panel found that Alberta's spending per capita is the highest in Canada and has been for the last 25 years. We would be spending \$10.4 billion less every year if our per capita spending simply matched the average of British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec, and our higher spending hasn't purchased better results. Budget 2020 keeps our four-year fiscal plan on track to move our per capita spending levels in line with Canada's largest provinces, with a clear focus on achieving results.

We made a commitment to Albertans that we would not cut health care or Education spending, and we have kept our promise. Budget 2020 maintains Health spending while taking meaningful action to improve the health care system. The recently released Ernst & Young AHS review identified a number of opportunities to reduce costs while improving system performance, with all the savings reinvested into front-line services.

Over the next three years AHS will implement the Alberta surgical wait times initiative, that includes contracting with independent surgical providers, with a goal to perform an additional 80,000 surgeries by 2023 and dramatically reduce wait times. Funding for a new mental health and addictions strategy will provide hope to those caught in the cycle of substance abuse. As outlined in Budget 2019, we will deploy up to 4,000 additional addiction and mental health treatment spaces.

A new funding model in Education will provide school boards with the flexibility and, more importantly, the predictability they've been seeking. The new formula better manages student growth, streamlines the large number of grants to reduce duplication, simplifies reporting, and directs funding to the classroom instead of administration. As our students transition from high school to postsecondary, there will be a focus on programs that result in good, tangible careers. A new outcomes-focused funding model for postsecondary education will provide base support for institutions and then top that up with performance-based incentives.

Budget 2020 continues new training opportunities to prepare students and adults for lucrative jobs in the skilled trades with funding to Skills Canada Alberta, Women Building Futures, new veterans and trades scholarships, and doubling the number of schools that work with Careers: the Next Generation. These skills will be necessary as the economy picks up and as a large segment of the population retires over the next 10 years. There are currently thousands of available jobs in transport truck driving in Alberta even while thousands of Albertans remain unemployed. A blueprint

for jobs will make new tools available to those who would make a career as a class 1 truck driver.

Our government committed to better protect rural Albertans from crime, trespassing, and vandalism. A new police funding model will support our fight against rural crime by putting hundreds of new RCMP and civilian positions in rural communities. We are funding 50 new prosecutors and expanding drug treatment courts to mitigate the cycle of addiction-related crime. Budget 2020 will also introduce a number of modernization initiatives that reduce costs to the justice system. We are moving away from paper records to digital forms and e-courts to save nearly 1 million court visits, 2 million hours, and over \$400 million in the first five years. This will result in improved justice capacity and the ability to focus resources on the front lines.

We committed to support Alberta's most vulnerable, and Budget 2020 keeps us on track. Funding for Children's Services will increase nearly 10 per cent by 2023 and will assist in ensuring that children have an opportunity to grow up in a safe and caring home. Community and Social Services will provide \$11.7 billion over the next three years, caring for adults and families in need of support, for people with disabilities and the homeless.

And 2020 will mark an important year in implementation of the MacKinnon panel recommendations. The panel found that Alberta has the highest total per capita compensation for all public-sector jobs compared to other large provinces. Mr. Speaker, you cannot discuss a balanced budget without discussing public-sector compensation. More than half of taxpayer dollars in Alberta are spent on staffing. It's our largest single expense. Since 2015 the public sector grew by more than 10,000 full-time equivalent positions, and salaries grew an average of 2.3 per cent per year. Albertans simply cannot afford this. Alberta can no longer afford to be an outlier in the nation. Therefore, this government is acting on MacKinnon panel recommendations to bring public-sector compensation in line with comparable provinces.

We have a goal to reduce the overall costs of public-sector staffing by 2.1 per cent over three years. This is both responsible and fair and respects the realities of those working outside the public service. More importantly, it will ensure our ability to deliver high-quality services that Albertans expect now and into the future. That means that as collective bargaining begins with unions that represent 270,000 public-sector workers, there is no money for pay increases. So again I ask the nurses and teachers and the dedicated professionals who serve Albertans every day: work with us as partners as we ensure a sustainable future for our public sector and the high-quality services you deliver.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, for many years Alberta has been the economic engine of the nation. We have made a massive contribution to the national economy and to Canadians' standard of living by adding \$100 billion to the national treasury in the last five years alone. Over that same time frame, however, adverse market conditions have been made worse by federal policies that have created uncertainty, damaged conditions for investment, and otherwise hindered the province's economic recovery. During this most difficult period for the province in a generation, our contributions to Canada have not been reciprocated. Alberta is seeking a fair deal to address this imbalance. The Fair Deal Panel is listening to people across the province regarding a new arrangement for Alberta within Canada and will report back to our government this spring.

While we're challenged with our current federal government, we do have a growing number of provincial allies on issues important to Alberta. With decisive leadership from our Premier, nine out of 10 provinces are supportive of energy and resource corridors. Nine

out of 10 Premiers share our opposition to Bill C-69, the no more pipelines law. Most provinces have joined us in opposing the federal carbon tax. And on our request for a retroactive \$2.4 billion fiscal stabilization payment, Alberta has the support of all 10 provinces.

After the federal election in October the Prime Minister offered words of concern for the west and in support of national unity. Unfortunately, to date they've only been words, and Albertans need to see real action, so I call on our federal government to unequivocally and tangibly support growth in the Canadian energy industry and our fair request for a retroactive fiscal stabilization payment.

Mr. Speaker, balancing the budget is critically important for our future as a province, but Budget 2020 is much more than that. It's about continuing the intentional direction set out in Budget 2019, a direction that's grounded in responsibility and confidence. It's about delivering public services to Albertans in a more modern, cost-effective, and sustainable manner so they're available for future generations. It's about laying a foundation for the future, a foundation of economic growth, prosperity, and opportunity. Once again, I make a commitment to all Albertans that this government will work relentlessly to create job opportunities and to get a fair deal for Alberta within Confederation.

Mr. Speaker, there are signs that in 2020 we will turn a corner and see real economic growth return to the Alberta economy. We are on track to balance the budget. We are on track to bring investment and jobs back to Alberta. We are on track to transform

service delivery and to protect the most vulnerable. Albertans are responsible, resourceful, forward-looking, and hopeful. Together we will achieve a strong, prosperous, and compassionate Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The Official Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Sweet:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is definitely a lot to unpack here in this new budget. I'm sure Albertans will have a lot to say, and I look forward to the upcoming debate to provide their feedback.

With that, I adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader has the call.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Finance minister. Congratulations on a well-delivered speech. I could think of no better way to end the legislative week than that, so through you to all members of the Assembly, thanks for a great week of work. Wish you safe travels back to your constituency.

I move that we adjourn the Assembly until March 2, which is Monday, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:45 p.m.]

## **Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 2nd Session (2020)**

**Activity to Thursday, February 27, 2020**

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

\* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitzings.

### **Bill 1 — Critical Infrastructure Defence Act (Kenney)**

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 25, 2020 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 12-18 (*Feb. 26, 2020 morn., adjourned*)

### **Bill 2 — Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020 (Hunter)**

First Reading — 30 (*Feb. 26, 2020 aft., passed*)

### **Bill 3 — Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Amendment Act, 2020 (Glubish)**

First Reading — 30 (*Feb. 26, 2020 aft., passed*)

### **Bill 4 — Fiscal Planning and Transparency (Fixed Budget Period) Amendment Act, 2020 (Toews)**

First Reading — 62 (*Feb. 27, 2020 aft., passed*)

### **Bill 201 — Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act (Gottfried)**

First Reading — 62 (*Feb. 27, 2020 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)



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