



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 4, 2020

Day 6

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Second Session

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
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Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 4, 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 all of those in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interests and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, this morning I had the absolute privilege to meet with a very special guest who's joining us now in the Speaker's gallery. Please welcome the Consul General for Portugal, based in Vancouver, Ms Marta Cowling. She is joined by Honorary Consul Mr. Fernandes. Thank you so much for joining us today.

I'm also most pleased to welcome visitors from Lethbridge-East, representatives of SouthGrow economic development: elected chairperson His Worship Jim Willett, the mayor of the village of Coutts, protecting the southern border; and the executive director, Mr. Peter Casurella, from the city of Lethbridge. Thanks so much for coming.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two school groups joining us this afternoon. From Edmonton-Mill Woods please welcome école Greenview school, and please welcome guests from Morinville-St. Albert, Neil M. Ross Catholic elementary students. Thank you so much for coming.

This afternoon, hon. members, in the Speaker's gallery are guests of the Minister of Environment and Parks – welcome representatives from Oxford House in Calgary – and guests of the Minister of Seniors and Housing, representatives of the Good Samaritan Society. I believe I saw former member George VanderBurg as well with them.

There are a number guests visiting the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods: Krishen Singh, Ashley Reid, Nader Parhamnia. Thank you so much for joining us.

Also, a guest of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora: please welcome Rachel Greeve, a MacEwan social work student who's doing her practicum placement at the member's constituency office. A very special welcome to you.

Hon. members, please welcome all of our guests.

Members' Statements

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

Bill 1

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past few weeks Albertans have been shocked by the virtual anarchy across the country. A small group of radicals has felt entitled to hold our economy hostage through illegal blockades and protests. These

protests have disregarded the rule of law, jeopardized public safety, and thrown our economy into chaos. It's hard to believe when viewing the images of blockades in eastern Canada: masked protesters attempting to derail a freight train; another train driving through flames after the blockaders set the tracks on fire. This has been Canada's image to the world for the last month. The illegal protests have already cost our energy sector thousands of jobs, billions in revenue due to postponed or cancelled projects. The risk of blockades bringing Canada, let alone Alberta, to a standstill is very real, especially that pipeline construction is now taking place.

Mr. Speaker, our government isn't willing to let that happen. Last week the Premier introduced Bill 1, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act. This common-sense bill introduces penalties for participating in illegal protest, with individual fines up to \$25,000 and jail time up to six months. Each day they persist will be a new offence. Attacking our infrastructure that employs citizens, moves our goods is serious and should have serious consequences.

The party opposite has announced that they won't support this common-sense bill. This comes as no surprise. Just look at their track record: five of their sitting MLAs recently attended rallies organized by radical antienergy protesters; the Member for Lethbridge-West, coauthoring protest guides, encourages blockades; the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood asking for Extinction Rebellion radicals to present in classrooms. Obviously, the members opposite will have to stand by while illegal blockades try to shut down our economy.

The government will keep standing up for hard-working Albertans and the rule of law. Actions have consequences, Mr. Speaker. No protester, no members opposite should be entitled to shut down our economy and put good people out of work through their illegal actions. Yes, unlike the members opposite, we believe in the rule of law, as many Albertans do.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has a statement.

Physician Concerns

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I got a message from a young Alberta doctor, who said: "I often wonder if what I say matters, and when you take word for word examples from [doctors] to challenge [the minister], I know [it does]. The battle might not be won, but at least I don't feel powerless and invisible." That meant a lot to me. The reason I got into this work is because I realized that's how far too many Albertans felt facing the arrogance and entitlement of a Conservative Party that had governed for over 40 years. Well, in less than one year this government has fallen right back into the same.

Here are some more voices of Albertans they prefer to silence, belittle, and ignore. From Carly:

I worked ER yesterday. I felt defeated, distracted and sad. I learned of a colleague's death by suicide. I couldn't meaningfully teach my student. I'm the victim of workplace harassment by my employer. And the changes haven't even gone into effect yet.

From Rob:

In the past 36 hours . . . I've seen five of my colleagues break down in tears . . . some of the finest, most resilient . . . doctors you will ever meet . . . They are tears of frustration because your policies are cruel to our patients and there is nothing they can do to stop you. They are tears of anger because you won't . . . listen to the very people you need help from.

From Kim:

The thing that sticks in my gut from all the meetings I've been at, is family physicians breaking down in tears. Their dilemma of

having to provide worse care to their patients . . . to keep their doors open is deplorable.

From Robert:

I was on call last week for orthopaedics and spoke to family doctors I'd known for 17 years. It was so disheartening to hear their voices crack when asked how they were doing. They are facing the real possibility of closing their offices in rural Alberta.

So, Premier, you can posture and talk tough about how you're not going to blink; Minister, you can claim to respect doctors' work while using their taxes to run a smear campaign against them; and, government members, you can choose to ignore your constituents and double down on talking points. But you can't say that you haven't heard the truth – in their own words – as you do. Albertans still have a voice in this province, whether you want to hear them or not.

Rural Crime Prevention

Mr. Rowsell: Mr. Speaker, crime in rural Alberta has been increasing for a number of years, and it remains high. My constituents in Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright are concerned. They don't feel safe, and they're sick of being burdened by theft and vandalism. Calvin Franklin, who lives east of Marwayne, shared with me that he had been shot at on his senior parents' property when he tried to prevent his truck from being stolen. He was unarmed. Caroline Parke of my riding had been assaulted by a perpetrator with a knife, who then attempted to break into her home, where her four children slept.

Mr. Speaker, the perpetrator already had over 30 charges laid but never faced jail time, and in conversations with my local RCMP officials they've signalled to me that this is a frequent occurrence within the justice system. Yet there are defence lawyers in this province and country advocating for pardons for certain nonviolent criminals. It is not fair to my constituents or to any rural Albertan to allow criminals to walk away after committing theft, break and enters, vandalism, or any other crime that is considered nonviolent despite its economic and emotional impact on victims. While crimes may begin with nonviolent intentions, they can quickly lead to violence, as was the case for my constituents.

That is why I commend our government for its efforts to reduce rural crime, not by reducing sentencing or pardoning nonviolent crimes but through legislation that will prevent crimes and defend lawful property owners. This includes creating a new police funding model in order to expand police services in remote areas, increasing maximum fines for crimes such as trespassing, and amending the Occupiers' Liability Act, that will ensure that criminal trespassers will not be able to sue a law-abiding property owner who is defending their property and family against trespassers who are or who they believe to be in the commission of a criminal act.

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

1:40

Budget 2020

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier campaigned on getting Albertans back to work. His job-creation tax cut was supposed to create jobs and, obviously, lower taxes. It has done neither. Since his \$4.7 billion corporate handout, Alberta has lost 50,000 full-time jobs; Calgary has lost over 19,000.

Albertans are footing the bill for this corporate handout. Calgary is seeing property taxes increase by 11.3 per cent on the provincial portion of their taxes because the UCP government has off-loaded costs to municipalities and has left them behind. The average Calgary household will be paying more than an additional \$130 in property tax. But that's not all. We learned that since the UCP's reform to electricity, costs for many Calgarians have jumped 19 per

cent. It's the same for insurance costs, which are skyrocketing all over the province.

The Premier's plan to make life more affordable is just a bunch of empty words, like his empty blueprint for jobs. Budget 2020 is paid for by punishing ordinary Albertans through increases in fees and fines. Over the next three years Albertans will be paying \$436 million more in premiums, licences, and fees. The environment minister said yesterday that camping is a luxury we can't afford. There is apparently a lot we can't afford under this government such as funding for children with special needs, drug plans for seniors, and reasonable tuition for postsecondary students. The price for the Premier's corporate handout is higher taxes, fewer jobs, increased fees, higher debt, and poorer quality services, a price Calgarians and Albertans just can't afford.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

International Women's Day

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize International Women's Day, which is celebrated annually on March 8. It's amazing to think of what we have accomplished since the first International Women's Day, in 1911. Initially, women fought for the right to vote and the freedom to pursue their educational and professional goals. Since that time, women have become leaders in business, politics, and academia. From the Bread and Roses movement in 1911 to the current red dress and Me Too movements, the work to advance gender equality continues. The challenge to advancing gender equality now is more complex than just laws and rules.

This year's theme is Each for Equal. We recognize that despite all the gains we have achieved, there is still more to be done to make our world an equal place. To remove the barriers that women still face, we need to create a cultural shift. We need to break through the glass ceilings that exist in traditionally male-dominated industries, close gender inequity in pay, create a world where sexist jokes and comments are unacceptable, and end all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

Our government is focused on making life better for Alberta women and girls. We need to make sure that women feel safe and welcome and respected in all spaces, and we need to empower women to be leaders, not just in politics and business but in all avenues of life. We need to make sure that women are given the opportunities to pursue careers in any field they choose. This session we have promised to take action to end human trafficking in Alberta and prevent convicted sexual offenders from covering their tracks by legally changing their names.

International Women's Day is a call for everyone to appreciate and celebrate the women in their lives, but it is also a call to action for all of us to come together to recognize and address the challenges women and girls still face. I encourage all Albertans to have these conversations at their dinner tables, workplaces, and schools. Together we will empower women in Alberta to reach new heights.

The Speaker: If I might take a small piece of Speaker latitude, in recognition of International Women's Day, tomorrow we will have an all-female table, and the Deputy Speaker will be in the chair for question period in recognition of that.

The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Budget 2020

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to do what I was elected to do, to be the voice of Edmonton-Castle Downs. I

have been inundated from constituents deeply concerned with the human impact of this UCP government. I would like to share one of those letters with you today.

The impacts started when they gave away revenue with the corporate tax cut, which didn't lead to jobs. The argument I remember is that if they do not cut corporate taxes, the corporations would leave. Unsurprising to many of us, some left anyway and some cut more jobs, so now we have higher debt, less revenue, and fewer jobs.

My husband and I are retired and on a fixed income. We were lucky not to be among the 60,000 people who will be knocked off the seniors' drug plan, as I recently turned 65. What will those people do? A drug bill for \$200 or more would have very real consequences for us.

The changes they made to prescription drugs is, quite frankly, terrifying. They have not bothered to discuss this with the people most likely to know and understand the necessity of certain drugs, i.e. doctors. I'm afraid of what would happen if one of us should require these types of drugs in the future.

As seniors the sneaky health care cuts are a big worry. We are healthy now, but what happens next year or the year after? With all the extra costs, privatized health care is out of our reach.

Their removal of the insurance and electricity caps means a lot to those of us on fixed incomes, let alone those struggling on AISH. Our insurance comes due in August, and I am worried that we will not be able to afford it. Add in increased costs to even register our vehicles.

I just have to add that it is really maddening to see them create a \$30 million private corporation that doesn't have to answer to the money it spends, and the reason for it is ridiculous . . . It is virtually a witch hunt using public money. I would really like to know their reasoning for putting their war room outside of normal accountability. What are they trying to hide?

Margaret

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Social Workers

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and mark Social Work Week 2020. Our social workers are brave, hard-working, and resilient people. Every year Children's Services receives tens of thousands of calls from Albertans looking for support. This work is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. It is emotionally draining, it is traumatic in nature, and it is extremely hard. The children supported by this ministry are our most vulnerable and most precious, and it is up to our social workers to ensure that they are safe, supported, and loved. I can think of no more worthy work to do. It is important that we celebrate social workers and all people who work in the compassion field, who do so much with little recognition.

I will share of one of the social workers I've had the privilege of working with over the years. I worked alongside Amanda for years at the youth shelter. We worked with both Children's Services and nonstatus youth. These youth have experienced trauma, addiction, anger, had behavioural concerns, FASD, and almost always had no trust for adults. Most of the kids had been abandoned, abused, and rejected by the adults that were in their life. Earning their trust would not be easy, but Amanda was very good at it. Her tools were relationships, empathy, compassion, and sincerity.

To be a trusting person that can be relied upon, you had to follow through. She was amazing at not only helping our youth realize their worth, their strengths, but she was a fierce advocate and was able to help others see their worth, too. This job was full of heartbreak,

and although they do their best to maintain professional boundaries, a social worker's heart is on the line. Many tears are shed, but as my friend Amanda says, they also get to go to graduations and experience so many victories and examples of youth resiliency and their ability to overcome.

Social workers give voice to the voiceless and ensure that those in greatest need in our community find help, so please join me today in thanking our social workers.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-South has a statement.

COVID-19 Response

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. COVID-19, the novel coronavirus, is highly contagious. This disease is spreading fast, but what cannot spread faster is an irrational fear of our Chinese neighbours and community members. It is important to follow medical advice based on the facts, but the existence of the COVID-19 coronavirus should not be used as an excuse to spread misinformation or racism. It is important to follow the medical advice from our professionals, but what we're hearing from Chinatowns and Chinese communities from across our province and country is that business is beginning to slow down and suffer. In other countries we've even seen attacks on Chinese people.

1:50

Now, Albertans know that when times are tough, we help our neighbours. We are stronger when we are united, and I'm pleading with all Albertans: do not stay silent. When we see racism against Chinese Canadians or any Canadians, we should speak out and be better. Chinese Canadians have worked to build this country and province and are crucial parts of Alberta's culture. In almost every single community across this province, whether it's rural or urban, you'll find a friendly local Chinese business, likely owned and operated by a Chinese family that has lived there for generations. Our local businesses don't deserve to suffer because of unrelated international affairs.

Again, it's important to follow that medical advice, but that advice does not include avoiding Chinatown or our Chinese and Chinese-Canadian friends and neighbours. I know that I'll be supporting my local Chinatown in Edmonton this week, and I'll continue to be a strong patron in the future. I encourage every single member of this House to join me in supporting a local Chinese business and dining in a Chinese restaurant in all of their communities.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I know that if the hon. member wants to invite me to the Hong Kong Bakery, I'll be more than happy to attend with you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora has the call.

Budget 2020

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday the Finance minister admitted to the Calgary Chamber of commerce that he knew that his budget was broken even as he stood in this House to present it. Yesterday the Premier was on national television admitting that he's already working on plan B. It doesn't sound like he has a ton of confidence in his Finance minister. So I have a sincere, constructive proposal for the Premier to consider. Will he withdraw the budget, put in 10 days' hard work, work through the

constituency break, and come back to this House on March 16 with a budget that he can actually stand by?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me thank the Member for Edmonton-South for his excellent remarks, which I heartily endorse.

I will not endorse that ridiculous question. Imagine the NDP claiming that they have any credibility to lecture anyone about fiscal responsibility, Mr. Speaker. That's the crowd that drove our debt from \$13 billion to \$65 billion, went through five, six credit downgrades, and had us on track for over \$100 billion in debt. This government has committed to Albertans to bring balance back to our finances in a thoughtful and gradual way.

Ms Hoffman: Neither the Premier nor the Finance minister have confidence in their own budget. You can see it on national news. The Finance minister stood with the Calgary Chamber and said that his WTI projection of \$58 might not hold; oil futures markets have known this since January. The Premier says that the coronavirus may have downward economic performance; the coronavirus was known as a global public health emergency in January, a month before the budget was presented. The minister said that Rome was burning behind him as he delivered his budget speech. To the Premier: how could you have let your minister present a budget that you knew was so flawed and broken? Why won't you start over?

Mr. Kenney: Well, I know that it may come as a shock to the acting NDP leader, but the government did not get a heads-up that last Thursday would see the biggest drop in the Dow and the global stock markets in over a decade, Mr. Speaker. It was a very serious day in global financial markets, and now the NDP wants Alberta to panic and make an assessment even though we do not know what the global impact of the coronavirus will be. This government will closely monitor market developments, that are changing by the hour with the reduction in the Fed rate yesterday and the Bank of Canada rate today. We will adjust to events as they unfold to ensure fiscal responsibility for . . .

Ms Hoffman: It's the Finance minister who's panicked. He said that he stood in this House and felt like Rome was burning behind him. Premier, that does not sound like a confident forecast.

Albertans also have known for a long time that a calendar year has 12 months in it, but strangely your budget only accounts for 11 months of AISH payments in fiscal year 2019. It's on page 132 of your fiscal plan, that you presented last Thursday. We've asked the Auditor General to investigate this matter. For the record: does the Premier stand by his new creative accounting standards?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't expect the fiscal incompetents opposite to understand that actually that was to comply with an Auditor General's recommendation about the appropriate time for payments to be made.

But she's raised oil projections, Mr. Speaker. The budget was predicated on the public service's estimate of a \$58 dollar average barrel for WTI. The NDP budget: the last time they tabled anything in this House as a government on the fiscal future, they were projecting an oil price this year of \$70 and \$6 billion that they dreamed up, which we've taken out of the fiscal plan to be realistic.

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

Ms Hoffman: The Premier accidentally admitted to Rick Bell that his current budget cuts are actually more than 14 per cent. Economist Ron Kneebone confirmed today that his math is correct, but if the Premier is already working on budget plan B, we can only assume

that he plans to cut even more, so will he commit today to this House and to all Albertans who are sick of the embarrassment to cut the \$30 million war room?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I guess the acting NDP leader still hasn't bothered to pick up the budget and read it. I recommended she do so yesterday. I'll do that again today. I point her to page 122, which demonstrates that under the NDP last year total expenditures were \$48.4 billion, and in 2022 under the fiscal plan before this House they would be \$47.4 billion. That's a \$1 billion decline in operating expenses on a nearly \$50 billion budget. That's about 2 and a half per cent. I know it doesn't accord with their fear and smear campaign, but it's reality.

Ms Hoffman: The reality is that this Premier told Rick Bell that it's 14.1 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

I have read the Premier's fiscal plan. I have to say that on page 80 there are nine different private-sector forecasts, and not a single one of them says that the government is right. That's right; the Premier who turns to private sector for everything ignored all private-sector forecasts. He's totally out to lunch on his estimates. This budget was broken before it even went to the printers. As the Premier works on plan B – he already told everyone last night on national news that he was already working on it – will he commit to banning his staff from staying in luxury, five-star hotels?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, all members of this government and staff observe government travel rules, travel economy, use government-approved hotels. You know, they appointed Tzeborah Berman to co-chair a panel on the future of the oil sands. It's like putting Colonel Sanders in charge of the future of chickens. She used to stay at the Fairmont hotel and expense her lattes like any rich green leftist would.

Ms Hoffman: The Premier's best friend is staying at five-star hotels in London at \$350 a night. That doesn't bring a lot of confidence and assurance to people on AISH who are seeing their cheques bounce this month, Premier. The Premier can claim that he was surprised by global events, but the truth is that this budget is an attempt to conceal the Premier's failure to create jobs or grow our economy. So the Premier can face the facts now, or he can delay the inevitable. Which will it be, Premier? Will you commit finally to scrapping your \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout, that's caused chaos in our schools, our hospitals, our doctors' offices, daycares?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Hoffman: The list goes on.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, like I said yesterday, you know, when people make things up over and over again, they forget what reality is. The reality is that the job-creation tax cut represents about \$200 million of forgone revenue in this fiscal year, not \$4.7 billion. In fact, if we had completely eliminated corporate taxes, it would cost \$4.7 billion. What they're saying makes absolutely no sense. But what we now know about the NDP is that they have now committed to vote against Bill 1, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act, because they've been completely captured by their radical green left allies.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:58.

Ms Hoffman: It was on page 144 of the last budget, Premier. You know it. Admit it.

Calgary Public Schools Budget 2020-2021

Ms Hoffman: There's chaos in Calgary schools today, Mr. Speaker. After taking a \$32 million provincial cut in last year's budget, Calgary public schools will have more students and fewer dollars again per student in 2020. Bob Cocking, president of the Calgary public teachers, says, quote, we are going to see schools feel forced to do more fundraising just to keep up, more casinos, more selling poinsettias and chocolates at Christmas, even more cheque writing by parents. Why is the Premier imposing more hardship on Calgary families? Own up to it, Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government is keeping its commitment to Albertans to maintain education funding at record, historic highs – higher than under the NDP, higher than any government, and amongst the highest per capita spending on education in the country – at \$8.222 billion this year with a \$100 million additional transitional support, so \$8.322 billion. Every single school board in Alberta, including the Calgary public board notwithstanding their management challenges, is getting an increase in funding this year.

2:00

Ms Hoffman: The Premier seems to be an enemy of the truth, Mr. Speaker, because the truth is that parents are being asked to pay more fees, property owners are asked to pay more property taxes, and funding from general revenues is going down. Premier, again, read your own budget. It's not that hard. I've done it in the week I have had. Again, President Cocking says that Calgary schools already lost 150 educational assistants last year. These assistants made it possible for kids with complex needs to learn in inclusive classrooms. Now they're gone thanks to this government. To the Premier: how many more educational assistants, how many more teachers will vanish from Calgary classrooms this year to pay for your \$4.7 billion no-jobs tax cut?

Mr. Kenney: Once again, there is no such thing. By the way, when they talk about the job-creation tax cut as a, quote, giveaway, the only way that would work logically is if every dollar in the economy belonged to the government first. Allowing people to keep their own money, for the socialist, constitutes a giveaway.

Mr. Speaker, on Education funding, the budget right here, page 129: \$8.222 billion under the NDP, this year going up to \$8.322 billion; instruction for early childhood to grade 12 going from \$6.4 billion to \$6.5 billion. If the Calgary board has to lay people off, then they're not managing . . .

Ms Hoffman: The Premier needs to read his budget documents. The general revenue fund – that's the money that's coming from the taxpayers – is going down, Mr. Speaker, because the taxpayers who are paying property taxes are asked to pay more. Parents are asked to pay more. Kids are asked to sell more chocolate almonds. Premier, you need to understand the difference between your two documents. If the Premier's new favourite euphemism is own-source funding, let me translate that for all the government members in here. It's the Premier putting his hand in parents' pockets. He thinks some parents' pockets are deeper than others. This is ludicrous. Premier, why are you taking the opportunity for kids to be able to escape poverty away from all Alberta children? Why are you putting this hardship on Calgary families?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, only a bunch of fiscally incompetent socialists would think that maintaining the highest level of education funding in the history of the province is a cut. You know what? If the Calgary board of education cannot manage its budget

at the highest level in history, that shouldn't be blamed on taxpayers or on the government but on poor management practices, which is one of the reasons the Minister of Education has launched an audit into that board. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Physician Compensation Framework

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, the Premier and the Finance minister have both admitted that they were not prepared for the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19. I'm beginning to be concerned the same may be true for this Health minister. Three weeks after a global public health emergency was declared, this minister chose to tear up the province's contract with doctors and plunge our health care system into chaos. Those doctors are speaking out, and they are deeply concerned. I have a constructive proposal for the Premier and this minister: will they restore the previous agreement with Alberta doctors until at least after this emergency has passed?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to echo the Premier's comments for the member's statement that was given by the Member for Edmonton-South. It was a wonderful statement, yet his colleague ignores the statement. It's incredibly important for us to listen to the best information we're getting from the chief medical officer of health. It's important for us to listen to the information we're getting about the preparations that both the ministry and AHS and the chief medical officer of health have taken to make sure that while we're getting prepared and surveying Alberta, if somebody does come to Alberta with the coronavirus, we are prepared to be able to respond.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am listening to the hundreds of doctors across Alberta who are raising concerns as they are seeing colleagues leaving their practices, as they're seeing their colleagues withdraw from their local emergency rooms. Clinics are reducing hours or closing altogether. Emergency room doctors in our major cities are warning of being overwhelmed by patients who should have been treated in primary care, including 36 in Lethbridge and Medicine Hat today, and speaking out about the negative impacts of this government's unilaterally imposed changes. That's the chaos being created by this government. Does the Premier believe that this is how we should be preparing Alberta's health care system for a possible emergency?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, as it turns out, we actually campaigned on supporting the patient's medical home model and making sure that we were going to provide stable and predictable funding for our primary care physicians, our family physicians both in major urbans and throughout the rest of Alberta, including rural Alberta, to make sure that they have the supports that they need. There is a lot of misinformation, unfortunately a lot of it perpetuated or repeated by the hon. member on social media. I think it's irresponsible. It's best for us to understand that we are, through the new compensation framework for physicians, ensuring that physicians in Alberta are going to continue to be among the highest paid in this country.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it interesting that apparently my Twitter account competes with the taxpayer dollars that this minister has poured into a fear-and-smear campaign against Alberta doctors through government accounts.

Now, at a time when Alberta may need all hands on deck, we have doctors leaving our province. Doctors who have been recruited to move to Alberta, like two in Drayton Valley, are changing their minds and staying home. The brain drain would be bad enough under normal circumstances. To the Premier: why is your government driving health care professionals out of Alberta with your attacks and misinformation just when we need them the most?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, as it happens, as soon as that report from Drayton Valley was reported on through Global media, I actually had physicians from Drayton Valley coming and reaching out to me, the physicians who are in charge of retention and recruitment of physicians in that municipality, and saying that that is misinformation, that that is not true. They reached out and let me and my staff know that this is another example of misinformation happening both in traditional and social media which is, again, being perpetuated by the hon. member. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. Order. When the Speaker is on his feet, the hon. member will come to order because the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has the call.

Provincial Parks

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recently announced as part of Budget 2020, Environment and Parks will be working to rightsize Alberta parks. This will ensure that all Albertans have access to appropriately sized parks for their families to enjoy. However, no one is surprised by the blockade-supporting members opposite claiming that the government is selling off 164 of Alberta's provincial parks. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: is this in any way accurate?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, it's not accurate. Like so many things that the NDP do to mislead Albertans, that is not an accurate statement. They, with their friends in organizations like Leadnow who are dedicated to shutting Albertans' access to Crown lands, cannot be trusted when it comes to this issue. The Alberta government is not selling any Crown lands when it comes to restructuring our parks. We are looking for partnerships on how to manage underused infrastructure across the province. But let me be clear: this side of the House will always fight for Albertans' rights to be able to access their backyard and their Crown land. The opposite side of the House's record on that issue is clear. They tried to shut it for them.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Minister, for that clarification. Given that this government intends to partner with various interested parties in order to manage these locations to provide safe and accessible park sites for all Albertans and given that the Official Opposition and their special-interest friends seem to think that only governments can run campgrounds or recreation areas, Minister, could you please elaborate on who some of these potential partners are?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. The NDP focused on trying to use parks to be able to stop Albertans from being able to access their own backyards and Crown land. We see a different approach, partnering with communities, municipalities, and nonprofits to be able to manage places like our

west country in Alberta, in my backyard, in effective ways. One of the best examples of that is the Friends of the Eastern Slopes, who have done that in partnership with the provincial government and the federal government for decades in this province. We will continue on that path, making sure that Albertans have access to Crown land, the opposite of what they did.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you. It brings up memories of the Castle and the Bighorn, Minister.

Given that access to parks for disabled Albertans is very important and given that the Member for Lethbridge-West has indicated that our government is looking to limit the number of comfort cabins accessible to disabled Albertans, Minister, can you please assure disabled Albertans that they will be able to enjoy the same level of accessibility within our parks that they always have this summer?

2:10

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, that again is a false statement by the NDP. No accessible comfort camping sites are scheduled to be closed. That's a fact. We took that into account when we were making our determination to help restructure parks across the province. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, when she was the minister just under a year ago, tried to shut large portions of the eastern slopes from the people of Alberta. This party came into power and stopped what she tried to do to Albertans. At the end of the day, if you talk to Albertans, they know who they can trust with Crown land. It's this government and my ministry, not the member that was the former minister. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

COVID-19 Response

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, media reports in recent days have shown that many Albertans are stockpiling supplies, including water, nonperishable foods, and toiletries, in preparation for the potential coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak. In estimates today the Minister of Municipal Affairs assured us that his department is prepared for such an occurrence. Minister, you're in charge of emergency management. My question is this: is there a need for Albertans to be stockpiling supplies?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the hon. member that my department, including with the Minister of Health and coordinating with several other ministries, is working hard to make sure that our people are prepared if and when the coronavirus arrives in Alberta. At this point in time I want to assure the general public that there isn't any need to be concerned because this government is fully surveying and monitoring what is going on.

Member Ceci: Thank you for the response, Minister. Given the role that Alberta's municipal governments play in the day-to-day lives of their residents and given the obvious importance of ensuring effective communications at all levels of government, will the minister commit to regular communications with local governments over the status of any potential emergency responses? If I asked municipal leaders today, would they currently feel like they're in the loop?

Mr. Shandro: Just to supplement my colleague the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs' previous answer, Mr. Speaker, and just to let everyone in the Chamber know, both the Alberta Emergency

Management Agency and our ministry have been working together to develop an operational playbook, as we're calling it, to be able to help both us as the government and as well our partners – that includes both municipalities but also our schools in the province – to be able to have clear communications and understand what our response is going to be should anyone come to the province with coronavirus.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Minister. Given the concerns shared by many Albertans over the risks of the coronavirus and given that only two months ago the UCP cancelled a \$122 million investment in a new emergency Provincial Operations Centre, or POC, and given that at the time the minister cited the fiscal environment as a reason for this cut but given that, you know, I've been told that there aren't adequate resources or supplies or bathrooms for the staff of that centre, will the minister finally admit that it was a mistake to cancel the needed upgrades to this vital centre?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year I spent a lot of time at the Provincial Operations Centre as the province responded to the northwest Alberta wildfires. I saw first-hand how our emergency management professionals come together with first responders and NGOs to keep Albertans safe and secure in a time of crisis. This is not an either/or. I am confident that the Provincial Operations Centre has the capacity it needs to keep Albertans safe. I am also confident that we need to fight for our energy industry, which is critical to the well-being of our province.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have many concerns around the novel coronavirus, including the health and safety of our public service. These are the men and women on the front lines responding to any emergency. The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions has called for workers to have access to fit-tested, NIOSH-approved N95 respirators, at a minimum, to ensure the safety of health care workers in the event of an outbreak. Will the minister of labour ensure that front-line workers in the public service have immediate access to all safety equipment and materials that they need to do their essential work safely?

Mr. Shandro: If I could answer that. The answer is yes, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the Public Service Commission is working with all of the ministries to make sure that each ministry is going to be able to have a response within their ministries, and that includes making sure that we are taking steps to work and make sure that the employees of the provincial government and our agencies are going to be protected.

I also would like to take this opportunity to offer that if I could provide the hon. members opposite of me a full briefing on our government's response to coronavirus, I'd be happy to do that, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the members of the opposition would appreciate that briefing.

Given that the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions also called for all workers who could be exposed to aerosol-generating medical procedures to be protected and trained on the use of powered air-purifying respirators and provided with full-body protection and given that this is a request that will ensure the safety of our front-

line responders in the event of a coronavirus outbreak, will the minister commit to ensuring that this request is implemented and ensure that all workers are provided this training? If yes, when will the training be completed?

Mr. Shandro: I'd be very happy, Mr. Speaker, to be able to take that information and be able to provide the hon. member with an answer at my earliest availability and perhaps to be able to include that answer when we give the hon. members opposite a full briefing on the government's response and preparations for the coronavirus.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the federation of Canadian nurses also called for government's emergency response to incorporate the precautionary principle to ensure that all nurses and health care workers have the same access to health and safety in their workplaces and given that they warned that if this principle was not implemented, nurses and health workers could "become vectors spreading the disease to each other and their patients," will the minister commit to this principle, implementing it and incorporating it into the government's emergency response?

Mr. Shandro: I have to admit that the precautionary principle to me in my previous life as an environmental lawyer meant something different, I'm assuming, so I'm happy to be able to take that information and be able to understand what exactly that means. But I can say that our first priority is going to be ensuring that if and when a travel-related case does come to Alberta, our first priority is going to be making sure that our health care professionals in this province are going to be protected, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've asked the table to pause the clock just in light of the discussion that's taking place here. I want to assure all members that the LAO is also undertaking significant steps to provide business continuity should we ever require that here at the LAO as well. If we can unpause the clock.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Infrastructure Blockades

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 7 Extinction Rebellion blockaded the Waltherdale Bridge. Hundreds of motorists were trapped, including me. I saw what happened. Lawbreakers were indifferent to many repeated pleas to just allow them to pass. Police took an hour to come. Instead of removing the blockade, they formed a protective line for lawbreakers, ignoring pleas to just enforce the law. To the minister: what will the government do to protect law-abiding ...

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the NDP showed their true colours this week when they would not support the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act. The people in Alberta expect us to make sure that the rule of law is upheld in this province. The members opposite don't necessarily respect the rule of law. They don't necessarily even respect the rules of this Chamber. We on this side of the House respect the rule of law. We expect the rule of law to be enforced in the province of Alberta. That's why the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act is so important.

Mr. Stephan: Given that this blockade occurred on Monday morning, when Albertans were trying to get to work, and given that those trapped in the blockade could have included Albertans with medical emergencies and given that Extinction Rebellion did not care about motorists' pleas to just let them pass and given that when

laws are not enforced, lawbreakers are emboldened, to the minister: how will the government provide clarity to the police so that they will stop the breaking of our laws?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, our department is in regular contact with the police chiefs from across the province of Alberta to ensure that the rule of law is upheld in our province. That is our expectation, and we work with them to make sure that they have the resources that they need. Members opposite want Extinction Rebellion in our schools. We say no to that. We say that we respect the rule of law in the province of Alberta, we want to make sure that the police are respected, and we want to make sure that they have the resources to get their jobs done.

Mr. Stephan: Given that in a similar vein Unifor also broke the law, blockading access to the Carseland fuel terminal, and given that Alberta fuel haulers incurred losses as a result of this law-breaking and given that Unifor for weeks ignored haulers' pleas to let them work and with nothing to make whole the family livelihoods that they harmed, to the minister: will the government help Alberta families and businesses hold the lawbreakers to account for their intentional breaking of the law?

2:20

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. In the province of Alberta, in that situation there, an immense amount of frustration was shared with my office regarding that matter. One thing that I want to point out to this Chamber is that a court injunction was granted on the Thursday, it was further amended on the Friday, and that blockade was down that weekend. The rule of law is respected in the province of Alberta. We work closely with the police. We work closely with them to make sure that it's done and upheld. We also have to send a clear signal that these illegal blockades that are happening across our country – we have to make sure: not in Alberta, not now, not ever in our province.

Provincial Parks

(continued)

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, the minister of the environment believes that investing in campgrounds is a luxury we can't afford. In fact, he said that such investment was like, quote, watching taxpayers' dollars go down the drain. At the same time his government is claiming that investing \$30 million into a war room that has been nothing but a state-funded embarrassment is a luxury that we can afford. Minister, will you tell the families again why you'll fund Tom Olsen's Twitter rants but can't bother to maintain the campsites that Albertans rely on for an affordable summer vacation?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government is spending over \$86 million this upcoming year on parks. We take recreation access seriously in this province. When it comes to the war room, which is funded by the industry, what you see is that hon. member, we know, has allied himself and his party has allied themselves with organizations like Extinction Rebellion, who are dedicated to shutting down our largest industry. That's why they want to see us shut down the war room. I can assure Albertans, through you to them, that this side of the House will continue to fight for our energy industry in this province and stand up against the socialists inside this Chamber.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, given that the minister himself is committed to standing up for the \$4.7 billion handout to big, profitable corporations, money that, I might add, hasn't created a single job –

and that's a fact that I know really agitates this Premier – and given that the move to close 20 provincial parks is estimated to save this government \$5 million, one one-thousandth of the money being kicked into this Premier's jobs plans, to the minister or the Premier: if you're not going to get Albertans back to work, will you at least reconsider taking away all their fun, too?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're saving a lot more than \$5 million by being able to deal with infrastructure that is not being used in this province and then diverting spending to be able to help parks that are actually being utilized by Albertans. But at the end of the day that's the difference between the current government and the NDP. That hon. member just called \$5 million insignificant. To the people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, many of whom are struggling to pay their mortgage, \$5 million, I can assure you, is a tremendous amount of money, and they are still very disappointed in the NDP, who took us to the largest debt in the history of our province.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that this minister has a long and troubled history of following the rules in Alberta's outdoors and given that properly funding campsites actually helps us maintain the quality of our natural environments and wildlife habitats and given that this minister didn't even talk to Albertans before privatizing or closing campgrounds altogether, to the minister: is your end goal to create complete mayhem in our parks? We do know that's the way he likes it.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, that is a ridiculous comment coming from the hon. member. You know what is a fact? That side of the House, the NDP, continue to support organizations like Extinction Rebellion, whose founder, by the way, said that the Holocaust was a normal event in history. I don't think that that hon. member should continue to stand inside this Chamber until his party finally apologizes for supporting extreme organizations that are blocking our oil and gas from getting to market, that are stopping people from being able to get to work. They should stand up and apologize for that.

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

Postsecondary Education Budget 2020-2021

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday it surfaced that the Minister of Finance will no longer publish details on how much funding is being provided to each of Alberta's postsecondary institutions. It's been less than a week since his government dropped the broken-promise budget. We've already seen news of almost 500 staff being laid off at NAIT and SAIT alone. Now this government is clamping down on information on just how deep these cuts are to the polytechnics and to all universities. To the Finance minister, simple question: what are you hiding?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Mr. Speaker, I'm a little confused by the member's question. I seem to be on a regular basis, though. I'm not sure where the questions are coming from, especially after we just got out of three hours of estimates earlier this morning, where we were able to go through all of the budget numbers in detail. In estimates it's quite clear that we're providing over \$2 billion of funding to our postsecondary institutions. It's right there in black and white, so I don't know what else the member is looking for. It's all there. It's all publicly available. I would encourage him to just look a little harder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that this information was provided 10 months ago but now it's gone completely silent and

given that students are being forced to shell out hundreds of dollars more for their education and they don't even know how bad the books are due to this government's cuts and secrecy – Finance minister, I know that you know how much you cut from each college and university. Release the information. What are you hiding?

Mr. Nicolaides: Again, Mr. Speaker, the numbers are right there, and we went over them for three hours this morning in estimates to show the impact of government funding and how we'll be working with our institutions to adjust the revenue mix of our institutions. Here in Alberta our institutions rely far more on government funding to finance their operations than institutions in comparator provinces. Here in Alberta tuition accounts for only 18 per cent of the cost of financing our postsecondary institutions whereas government funding accounts for over 50 per cent. We need to work with them to develop a stronger, more stable revenue mix.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that while the UCP claims to want more graduates in trades, for example like NAIT and SAIT, two of the best polytechnic trade schools in Canada are amongst the hardest hit by this government's broken-promise budget – how ironic, Mr. Speaker – and given that this contradiction was noted by none other than Don Braid in the *Calgary Herald* today in a column all about this Premier's plummeting support, to any minister at all, really. I know that you have the list. I know you do. This will only get worse. Hand it over.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, that is completely wrong. The only ones who have publicly denigrated the trades are members on that side of the aisle. Our government believes that a trade certificate has the same value, merit, and worth as a university degree, and we're backing that up. We have a robust skills for jobs agenda that includes over \$11 million in four years to Careers: the Next Generation, \$10 million to Women Building Futures, and much more. I'd encourage the member to take a closer look at our skills for jobs agenda because, again, I think that he's misunderstood it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East is rising with a question.

Automobile Insurance Review

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in 2017 the previous government planned to address problems within the auto insurance industry by capping premiums. That plan backfired and failed Albertans, leading to high costs and fewer coverage options. Now, back in December our government announced a panel to fix the previous government's mess. Minister, when can we expect to see the report, and will it be before the end of this session?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our expert advisory committee on auto insurance is busy doing work right now reaching out to Alberta consumers, Alberta motorists, to medical experts and legal experts to identify root causes to the increase in insurance costs in this province. I'm looking forward to the report, which they will be presenting to us this spring.

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

Mrs. Pitt: Wonderful. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for the answer. Given that the auto insurance industry is no longer meeting the needs of Albertans, as identified, and further

given that we pay some of the highest rates in the country, Minister, once the committee makes its recommendations, how soon do we expect to see action on fixing the previous government's auto insurance disaster?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct. Alberta pays the third-highest auto insurance premiums in the country, behind Ontario and B.C. I will commit to the Member for Airdrie-East that we will work expeditiously when we receive recommendations from this expert committee. Alberta motorists are waiting.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that the previous government's cap on premiums actually caused Albertans to pay more for the same coverage and further given that Albertans want more choice and auto coverage that they can actually count on, Minister, please tell Albertans why the previous government's inability to handle complex policy issues led them to think that a rate cap was actually a good idea, and would you agree that their idea of a policy solution is slapping on a Band-Aid and calling it a day?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the NDP's simplistic Band-Aid to fix auto insurance just created more problems and delayed the ultimate solution, that this government will bring forward. With the rate cap, ultimately it resulted in less choice for Alberta motorists. Many Albertans couldn't find collision coverage or comprehensive coverage. The NDP simply didn't have the courage to deal with the issue. This government will deal with the issue of auto insurance. We will provide solid recommendations for Albertans.

Alberta Distance Learning Centre

Member Irwin: Rural students, remote students, students who struggle in traditional learning environments: these are just some of the tens of thousands of young people who access the Alberta Distance Learning Centre, the ADLC, which has been operating for nearly 100 years. Their record of success speaks for itself, which I saw first-hand as a teacher. This is why it was such a shock for me and so many Albertans to hear that the Minister of Education would be defunding and eliminating ADLC over the next two years. Why is the minister abandoning a service that has such a positive impact on so many students across our province?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The truth of the matter is that the ADLC program, when it was first started, was the only game in town. Since then we have 32 out of 61 boards that provide a very similar service. It is now time to put everybody on the same playing field, and that's exactly what we're doing.

Member Irwin: Given that officials with ADLC were completely caught off guard by this government's budget and given that the superintendent of the Pembina Hills school division reported that they hoped to meet with Alberta Education in the near future to discuss this change and given that the minister could only offer vague assurances that she didn't think current students would be impacted by this change, will the Minister of Education guarantee right now that every single student enrolled in ADLC courses will not be left without supports?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to make that assertion. These changes will not impact current students completing their high school diplomas. I actually spoke with Pembina Hills earlier today and their administration, and they are looking forward to working with my department and myself to move things forward.

Member Irwin: Given that graduates of ADLC have expressed their concern that these cuts will push vulnerable students even further out of the education system and given that many rural and remote districts rely on ADLC to provide those courses that their schools cannot and given that my hometown of Barrhead, where this is based, will be severely impacted by this decision, will the Minister of Education explain just how she's supporting rural Alberta by cutting jobs, damaging small communities, and hurting our students?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I really don't understand why this opposition continues to not support the new model that we have put forward, which, actually, is addressing the goals that the previous Minister of Education raised. In 2019 the Member for Edmonton-North West told delegates at the Alberta Rural Education Symposium that the time is up on how we fund education and that kids deserve a fair and equitable system regardless of where they live. Our new model does exactly that. It provides equitable funding, closes the gap for rural education, and drives more money into the classroom. We're doing what they . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

AISH Payment Schedule

Ms Renaud: Yesterday Albertans on AISH got no answers, no good answers, anyway, from the Minister of Community and Social Services about why the date of their monthly payments was moved without warning or consultation. They got no answers during six hours of estimates, and this minister appeared to blow off media questions about the matter as well. Minister, how are Albertans on AISH supposed to feel when you won't even address the really basic concerns?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, first of all, that's absolutely not true. I did answer questions, for six hours in fact, and I provided substantive answers to those questions. The reason for the date change was to provide consistency and predictability in the schedule, which certainly did not exist with the pre-existing schedule.

Ms Renaud: It's just funny.

Given that AISH payments were four days late yesterday, with Albertans expecting them Friday but some still not having them yesterday, and given that I asked the Premier to personally deal with this matter and ensure all payments were made by the end of the day but he opted, instead, to look down and chew on his pen, to the Premier or the minister: can you tell this House if every single Albertan on AISH has received their payment by now? If not, why not? You didn't answer yesterday. It's really simple.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I did answer yesterday, and I answered the media as well. I am asking for daily updates from my department regarding this matter, and our most recent information shows that calls to our call centres and written requests for help have not been higher than normal. I did give out numbers yesterday indicating that more than 120,000 payments have been delivered.

Ms Renaud: We heard directly from AISH recipients yesterday that the delay in getting the payment was now leading to them incurring additional late fees and penalties. You say 120,000. There are more than 127,000. What about those other people? Given that Albertans that rely on AISH are already forced to budget every cent, to the minister: will you commit here and now to compensating AISH recipients for any fees that they've incurred because of the bungling on this file, mistakes you deliberately made? You knew it would be a problem. Fix it.

The Speaker: I might caution the member about making an accusation of what the minister deliberately did or not.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker and to anybody who might be listening, to all Albertans, we are committed to helping anybody who needs help with this date change policy.

In terms of clients who didn't get their cheques or their payments, there are many reasons why that could have happened. There could be changes in their banking information. It could be as part of processing for the very first payment or other issues with their bank accounts. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Crown Prosecution Service Judge Appointments

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ensuring that court cases are heard within a reasonable amount of time is essential for keeping our communities safe. Given that Albertans have faced an increase in violent crime over the past few years, meaning more cases being brought to our already overloaded justice system, and given that our government committed to hiring more prosecutors to address shortages and to ensure that we maintain the rule of law while dealing with a backlog of cases, to the Minister of Justice: can you please update this House with regard to our efforts to hire more prosecutors?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to that hon. member, thank you for your advice on legal recruitment. I know he has a background in that area.

In this budget we have additional resources to hire 20 more prosecutors this year, on our path to hiring 50 additional prosecutors in the province of Alberta. On top of that, we also recognize that there was a gap, a gap on a pipeline of legal talent. That's why we hired 16 new articling students, doubling the capacity. Next year we're going to hire 20 articling students to make sure we develop legal talent in the province of Alberta that can stay here and go to communities across the province.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for the very kind answer. Given that the Supreme Court ruled in 2016 that a criminal case must be brought to trial within 18 months and given that since it began, over 45 cases have been thrown out of court in Alberta due to this Supreme Court ruling – as the government it is our responsibility to stand up for Albertans and to protect them from violent criminals – can the Minister of Justice please tell this House: what has our government done or is it planning to do to ensure that more criminals do not walk free?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've provided additional resources to our Provincial Court this year. As we work through our justice digital initiatives to modernize our courts, making sure that we streamline the system there as well, in addition it's important that we hire additional prosecutors in the province of Alberta. Our prosecutors right now across this province are doing amazing work, but they simply have too many cases to manage. We believe that by giving additional resources to our prosecution offices, they'll be able to deal with these matters in a more judicious way and, basically, get the job done for Albertans.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that judges play a vital role in the justice system and given that many of the 136 judges in Alberta have cases that are currently waiting from 24 months to even 30 months, this adds unnecessary stress on the justice system, meaning it is more difficult to ensure criminals are held to account. Really, this just boils down to one simple fact: our province needs more judges. Can the minister please update this House on what we are doing to attract more judges to the bench?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this budget that's one of the reasons why we provided additional resources to our Provincial Court. Right now we're in the process of reviewing to find additional judicial appointments. We want to make sure that they have an excellent work environment. One of the things that we're working on as well, though, is making sure we modernize the infrastructure around our judiciary. MS-DOS from 1981 is still a foundational program in our courts. That is unacceptable. Right around then we found out that Luke's father was Darth Vader. We've got a lot of work to do in the province of Alberta.

Driver's Licence Training and Road Tests

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, this past summer was a disaster for driver's licence testing because of the previous NDP government dismantling the system. Their replacement online booking system was dysfunctional. People had to try over and over and over and wait months to get an exam. To the Minister of Transportation: what will this ministry do to ensure individuals will have access to road tests in a timely manner in the peak demand of summer 2020?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation is rising.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right: the NDP left the driver examiner system in a big mess last year. They went from 153 driver examiners to 73 on March 1 last year, at the beginning of the peak season. I'm happy to report that as of this morning we're up at about 169 driver examiners. We are making big ground. The delays have been reduced from eight to 12 weeks back down to one or two, and we're not finished yet.

Mr. Orr: Given that the problem is not just with class 5 testing and given that class 1 drivers must now meet mandatory entry-level training requirements, or MELT, and given that the MELT exam is new and the training providers are new and given that some experienced drivers are not passing the test after multiple and expensive tries, to the Minister of Transportation: how many who take the test after training are able to pass the test, and are you satisfied that the training is adequately preparing drivers to successfully pass the test?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member. It's a thoughtful question that I hear from a lot of Albertans. We're making ground. Before we had in place the MELT training program, about 68 per cent of those going through the program were able to pass the test. I'm happy to report that since we've implemented the MELT training, we're up to 78 per cent. We're not satisfied yet. We're making ground. We're working with the industry, with individual drivers, and those doing the training to try to get even better because we're not satisfied quite yet.

Mr. Orr: Thank you for that information, Minister. Given that in a modern rural riding, where distances are far, driving is a necessity of life and given that travelling to school requires transportation – all the country schools within walking distance are long gone – and given that school bus drivers now must also pass MELT and given that this is a great expense for school boards and that they may not be able to find or train enough certified drivers, to the minister: how are we going to solve this problem for school boards trying to get students to school?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for another thoughtful question that I hear from all over Alberta. Let me say this. The school boards have come to us, and we're working with them. There's at least one school board that is actually setting up to do training for other school boards around to bring the average cost of training for school bus drivers down and to deliver it in a more timely way. We're going to try to replicate that across Alberta, and we're still not finished. We're looking for more ways to deliver that training to school bus drivers through the school boards in a more effective and timely way. We're making ground, but again we're not finished. We're still working on that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes Oral Question Period, but given the schedule we're going to continue immediately to Members' Statements as there's only one that remains.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Burman University in Lacombe

Mr. Orr: Lacombe is home to one of the oldest postsecondary institutions in the province. First opening in 1907, Burman University has been delivering high-quality education to students from Lacombe and over 30 countries. For over a hundred years it has provided the city of Lacombe with world-wide potential.

The university is named after Charles and Leona Burman. Charles was the first president; his wife taught and was the school nurse. In 2017 the Burman University Board of Trustees installed Dr. Loren Agrey as the 25th president. Burman University offers 35 bachelor degree programs in its divisions of arts, science, business, and education. They are one of 13 Adventist universities in North America, one of 119 globally, but the only one in Canada.

Located on a hilltop in Lacombe with a view overlooking beautiful Barnett Lake, Burman University is a perfect location for students to receive quality education while experiencing a small academic community. One of the many great things about the university is its community spirit.

Recently Burman introduced their brand new Small Business Centre with the two-fold purpose of strengthening small businesses,

working with their finances, strategy, and marketing, and providing students with first-hand learning and networking opportunities.

Burman also has an extensive music program and provides world-class music evenings for the community. Burman hosts the Herr speaker series, bringing in speakers such as Kim Phuc, famously known as the girl in the picture, and Roméo Dallaire, the author of *Shake Hands with the Devil*. The next speaker will be former Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Kim Campbell.

I'm grateful and proud to have Burman University call Lacombe home. It enriches our cultural, academic, and economic vitality. The students and faculty of Burman University are tremendous ambassadors of what small, independent academic institutions contribute to Alberta through university education.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a document that is a petition with over 300 signatures that asks that students at law be seen as eligible students under the Student Financial Assistance Act. It was brought forward by Samuel Johnson, a law student and Mill Woods constituent, who has joined us in the gallery with fellow students today. His original letter is also attached.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there other tablings? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of letters I've received and that I've been CCed on as well as they were sent to the Minister of Children's Services from constituents of the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, from constituents of the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, and from constituents of the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. In all of these e-mails the constituents are very deeply concerned about the cuts to the benefit contribution grant and the staff attraction incentive, which actually resulted in significant increases to child care fees which are being borne directly by Alberta families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail from Sheena MacLeod, who is writing to express her concern about the recent government decision to remove the benefit contribution grant and staff attraction incentive from licensed child care centres.

The second tabling is also an e-mail, from Holly Thompson, who writes to express her concerns about the removal of the benefit contribution grant and staff attraction incentive from licensed child care centres as well.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you. I rise today to present the requisite number of copies of an article that speaks about how rural communities here in Alberta are preparing for climate change. It's a good read that I suggest all of you check out.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table an article here from the *Financial Post* saying that Suncor expects to spend the next six years trying to secure approval of replacement oil sands mine. Analysts say the extended timelines associated with the view of the project will make it more difficult for other companies to propose new projects. These things do cost money and act as barriers to entry, a good reason why we need to fix our system with the approval process with the federal government.

Another article, more of a good-news article, entitled *New Surgery Targeting Stomach Intestinal Cancers Comes to Calgary*. Patients in Calgary battling early stages of stomach and intestinal cancer can now undergo an innovative new surgery that health officials say has a shorter recovery time than traditional procedures.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Shandro, Minister of Health, responses to questions raised by MLA Irwin, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood; Mr. Shepherd, hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre; and Ms Sweet, Official Opposition House Leader, on November 5, 2019, Ministry of Health 2019-20 main estimates debate.

Pursuant to the Health Professions Act, College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta 2018 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Schweitzer, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Alberta Human Rights Commission annual report 2018-19 and responses to questions raised by Ms Ganley, hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, on November 19, 2019, Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General 2019-20 main estimates debate.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order, and the hon. Government House Leader has the call.

Point of Order Supplementary Questions

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order today. I know that you know that the practice in this Assembly is for supplementary questions to be related to the main question. I'd like to draw your attention to a couple of documents today to help with your decision shortly.

First off, Speaker Kowalski on May 12, 2004. You can find this on page 1390 of *Hansard* that day, in which the Speaker said:

There's also a tradition we follow here that if an hon. member is recognized, they raise a first question and then they're allowed two supplementals.

And he went on to say:

It has always been understood that supplementals must have something to do with the first question.

I will also refer you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, 2017, page 513. Under Supplementary Questions it says: "By definition, a supplementary question is meant to arise from the information given to the House by a Minister or Parliamentary Secretary in his or her response to the initial question."

There are further rulings to this effect, Mr. Speaker, which I will not read but will draw your attention to: on December 6, 2016; on April 16, 2018; and on October 29, 2018.

I am referring to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora's second question, particularly the second supplemental, Mr. Speaker. I know that you probably have the benefit of the Blues. I

have just had my copy come in, which is different than yours. I don't think that the hon. Opposition House Leader has it yet. In reality, my primary concern will be the question which was primarily about budgets. In fact, the hon. acting leader of the NDP asked the Finance minister to withdraw his budget and redraw it over constituency break. I know that the Premier assured her that that isn't going to take place. Then she followed up with another question around whether or not the Finance minister had a plan B. Then she moves into the second supplemental and begins to ask questions about government travel as well as the \$4.7 billion corporate handout, chaos in schools, hospitals, and doctors' offices, and other issues along that line, completely separate from the first two questions.

I would ask that you ask the opposition to try to keep their questions in line with the rules of the Chamber.

The Speaker: Happy to have the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View respond on behalf of the Official Opposition, but I have a sense of the direction this is heading.

Ms Ganley: I think the point here is that the questions were around budget, and ultimately budget is a series of decisions. The government has argued repeatedly that there are difficult decisions that need to be made and, therefore, that cuts need to be made to vulnerable populations like AISH, that cuts need to be made to EAs for students in school, that cuts need to be made that will hurt Albertans. In the meantime they are making active choices to give \$4.7 billion away to corporations, to spend \$30 million on a war room, to spend hundreds or even thousands of dollars a day flying people around the world to have conversations that are ultimately fruitless because the people with whom they are conversing feel that they want to invest their money and their funds in places that they

feel have a plan moving forward with respect to climate change because that is just the way that global financial markets are going. So I think that the tie-in between budget and the unnecessary expenses in the Premier's office is that at the same time that we're making cuts to students and seniors, we are buying five-star hotels for the Premier's staff, which is also in the budget. So that would be my argument on the relationship there.

The Speaker: Hon. members, thank you for your interjections. I don't think I require any more information to rule on this point of order.

I would just say to the hon. Government House Leader that I'm not specifically familiar with the exact ruling that you've referred to with respect to Speaker Kowalski, but typically speaking, given leaders' questions, we have provided a fairly wide latitude as to what constitutes a supplemental question.

The other thing I might add is that members of the government have taken some latitude at times with respect to their follow-ups, in fact asking multiple ministers multiple questions loosely tied together. I'd just provide some caution. As such, I do think that it is important that all members of the House try to do everything they can to follow the rules, so I am in agreement with you on that. But largely speaking, this is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Hon. members, the daily Routine is now concluded. Pursuant to Standing Order 3(1.1) and 59.01(5)(b) the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30. I encourage you to check the Order Paper if you are unsure as to where and when committees will be meeting. It is available for you there.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:56 p.m.]

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