



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 16, 2020

Day 8

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

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

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker  
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Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (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)  
Dreeschen, Hon. Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)  
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Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)  
Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UCP)  
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)  
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)  
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Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)  
Horner, Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)  
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., Taber-Warner (UCP)  
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),  
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Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UCP)  
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Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UCP)  
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UCP)  
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UCP)  
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UCP)  
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)

**Party standings:**

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Getson  
Loewen  
Rehn  
Rosin  
Sabin  
Singh  
Smith  
Yaseen

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 16, 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 prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. I'd invite you all to participate in the language of your choice.

### Hon. Members:

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

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, please be seated.

Hon. members, we are at the start of the Routine. I do see the hon. Government House Leader on his feet, which would be an abnormality, but given the circumstances more broadly perhaps we'll hear what he has to say.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two things. First off, I would like to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Standing Order 7(8) the daily Routine may continue beyond 3 p.m.

In addition to that, I rise to request unanimous consent in order to proceed immediately to hear a message from the Administrator.

**Ms Sweet:** Point of order. Standing Order 13(2). Can you please explain how we are able to go outside of Orders of the Day and the daily Routine?

**The Speaker:** Perhaps you might wait until the Speaker addresses you. I'm more than happy to do so.

There is a pretty easy solution to this. If the hon. members or any hon. member wouldn't like to provide unanimous consent, that's a way to do that. It's very difficult to get on your feet and say 13(2) when the Speaker had not yet spoken and not provided any ruling. As we all know, 13(2) is for the Speaker to clarify a ruling, which he had not yet made, so this does present a bit of a challenge both for the Speaker as well as the Assembly.

A request has been asked for unanimous consent. I think we can all agree that the circumstances external to the House are very, very, very strenuous. I think we can also agree that we've seen many other Chambers all across Canada finding ways to work together. As such, it's very possible for the Government House Leader to be recognized.

Now I'm more than happy to recognize the hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Sweet:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, just for clarity of the House as we are moving around Orders of the Day, although I appreciate your comments around other jurisdictions being able to work together, these motions were not provided to the Official Opposition. We had no notice of this. We're not aware of what is going on on the government side. Therefore, how does this House expect us to work in collaboration, to be able to vote unanimously on a motion we haven't even seen or been able to discuss? So if I could please have a point of clarity, again, on why we are not giving notice so that the opposition can actually see the motion that is in front of us so that we know what's going on.

**The Speaker:** I believe that the hon. Government House Leader asked for consent to present the motion, which is waiving notice. If members of the opposition wouldn't like to waive that notice, it's well within their right to do so, and if that's the case, I encourage them to do so.

Having said that, a request has been put to the Legislative Assembly floor for unanimous consent to proceed immediately to receive a message from the Administrator.

[Unanimous consent granted]

### Transmittal of Estimates

**The Sergeant-at-Arms:** Order! All rise.

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

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from Her Honour the Administrator, which I now transmit to you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the Administrator transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, and recommends the same to the Assembly.

Please be seated.

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, due to the ongoing emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic I wish to table the revised 2020-2021 government estimates.

### Members' Statements

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

### COVID-19 Response

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Canada and here in Alberta recently we have truly found ourselves in unprecedented times with COVID-19. We had serious viruses wreak havoc in the past such as SARS and H1N1. This virus, however, is a particular problem since it has developed in such a way that no one has immunity to it at this time. That is why the prevention of community spread is so important. The government has taken actions that are following the recommendations of the chief medical officer, who is very capable and a nonpartisan official. With major disruptions to how we have come to live our lives and some people demonstrating the worst, I want to celebrate some of the positive things that we've seen to date.

Sobeys Belmont in Edmonton, as an example, has given seniors the exclusive opportunity to shop in the mornings to get the things they need without people pushing past them. This is a great move by them to support this vulnerable population and an example I hope other stores will follow.

A volunteer group in Calgary has formed to assist those in need, such as with food delivery, shovelling sidewalks, amongst other things. In fact, they have so many people looking to help that they have pulled down their post recently because too many people were responding to the need.

In absence of hockey the Edmonton Oilers will continue to pay staff at Rogers Place that wouldn't have otherwise been getting paid at this time.

This is the Alberta that I know and love, Mr. Speaker. As a province we may not always agree – most families don't – but like any great family, we're pulling together, and this is why I know we'll make it through this together.

Speaking of hockey, it didn't take long for researchers in Saskatchewan to discover a potential vaccine after the NHL season was suspended. The breakthrough still needs to be run through proper testing before it can move on, but there is still light on the horizon there.

Until then, my fellow Albertans, while we work through the difficult time and implement temporary measures, continue showing us your best, please follow the guidelines from health and government officials, and keep yourself and others safe by washing your hands. Stay calm, and carry on.

Thank you.

#### 1:40 COVID-19 and Physicians

**Mr. Shepherd:** Mr. Speaker, I want to rise today to first thank our province's excellent health care providers, who are working so hard to slow the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in our province. This morning I stood with one such professional, Dr. Darren Markland, a senior intensive care doctor at the Royal Alexandra hospital here in Edmonton, and he told me in no unclear terms about the chaos that this government is causing in the health care system by forcibly ramming through changes to physician compensation.

Our front-line health care staff are stressed, already working long hours in difficult conditions to keep people safe and slow down the spread of the coronavirus. But on top of spending all of their energy preparing for the pandemic, the government is also forcing them to figure out how they will get paid come April 1.

If our province's family doctors are left struggling to support patients in the face of financial uncertainty, that pressure is going to ripple out and overburden our health care system by creating additional and unnecessary pressure in doctors' offices and emergency rooms across the province. Yet instead of pulling together with our health care providers and supporting them in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, this government thinks that this is the right time to continue fighting with our doctors about pay.

Cases are growing day by day. There couldn't be a worse time for this government to inject further chaos into our health care system. To deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, doctors need stability, certainty, and support, but instead they're left feeling demoralized by unprecedented chaos caused by a government that has doubled down on standing against them. Our health care system is being asked to function at levels like we've never asked it to before.

This government needs to reverse course and take the first steps towards rebuilding trust with front-line health care professions. Premier, Minister, end the uncertainty, pause the changes, restore the original framework, and free our doctors to focus on doing what they do best, protecting and supporting the health of Albertans.

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

#### COVID-19 and Community Supports

**Ms Glasgo:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are facing much uncertainty with the COVID-19 outbreak. It went from something happening a world away to affecting how we live our everyday lives in a very short period of time. People have had to cancel their vacations or return home from them earlier than they had expected. Schools are closed, and parents are concerned about child care. From toilet paper to water to beans and soup, we have seen people stockpiling supplies in a panic. Small businesses in Brooks-Medicine Hat are worried about how they will stay afloat and care for their workers. Hard-working Albertans are concerned about whether or not they will have a job and be able to pay their mortgage or put food on the table for their families.

Naturally, worry affects our mental health and our ability to cope in the face of uncertainty. Many Albertans look to their faith communities for guidance and support in a crisis. With the recommendation that large gatherings be avoided, many are wondering whether or not they can go to their place of worship. Fortunately, we live in a time where we can stay connected without having to leave our homes. This is more important now than ever. For many, feeling secure in our faith will help us cope in these uncertain times.

We can practise our faith in other ways than attending services. We can reach out to our communities and offer help, and we can reach out to our communities to ask for help. The beautiful thing that this crisis can teach all of us is that practising our faith is not only with those who belong to our congregation but also with those outside of the walls of our churches. Love thy neighbour is more important now than ever.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask all Albertans to reach out to their neighbours even if it's just to chat. In Alberta – urban, remote, or rural – no one is alone, and we are all here for each other. Albertans are resilient, and I know we'll get through this together.

Thank you.

#### COVID-19 and Helpers

##### Member Irwin:

When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." To this day, especially in times of "disaster," I remember my mother's words and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers – so many caring people in this world.

Those aren't my words, of course, but those of Mr. Rogers. This is an uncertain time for all of us, this is a scary time for all of us, and this is a stressful time for all of us. None of us can make these very valid worries disappear, but what makes things a little less uncertain, a little less scary, and a little less stressful is knowing that there are helpers all around us.

The grocery store workers coming in early and working long hours and facing endless lineups: they are helpers. The child care workers offering their supports to families that are scrambling: they are helpers. The teachers, the education workers, who came to school this morning only to greet classrooms of empty desks, worried deeply about their students at home: they are helpers. The small-business owners going to extraordinary measures to support the public and their staff: they are helpers. The doctors, the nurses, the front-line health care workers, all those working unimaginable hours but all united with the goal of easing this pandemic: they are

helpers. Each one of you checking on a neighbour, calling a friend, texting a loved one, offering to run errands: you are helpers.

We are a province of helpers. We are a nation of helpers, and as much as it might seem right now that you're hopeless, that you're helpless, you aren't alone. And while it might seem that each task is impossible and the burden too large to bear, we will get through this because we always do. Keep caring for each other, keep looking after each other, keep reaching out to one another, and keep helping.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

### COVID-19 and Health Care Workers

**Ms Goodridge:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We truly are living in unprecedented times. In a matter of days our province has gone from watching a global pandemic to living with sweeping changes in our daily lives. Dozens of Albertans now have contracted COVID-19. Each of these people had to be tested, then had their test sent and examined, to be contacted with test results, and some of these cases have required hospitalization. At every stage Alberta's health care workers have been an essential piece of our response in these early days.

In the coming weeks our health system will face new burdens in order to match the demands placed on it by our pandemic. All workers in our health system play a critical role in managing this crisis. Front-line workers at assessment centres, nurses answering calls on the Health Link 811, lab technicians testing samples, doctors working in ICUs, nurses, public health officials, and so many more are all coming together to fight this illness each and every day.

As Albertans come together to do our part in stopping the spread of COVID-19, I want to take a moment and commend Alberta's health workers and officials for their rapid response and showing remarkable courage and resiliency. Public health officials have already demonstrated efficiency and innovation to manage challenges in testing, and as a result our province has been able to test nearly 9,000 samples, showing a capacity to conduct tests beyond those of other North American jurisdictions. On behalf of all of my hon. colleagues here at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, I would like to sincerely thank all health workers and officials province-wide. We are extremely grateful for your service.

### COVID-19 and Seniors

**Ms Sigurdson:** Albertans are experiencing a crisis the likes of which many of us have never known before. The COVID-19 pandemic has spread rapidly around the world, and here in Alberta the last update indicated that 56 people were diagnosed with the illness. We know that it is highly contagious, and measures such as social distancing, cancellation of events as well as closure of institutions and schools have had a significant impact on our province.

Seniors are particularly at risk as they may have chronic health conditions which, compounded with the virus, may cause serious illness and even death. That is why it is so important that precautions are taken to ensure that seniors are not exposed to the virus and have the supports they need. The Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council has put together information for seniors regarding program closures. They also have information regarding resources online. This is helpful, but what if a senior does not have access to the Internet or the knowledge to navigate it? How will they learn of the changes? And those who do know

about the closures and cancellations: how will they be supported? As this situation may continue for some time, what provisions will the UCP government make so seniors are supported in their communities?

Social isolation is a serious concern for many seniors. We know that 1 in 4 seniors in Edmonton seldom or never has someone they can rely on for help when they need it. This pandemic is making things worse, and more seniors will be isolated. Sadly, this UCP government has brought in a budget that is defunding programs that support seniors, that will have severe impacts on addressing the pandemic. Programs such as home visitation ensure that isolated seniors have the supports they need. We are learning that even before the pandemic hit, these programs would no longer be available due to the UCP budget. Once these programs are cut, starting them up again will be costly. This is the time for the UCP to invest in seniors' programs, not defund them.

1:50

### Oral Question Period

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

### Income Support for Persons Affected by COVID-19

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by offering my thanks to the Premier for responding to our calls to ban sick notes and ensure job-protected sick leave for at least two weeks. However, on the matter of income support, since your announcement on Friday our offices have been absolutely overwhelmed with requests for information on how, when, or if this provincial government will provide income replacement. They deserve answers. Will the Premier update Albertans today on what his plan is for providing immediate income support, including when Albertans can expect to receive it?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I believe all members will join in expressing the deepest of concern for those who, in the midst of this multifaceted crisis, have had to stay home in self-isolation or who've lost their employment. Sadly, I think we can expect many challenging announcements about job losses in the weeks to come. That is in part why we've amended the employment code to ensure the protection of those who have to stay at home in self-isolation, and we are working with the federal government, as are other provinces, for significant expansion of employment insurance to provide income security to those individuals.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, on Friday the Premier said that Alberta would provide income support, not Ottawa. According to the chief medical officer of health the following people should not go in to work for at least two weeks: anyone who's returned from international travel, anyone who has had contact with someone who's tested positive, and anyone who has any flulike symptoms. That's hundreds of thousands of Albertans, many of whom do not have sick leave, cannot work from home, and are not eligible for employment insurance. The Premier's office promised them help. When will they hear from this Premier?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, last Friday we announced an order in council waiving the requirement for 90 days' service with an employer to provide for 14 days of unpaid leave for the purpose of self-isolation or quarantine if someone is following the requirements of the chief medical officer and waiving the requirement for employees to provide a medical note to access leave. We are working with all 10 provincial governments and the government of Canada on an announcement that we hope will be forthcoming early this week

to provide a significant, unprecedented expansion of access to employment insurance benefits, including for the self-employed.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds of thousands of Albertans who can't access EI at all.

Now, as of yesterday, at least 100,000 families with young children and toddlers are scrambling to find child care. This forces them to miss work and lose pay. Today on the radio all the Minister of Education could say is that this would be the parents' contribution to their kids' safety. For tens of thousands of low-income families where parents have to work, that answer doesn't cut it. Neither does relying on the federal government when this Premier told Albertans on Friday that this province would be stepping up. To the Premier: what is the plan?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, the plan is for an unprecedented expansion of the employment insurance program to include individuals who have not traditionally been covered, including the self-employed, to ensure that there is at least some income support for those who have to stay at home. We await the announcement of the government of Canada. If there are additional measures that need to be taken by the government of Alberta, we are studying options and possibilities, but first we believe this is a national responsibility.

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

#### Health Budget 2020-2021 Revision

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, just three weeks ago this Premier's budget was off by billions. Today, by my calculation, revenues are off by at least \$15 billion if not more. On top of that, even with an extra half-billion dollars, that they just announced, in their health care budget, it will still absolutely fail to keep Albertans safe and healthy in this pandemic. The Official Opposition is ready to help this government and make a realistic fiscal plan to support the actual needs of Albertans. To the Premier: why will you not withdraw your absurd budget and allow us to work together to support Albertans through this crisis?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, you just heard the only opposition leader in Canada who is seeking to politicize this crisis. The budget before this place includes the single largest investment in health care in the history of the province of Alberta, to which we have just added an additional emergency contribution of half a billion dollars to ensure that the resources are there for the COVID-19 response. I would call on the opposition to emulate what oppositions of all partisan stripes are doing across the country, which is to get the budget passed so we can pay for our doctors and nurses in the months to come.

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, this is the only House that is passing a budget with fundamental cuts to health care and that is actually trying to jam through a budget that is billions and billions of dollars off. Now, rushing through a budget that is fundamentally inadequate, broken, and dishonest insults every member of this House. We don't need to do this. We can pass interim supply that addresses current demands. We can come back and debate a realistic budget at a better time. To the Premier: why won't you take the time to give Albertans a budget that actually adds up?

**Mr. Kenney:** I've 23 years of experience as a parliamentarian, and I've never seen, at a moment such as this, an opposition party seek to divide people, let alone to mislead them, Mr. Speaker, let alone to create public concern about the availability of health care during an

unprecedented public health emergency. In 2019 the budget for Health was \$48.4 billion. In this budget it has gone up, and – excuse me. Of course, I was wrong: \$20.4 billion. It's gone up to \$20.6 billion and now \$21.1 billion with the additional half-billion dollars, unprecedented investments to help face this crisis.

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, even with this extra health care money that they talked about today, after population and inflation we are spending less on health care this year than last, and to be clear, there was no pandemic last year. It is not true that you need to pass this broken budget to authorize spending. What is true is that passing this budget now will allow this government to avoid oversight, transparency, and accountability for the next year. To the Premier: why is he forcing this House to engage in a sham debate and jamming through a fake budget when Albertans deserve real answers, real numbers, and real plans?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, many Albertans will recall that during the Wood Buffalo wildfires the then Leader of the Opposition and opposition parties stood down the partisanship and stood with the then Premier in an expression of solidarity. This government has just added an extraordinary half a billion dollars to our Health budget to cope with the greatest public health crisis in over a century in the midst of a massive global economic crisis, which is hitting this province particularly hard. We do not know for how long this Legislature will be able to sit for health reasons. We need the budget passed now to take care of these issues.

#### Health Care Workforce and Budget 2020

**Mr. Shepherd:** Mr. Speaker, I first want to thank the many front-line health care workers working so hard to provide care for Albertans right now, and indeed this question is for them. This Premier announced that more than 5,000 health care positions would be lost under his plan, including firing 750 nurses, perhaps ones that are working double shifts right now. It's the most serious public health crisis in decades. Can this Premier tell us: how many workers will this \$500 million injection save, and how many of those will be fired once they're done working so hard on the front lines of a pandemic?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, yet again, an opposition that in the midst of a time of enormous public anxiety is seeking to frighten people on the basis of gross misinformation. The numbers he just cited are a complete fiction. They always were, and he knows that. With the additional half-billion dollars for the COVID-19 response, we anticipate that there will be an increased health care workforce. We would ask the opposition to stop trying to seed division and fear at this critical time.

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

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fear and division have been seeded since this government began its attack on front-line health care workers. This Premier broke his election promise to Albertans, wants us to rubber-stamp a plan to fire thousands of health care workers and create further chaos during a pandemic, and we will not. Meanwhile he's letting his minister pursue an irresponsible fight with doctors, who are giving up ER shifts and struggling to stay on the front lines. They deserve a government that respects them, that values the life-saving care they provide, now more than ever. Will this Premier provide some stability and immediately delay or rescind their changes? When will he start focusing on what matters?



2:00

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta and those who serve Albertans have been focused on nothing but what matters: public health and safety as well as the economic crisis we are facing every hour since this crisis began to unfold. This is the only Legislature in Canada where we're hearing language of that nature, which is unfit for a time when Albertans expect us to be united. This government has come forward with an unprecedented measure of an additional half-billion dollars in health care for support for our medical workers. We are there for them.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Mr. Speaker, this is the only Legislature in Canada where we've seen the government tear up their contract with our front-line doctors on the eve of a pandemic and insist on pushing it through during that process. This Premier continues to ask us as the Official Opposition to trust him to do the right thing once his budget is passed, but I've spent all weekend and the past weeks and again this morning talking to health care workers who have had their trust broken, who have been disrespected and left behind by this same government. To the Premier: how can we possibly trust you when you continue to break the trust of so many front-line health care workers?

**Mr. Kenney:** Now we know, Mr. Speaker, that this opposition, when they see an unprecedented public health crisis, an unprecedented economic crisis, great anxiety and even fear in the broader public – how do they respond? With disruption, with division, with deception. It is unacceptable. This budget before the Chamber includes \$5.4 billion in physician compensation. That is not a reduction; it is the highest level in Alberta history.

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

#### Kindergarten to Grade 12 Class Cancellation

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our NDP Official Opposition caucus fully supports the cancellation of kindergarten to grade 12 classes as recommended by Dr. Hinshaw. But today hundreds of thousands of Alberta students are at home, and they're under great stress. Students are worried about what the future holds for their education, for their family's financial security, and for their safety. Can the Premier describe what additional mental health resources he's making available to Alberta students and their families, and will the Premier please be specific?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, we do recognize these unprecedented and uncharted times that we're in. The safety of our students, teachers, and staff are number one for all of us, and we have cancelled classes indefinitely, and students are expected to stay home. This decision was made on the advice of the chief medical officer. We respect that decision, and we're carrying it through.

Thank you.

**Ms Hoffman:** We respect the decision, too. The question was about mental health support for youth who are feeling extreme anxiety at this time, and the Premier refused to answer.

Students are home, but schools remain open at this time. We know teachers have been told that they must continue to work, but we also know that there are many other waged employees who care for our schools and keep them clean. These are people like bus drivers, educational assistants, custodians, and many other employees who are paid by the hour. Will the Premier – the Premier – assure this

House that no wage school-district employees will lose their income as a result of his cancellation of their classes?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, again, these are unprecedented times, and we are working closely with school authorities to ensure that all of the staff are being looked after.

To answer your previous question about the mental health and wellness of our students, we do have the Kids Help Phone, and the line number is 1.800.668.6868.

**Ms Hoffman:** The answer to the first two questions was about depleted resources under attack in this current budget, Mr. Speaker. Grade 12 students are entering a critical time and preparing for graduation and applying for postsecondary. The Minister of Education committed to ensuring these students would be able to graduate and will have what they need to pursue higher education. My question is to the Premier. What specific arrangements is the Premier making to achieve this, and when will students know more?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, we are very, very confident that every student who is eligible to graduate from grade 12 will indeed graduate. Diploma exams that are essential for postsecondary acceptance will continue. We will be working with postsecondary institutions to ensure that these extraordinary circumstances do not prevent our students from being eligible for admission to postsecondary studies. We're working with postsecondaries, and we will ensure that our students' needs are met.

Thank you.

#### COVID-19 Response and Long-term Planning

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Mr. Speaker, during this time of uncertainty it is important that we bring clarity to the lives of Albertans. An issue that is as complex as COVID-19 also needs everyone in this House to put partisan differences aside. Given that expediting the process for Budget 2020 is necessary to keep critical government systems operating, to the Minister of Finance: can you comment on your long-term planning with regard to the effects of COVID-19?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are jointly working with the federal government to ensure that people are supported during this time and that businesses have access to liquidity and capital. As we emerge from this crisis in the long term, we'll be doubling down to ensure that Alberta has the most competitive business environment possible so that as our economy moves to recovery mode, we'll be attracting a disproportionate amount of capital and investment back to Alberta, which will result in a growing and thriving economy once again.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Highwood.

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in Budget 2020 we established specific support to the most vulnerable and to health care and given that we need to continue to provide the necessary funding for these crucial areas and given that just yesterday the Premier announced an additional \$500 million to the health care budget, to the Minister of Finance: can you please explain what additional resources will be made to front-line staff?

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we are amending Budget 2020 and providing an additional \$500 million to the Health

budget. This additional funding will ensure that we have an adequate complement of front-line health professionals needed and that they have the tools that they need for testing, surveillance, and the treatment of patients as the province works to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Given that we are seeing global economic impacts of the COVID-19 virus and given that our Budget 2020 is still committed to delivering the supports that Albertans need during this time of uncertainty, to the Minister of Finance: what does this government see as the long-term overall impact of this global pandemic?

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, we're in uncharted territory. Our initial priority as a government is to ensure that we can provide timely and appropriate care to all Albertans and that our health care has the adequate resources so that we can ensure that we're providing timely, responsible health care to Albertans in this time of crisis. In the long term, as we emerge, we will assist our businesses in this province to ensure that we have the most competitive business environment possible, that will once again attract investment, grow the economy, and provide opportunities for Albertans.

**The Speaker:** The Member for Lethbridge-West.

#### COVID-19 and Small Business

**Ms Phillips:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Small businesses across Alberta are suffering. Many are facing significant cash flow shortages. They're unsure how they're going to be able to stay afloat during the pandemic. Many of these business owners are doing the right thing. They're sending staff home if they're ill as per the advice of the chief medical officer, but this puts a big strain on their ability to continue. To the Minister of Finance: what are you doing to offer paid leave for workers without crushing small business, as you announced on Friday?

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly want to acknowledge the member opposite's assertion that Albertans are heading into a challenging time. That's the case for businesses and for employees. We, as mentioned earlier, are working with our federal government to ensure that we have an enhanced EI program that can be delivered nationally and to Albertans so that Albertans will be provided for during this time of need.

**Ms Phillips:** Given that this budget that we are being asked to pass contains zero measures to support small business, given that this government's answer to the question seems to be waiting for Justin Trudeau in Ottawa and given that many are or will face eviction as operating costs pile up and given that thus far there has been deafening silence from this government, will this government demonstrate that it cares about contractors, sole proprietors, and business owners and protect them from eviction due to cash flow shortages at this time?

2:10

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, this government is working right now on various measures that will be rolled out in the coming days, measures that will improve the liquidity and access to capital for Alberta businesses as they face unprecedented challenges.

**Ms Phillips:** Mr. Speaker, given that jurisdictions around the world have already put measures in place to protect small business, will the minister demonstrate that he is listening and that he cares by committing to a plan for loan guarantees, for financial support for paid employee leave, and deferred income tax, just for a start? Or are we just waiting for Ottawa?

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, our government is working right now to ready an announcement that will be coming within mere days, and it will include measures that will provide access to capital, ensure liquidity, and ensure that businesses can access that much-needed capital to make timely and good management decisions during this time of crisis.

#### COVID-19 and Homeless Shelters

**Ms Renaud:** If you feel sick, you should stay home. This is the advice of Alberta's chief medical officer, and it's advice Albertans should follow. This is not an option for homeless Albertans. Shelters around Canada and Alberta continue to express alarm about the possibility of an outbreak within their facility. To the minister: what new tangible steps are you taking to protect both the workers and Albertans using shelter services during this pandemic?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues have mentioned, these are extraordinary, unprecedented times. I have been in touch this past weekend with shelter providers to try to get a good understanding of what their emergent needs are and what we can anticipate. I can tell you that my department is working closely with shelter providers to try to put together plans, and we're also working very closely with AHS as well.

**Ms Renaud:** Given that the drop-in shelter in Calgary has cancelled volunteer shifts and agencies like Boyle Street Community Services are preparing for the possibility of community spread, which will be devastating to the homeless population, and given, I repeat, that homeless Albertans can't stay home, to the minister: what additional money, equipment, and personnel will you make available to shelters to prevent community spread?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Mr. Speaker, again, my department is working very closely with Alberta Health and AHS and the chief medical officer as well as all of the shelter providers to get a deep understanding of their needs, and plans will be put in place.

**Ms Renaud:** Given the serious concerns among homeless Albertans, shelter workers, and volunteers about the risks they're facing and given that many are still waiting for answers and given that your budget cut homeless shelter supports, will the minister commit to publishing a specific plan for homeless shelters during this pandemic? Now is the time to act, right now, before it gets worse.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Mr. Speaker, obviously, we are deeply, deeply concerned about our vulnerable Albertans, including those that are experiencing homelessness. I can tell you that we're working very hard, day and night. All weekend we were in discussions with the service providers and the emergency shelter providers to make sure that we have plans in place to make sure that they're taken care of. That's our commitment. We will take care of them.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis has a question.

#### Kindergarten to Grade 12 Class Cancellation

*(continued)*

**Ms Rosin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The safety and well-being of our students, teachers, and education staff is a high priority for this government. Yesterday the Premier, the chief medical officer of health, and the Minister of Education announced the immediate cancellation of classes for K to 12 students across the province as a result of the evolving situation around the COVID-19 pandemic.

Can the Minister of Education please explain to this House the actions that this government is taking to ensure student, teacher, and education staff safety?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you. As the member indicated, we have cancelled all K to 12 classes immediately. This was not a decision that was made lightly. Mr. Speaker, based on what we've seen over the last couple of days, it has become clear that we needed to put more restrictions in place to help slow down the virus and protect public health. This recommendation was made after extensive discussions with school boards and took into consideration the cases of community transmission identified over the weekend.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

**Ms Rosin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Well, given that student safety is paramount for every student across our province and given that students were scheduled to be writing provincial achievement tests in the coming weeks and further given that this indefinite cancellation of classes affects these testing times and schedules, can the minister please explain the accommodations that are being put in place to ensure these cancellations do not affect student progression?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, we expect every student to receive a final mark and that students will progress to their next grade level. As of this time provincial achievement tests have been cancelled. We are working with school authorities and education partners to determine the best way to ensure that students do not fall behind.

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

**Ms Rosin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it is near the end of the school year and given that grade 12 students are preparing for diploma exams, which are worth 30 per cent of their final mark, and given that grade 12 students are preparing for and anticipating their graduation at the end of this year and further given that many of these students hope to attend postsecondary next year, can the minister please explain how we are accommodating students who are expected to graduate at the end of this year?

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you again for the questions. Mr. Speaker, we are very confident that every student who is eligible to graduate from grade 12 this year will graduate. I can understand the concerns. While PATs are cancelled, at this point we will be moving forward with diploma exams, only the ones that are essential for postsecondary acceptance. We will be working with postsecondary institutions to ensure that these extraordinary circumstances do not prevent our students from being eligible for admission to postsecondary studies.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has the call.

### COVID-19 and Seniors

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors are among the most at risk of serious illness or death from the coronavirus, which is why I support the chief medical officer's decision to close long-term care facilities for visitation. Staff, however, will need to take on more care for seniors who can no longer receive support from their families and loved ones. For example, family members often help residents eat and

prepare for bed. Will the minister immediately commit to increasing funding for long-term care centres to support hiring more staff to support seniors?

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

**Mr. Shandro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we did take the recommendation of the chief medical officer of health regarding that recommendation, and it wasn't one that we took lightly. Family members, if they are an essential visitor, are still obviously allowed to continue to see their loved ones in their care facilities. Our request is that the visitors only be essential visitors and that if they do attend, they make sure that they're prepared that there may be additional measures to be able to protect them and be able to protect the patients in those care facilities when they do go to visit their loved ones there.

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

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that staff in long-term care facilities are overworked as it is and given that with the growing pandemic the pressure on them to care for seniors is increasing and given that many of these folks are wage staff who can't afford to stay home if they get sick, how will the government make sure that the people caring for our most vulnerable don't have to choose between their own safety, the safety of seniors, and being able to afford their rent?

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the safety of our patients and the safety of the care providers in those care facilities are, of course, very important for this government. We're going to continue to work with the employees in those care facilities and all of the care facilities in this province, whether they're an AHS care facility or whether they're one of our independent providers in this province, making sure that both the patients and the employees of those care facilities are going to – that their health is going to be protected throughout our response to this pandemic.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Given that the UCP government eliminated the role of the Seniors Advocate last year and cut \$1.5 million from the advocate's budget and given that the advocate was supposed to provide a place for seniors to voice their concerns and seek additional support, how can seniors and their families be sure that they have a place to go if their concerns are not being addressed by this government? To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: where exactly do seniors turn? Please be specific.

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it ends up that we did not. That's completely a fabrication. The Seniors Advocate was just moved to the office of the Health Advocate, so obviously seniors could continue to be able to contact the Seniors Advocate in that office there.

### 2:20 Support for Persons Affected by COVID-19

**Mr. Carson:** Mr. Speaker, many working Albertans across the province are not at work today either because they are taking the responsible step of self-isolating, their workplace is closed, or they're managing the reality of child care and school closures. This puts many renters at risk of not making rent at the end of the month. Will the Service Alberta minister introduce a moratorium on evictions due to late or short rent payments when the renter has been affected by the coronavirus pandemic?

**Mr. Glubish:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. We understand that we're in a very difficult time and that Albertans are

facing unprecedented challenges. Certainly, for folks who find themselves out of work or unable to go to work because of self-isolation protocols, that can put families into hardship and make it difficult to pay rent. We're monitoring the situation, and we will provide updates in the time to come. We're going to have to make some decisions on how we're going to respond to this, but at this time we don't have a specific answer on this.

Thank you.

**Mr. Carson:** Well, Mr. Speaker, given that many Albertans who are not able to go into work are facing similar challenges with utility bills, regardless of whether they own or rent their home, and given the shut-off of utilities is a severe hardship and may encourage Albertans to go into work even when they shouldn't, will the minister introduce a moratorium on utility shut-offs for Albertans whose income has been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic?

**Mr. Glubish:** Mr. Speaker, you know, I'll just remind the member opposite of what our Premier spoke about earlier, which is that we're working very hard with the federal government to get clarity on the EI policies that we hope will be expanded by the federal government to assist Albertans who are going through this difficult time. Until we have clarity on what the federal government's role and commitment will be on this, it would be premature for us to make a judgment call as what the member opposite has been asking for.

**Mr. Carson:** Well, Mr. Speaker, given that these Albertans need supports today and they need them from this provincial government and given that all Albertans are concerned about continuing access to the basic necessities of shelter, water, power, and food and given that we have seen acts of profiteering and price gouging in other provinces, what protections will the minister introduce to protect Albertans from these despicable practices, and how soon will he announce them?

**Mr. Glubish:** Mr. Speaker, the most important thing that we can do to protect Albertans in this difficult time is pass this budget to ensure that this government has the resources it requires to provide the services that Albertans need, including health care services, including education services. That is what our government is focused on today, and I encourage the members opposite to put their partisan stripes aside and work with us to get this done so that we can deliver the services that Albertans require.

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

#### **Support for Persons and Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19**

**Mr. Guthrie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans all across this province have been affected by the recent events regarding COVID-19. Whether they are infected or self-isolated as a precaution, it has become apparent that income may be substantially impacted due to the unprecedented circumstances we now face. To the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board: how will this government support ordinary Albertans affected by this crisis?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The health and well-being of Albertans are this government's primary concern. That's why we just announced an additional \$500 million to the Health budget for this upcoming year. As we've mentioned before and

because it is a national responsibility, we are advocating hard on behalf of Albertans to see substantive changes to the EI program so that that program can adequately provide for Albertans during this difficult time.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Thank you, Minister. Given that small businesses are the backbone of our communities and given these business owners are not only worried about their livelihoods but also those of their staff and given that I've received messages from concerned business owners about keeping their doors open and staff employed as they face the unenviable decision as to whether or not they should lay off employees, to the Minister of Finance: what sort of options are being explored to assist small and medium-sized businesses?

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, this government, as has been mentioned before, is working to develop programs that will improve the liquidity and access to capital for small and medium-sized businesses in this province, businesses that will be challenged in upcoming days.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Thank you again, Minister. Given that I have concerned constituents who work in nontraditional jobs that may not be entitled to employment insurance if they stop working due to illness, quarantine, or deteriorating economic conditions, could the same minister please explain how we will support these vulnerable people?

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Toews:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government recognizes that many Albertans do not qualify for employment insurance, and that's why we're advocating hard on behalf of Albertans to the federal government to expand the EI program so that it can provide much-needed support to all Albertans during this time of crisis. But we're also prepared to bring in additional measures to ensure that no Albertans are left behind during this time of economic challenge.

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

#### **COVID-19 and Child Care**

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As stated by my colleagues, the Official Opposition caucus fully supports the public health measures announced by Dr. Hinshaw yesterday in response to the coronavirus, but there appears to be some confusion about which child care facilities were ordered to close and which can remain open. I understand at least one daycare in Calgary told parents that they would be open today while they waited for more information from the government. Can the Minister of Children's Services set out clearly which child care facilities should be closed and which remain open and what her plan is to ensure that this has been effectively communicated to operators and to parents?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you can appreciate – and this is an excellent question – we made this decision, obviously, on the recommendation of the chief medical health officer, and child care centres have been relying on the information that they are receiving from Alberta Health Services and the chief medical health officer over the past week and since this situation has been progressing. I do understand that there was one centre that had identified some confusion over what they were hearing from the chief medical officer, and then they had reached out to parents with a correction about that before this morning.

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

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that all K to 12 classes are cancelled at the same time that all child care centres are also closed and given that we've heard reports that the Alberta government and Alberta Health Services are giving their own employees only a single day to make alternative child care arrangements at a time when all child care centres are closed, can the Premier or the Finance minister tell us what steps are being taken to support government employees trying to find alternative child care, and has the government taken additional steps to support employees to work from home where possible?

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, the challenges with COVID-19 are moving very, very quickly. Albertans need to understand that this government realizes the hardship and burdens that this challenge represents. We will be making decisions in the upcoming days to ensure that Albertans are cared for during this time of unprecedented challenge.

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

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are a lot of Albertans who are really seeking some concrete answers from this government right now and given that child care centres across the province are closed indefinitely and given that these centres are the employers of early childhood educators, what arrangements is the Minister of Children's Services making to ensure that these centres do not go out of business and that child care professionals receive financial support and paid leave?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that my comments would echo those of the Finance minister, that we are waiting for the federal government, as we understand that they are expanding EI benefits for people who wouldn't typically qualify for EI benefits and supports. I can tell you that as a parent of two young children who are in a licensed child care facility, I understand what parents across the province are going through. I understand the concerns of our front-line workers, and I have a call this afternoon with our operators of child care centres across the province to ensure that we have their concerns recognized and let them know that we are working on a plan.

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

### COVID-19 and Indigenous Communities

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend the Premier told Albertans that he was impressed by the preparations done by indigenous communities for the coronavirus pandemic following a conference call, but there's been no specific action taken to ensure that indigenous communities have the financial resources to guarantee the appropriate level of health protection. To the Minister of Indigenous Relations: can you here and now list what specific additional supports and resources you are making available to all of these indigenous communities?

2:30

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, as has been said several times today, the top priority is to work with all Albertans, including indigenous communities, to be able to go through this crisis together. The government is going to have much to say in the coming days and plans going forward, but the most important thing that this Chamber can do to help with that process – this body right here, the Alberta Legislative Assembly – is get the budget approved

and passed so we can fully fund all of those initiatives to be able to help everybody across this province, including our indigenous communities.

**Mr. Feehan:** A deep concern considering this budget is 42 per cent less than our previous NDP budget for the indigenous communities. Given that yesterday the Premier announced an investment of \$500 million into health care and given that this House and indeed all Albertans are still waiting for details on what this spending will look like or what it will be spent on and given that health concerns are being expressed by indigenous leaders, to the minister: can you tell this House exactly how much additional health funding is being provided for on-reserve care?

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

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can advise the hon. member that the \$500 million is going to go primarily towards testing for all Albertans, including those in our indigenous communities, for public health surveillance as well as treatment of patients, including those in our indigenous communities. When it comes to our co-ordination efforts with our indigenous communities, I can advise the member that in the Emergency Coordination Centre, which is located in Calgary, there is in the bullpen there, in the ECC, an individual who – actually, his sole job is to co-ordinate the health response in our indigenous communities with those folks.

**Mr. Feehan:** I'm very concerned here that there's no specific money for on-reserve care. Given, Mr. Speaker, that, like the minister and the Premier, I'm impressed by the work being done by the indigenous communities in preparation for the impact of the coronavirus and given that the budget proposed by this government includes a significant reduction in funding for Indigenous Relations and given that this government knows the impact the coronavirus will have and the need to make sure that all levels of government, including indigenous ones, have every single resource they need to prepare effectively, will the minister agree to reverse the funding reductions proposed in the Indigenous Relations budget so that indigenous communities can be as prepared as possible?

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

**Ms Fir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are taking several measures to look after our First Nations and Métis communities in Alberta. There was a teleconference this weekend with the Premier and First Nation leaders to discuss logistical and medical plans in place. The Department of Indigenous Relations is in constant contact with the federal government under the direction of Indigenous Services Canada and First Nations and Inuit Health, Alberta branch, to discuss plans and latest information. The Ministry of Indigenous Relations and department staff are continually engaging with Alberta First Nations and Métis communities to answer questions and direct where necessary and continue to do so. We will always be here for our First Nations people to look after their . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

### COVID-19 Diagnosis and Treatment Resources

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has been consumed by the widespread pandemic of COVID-19, and I have been in communication with constituents about what this government is doing to protect Albertans and what our plan is to

combat this pandemic. We have heard questions about the resources necessary to supplement the health system. To the Minister of Health: what are you doing to provide the health system the resources it needs to get through this crisis?

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

**Mr. Shandro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to secure an additional \$500 million to support our COVID-19 response in Alberta. We're ensuring that our public health officials have the resources that they need to respond to keep Albertans safe. As I mentioned earlier, the funding will go primarily towards testing, public health surveillance as well as the treatment of patients. We'll continue to implement additional aggressive measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 as needed.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that there has been a shortage of COVID-19 testing kits globally and there has been a growing number of Albertans needing to be tested every day and given that Albertans have been patiently waiting through an overworked and overloaded 811 system to get advice on testing, to the same minister: what is the government's plan to help those waiting to be tested for COVID-19 and those who are being overloaded on the other end of the 811 phone calls?

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

**Mr. Shandro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health Link 811 continues to be a critical part of our response to COVID-19. Just yesterday morning we added an additional 46 lines to Health Link south. We've also launched a self-assessment tool on Friday. As of this morning over 800,000 Albertans have completed that self-assessment. We are also working to add to the tool to allow those taking the assessment to automatically be referred to testing if needed. Alberta's health system continues to work around the clock to respond to COVID-19.

**The Speaker:** The member.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear from the minister that it's being taken very seriously.

Given that the current spending trends indicate that without serious reform our health system is unsustainable and given that some are spreading rumours about a reduction or a small reduction in the positions within AHS, to the same minister: can you commit today to not laying off any nurses or other front-line staff in the midst of this crisis?

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

**Mr. Shandro:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that there will be no layoffs of front-line staff for the foreseeable future. We need additional resources in the health system now more than ever, and I've committed to AHS that they will get any and all resources that they need to fight this pandemic. I've been so tremendously impressed by the dedication of our front-line health workers, and I want to thank the thousands of doctors and nurses and other health professionals who are working around the clock to help identify, to help isolate, and to help treat cases of COVID-19.

### **Job Protection and Income Support during Self-isolation for COVID-19**

**Mr. Loewen:** Mr. Speaker, in recent days the government of Alberta, following the advice of the chief medical officer, has recommended that anyone who might have been exposed to COVID-19 self-isolate for 14 days. Additionally, anyone who has returned from international travel has also been asked to self-isolate. This means staying at home and, of course, not going to work. This has affected some of the constituents I serve, and they are concerned. Minister, can you please let Albertans know what job protections are available for those who are required to self-isolate?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is working to improve outcomes for Albertans directly affected by COVID-19, and this includes removing the requirements to have worked 90 days and establishing a special leave. This change will allow employees to take 14 days of job-protected leave to cover the self-isolation period recommended by Alberta's chief medical officer. Details related to how the leave will occur will be coming in the next few days.

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you, Minister. Given that some employers require employees to get a note from their doctor in order to take medical leave and given that we are asking those who might have come in contact with COVID-19 to self-isolate, what is the government doing to ensure Albertans will not put others at risk by leaving their house and also burdening the health care system in order to get a note?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The chief medical officer has advised that Albertans should call Health Link at 811 or use the online assessment tool rather than visiting a medical facility in order to limit the spread of COVID-19. Because of this recommendation, our government is removing the requirement for an employee to provide a doctor's note if they must self-isolate. We do not want Albertans putting themselves or others at risk. This change will help to contain the spread of the virus and reduce the burden on doctors' offices and other health care facilities.

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you, Minister. Given that many Albertans are worried that if they are required to self-isolate, they will not be able to put food on the table for their families and given that many do not have the option of working from home, can you please tell Albertans what options are available to help them if they are required to self-isolate?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Toews:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do understand that this is a stressful time for many Albertans, and we're working as quickly as possible to provide additional information. Again, Albertans will have access to 14 days of job-protected leave to cover the self-isolation period recommended by Alberta's chief medical officer. This government is working hard to advocate on behalf of Albertans to the federal government for an enhanced and expanded EI program so that all Albertans in this situation will be cared for appropriately.

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

## COVID-19 Diagnosis and Treatment Resources

(continued)

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, this government is pledging \$500 million more for health care, an amount that we are concerned will not be enough. Since I may have a very limited opportunity to ask this minister questions in estimates thanks to this government, I'd like to ask him some now. We know that in other countries supplies in their hospitals have been a major issue. Minister, how many ventilators are currently available in our hospitals to assist with the treatment of patients suffering from COVID-19?

2:40

**Mr. Shandro:** Mr. Speaker, off the top of my head, I cannot answer that question. I can commit to the member that I will get back to him with that answer, but I can say this: we have committed to AHS, as I've already said earlier today, that any and all resources that they need to be able to respond to COVID-19, those resources will be there. Resources and politics are not going to be at play when we make decisions about responding to COVID-19.

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

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that we also know that the national nurses' union is calling for the N95 masks to be provided to all front-line health care workers and given that we know the Premier has written to the Prime Minister requesting tens of thousands of masks – again, we will wait on Ottawa – but given that he has made no public statement about efforts to add masks at the provincial level, to the minister: how many masks are we short, and what are you doing to address this urgent need?

**Mr. Shandro:** Mr. Speaker, AHS has taken great strides to be able to stockpile. We have the benefit of being an integrated health system in this province. That makes us the envy, I think, of everywhere in this continent, especially at a time like this. It allowed AHS to be able to respond very rapidly and stockpile. I'm very happy to be able to provide the member with the exact number of masks and other PPEs that we have at the ECC in Calgary. I did have the chance to go and visit the stockpile at the ECC, at the location, and was very impressed by the amount of work AHS has done to respond so far.

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

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that I hope our health care system continues to be an envy and given that we know that about 96 per cent of acute-care beds are currently full and given that there's been no update of additional beds being added for a need that will no doubt come, to the minister: are you adding any additional beds to Alberta hospitals, and when would those be available?

**Mr. Shandro:** As it happens, Mr. Speaker, AHS has already been working. They started this work actually in January, back when coronavirus was first identified in China. They actually began the work to prepare to expand the ability for us to be able to provide acute-care beds for patients in Alberta. I'm very proud of AHS and their quick ability to be able to respond to this and to be able to provide that quick responsive action in expanding the number of beds we can have to respond to COVID-19.

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

## Members' Statements

(continued)

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Sherwood Park has a statement to make.

### COVID-19 Community Response

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province is taking aggressive, widespread action to slow the spread of COVID-19 across our province. Public health experts have stated that here in Canada we are at a critical moment to reduce the severity of the outbreak. The news last week that a child in Calgary had contracted COVID-19 was a sobering moment for families province-wide. No parent wants to imagine their own child seriously ill with this type of virus.

I remember from my own family growing up just how quickly illness can spread through a household or community once a child is contagious. Public health and school officials have been weighing the risks of gatherings in classrooms and ultimately advised that all in-person classes be cancelled in the province for the foreseeable future. This decision did not come lightly, and it represents the seriousness of the moment in slowing the spread of COVID-19 throughout Alberta. With new cases of community transmission detected over the weekend, it is clear that serious measures must be put in place to reduce the number of people gathering in crowded spaces.

At this point in time the most important things Albertans can do are: help one another, follow public health guidelines, and do our best to keep each other safe. We are hearing wonderful initiatives happening across our province. Stores are opening early to allow seniors to shop with fully stocked shelves in clean stores. Complete strangers are offering to help those who are in need as we as a society navigate COVID-19.

In recent years we have rallied together and persevered through fires and flood. I am proud to be an Albertan, and I know together we will weather this storm.

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

### COVID-19 and Workers

**Ms Gray:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the health care workers on the front lines, the grocery store staff, the pharmacists, the school maintenance workers, and everyone who is going to work to make sure we can all access the services and supplies we need during this outbreak.

On Friday the Premier announced a new 14-day paid job-protected leave but did not have the details ready. This sounds promising, but Albertans were left with a lot of questions, and many workers and employers reached out to my colleagues and I this weekend worried and uncertain. I am again calling on the government to provide certainty and supports for all Alberta workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The chief medical officer, Dr. Hinshaw, has said clearly:

The most important thing that I want Albertans to do is to stay home when feeling sick. Even if you have not travelled, if you have symptoms of cough, or even mild cold-like symptoms, you need to stay home and away from others. This is critically important.

This government needs to ensure that job protection is provided for everyone who follows the directions provided by our public health system. Dr. Hinshaw acknowledged that in most cases the people staying home sick will not have COVID-19, so will those Albertans have the job protection they need to follow directions?

This government needs to make sure that paid sick leave is in place for employees and that other financial supports are in place for the workers who do not get sick time. We have many working in the gig economy, part-time jobs, contract work, self-employed, and there are many who do not qualify for employment insurance.

This government needs to clearly ban all sick notes. Everyone needs to stay home if they are feeling sick. This is crucial to reduce the spread of COVID-19 but also to reduce the burden on an already stressed health care system.

And now, given the sudden closure of schools, we know that financial supports need to be extended to parents who may be forced to stay home to care for their kids for an unknown duration of time. Albertans are still waiting for these important details. They are concerned, they are looking for answers, and they need those answers now.

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

### COVID-19 Protective Measures

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are entering a difficult period in our province's history. Last week a combined public health and economic crisis hit our province. As coronavirus infections spread world-wide, the price of oil dropped due to an OPEC price war. Now, I can't sugar-coat it. This is a challenging moment. Everyone is affected by this virus in one way or another, and as the efforts to reduce the spread of illness continue, the daily lives of Albertans will have to change.

In recent days our chief medical officer of health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, has advised new restrictions on mass gatherings. Gatherings of over 250 people such as conferences, cultural events, sports games, and religious services have been advised to cancel due to the risk of spreading disease. On Sunday officials also announced that in-person programming at daycares, K to 12 schools, and postsecondary institutions have been cancelled indefinitely.

These are sweeping measures, but they are necessary to slow the spread of disease and keep our most vulnerable populations safe. These changes will be significant, but we are resilient, persistent, and resistant people here in Alberta. We are a community-oriented province, and in moments of crisis like this we can come together to support each other and help reduce the speed at which the virus spreads.

Mr. Speaker, I am lucky to represent two incredible communities in this time of crisis. Both Spruce Grove and Stony Plain have great leadership in place, and I'm confident that Mayor Choy and Mayor Houston are working hard to ensure that our communities are following proper procedures and are kept as safe as possible in this time. I want to encourage any residents of Spruce Grove or Stony Plain to continue reaching out to my office with your questions as we will continue to do our best to get you the answers that you and your family need.

Thank you.

### Presenting Petitions

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I request leave to present the following petition, that has been received for a private bill in accordance with Standing Order 98(2): the petition of Lorimer B. Dawson, QC, on behalf of The Sisters of

the Precious Blood of Edmonton for The Sisters of the Precious Blood of Edmonton Repeal Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

### Notices of Motions

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

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to do several notices of motions, but I'll start, first off, with the Standing Order 30, the emergency debate. I have the appropriate number of copies for the pages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, that the Legislative Assembly express its support for the government's efforts, as guided by expert health professionals and officials, to undertake every possible action within its power to protect Albertans from the growing global COVID-19 pandemic and its related economic consequences.

I also will move several more motions to be put on the Order Paper in my name, Mr. Speaker, starting with Government Motion 10, and I will read it.

**The Speaker:** Sorry, hon. Government House Leader. If you can provide members of the LASS the documentation for the Standing Order 30.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Done. Do you want me to wait?

**The Speaker:** Yeah. I'll actually have you wait because there's also an additional Standing Order 30 application by the hon. the Leader of the Opposition, and then we'll return to any other government motions that you may have.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide notice that at the appropriate time I'll be moving the following motion today.

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to debate a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the provincial government response to the COVID-19 coronavirus in relation to response, prevention, and economic impact.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Government House Leader for additional government motions.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to provide oral notice of the following government motions to be placed on the Order Paper in my name, starting with Government Motion 10.

- A. Be it resolved that despite any standing order, practice of the Legislative Assembly, or the 2020 sessional calendar,
  - (a) at any time during the 2020 spring sitting of the Second Session of the 30th Legislature the Government House Leader may
    - (i) advise the Assembly that the public interest requires that the Assembly adjourn, or
    - (ii) if the Assembly stands adjourned, advise the Speaker that the public interest requires the period of adjournment to continue,
 and the Speaker shall give notice that the Assembly shall remain in a period of adjournment until the government advises the Speaker that the Assembly must meet to transact its business;



- (b) if the Assembly stands adjourned or a period of adjournment is continued in accordance with clause (a),
- (i) the Government House Leader may, following consultation with the Opposition House Leaders, file a revised sessional calendar with the Clerk, and the Clerk shall publish that revised sessional calendar as soon as possible after it is received, and
- (ii) during the period of adjournment, documents may be deposited in accordance with Standing Order 38.1 despite the period of adjournment not being continued to a specified date;
- (c) despite the government advising the Speaker that the Assembly must meet to transact its business under clause (a), the Government House Leader may advise the Speaker of any extended adjournment before the Assembly has reconvened or, following the reconvening of the Assembly, may advise the Speaker or the Assembly in accordance with clause (a) of a further adjournment or continuation of an adjournment;
- (d) Standing Order 39(1) does not apply to members of the Executive Council, who may move a motion or introduce a bill immediately upon providing to the Official Opposition House Leader a copy of the notice that would otherwise be required under the standing order;
- (e) the 2020-21 government estimates (revised), tabled by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board on March 16, 2020, replace, for all purposes, the 2020-21 government estimates tabled on February 27, 2020;
- (f) the main estimates of ministries stand referred to the Committee of Supply;
- (g) the Committee of Supply shall meet to consider the main estimates of ministries on Tuesday, March 17, 2020, in the following manner:
- (i) the main estimates of ministries for which a legislative policy committee has completed its considerations of the 2020-21 government estimates tabled on February 27, 2020, are deemed to be complete for the purpose of the 2020-21 government estimates (revised);
- (ii) the main estimates of the remaining ministries shall be considered for a maximum of three hours by the Committee of Supply;
- (iii) only members of the Official Opposition and members of Executive Council may speak;
- (iv) all speaking times are limited to 10 minutes at one time;
- (v) if an amendment is moved to the main estimates in the Committee of Supply, the vote on the amendment stands deferred until the end of consideration of main estimates;
- (vi) amendments moved to the 2020-21 government estimates tabled on February 27, 2020, in a legislative policy committee are, upon notice given by the mover of the amendment to the Clerk of the Assembly, considered to have been moved during Committee of Supply consideration of the 2020-21 government estimates (revised);
- (vii) the vote on the main estimates shall be held when the time allotted for the Committee of Supply's consideration of main estimates has concluded or there are no members who wish to speak;
- (h) the afternoon sitting on Tuesday, March 17, 2020, shall be continued beyond 6 p.m. if the Assembly has not adjourned by that time, and if the afternoon sitting is not adjourned prior to 7:30 p.m., the sitting shall

continue until it is adjourned, and there shall be no evening sitting that day;

- (i) upon receiving first reading, Bill 6, Appropriation Act, 2020, shall be moved immediately for second reading and debated without amendment by the mover of the bill and no more than one member of the Official Opposition, and if the motion is carried, it is deemed to be referred to the Committee of the Whole on division, deemed considered in Committee of the Whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred on in a report of Committee of the Whole on division, deemed read a third time and passed on division;
- (j) Bill 5, Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020, may receive second and third reading and advance two or more stages in one day.

**B. And be it further resolved that**

- (a) this motion takes effect immediately upon passage,
- (b) clause (a) and (c) of part (a) expire at 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, June 4, 2020,
- (c) clause (b) of part (a) expires at 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, October 25, 2020, and
- (d) clause (d) of part (a) expires at 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 26, 2020.

That's Government Motion 10, Mr. Speaker. I'm ready to go to Government Motion 11 with your permission.

**The Speaker:** Proceed.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Government Motion 11, to be put on the Order Paper in my name:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) and subject to Government Motion 10, commencing upon the passage of this motion, the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the duration of the 2020 spring sitting of the Second Session of the 30th Legislature unless the Government House Leader notifies the Assembly that there shall be no evening sitting that day by providing notice under Notices of Motions in the daily Routine or at any time prior to 6 p.m.

**Moving on to Government Motion 12, Mr. Speaker:**

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Government Motion 10 is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the motion, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the motion shall be put forthwith.

**Moving on to Government Motion 13:**

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 5, Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in second reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

**Government Motion 14:**

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 5, Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

**Government Motion 15:**

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 5, Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

**Government Motion 16:**

Be it resolved that for the duration of the 30th Legislature the following committees may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period of prorogation:

- (a) the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services; [and]
- (b) the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** Are there tablings today? The hon. the Minister of Environment and Parks.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I think that maybe the Minister of Finance was rising under Introduction of Bills? I blocked him. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. We already tabled that, obviously, at the start of session. I apologize.

Under Tabling Returns and Reports I just wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, that given the extraordinary circumstances of the global pandemic, I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of the revision to the 2020-21 main estimates schedule. This is to reflect the government's desire to sit in the afternoon tomorrow for consideration of government business, including the motion I gave notice of that proposes to move consideration of the remaining estimates to Committee of Supply. I have the appropriate number of copies.

3:00

**The Speaker:** Are there other tablings?

The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Sweet:** Mr. Speaker, just a point of clarity again. Given the circumstances and this unorthodox way of running the House, should the opposition not be given an option to see the motions that were just presented even though they're giving notice? We don't have anything to read until they're on the Order Paper tomorrow. Standing Order 13(2).

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** It's oral notice.

**The Speaker:** Yeah. The government is able to provide you a copy, but it is oral notice of a motion. That is the purpose of oral notice. This is how oral notice generally works, that they would provide the notice of the motion. That is the purpose. We'll see. I don't think that there's a requirement of them, but I would say that given the times, they'll be happy to make sure that you get those copies.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Just briefly, Mr. Speaker, to provide some clarity to the House and to the Official Opposition House Leader, all those motions, though we are not required to, have been e-mailed to her staff.

**The Speaker:** Are there other tablings?

I do have one tabling this afternoon. Pursuant to section 28 of the Conflicts of Interest Act I have the requisite six copies of a report of the office of the Ethics Commissioner.

### 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. Kenney, Premier, President of Executive Council, and Minister of Intergovernmental Relations, responses to questions raised by Ms Notley, hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, on November 7, 2019, Executive Council, main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Insurance Act the Alberta Automobile Insurance Rate Board annual report for the year ended December 31, 2019.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Schow, chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, pursuant to the Election Act

2019 General Election: a report of the Chief Electoral Officer, volumes 1 and 2.

### Emergency Debate

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 30(2) a "Member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he or she considers relevant to the question of urgency," and in the role of chair to rule as to whether or not an order should be granted.

As mentioned earlier today in Notices of Motions, the Speaker's office received two notices of motions on Friday, one at 10:30 a.m. from the Government House Leader and one at 4:25 p.m. from the Leader of the Official Opposition. As such, the hon. Government House Leader may briefly present an argument as to why a request for leave may be granted.

### COVID-19

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was going to quote *Beauchesne's* and all the relevant moments for your decision. You've already, I think, recapped that well. I don't need to waste the Assembly's time with that today.

The reality of the question is whether or not this situation is urgent enough for you to grant emergency debate to this Assembly today, Mr. Speaker, as you recognize. I can think of few situations that are more urgent than what we face right now inside our province. I know that in my time in the Legislature this is the most urgent situation that I have seen here and, I suspect, in the top two or three urgent moments in the history of this province, up to the equivalent of the Great Depression and World War II as far as urgency inside our province.

The reality is that we face an unprecedented crisis both from a global health pandemic that is creating significant consequences across our economy as well as to the health care system, Mr. Speaker, and the reality is that it is incumbent upon us inside this Chamber to respond to it as best as we can on behalf of the people of Alberta. I think that that in and of itself shows you the level of urgency that Alberta faces and the opportunity for us as the elected representatives of the Legislative Assembly, as Alberta's elected representatives, to take the time this afternoon to have a debate and a conversation about this important issue.

I will close with this. I think the fact that the Official Opposition has also brought forward a similar motion shows that, quite frankly, the House is united in its desire to have a debate on this important issue.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader has met the requirements of providing at least two hours' notice to the Speaker's office by submitting the required notice on March 13, 2020, at 10:30 a.m. The request reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely, that the Legislative Assembly express its support for the Government's efforts, as guided by expert health professionals and officials, to undertake every possible action within its power to protect Albertans from the growing global COVID-19 pandemic and its related economic consequences.

The relevant parliamentary authorities on this subject are pages 695 to 704 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, and *Beauchesne's*, paragraphs 387 to 390.

I would like to note that the request made by the Government House Leader under Standing Order 30 should be in the form of a request for leave to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss the matter of importance. It should not be in the form of

a substantive motion since emergency debates do not entail a decision of the Assembly, as set out in Standing Order 30(6). Despite this error in form and given the gravity of this situation, I am prepared to allow this request to be considered.

Members, let me point out that there is no question that the COVID-19 virus, which has been deemed by the World Health Organization as a pandemic, constitutes a genuine emergency, which, under Standing Order 30(7)(a), calls “for immediate and urgent consideration.”

It is also clear that the circumstances we are facing are unprecedented.

In addition, given that this is the Assembly’s first day back following a constituency week, today is the first day that the Assembly has had an opportunity to debate this matter.

Finally, given that the Leader of the Opposition also requested leave under Standing Order 30 at 4:25 p.m. on March 13, 2020, to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic and, specifically, the government’s response to the global health crisis, there appears to be a willingness on both sides of the Assembly to set aside the regular business in order to consider that matter today.

Accordingly, the chair finds the request for leave in order.

The rules governing the procedure, once the chair finds the request to be in order, are as follows: Standing Order 30(3) requires the question to be put to the Assembly. I will do so now. I will ask only one question. Is there anyone opposed to the debate on the emergent matter proceeding? Please say aye.

**An Hon. Member:** Aye.

**The Speaker:** Perfect. Those in favour of the debate proceeding?

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Speaker:** There is some question. As such, if there are 15 or more members that rise, the debate proceeds.

[Several members rose]

**The Speaker:** As such, I will grant the emergency debate, and we will proceed to that immediately.

Please be seated.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 13(2). I just want to – 13(2) may be the wrong way to do it – clarify how long this debate will go.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members will know that all members who wish to speak will have 10 minutes to do so until all who wish to speak have done so or until the normal hour of adjournment. In this case that would be 6 p.m. today.

The hon. the Premier.

**Mr. Kenney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Albertans face one of the most extraordinary challenges in the history of our province. The last time we saw a pandemic of this nature threaten lives and public safety in this province was with the spread of the Spanish flu in 1918, in the last days following the First World War, the Great War, which itself resulted in the loss of the lives of 65,000 Canadian servicemen, including over 15,000 from Alberta. Upon their return home, communities across the country and across our province were affected profoundly by the tragedy of that influenza.

3:10

Today, Mr. Speaker, we face a challenge of a similar nature. We do so, however, with decades of medical experience and expertise in managing such outbreaks, we do so with the miracle of modern medical technology and science, and we do so with the people who remain as resilient today as they were 102 years ago.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Madam Speaker, I can report that, as of now, we are aware of 59 cases of infection from the coronavirus here in Alberta, the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, and we have completed some 10,200 tests. Let me commend all of those working in our health services for their remarkable efforts under trying circumstances. Let me thank in particular our chief medical officer, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, who has provided thoughtful, measured advice to the government on this response.

Madam Deputy Speaker, sadly, we face not only an urgent public health threat but also, at the same time, a massive economic and social challenge. Concurrent with the coronavirus we have seen a significant decline in global economic demand and output, resulting in what is clearly a major global economic recession. In part because of the decline in global demand for energy resulting from that downturn, we have seen a price war for energy emanating from OPEC and Russia, which has resulted in a disastrous decline in energy prices, which will affect us with great impact in this province.

In addition to these three challenges, we are still struggling, Madam Deputy Speaker, to overcome five years of economic fragility in this province. So we are not as resilient in terms of our economic or fiscal capacity to respond to these multiple challenges. That is why it is incumbent upon all of us as Albertans to come together to the greatest extent possible, in unity, to tackle and overcome these historic challenges that we face together.

First, of course, and most urgently, is the public health imperative. That is why we call on all Albertans to follow scrupulously the advice of Dr. Hinshaw and our medical professionals. The single most important thing that Albertans can do to prevent the further spread of this deadly virus is to respect the basic rules of personal hygiene, Madam Deputy Speaker: to wash their hands frequently with hot, soapy water for at least 20 seconds; to avoid touching their faces; to avoid going into crowded areas; to practise social distancing; to avoid travelling; particularly for those who are exhibiting symptoms of cold or flu to stay at home, to self-isolate for 14 days; and for those who have returned from travelling abroad to also self-isolate and to closely monitor their medical condition.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if people believe that they may exhibit symptoms of the COVID-19 disease, they can log on to [alberta.ca/covid](http://alberta.ca/covid) to find an innovative and effective new self-assessment tool that was recently developed by Alberta Health Services, which, already, hundreds of thousands of Albertans have used. If, after having done so, there is an indication that they may have COVID symptoms, we recommend that they call 811 to speak to a medical professional to seek advice on how to potentially be tested for the condition. We understand that many Albertans are frustrated waiting to speak to a professional online. We ask them to be patient. The staffing of that medical helpline has more than doubled, the number of lines have tripled, and we continue to add resources.

Madam Speaker, let me be clear. Alberta is leading the way, as so often we do, because of innovation by our medical professionals. AHS is delivering some 1,000 tests every day for the coronavirus. To put that in context, I understand that the whole province of Ontario is conducting an equal number of daily tests for a population that’s nearly four times our size. We are leading, I believe, North America and are amongst the leading jurisdictions in the world in the per capita incidence of testing.

While two people are in intensive care having contracted this virus, thankfully we have not yet had any fatalities. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, let us be clear: there almost inevitably will be lives lost as a result of this virus. As we have seen in countries from China to Italy, all around the world, that is, sadly, inevitable. What is not inevitable is the rate of spread of this disease, and the essential challenge for all of us is to ensure that the peak point of infection

does not overwhelm our health care system here in Alberta. We have one of the most well-resourced and robust health systems anywhere in the world. Canada's health expenditures are at the high end of the developed world, and Alberta's are the largest health expenditures in the country. This Legislature, upon a royal recommendation, I understand, this morning adopted an amendment to the Appropriation Act to add an additional \$500 million to the Alberta health care budget. We will continue to leave no effort on the table in combatting this virus.

Let me, then, briefly turn to the economic consequences of this. We know that tens of thousands of Albertans have had to stay home in self-isolation. Many thousands more have had to stay home for child care or have faced recent layoffs, and we are working urgently with the government of Canada and the other provincial and territorial governments to ensure that there is adequate income support for those individuals so that they do not have to choose between following medical advice to self-isolate and being able to take care of their family's financial needs. We call upon the business community, including the banks, to exercise understanding and flexibility during a time when many people will be stressed to pay their mortgages, their rent, and their basic bills. We call upon unions as well to demonstrate the same flexibility with respect to union dues. They, too, can have a role to play to provide support to their members. We salute the wonderful charities and nonprofits and civil society in Alberta that will be providing support to those who are facing isolation.

This government is working on an unprecedented economic and fiscal rescue package to provide greater liquidity to both businesses and households who are facing enormous financial stress and to create economic stimulus so that we can turn the corner and recover from the massive economic threat that is posed to Alberta today.

Madam Speaker, let me close by saying, once again, that as we were in 1918, we are still a resilient people, a people of great innovation, of hope, and of optimism, and while we are facing challenging times, we will get through them together.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

3:20

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is unfortunate that we all have to rise today to speak about the many concerns that many Albertans are experiencing during these very unprecedented times, including the unprecedented challenges that they present.

The motion or the matter that we are debating, strangely, actually, out of order – nonetheless, the general theme is the same – is whether or not we support the actions of this government in terms of managing this crisis. Let me say very clearly that we absolutely support the very dedicated service that we know is being demonstrated each and every day by Alberta's hard-working public servants and front-line providers. In particular but not limited to that, in the health care sector we see nurses' aides, doctors, first responders, nurses, counsellors, and many, many more who are putting themselves on the front lines, at risk, to provide care to Albertans as we go forward and, of course, the many, many public health officials, including our own chief medical officer of health, who we all hope is able to recover from her symptoms very soon. Let me say that the Official Opposition is absolutely here to support all those folks.

We know that it is a very trying time, too. As the Premier has indicated, we have a pandemic unlike anything that we have seen for decades and decades and maybe even more. Of course, that has been compounded by a drop in the price of oil, which hurts Alberta's economy, particularly in relation to what we see being experienced by people outside of Alberta. Either way, we know that

there are going to be significant economic consequences for all Canadians, and Albertans are going to feel that as well. That's why we need to be having a conversation about the government's actions and their plans going forward.

Now, the Premier took the opportunity in question period to get up and suggest that somehow people in this Legislature are not acting like people in other Legislatures across the country, and he's absolutely right about that, Madam Speaker. In other parts of the country we have seen the government reach out respectfully to the opposition in order to negotiate strategies, which, of course, include agreement to raise the Legislature at a certain point, depending on the advice of the chief medical officer of health, but also to negotiate strategies for addressing the problems in the short term while deferring big decisions to another time. As a result, we see that in Ontario there is no budget being jammed through. There is no budget being jammed through in Ottawa. There is no budget being jammed through in almost any other province in the country.

In particular, what we don't see is a budget being jammed through by ripping up the fundamental principles of parliamentary democracy and, even more importantly, if that is possible – but in this urgent situation I think it's fair to say that it is – by passing a budget which includes cut after cut after cut to the very public servants that I was just describing, who Albertans need more than ever. It's not just that we've ripped up the deal with the doctors, Madam Speaker; it's that this government is wanting us to jam through a budget that, taking into account the simple factors of population and inflation, will result in less money being dedicated to our health care system this year than last year.

Now, maybe the government thinks, from a policy perspective, that we're just going to have to reorganize and figure out the best way to make do with less because we've been spending too much on health care. I don't agree with that argument, but I can't imagine that anybody in Alberta thinks that right now is the time to ask people running our acute-care wards to implement and execute operational best practices, which, by the way, is a way to take stuff away from nurses, reduce their hours, and push more jobs onto nurses' aides. I can't imagine that this is a time you would want to do that. I can't imagine that this is a time you'd want to start privatizing swaths of the health care system. I can't imagine that this is a time that you want to rip up doctors' working conditions. I can't imagine that this is the time that you would want to do that even if you think it's the right thing to do.

But that's what this budget anticipates, because the fact of the matter is that that extra \$500 million is going to be required for the extra costs caused by this pandemic. It is going to be required for the extra hospital beds that will have to be opened. On a conservative estimate, Madam Speaker, we're probably looking at having to invest in about 25 per cent more hospital beds. We're going to have to invest in more mental health supports. We're going to have to invest in more staff in our long-term care centres, and let me just unpack that one just a little bit. Because there are so many long-term care centres, I have to think that some folks on the other side of the aisle right now can think of a loved one who is in long-term care whose quality of life depends on a relative or an additional paid staffperson to go into that long-term care centre and make sure that that loved one eats, is bathed, is given a walk, is talked to, those things. And in the absence of those people being in the long-term care centre, it is going to be necessary to have more approved staff in there to provide the support that now people can't provide. I get why that order has been made – I'm not suggesting that it shouldn't be – but the point is that there is greater cost.

Then we haven't yet gotten into the issue of paid leave. I have to say, Madam Speaker, that we all watched with great interest when the Premier had his press conference last Friday. We had pushed on

this issue. The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods raised this issue early last week, so we were happy to see the Premier address it, but then the Premier said that Albertans will be provided with 14 days' paid leave. Albertans are losing their minds over trying to find out what this means, not just the people that need the paid leave but the employers and the small-business owners, who think that maybe they're the ones that have to pay it now, not to mention the fact that for many people EI, should the federal government expand it even more than they already have, represents typically, on average, about 25 to 30 per cent of the income of the average Albertan, even waged employees. So there are tremendous problems, and we're not getting clarity.

What we are doing is that we are adopting a very draconian approach to jam through a budget which is at least \$15 billion off. When I say that, I believe that that is a very conservative number, and I think that most people in the Executive Council know that I'm being generous by suggesting that they're looking at a \$15 billion deficit right now; I think it's going to be larger. And that assumes not throwing out investment to support workers who are losing hours at work because of all the things that have been rightly recommended, nor does it assume the massive economic stimulus program that Albertans are going to need to see if they are going to ensure the economic stability or a portion of the economic stability that they need. None of that is in the budget.

Now, we offered to say: let's pull this budget – we all know that it was developed in January; it's absolutely not of any help to anybody right now – and that we would sit down in a much-shortened process to come up with some agreed-to parameters for interim supply and then maintain the budget at the level that it was at in '19-20 and then come back to the table when things are calmed down. That is a far more reasonable way to proceed. That is what you see in the other jurisdictions that the Premier is, very sadly, suggesting that we are not following. I agree: we should be working more collaboratively. We should not be using this as an opportunity to jam through a budget. We should do better, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Health.

3:30

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I'm happy to speak to this motion today. The COVID-19 pandemic is a serious challenge for our province, and we're taking this extremely seriously. As Minister of Health I want to stress that Dr. Hinshaw has my complete confidence. I will support any public measures which she feels are necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19 and to protect the health of Albertans.

In light of the rapidly changing situation, Albertans need to know that we will not let budget or politics guide our response to this outbreak. I want to be clear that there will be no layoffs of front-line staff during our COVID-19 response, Madam Deputy Speaker. Whatever resources the health system needs in the days and the months ahead will be there. Aggressive additional public health measures are being implemented province-wide to limit the spread of COVID-19 and to protect Albertans. This includes an additional \$500 million committed to the COVID-19 response to give Alberta's public health officials the resources that they need to respond to keeping Albertans safe.

The new funding will ensure that front-line health professionals have the tools that they need for testing, that they need for surveillance, that they need for treatment of patients as the province works to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This is truly an unprecedented public health emergency in Alberta. Our government is committed to bolstering the efforts of our front-line

health professionals with the resources that they need to continue protecting the province. Alberta's public health workers are doing an outstanding job, and we are here to support them with whatever they need.

On the advice of the chief medical officer of health added public health measures also include, effective immediately: students will no longer be attending classes in K to 12 schools and postsecondary institutions until further notice; postsecondary campuses will remain open, but in-person classes are cancelled; all licensed child care, out of school care programs, and preschool programs in Alberta are closed at this time as well; all long-term care and other continuing care facilities are advised to limit visitation to essential visitors only; places of worship are no longer exempt from restrictions on mass gatherings; and travel outside of the country is not being recommended at this time.

Alberta's health system is working around the clock to respond to COVID-19 and to prepare for every possible scenario. As of yesterday there have been 10,238 tests of COVID-19 that have been completed around the province, with thousands more to come in the days ahead. AHS opened their first drive-up assessment centre for COVID-19 on March 10, 2020. A second centre will open tomorrow. Both are in Calgary. People will be referred to these sites after referral from Health Link. There are also assessment sites currently open in Edmonton and Calgary, with more being planned in other areas throughout the province. Since Friday more than 800,000 Albertans have also completed the COVID-19 assessment tool available on the AHS website, with about 2,000 concurrent visits at any one time. We are working to add to the tool to allow those taking the assessment to automatically be referred for testing if needed.

Health Link 811 continues to be critical to the COVID-19 response. Health Link receives more than 6,700 calls daily, and the volumes are equally high today. Wait times can be high, particularly during peak times, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and then 6 p.m. to 10 p.m., Madam Deputy Speaker. I know it can be frustrating and it can be stressful to wait on the line, but we're asking Albertans to continue to be patient. AHS continues to train more clinical staff, and we will do everything possible to manage wait times in the days ahead. This is the best way to receive an assessment and, if needed, arrange follow-up testing. Yesterday alone there were more than half a million page views to the COVID-19 website. Total hits to the website are well over 1 million. Alberta Health and AHS have teams ready to respond to questions on social media and e-mail inquiries. Pages are being translated along with outreach to our cultural communities.

In the coming days and the coming months we must all exercise caution. The most important measure that Albertans can take to prevent respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, is to practise, as the Premier said, Madam Deputy Speaker, good hygiene. As the Premier said, this includes washing your hands for 20 seconds with warm, soapy water; avoiding touching your face; coughing or sneezing into your elbow or sleeve; disposing of tissues appropriately; and staying home and away from others if you are sick. We're also encouraging all Albertans to visit [alberta.ca/covid19](http://alberta.ca/covid19) – that's [alberta.ca/covid19](http://alberta.ca/covid19) – for recommendations on protecting yourself and your community.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I want to thank the thousands of doctors, the thousands of nurses and other health care professionals who are working around the clock to help identify, to help isolate, and to help treat cases of COVID-19. I know that this outbreak is putting a significant burden on all of you and your families. Your dedication is a reminder that our province has a long track record of overcoming adversity.

I also want to thank Dr. Deena Hinshaw for her dedication to Albertans, for her continued efforts to provide the province with critical public health information. Dr. Hinshaw is currently in self-isolation with mild symptoms consistent with the common cold, likely due to the long hours that she has been working in the recent weeks. Her symptoms do not appear to be consistent with COVID-19. In line with the advice being provided to all Albertans, Dr. Hinshaw is self-isolating and working from home until her test results are confirmed. Dr. Hinshaw continues to perform all of her important duties while in self-isolation, and this is an important reminder to all of us to stay home while we are sick. The government's daily COVID-19 press briefing will continue with Dr. Hinshaw leading via video conference. Each of us needs to do our part and to follow Dr. Hinshaw's advice to adhere to all public health recommendations.

I want to state again, Madam Speaker, that every Albertan needs to take this very seriously. I know that some of these recommendations are significant to the daily lives of Albertans, but this is the best way to help slow the virus and to protect the health of those around us. As Dr. Hinshaw has often said: we are strongest together.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton City-Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and participate in this emergency debate today. The Premier noted – he was right – that we had similar motions, and indeed our motions are similar in that we both want to discuss the concerns around this and certainly the government reaction. I would note, though, that we have, I guess, some concerns with some things which may not be covered.

Certainly, I want to begin by stating that we absolutely support the public officials and think they have been doing an incredible job in their response to this. Dr. Hinshaw has been an upstanding pillar of the community, incredibly calm, providing such amazing support to all Albertans at a difficult time, and we deeply appreciate it. We wish her all the best and a quick recovery. I deeply appreciate Dr. Verna Yiu and all at AHS that have been working to bring things to bear. Indeed, thinking back to the many conversations I've had the opportunity to have with many ER and critical care and family doctors as well as other front-line staff, I believe that they are putting in their absolute best and will make every effort to support and protect the health of Albertans.

I do have some concerns with the government's steps towards dealing with this, the first being that I'm deeply concerned that the government is choosing to use this as an opportunity to force through their budget. We have made offers to sit down and work through this. They have options like interim supply. It does not have to be this way, Madam Speaker. The government is choosing to do this. They are choosing to reduce scrutiny. They are choosing to hide from Albertans. They are choosing not to give full transparency, in particular with this minister, to a massive transformation of our health care system and taking what would have given me the opportunity of a total of about three hours and 20 minutes to discuss that with this minister. It will now be part of a single three hours should this government choose to force through its motion.

In regard to the government's response in general, I do want to note that there are concerns from many doctors that this government is not providing sufficient support for them to look after their patients. Now, of course, some of the members on the government side seemed to have some difficulty in finding time to meet with

those doctors, so perhaps they're unaware of their requests. So I'll take a moment to discuss them here now.

**3:40**

I would note that in many conversations I had with family doctors this past weekend by phone and in person – in Edmonton, in Airdrie, in Calgary, in the Bow Valley – those doctors expressed the concern that they have inadequate support to deal with the very prudent rules and suggestions, advice, that has been put in place by the chief medical officer. These doctors are the front line in their communities. People do get sick with things other than COVID-19. These doctors need to be able to see patients, but they also need to be able to protect those patients.

Now, doctors are incredibly innovative. They've been purchasing restaurant paging systems so that their patients can sit outside in their car and be buzzed when it's time for them to come in for their appointment, be checked at the door, ushered in, taken in, checked in, and then given their appointment. But, of course, that's an additional cost to those doctors at a time when this government is actually planning to cut their pay as of April 1, again, refusing to listen to these doctors about the challenges and the additional pressures and chaos and uncertainty they are causing for them.

These doctors are requesting an opportunity to be able to make use of telehealth. They are asking for telephone codes, billing codes, that have been provided to doctors in other provinces. In particular, they note that there is a billing code, 03.05JR, which doctors can use to counsel patients over the phone, but that code is limited to only 14 uses a week and pays them \$20 as opposed to the standard \$41. Doctors would be willing to work for a half rate to do telehealth if this minister would simply remove the cap on the number of calls. So far this minister has not spoken to that. He has refused to respond, and he has shown no action to provide that tool to our family doctors to ensure the protection of Albertans while they continue to support their health in the midst of a global pandemic.

Now, under pressure from the Alberta Medical Association, I would note that the minister did reactivate another similar telephone counselling code, 03.01AD, for counselling patients, but only specifically regarding COVID-19 concerns. That's a code that was last used during the H1N1 influenza epidemic. It also pays \$20. I would note that that \$20 fee has not been updated in over 11 years. New Brunswick is paying doctors a similar fee at \$45, Saskatchewan at \$35, and Ontario pays a range from \$23.75 to \$67.75. That is the only tool this minister has provided to doctors.

Let's remember that these doctors are small businesses. If they cannot safely continue to see their patients, that means they are paying out of pocket for their overhead to not be able to operate. I cannot see how it is helpful for Albertans to put our doctors, our family doctors, in a position of potential bankruptcy.

Now, these doctors are simply asking that the Minister of Health, as part of his response, uncap this one code that would allow them, for half the cost of a regular visit, to do telehealth appointments with Albertans, protecting them, allowing doctors to continue to operate on a shoestring, mind you. They will still be taking a loss. But these doctors care about their patients. They are willing to take that loss to protect the health of Albertans, so they are asking that that be uncapped and that the minister consider, then, perhaps updating that fee to a 2020 level, as opposed to the level it was set at in 2011, as we see in other provinces.

Indeed, the Premier talked about how Alberta is leading the way; our health care system is the envy of others. Well, then let's follow through on that, Madam Speaker. Let's indeed lead the way. Let's support our doctors with what they need. They are also facing the need for child care. If they have to self-isolate at home, they have

no income, they are unable to pay their staff, and they have to continue to pay their overhead. So far we have heard nothing from this government about how they intend to support family doctors, who, again, are one of the important partners we have in controlling the spread of this virus, particularly when we know that we continue to see record volumes of calls to 811.

I do applaud the minister for expanding the capacity and indeed for bringing in the online assessment tool, which I understand has now been embraced by Saskatchewan. Those are very positive things, but those are just the first steps. This minister may choose to double down on his intent to make it incredibly difficult for family doctors to practise in this province. He may choose to double down on keeping the very ER physicians who are currently battling this in the hospitals, who are preparing to fight this, who will be on the front lines of exposure, in limbo about what he is going to pay them come April 1, but the least he could do is at least lift the cap on this telephone code, consider raising the amount on par with the other provinces so that we can sustain the family doctors that they are so quick to praise but seemingly so slow to support.

I would encourage all members in this House to follow through on the many offers I know you have received to meet with the family doctors in your area and listen to them because at this time, when we are facing this pressure here in our province, it is our front-line health care workers that need to know that this government has their support and has their back. And I can tell you, having spoken to them this weekend, that they do not feel that. That is not because of a lone opposition member and his Twitter account; that is because of the facts of how this government is behaving.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

**Ms Glasgo:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I really appreciate the opportunity to participate in this special, emergency debate. As such, I would like to start by saying that I know that Albertans are very nervous and that things remain uncertain in this time. That is also why I would like to urge the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona to work with our government in providing solutions for this conflict and for this problem instead of conflating numbers in this House and scaring Albertans. Just a few minutes ago we heard significant misinformation, and I would like to remind the members opposite that an additional \$500 million was given to the Ministry of Health to combat the COVID-19 crisis.

Now, I know that the members opposite together, I will acknowledge, have tons of parliamentary experience, especially in this House, especially the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and I would like to encourage – I know that I respect her as another parliamentarian, as another woman, as a former Premier of this province, and I would hope that she would recognize and lean on that parliamentary experience to acknowledge that this is a special circumstance and that we must put aside political theatre and personal political gain in order to stand together, united, and weather this storm.

With that being said, Madam Speaker, I would also just like to reiterate that I feel privileged to be standing in this place today, especially in good health, and to be able to participate in this emergency debate. I would like to start by thanking Dr. Deena Hinshaw, our province's chief medical officer, for her expertise, hard work, and calm leadership during such a time of uncertainty. Dr. Hinshaw completed her undergraduate degree at Augustana university in Camrose. At the University of Alberta Dr. Hinshaw then completed her medical degree, a master's in public health, and residencies in family medicine and community medicine. She held a number of notable roles at Alberta Health Services, including

deputy chief medical officer of health, prior to being appointed to her current role on January 28, 2019. It is the job of her office to support health surveillance and provide expertise on public health issues. I know I speak on behalf of many when I say that her daily live updates to Albertans are helpful and appreciated.

Madam Speaker, I'm also encouraged by the leadership of many people in our communities. I want to thank those who are stepping up and offering help in practical ways. Things can seem pretty glum on social media these days, but there are also bright spots with people showing kindness and generosity to those in the community, including to complete strangers. For example, I have constituents in Brooks-Medicine Hat putting out offers online to go shopping for those who are in self-isolation, the elderly, the immunocompromised, or who need food and medications dropped off. I've also seen a number of community Facebook groups even just this morning. I'm including AHS community helpers, which is actually facilitated by my amazing friend Kallyn Heindinger, and another group called YXH COVID volunteers. It's because of civil society groups like this that we are able to maintain public confidence and that we are able to help each other and weather this storm. For those of you who are in self-isolation or are more vulnerable, know that you are valued and loved and you're worthy of support.

3:50

Madam Speaker, some Albertans say that the government and others are overreacting to the coronavirus, claiming it's, quote, "Just the flu," which is false. Other Albertans say that the government is not doing enough. But it is important that the decisions are made carefully but swiftly and are always evidence based. Because some new cases over the weekend appear to be examples of community spread rather than travel related, aggressive additional public health measures are being implemented province-wide to limit the spread of COVID-19 and protect Albertans.

Effective immediately, students will no longer be able to attend classes regardless of grade or class size. Campuses and schools will remain open, but classes are cancelled. Our Minister of Education will be working closely with school authorities to help teachers and parents through this challenging time, and I thank her for her leadership. Students will progress to the next grade level next year, and every student eligible to graduate from grade 12 this year will graduate. Madam Speaker, I know that this decision to cancel classes was not a decision that was made lightly. School leaders across the province have been clear that guidelines provided last week were proving difficult to put into practice due to product shortages, challenges with staffing, and other operational issues.

I want to assure my constituents of Brooks-Medicine Hat and Albertans that the government of Alberta is paying attention and is totally and unrelentingly focused on dealing with this crisis. Alberta's public health workers are doing an outstanding job, and we are here to support them with whatever they need, including providing \$500 million in additional funding.

I will end my remarks by echoing some recent words from our Premier. He said: I think we can draw comfort and strength from the courage and fortitude of our forebears, who faced their own pandemic without modern medicine, technology, and experience that perhaps we take for granted today.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to represent Brooks-Medicine Hat, a constituency whose courageous residents are taking steps to protect themselves and others and extend a hand in a time of need. As Albertans we can and will get through this together.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to this motion before us, that the Legislative Assembly express its support for the government efforts. Well, there was another motion, which wanted to discuss the measures to prevent the spread and the threat to Albertans, but it is what it is. So I will be speaking to the motion before us.

I know that these are unsettling times. Albertans are facing an unprecedented challenge, and we have officials, we have health care workers on the front lines. So let me begin by offering deep admiration and gratitude to all those who are at the front lines, who are responding to this pandemic, and also let me offer my support to all Alberta families and businesses that have been affected by this pandemic.

While we are talking about government efforts and we are talking about an unprecedented challenge, the one thing for sure is that the success of our response depends on our front-line staff, our health care professionals. So I would say that this is not the time that we attack our front-line health care professionals, fire nurses, or slash their contracts. It's the time to work with them. It's the time to seek their advice so that we can all get through this.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The government, since this morning, is patting themselves on the back for adding \$500 million. I think, let me be clear, that they were cutting way more than \$500 million from this budget, and they are just adding some of that back into this budget. So it is still far short of what was provided in previous years, when we were in government.

Also, when we talk about government efforts, we said that we have reached out to the UCP, that we are here to work with you, that we are here to deal with this pandemic together. However, I think that what we have seen so far is that people were promised that they would get paid jobs, paid leave, but later on we found out that, no, the government will not be supporting, providing any supports. Instead, they are waiting for Ottawa and PM Trudeau to act and expand EI so that people can get supports. I think that's not what Albertans want. Albertans want action from this government.

I was part of the government when we were faced with the Fort Mac fires. I think that within a matter of days we were able to set up reception centres, and we were able to provide financial assistance to over 100,000 Albertans, those cash-card debit payments, so they could get through it. The government is saying that this is a pandemic that is unprecedented, and I agree. At this time I think the government needs to step up, instead of waiting for Ottawa, and provide financial support to those who need those supports to get through it.

Personally, I represent a constituency which mainly consists of Albertans who have lower incomes as compared to other quadrants, other neighbourhoods of Calgary. Most of them have either small businesses or low-paying jobs, so I do recognize that the challenges that this pandemic presents will be felt more by those who are surviving on single incomes, lower incomes, and who have younger kids as well. If I look at the schools in my riding, they are all operating at full capacity, so there are many kids who will be sitting at home, and we know that with school closures and day home closures – almost 100,000 day home spaces will be closed – it presents an even bigger challenge for those to look after their kids and maintain their jobs as well.

Not every one – not every one – of us has the ability, has the kind of job that can be done from the home. As a result, there will be people who have to choose between looking after their kids and going to work. During these times I think it's incumbent on the government to step up and provide those necessary financial

supports, make those arrangements, provide those assurances to Albertans that they will not be left on their own but that, rather, their government will do something, and they will not wait forever for the Ottawa government to expand EI and provide supports. It's the job of the government that Albertans elected.

The other thing I also wanted to mention was that with these recommendations coming from Dr. Hinshaw's office and the city of Calgary banning gatherings of 250, closing recreational facilities, that will have a huge impact on all Albertans. Again, if I specifically talk about my riding, my riding is home to people of many different cultural backgrounds and talents. There are many prayer places there, from mosques to temples to gurdwaras. I was looking it up this morning. Some of them have already decided to close. On top of that, the city is closing recreation centres. For instance, Genesis Centre announced that it will be closing its doors to the public. Whenever I walk into the Genesis Centre, that's a hub of community activity in the northeast area. When all those things are closed – aside from their religious significance, I think people going to these centres also get to socialize with each other and get support from each other – this will have a huge impact on people's daily routines and people's lives, and they will be needing mental health supports, other social supports to get through this.

Again, we haven't seen anything along those lines coming from the government. Instead, this morning I heard that people were given just one day's notice to arrange for daycare when we are closing, shutting down, all 106,000 or so spaces. I think it's quite challenging for people to arrange for those daycare spaces. Many are health care workers with children and parents who work in school settings. They still have to go do their job. Again, these are the people who are at the front line of our response to COVID-19, and Albertans deserve their government to provide full support to these workers.

4:00

They were saying that they are providing \$500 million, but over the last eight or 10 days what have we seen? We have seen doctors, nurses, parents, teachers asking this government to halt their cuts, to put a brake on their cuts. This weekend my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre was in Calgary meeting doctors across the city. Everyone had just one message for this government: put the brakes on your cuts. This is not the time to attack doctors. If we are serious about our response to COVID-19, and I'm sure the government is, then that needs to be reflected in our decisions on how we support our front-line staff. So far all I have heard is that the changes they made to doctors' compensation, all those things will still go ahead notwithstanding the unprecedented nature of this challenge.

I think we support these recommendations from the public health officials, from Dr. Deena Hinshaw's office. These are good recommendations; these are solid recommendations. At the same time, we need this government to make sure that people understand those recommendations and that people have supports, that people have resources to act on those recommendations. That's important.

Thank you so much.

**The Speaker:** Anyone else wishing to join the debate tonight? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise in the House today and speak about the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, and its impact on our province. I'd, first, quickly like to remind a few of them how we got here today. On April 16, 2019, after four years and \$50 billion of additional debt by the NDP, which amounts to approximately \$14,285 for every man, woman, and child living



in Alberta, that kind of debt, the province overwhelmingly voted for a fiscally responsible United Conservative government. Number one on almost every Albertan's list of things for this government to do was to bring balance back to Alberta's books. In plain language Albertans virtually screamed: stop spending so much money. At the same time there was a groundswell of the same people saying: but don't spend less on health care, on our kids' education, on seniors, or on the vulnerable and the disabled.

We heard those opposing voices and messages and did something that I almost didn't believe possible. We presented a four-year plan to balance that budget without reducing spending on health care or education. We actually increased spending in Community and Social Services, Children's Services, and Seniors and Housing. But to do this, we must make changes: less funding for Infrastructure, less funding for Municipal Affairs and Advanced Education. Beyond that, we must make changes in every single ministry. The purpose of sustainability is to do things better, to find efficiencies, to reduce redundancies, to eliminate duplication and waste. Why? Because it is the very definition of insanity to do otherwise. It is insanity to continue to do the same things and expect a different result.

Now, I would like to list some of the steps our government has taken in recent days to make those changes in co-ordination with public health officials. We have been closely monitoring the situation and prioritizing transparent communication with Albertans, encouraging social distancing and good hygiene practices, which, experts say, are the most effective ways of slowing down the virus so that our health care system can handle it. An additional \$500 million, half a billion dollars, will be given to Alberta's public health officials, giving them the resources they need to respond. Alberta Health Services has doubled Health Link staff and tripled call line capacity, an online assessment tool that has been created that Albertans can utilize at any time, and I understand from debate today that almost 800,000 Albertans have already used this service.

The Employment Standards Code has been changed to include 14 days of paid, job-protected leave to cover the self-isolation period. In addition, employees do not need to provide a medical note for this leave, nor do they need to have been employed for at least 90 days in order to be eligible. This is extreme care in an extreme circumstance.

Health officials have asked for all large gatherings of 250 people or more and international events to be cancelled as well as recommending that all nonessential travel plans be cancelled. Travel Alberta has been asked to redirect its advertising to snowbirds returning to our province to ensure they follow the protocols in place to manage the spread of COVID-19.

Until further notice students will no longer be attending classes in schools and postsecondary institutions, and licensed child care and preschool programs are closed. Thank you to the ministers that have shared some of the details about those programs earlier today.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that while government and health officials are doing what they can, how successful we are at keeping the illness at bay will largely depend on whether Albertans listen, whether they take personal action, and whether they make some personal sacrifices. The decisions made by Albertans will also be an important factor in how we as a province handle the related economic consequences.

I feel for those who have cancelled trips that they've been looking forward to for months and for those whose passion is sports, who have seen their seasons cancelled. I feel for those who were vulnerable financially before this pandemic began and are worrying about what this will mean for their livelihood. I think of those who

feel loneliness as they self-isolate or are exhausted as they try to keep small children occupied at home. I think of women who are pregnant and are wondering what this might mean for their babies. I think of those with additional health risk factors who may contract this virus. I think of those in the medical field and the immense amount of pressure that they are under. I could go on, Mr. Speaker. This is not an easy time for anyone. This is not an easy time for those of us that sit in this Chamber and are forced to make decisions that are beyond normal.

I would like to recite a Bible verse which has great personal significance to me. Second Timothy 1, verse 7, says, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but one of power, love, and self-discipline." As Albertans we have a choice. We could panic and try to stockpile goods for ourselves, or we can exercise self-control and love our neighbours, only purchasing what we need for the next few weeks so that others can also purchase what they need for that same time.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans will get through this pandemic, and when we do, we will all want to look back and be proud of our conduct. Did we show self-discipline and look after our friends and neighbours, or did we react out of fear and think only of ourselves, pushing people aside in the grocery aisles so that we could collect copious amounts of toilet paper that will just take up space in our homes? Now more than ever it is important that we look out for each other.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage people to check in with friends and family and see how they're doing, especially if we're spending more than the usual time at home. It's a great opportunity to call or video conference or Skype with loved ones or with friends we have not connected with in some time. With regard to long-term care and supportive living facilities, effective immediately only essential visits are recommended, but I encourage those essential visitors to spend time with those that would otherwise feel very alone. Individuals over 60 years of age and those with pre-existing health conditions are most at risk of severe symptoms of COVID-19, so please consider alternative means of supporting loved ones in these facilities, including supporting those that work at these facilities during this difficult time, such as regular phone calls rather than going to visit in person.

Furthermore, I strongly encourage anyone who's struggling with mental health as a result of this stress and this situation to reach out and use the resources that are available to them such as the mental health helpline, which is 1.877.303.2642. Again, those that need help, please reach out to the mental health helpline: 1.877.303.2642.

**4:10**

Mr. Speaker, we are still in the early stages, and the number of cases is expected to continue rising. Alberta's health workers are doing an outstanding job, and our government is here to support them with whatever they need. Please take time to encourage and give help where you can and encourage those health care workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there others wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to take a minute here to share some of the questions that have been coming to me that I was hoping we'd receive answers for, whether it be in this House or whether it be in budget estimates, from folks who live in this province who, rather than having us debate a motion around supporting the government's efforts, have many questions about what the government's efforts are and will be.

One, for example, that I got this morning was from a neighbour who's a retailer, somebody who owns a small business, who was assured last week, when they heard the Premier announce it, that there was going to be 14-day paid sick leave. They were really excited. How would they be able to make sure that their employees could access this? Of course, they don't want their employees to go without, but they also have seen significant reductions in the retail industry right now as well, right? I think most of us know that a lot of people are not supporting local businesses in the same way they were, especially things that are maybe seen as nice-to-haves not need-to-haves. People are certainly buying basic provisions, but fewer people are going out and buying shoes. Those small businesses still need to be protected in this downturn, and they deserve clarity on how and in what ways.

Today I guess we got some of that clarity. The Premier said that he was waiting on Ottawa and Justin Trudeau to make announcements about this. That certainly isn't what my friend and neighbour, the small-business owner, heard on Friday when the Premier made his statement. So that is certainly a disappointment.

There are also restaurant owners, other small-business owners, who are being deeply impacted already and know that this could go on for quite a long period of time. There are contracts in leases; there are provisions in leases. I appreciate that the Minister of Service Alberta earlier today said, "That's certainly something we're going to have to look into," when there was discussion around leases for individual residences that people live in, but there are also leases, when you're in a shopping mall, around staying open for the extended hours that the mall is open. Certainly, that isn't something that is financially sustainable for these small-business owners or for the people who work in these businesses.

Definitely there are many, many, many people in this province, and we all represent some, who are living paycheque to paycheque, who simply can't afford to stockpile groceries if they're not getting paid, period. Like, the idea that all we need to do is plan for two weeks at a time when people can't live two weeks at a time without a paycheque I think is where the government should be focusing their efforts. How do we ensure consistent income for those who are following the recommendations of the chief medical officer of health, which of course is the right thing to do, but are feeling like they are making a decision between potentially spreading this virus or not being able to put food on the table? That is not a decision we want anyone to feel like they have to be put in the position of, and I think that it would be becoming of the government to act swiftly, to come forward with a variety of different methods. I don't care if you give money to the employers to give to their employees. I don't care if you give it directly to the employees. I don't care if you give it through cash cards or through other stipends. People need to be able to continue supporting themselves and their families without fear that they're going to lose their home or their business. This is significant.

I also want to touch base, while we don't have a lot of time – 10 minutes goes very fast in this place – around the health care budget. A lot of people have been saying that there's an addition of \$500 million to health care, which was proposed today, which is true, but I want to acknowledge that if you look at population plus inflation, that's 3.6 per cent. The Health budget should be \$21.578 billion just for basic population growth and inflation, not in the face of a pandemic. The UCP budget is \$20.616 billion, so that's a difference of \$962 million, not acknowledging that we're in the middle of a pandemic. That's if we were to do business as usual, accounting for the increased population and for the increased inflationary costs. While I appreciate the \$500 million, the actual gap would have been \$962 million. This is certainly a good step, but it is not something

that we should be rushing towards. The Health budget is fundamentally flawed.

Let me tell you about somebody else who called me this morning, somebody whose mom was assessed as needing home care three weeks ago: they were short-staffed, so could they take a few weeks, and would her dad be okay continuing to provide care for his wife for three weeks because they were short-staffed? They were going to figure out how they were going to expand home care. The dad said that, you know, it's going to be really tough because the spouse is experiencing severe symptoms of Alzheimer's and dementia and it is causing significant strain, but he'd do his best to make it three weeks. Today is the three-week mark, and they got a call from home care saying: we're really sorry; we can't send anybody because we need the additional home-care staff to deal with the pandemic. That's one example.

While I appreciate the \$500 million, which is, of course, more than nothing, it is not even enough to keep pace with population growth and inflation. It is not enough to make sure that the person who called me receives the proper home-care support so that their mom doesn't end up in emergency, so their mom doesn't end up being an additional burden on the acute-care system. With home-care support, that could probably be at least delayed for a significant portion of time.

So I have to say that while, of course, \$500 million does sound like a lot – it is – it is not as much as this government has cut through their failure to provide for population growth and inflation. It is definitely a move in the right direction, but a pandemic of this scale deserves significantly more intentional investment and focus because all we're going to do by continuing to put more pressure on individuals and individual responsibility is put more pressure on an already strapped health care system.

I, too, like many of my colleagues want to commend everyone who's working diligently in health care, whether it be specifically dealing with patients who are being treated for coronavirus or whether it be keeping folks healthy and safe at home, whether it be people who are on the phones. I've toured those 811 Health Link offices a number of times, and I know that at the best of times they're really busy places, so I can only imagine how busy they were, that the phones kept going to busy and not even being able to get through on the phone lines. That is not what any of the nurses working in that facility aspire to. They all want to give timely, effective responses to everyone.

Then I also want to touch on the homeless shelter piece because I think this is one that I find particularly shocking, when government says that we need to rush to pass a budget that's going to cut homeless shelters in the middle of a pandemic, because everyone knows the basic precautions that are being offered by the chief medical officer of health require increased social distancing and often actual social isolation. Rather than rushing to pass a budget that will cut significantly and increase risk for closures of homeless shelters at a time when we need expansion of isolation and more supports for folks, I think that we could be answering these kinds of questions in this place today. Rather than voting on expressing support for the government's existing efforts, I think we should talk about what's next because while people appreciate what has been done, they want to know what will be done, and what will and must be done, moving forward, is significant increased attention.

Another example I want to raise is child care. Somebody said to me today: "I'm going to need to hire somebody to take care of my child because I work in health care. I'm going to need to hire someone. Good news. There are a bunch of high school students. I can probably get one of them to babysit during the day." That's great news, but they're currently paying a daycare provider, and

now they're also going to be paying an individual child care provider. So what's happening to that daycare? Is the daycare actually ceasing payment? They probably should if they're not operating in a way that's providing service, if parents are having to pay other providers to provide that service. But they can't afford to do that. They can't afford to continue to pay two sets of child care, and of course we need them on the front lines. They can't afford to stay home either. We can't afford for them to stay home.

This is why what I was expecting and hoping the government would do is come to this place after – this notice was given on Monday, 10:30 a.m., lots of time to think and plan and come here with concrete steps. We know that the Premier gave a great deal of hope on Friday, actually, in that press conference around the 14-day paid leave. But it seems like there has been a significant backstep from where we were on Friday. I'm really not looking forward to having to call back these folks and tell them what we've learned today in this House. I think that rather than standing in here self-congratulating government for the existing efforts – and I want to acknowledge that there have been efforts – I think we need to talk about what's next because we know that what's coming next is even more extreme and significant than what we're dealing with now.

4:20

I do want to touch a bit on education, and I did mention it briefly in question period today. There are many wage employees in schools. Actually, probably close to the majority are wage, whether it's a person who picks up your child on the school bus or the custodian who cleans the hallways, the educational assistant who's working one on one, the admin assistant who is greeting people when they come in the door. Those people are typically wage employees. If kids aren't coming to school, they're probably not working, which means they won't be receiving compensation for their efforts, so how are they going to make sure that they can still buy groceries in two weeks? How are they going to make sure that they can still pay their mortgage in two weeks?

Other jurisdictions are ahead of the curve on this, and this government has an opportunity to learn from them and take the best and move forward. Right now is not a time to debate, you know, whether or not we should be increasing borrowing or not. Now is the time is to save lives and prevent this pandemic from becoming worse and becoming something that we've seen in other jurisdictions. I wish that the government would spend its effort on answering those questions.

**The Speaker:** Are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me. I just want to say thank you to the Member for Lethbridge-East as well for his comments around mental health, which is an important thing to be recognizing right now, and making sure that we're looking after one another. I think that one of the most important things that you can do just even in your own community, amongst your friends and your family, is to reach out to one another, make sure that people have access to the basic needs and to really reach out, open up that line of communication. Sometimes a conversation is all it takes to help somebody who might be feeling down and only a conversation to recognize that somebody might be in a problem as well. Sometimes folks can be hesitant to reach out and ask for help, but if that offer of help comes, that can be important as well. So thank you to the member for bringing that up.

Mr. Speaker, in the past 10 days we have seen just how quickly conditions can change in the face of the global coronavirus

pandemic. In our province we went from no confirmed cases to dozens. Sweeping and aggressive measures have been taken to slow the rate at which COVID-19 will spread, and now that we have two confirmed cases of community spread, that vigilance needs to be raised. I think that folks need to realize that basic hygiene, washing your hands with warm water, soap, goes a long way. Not touching your face – I believe I just did – and trying to remember those kinds of habits can go a long way in preventing this spread.

Of course, this affects every Albertan. Many sectors are feeling the combined effects of dropping oil prices, of the falling stock market and public health related measures to slow the spread of coronavirus. In my own riding, Mr. Speaker, of course, we have the Edmonton International Airport with Nisku and Leduc industrial. We rely heavily on the oil and gas industry, so the folks in my riding are going to be hard hit over the next few months and years as we see exactly how this pandemic plays out but also the sharp drop in oil prices.

I know that there's a lot of uncertainty and fear in our province right now, Mr. Speaker. It's understandable. These are unprecedented times, and I'd like to commend the government for its level of communication. To have Dr. Hinshaw out quite frequently and the Premier and ministers talking to Albertans, giving them frequent updates, letting them know the situation that we are in, and then taking measured steps to combat the spread is an important piece of this. People deserve to know what's going on.

Although these are early days in what is likely to be a long period of change in order to combat the spread of COVID-19, although it is a rapidly changing situation, there are measures that our government can take to ensure that Albertans are in the best position to comply with public health measures and stay safe. On March 12 this government announced some employment rule changes which will support working Albertans to take appropriate precautions and slow the spread of the disease. Effective immediately, the Employment Standards Code will allow employees who are required to self-isolate to take 14 days of protected job leave to cover the self-isolation period. Any requirement to have a medical note for this paid leave has been waived. In addition, all employees are eligible to take advantage of this leave as needed regardless of whether they have worked the customary 90 days.

These are the first in what will likely be a series of relief measures to support public health in the weeks to come. Our government understands that the COVID-19 outbreak is putting a great amount of pressure on families and small businesses and large corporations alike. This is a public health crisis of unprecedented magnitude and requires an equally unprecedented response.

It is important for all of us here in Alberta to remember that the closure, event cancellations, and social distancing measures are not only in effect to support our own individual health but also the health of others. The threat of the novel coronavirus is much higher for the vulnerable populations like seniors and people with underlying health conditions. Slowing the spread of the illness through these public measures is essential to keeping these populations safe.

Our government is committed to taking advice from public health experts in implementing necessary actions. As my colleagues and many Albertans are keenly aware, each day will likely bring new changes that will require new reactions from this government.

On March 15 the province announced an additional \$500 million in funding to fight COVID-19 in Alberta. These funds will give Alberta's public health officials the resources they need to respond to the outbreak. Mr. Speaker, of course, that's on top of the record spend on health of \$20.6 billion that this government has invested. Obviously, in a time of fiscal restraint it is important to maintain

that campaign commitment, which we have, of increasing or maintaining health spending. We have done that with a record level of \$20.6 billion, and this additional \$500 million to help combat COVID-19 is an important part of this. The new funding will ensure that front-line health professionals have the tools they need for testing, surveillance, and treatment of patients as the province works diligently to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

An aggressive threat to front-line workers and the public necessitates an equally aggressive response. In addition to this additional funding for the fight against COVID-19, significant gatherings have been banned of more than, I believe, 250 people, coming into effect in hopes of slowing the spread of this illness.

Starting today, of course, as everybody found out last night, classes are cancelled indefinitely at all daycare, K to 12, and postsecondary institutions. This is a decision that was not taken lightly; however, as the number of cases of coronavirus rises in the province, we must put in place stricter measures to protect all Albertans. Although, Mr. Speaker, my two daughters are not school aged, they do go to daycare, so this will affect my household. I will be working with my wife in order to manage both of our careers and do everything I can to make sure that she can do the work that she needs to do and I can do the same and that our daughters are looked after. I can appreciate the position that many Albertans were put in last night, but this was not done lightly, and it was for the broader safety of all Albertans, so I hope everybody takes into consideration the complexity of this and the seriousness of it.

In addition, officials have advised places of worship to cancel all gatherings over 250 people. This is a great challenge, especially in uncertain times, but it is essential to co-ordinate our response to the ongoing outbreak. We are in the early days of a long process to protect public health and recover from significant economic challenges, and I recognize that many people in my riding of Leduc-Beaumont are feeling the uncertainty that the widespread closures and social distancing measures are having. Although we may be in challenging times, we are in them together. Our primary focus is the safety of Albertans, and we will continue to work aggressively and together to combat COVID-19.

I can't stress enough, Mr. Speaker, the need for the community to come together, for people to look after one another. Like I said at the beginning, it is important to phone your friends and family and loved ones and really to come together, ensure that everybody has access to the basic needs. It is important that the government does their part, but every individual has a role in this as well.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there others wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With regard to Standing Order 30, brought forward by the hon. House leader, it identifies that the "Assembly express its support for the government's efforts . . . to undertake every possible action within its power to protect Albertans from the growing global COVID-19 pandemic and its related economic consequences." I want everyone in this House to know that we on this side, of course, support officials, and we support the health care workers who are on the front lines responding to this pandemic. Of course, they're not the only people who are responding to this pandemic. Many families across Alberta and businesses are doing that right now as well by isolating in place, by taking care of children that would have gone to school or daycare, and businesses and families are being impacted by all of this in our province. Many are feeling the effects, and on this side it was our dire hope that the government would and could do more to address the needs of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the second part of that SO 30 motion talks about the related economic consequences, and repeatedly on this side we've asked questions like: how are Albertans who will self-isolate going to be helped financially? How will small and medium-sized businesses be helped? To these questions and many, many more, Mr. Speaker, the government has evaded and dodged and weaved and, ultimately, said that it's not their job and pointed to PM Trudeau to solve it for them.

4:30

What is clear is that this government's response, Mr. Speaker, is lacking. Their planning is lacking. Instead of digging in on this pandemic, what they are digging in on is passing Budget 2020 in the next few days, which is a budget that seriously lacks the proper funding for population growth and inflationary support for all of the public services Albertans rely on like education, health, postsecondary, social services, children's services, and on and on and on.

Just two weeks ago the Finance minister said that as a result of the impending recession and the pandemic he was witnessing and we were all witnessing that was coming at us, he felt like Rome was burning. That was just in the last two weeks. Things have not gotten better in the last two weeks. If anything, they've gotten worse, with world economies being more and more stressed, not less, with the pandemic getting worse, not better, and with stockmarkets around the world being more beleaguered, not less beleaguered. The outlook for oil prices, as we all know, is less certain and less clear going forward; they're not better.

It is time to press pause and to reconsider, Mr. Speaker. That's what this side of the House has been endeavouring to do, and that side of the House has been saying: it's business as usual; let's go through with things and pass a budget that does not make any sense anymore.

What the government is counting on is for Albertans not to care about the budget processes of estimates that we go through, where a minister comes before a committee of the Legislature and defends their ministry's budget. TBF, Treasury Board and Finance, for instance, Mr. Speaker, was scheduled for tomorrow, and it was scheduled for six hours starting tomorrow. TBF was one of six ministries, including the Premier's, that would've been in front of estimates committees for the rest of the week, but instead this House leader has brought a series of motions to this House that will reduce the entire estimates process to a matter of minutes.

It's clear to me and should be clear to every member of this Legislature and to Albertans that the government is choosing – yes, they are making a clear decision, a clear choice – to limit debate to evade scrutiny and questioning in the face of clear and usual alternatives, which include, namely, interim supply and special warrants. This government is using this crisis as an opportunity to avoid the regular scrutiny and transparency that typically happens in this House for several hours in estimates with ministers before those committees.

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that what needs to happen is not the process that the House leader has laid out. What needs to happen is that we need to go back to the usual way of reviewing budgets of each of the ministries, and if things need to change, I would argue that even the estimates process is probably not going to be what's needed for this province. What is really needed for this province is a review of the budget because of the great uncertainty, the fallacy of the revenues that have been identified, and the dire consequences that'll occur as a result of the underinvestments in our programs and services to Albertans. This government needs to have Albertans' backs, and frankly I think they are woefully short on being able to say that.

We've been through other crises in this province, the Fort McMurray wildfire being the most recent one that I can think of, that the previous government of Rachel Notley was involved with, and arguably – sorry; I apologize. The previous Premier. I would argue that we came through that and got up and running on that crisis a great deal faster than the current government is looking at this pandemic and the crisis of the economic decline that is in this province and happening across this country as a result of an impending recession.

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the process we've been put on as a result of the House leader's actions today is the wrong one for Alberta, removes scrutiny from all of the ministers that have not been before estimates, and provides essentially a fait accompli to this government and its failed budget processes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

**Mr. Toor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the situation that we are facing is indeed a very serious thing and this is deeply affecting every Albertan, the only problem I have is – I'm normally good with numbers, but when I hear the numbers coming from the member opposite, I'm a little bit confused, too.

I was just listening to the member opposite from Edmonton-Glenora. She was talking about the crisis, but I was just reading the same news story. When the member opposite was a part of the government, she signed an agreement with the same AMA and told the taxpayers that they were going to save \$500 million over two years, which was 10 per cent of the doctor compensation at that time. Basically, now we matched dollar for dollar. Yesterday we announced that we're going to put in \$500 million more, and they're still blaming us, that we're making cuts. Where were those members when they cut \$500 million to that same physician compensation? Were they complaining? They were the ones who signed that. Either they were lying to the taxpayers or they were lying to the same government. So I am confused. Normally I'm good with numbers, but today I think I need another lesson, too.

Especially during this crisis, I think the way they are fearmongering and spreading the rumours is not helping. The simple lesson they should learn is called co-operation. I was in the community yesterday. I was in Calgary-McCall, I was in Calgary-Falconridge talking to a few religious institutions. We have a community action plan. We signed up hundreds of volunteers. We are going door to door and asking people, especially those who are self-isolating, if we can deliver groceries or whatever they need. We're making the grocery runs.

When I walked into this Chamber, I was expecting co-operation, but I think that's the only thing we are missing now. We need some co-operation from the members opposite on this. I think we can play politics – we will have a long time for that – but not during this time. I urge the members: please do not play with fake numbers.

Let's talk about the coronavirus. We saw how quickly conditions can change with an illness like this. Within one week we went from a handful of cases to a declared global pandemic with robust public health measures in place. This is a fluid situation, and the measures that are needed to respond to this global health crisis are changing rapidly. It is impossible to ignore the impact that the novel coronavirus is having on all of our lives.

Mr. Speaker, we are in a pivotal moment of slowing the spread of this outbreak across Alberta and Canada, and we cannot take business as usual. The approach to a threat as significant as this virus, the actions that are being taken today by public agencies, businesses, community organizations, and families, will alter the

speed at which the disease can spread. Our chief medical officer of health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, said in her March 14 update on the pandemic response: we need to get used to a new normal. The reality is that we can expect cases of this outbreak to continue in Alberta and around Canada for months.

**4:40**

We have taken aggressive measures to limit the acceleration of the spread, but we will not be able to completely stop it. We cannot be complacent. We must be vigilant. These are important truths about the times in which we are living. In order to protect high-risk populations in this pandemic, that is immunocompromised people and those over age 65, significant public health action must be taken to slow the spread of the disease. Every day that the spread of this outbreak is slowed, front-line health workers can better equip themselves for the increased risk and demands on health care facilities province-wide.

Right now the focus of every person in our province must be to flatten the curve. This is the phrase used to describe efforts being taken world-wide to control the spread of this outbreak. Today we are in the early stages of this pandemic here in Alberta. We are seeing that each day the number of cases in our province is rising higher. There are still options at this point in time. If we take aggressive measures now, the number of cases can increase at a slower rate. This can extend the time before the peak of the outbreak, giving health facilities critical extra days to prepare. The peak number of cases can be lowered, hopefully preventing an overload on our health care system.

So what is being done to flatten the curve here in Alberta? At this time restrictions are being made around international travel and mass gatherings. As of March 12 all travellers returning from outside must self-isolate for 14 days to monitor for symptoms like fever and cough. Albertans and Canadians in general are being advised to avoid all nonessential travel outside of the country. In addition, gatherings of over 250 people are being cancelled province-wide. This includes sporting events, concerts, and conferences. Gatherings over 50 people can only go ahead if special criteria are in place such as having hand-sanitizing stations available, preventing people with symptoms from attending, and having the ability to put sufficient social distance between the attendees.

We have seen from international conditions just how devastating this disease can become. Stories from China, South Korea, Italy, and the growing number of countries demonstrate the need for decisive action in the early days of the outbreak. But these countries also provide insight into what methods can slow the spread of this disease. Practising good hygiene like frequent hand-washing, social distancing like avoiding crowded spaces, and self-isolating if you are feeling ill are all critical techniques to combat this outbreak.

Recommendations will change according to the advice of public health experts in this province. As we all know, the fight against the novel coronavirus is constantly changing. I know that the situation for Albertans is uncertain and with this uncertainty comes fear, but we are a resilient people. As long as we come together and work to protect our communities, we can weather whatever comes next for this province.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Are there others wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to this emergency debate on this very important issue right now. I want to start my remarks by giving just a really big

thank you and sharing gratitude for all of the first responders, health care workers, the chief medical officer, and all of the teams working on the emergency rapid response, the ECC and AHS, the POC, all of the public servants who are adjusting and working to help get us through this particular crisis, the people who are cleaning the hospitals. These are all people, front-line workers, who are going in, putting themselves in danger to help tackle this outbreak and to help mitigate and decrease the spread.

A lot of people have been talking about the need to flatten the curve, and everybody has a role to play in that by following the directions of our chief medical officer. The directions of the chief medical officer have been very clear. We all want to be washing our hands more frequently, avoid touching your face. You want to keep distance from others. If you feel any signs of illness, you need to stay home.

It's on this that I would like to start some of my comments, Mr. Speaker, because right now this government has not provided the clarity that working Albertans need to be able to follow the chief medical officer's directions. Almost a full week ago now, I sent a letter to this government raising a number of concerns that will directly impact working people impacted by this outbreak. To date I haven't received a response. In that letter I also offered to work with the government to pass any emergency legislation that might be needed, but we are not seeing a spirit of co-operation on these issues. I feel very strongly that this government has not been willing to work with the opposition on these issues, and I think that we could be helping.

In my letter I talked about the importance of sick notes because I think that the government has gotten a bit on the wrong track. They are talking about not needing sick notes for people who use the new 14-day paid job-protected leave that they are bringing in, which we have not seen the regulations on yet, but that is not good enough. We need a complete and total ban on all sick notes. As Dr. Hinshaw has mentioned, a lot of the people who are going to be staying home will not have COVID-19. They are home because they have a common flu and they're trying to take appropriate precautions. We need to make sure that nobody is being asked to go to their doctor's office to get a sick note. The exemption needs to be complete.

Interestingly, the exemption in that recommendation has been made on the CDC's website. It is available on the Canadian Public Health Agency's website, but it is missing in our Alberta information for employers, and it is a simple thing. It can be done in regulation, but even just updating the website to provide that clarity would be helpful because we need people to follow the direction of the chief medical officer, and right now they do not have the certainty that if they stay home while sick, they will continue to have a job. So that is my number one ask, concern right now. Sorry. Not my number one concern; that is the first concern that I will raise at this point.

Secondly, workers and employers need certainty on the new 14-day paid job-protected leave, because the government was very clear on Friday that this would be paid. In fact, when the opposition asked questions about that, the government chose to put out information to all Albertans through social media that put the word "paid" in all caps. That was a choice the government chose to make, and now, when we ask about this paid 14-day job-protected leave, they're changing their language on what it means. They're saying that they're waiting on Ottawa and the Prime Minister before they can provide supports to Albertans.

That is shocking to me. After the government went out and made an announcement that – I can tell you that a lot of Albertans saw that announcement and breathed a sigh of relief because this is creating incredible stress on our citizens. People are home today for a variety of reasons. Some have been directed to self-isolate by

AHS. Some might just be feeling under the weather and are following the chief medical officer's provisions. All of them hoped that they could trust this government when the government announced paid job-protected leave last Friday, and today in question period what we heard is that, no, the government doesn't have a plan and is simply hoping – hoping – a solution might be found.

Along with employees who would qualify for a 14-day job-protected leave – I want to stress that not all employees qualify for that job-protected leave – there are a lot of people who are workers who don't technically count as employees in employment standards. A simple example would be somebody working in the gig economy. An Uber driver doesn't have access to the same kind of paid sick leave, somebody who's working for DoorDash. We need to make sure that all different scenarios of employment and family situations are accounted for when we're providing supports for Albertans. We have people who have been now laid off because they work in the arts industries, and places like the Jubilee are now closed. We need to make sure that there's a solution that will meet all of their needs.

4:50

When the government came out on Friday and announced a paid 14-day job-protected leave, that meant something significant for people all around this province. It meant one less thing to worry about, but now the details aren't there, and it sounds like the government is not following through on that commitment that they made. We need to make sure that families can follow the direction of the chief medical officer. That is how we flatten the curve, and that is something that government has a huge role in doing. We need to see what the regulations are for the employment standards changes, we need to be banning all sick notes, we need to be providing paid leave for workers, and for those who aren't employees, we need to have another solution.

When people are getting paid, that means that they will be able to continue to pay rent. That means they'll be able to continue to buy groceries and to support their family. Without that, we are going to have families that are put into terrible, difficult situations, and I worry that not all members in this Chamber are taking this seriously.

I would like to speak as well about worker safety. All of those front-line workers who've been asked to go into places where contamination is likely, hospital settings, where the risk of exposure is higher – I just saw a *New York Times* article that talked about the different risks of exposure – people who work in dental fields, paramedics: a lot of these people have higher risks. We need to make sure that they have the protective equipment appropriate to continue to work through this pandemic, and right now I'm seeing a disconnect happening between the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions. I asked the minister in question period about this, the use of N95 respirators and the current Alberta standard, and the minister assured me in question period that they would take every measure necessary to protect workers. But I would really encourage this government to stay in touch with your front-line workers through their trade unions.

We need to be focused on health and safety, and I would remind that all workers have the right to be kept safe while at work. Employers have a responsibility to make sure that they have the protective equipment that they need, that procedures and practices are in place. Anyone with questions about their individual work situation: because there are so many, I would encourage them to call occupational health and safety to get advice of what changes they might need to make in their workplace to be able to go to work and still feel safe.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This budget that the government is now trying to use this crisis to push through – this is a very cynical, political move in my view. There are other ways. We have not seen governments in other jurisdictions try to ram through budget packages in this way. The lack of communication between the government and the opposition is distressing because we need to be putting partisanship aside, and instead we're seeing the opposite. I would like to be part of the solutions. I would like to make sure that Albertans get through this crisis supporting each other, and that includes here in this Chamber, that gets through this crisis by doing what's best for the working people, for the employers, for all Albertans, and I'm worried that that's not happening. I'm worried that passing a budget that includes in it spending that does not keep up with population and inflation – as some refer to that, cuts – is problematic in a pandemic. We've already heard my colleagues speak eloquently about the needs out of this budget and that this budget does not meet the test of reasonableness in a time of crisis.

Finally, I want to echo my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre. Doctors, nurses, health care aides, other health care workers working on the front lines have been feeling very attacked by this government. They have very real concerns about billing and compensation, particularly during this crisis. There are some specific asks to change limits and caps on billing codes that should be agreed to.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Peace River.

**Mr. Williams:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate very much the opportunity to rise today to speak on behalf of my constituents and to my constituents on the important issue of this emergency debate that we're having.

We are here today in spite of a global pandemic and crisis. We are here today living our day-to-day lives, albeit changed, continuing on. In some of the francophone communities in my constituency they have an expression called *la vie quotidienne*. That means day-to-day life, or “everyday life” is as simply as it can be translated. But it means more than that as well. There's another sense. It's tough to pin down in English, but it means in part that day-to-day life that is oriented towards the community, towards your family, towards a habitual routine that contributes to something else. It's not just those actions; it means more. As we go through this crisis, we can see that day-to-day life continues on, and even in that community, day-to-day life goes on. *La vie quotidienne* does not end.

If we reflect back on the comments from our Premier at the beginning of this time today and of the Minister of Health, we thank them for bringing forward some of those common practices that now have to be incorporated into our day-to-day life, into *la vie quotidienne*. In spite of it changing, it continues on. We remember that we have to wash our hands for 20 to 30 seconds. They point to that hand sanitizer should be used when soap and water are not available. Touching your face and hands, as we saw the Member for Leduc-Beaumont point out, is not a good practice. And use social distancing where and when possible. Avoid vulnerable populations such as nursing homes.

I think particularly, in St. Isidore, a community I visit regularly, as often as I can, of the long-term care facility there. Many of the seniors gather for lunch weekly, and I attend where and when I can. I cannot attend that lunch anymore. I know that I have to create that distance for the sake of those vulnerable populations because ultimately that is who is most at risk and why we are practising these best practices that the minister and the hon. Premier

mentioned earlier. Nonetheless, the day-to-day life goes on, for me in ways I can communicate with them – I should – in ways that they can continue to have a community. They ought to, and I know that they will.

I thank very much the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat for her comments, along with the members for Edmonton-Strathcona and Edmonton-Mill Woods for their comments as well, supporting the work that the health care professionals in the province do, supporting particularly Dr. Hinshaw and the work that she does tirelessly to make sure that we are in a safe province, that we are constantly practising the best, most up-to-date health care practices available to us in the midst of a crisis.

Now, for them, their day-to-day life has changed immeasurably. It is not the normal life for Dr. Hinshaw. Nonetheless, I think they are living more of *la vie quotidienne* than they were before, more of a community-oriented life of selfless sacrifice towards others. There are ways in the midst of the crisis to find an opportunity for us to continue living day to day, to contribute towards each other, to not just isolate ourselves to the point where we no longer have a community. Isolate yourself to the point where you are safe, but making sure we continue to live our lives day to day is an important part of that, and that is in part why we're sitting here today.

We look at what many other members have spoken about. Particularly, I thank my colleague from Calgary-Falconridge for his comments encouraging a certain degree of co-operation. We're here looking at this right now in ways that we can co-operate, and I submit that our *vie quotidienne* has changed. There's no one in the galleries today. We don't have our pages with us. We have many restrictions on how we work day to day. Nonetheless, we are here for a reason. That reason is that the government cannot supply without us giving consent to do so. It cannot continue to fund the services that we here as elected officials are responsible for providing. We have a responsibility to be here in service. We have a responsibility to be here in co-operation as well with each other across the aisle.

I'm looking forward to opportunities where we saw some members, including the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, who congratulated and applauded the minister for the work that he has done and the actions taken by the government up to now surrounding Health Link and many of the other opportunities that we have found new, innovative solutions to – and I saw many of the same things from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, thanking the government for its work in bringing forward a half billion dollars of supplementary, extra spending to deal with the crisis. Where we can find those commonalities, I believe that is our obligation because our day-to-day life, though it is disrupted and changed and we have new practices that we must incorporate for it to be normal – nonetheless, it is important for us to continue finding those moments of co-operation.

Without that, I believe that Albertans will wonder why they have to co-operate. Without that in this Chamber, I believe that Albertans will start asking themselves: what is the point of following the advice? If the members themselves of that Legislature, the august body, where free speech and co-operation for the sake of the common good – is it not even happening there? They will ask themselves questions, and I would regret if at any point in a position of leadership we found ourselves responsible for that. I think it's incumbent on all of us to reflect on the actions we take, the language we use, and the way that we communicate in how we go forward, co-operating, in living our *vie quotidienne*, our day-to-day life, as we are responsible to do as elected officials in this place.

5:00

That is why, more so than ever, it is incumbent upon us to make sure the government is funded. That is fundamentally the heart of the parliamentary system. It is a compromise, a negotiation about funding the government, the Crown. We as the elected commoners, the House of Commons or the Legislature, have that responsibility to provide those dollars to them, and it would be tragic if in any situation we end up with that being held hostage for political ends, for petty fights, for short-sightedness, a myopic vision of what's in front of you politically rather than the common good of our society and our province.

It's in that light that I call upon all members of all sides of the House to support the government, exactly as we're looking at in this debate, to protect Albertans with every means within our ability. Without that, I fear we will be inspiring Albertans to lose faith in us, and that would be a tragedy in a moment of crisis. So I ask – just as municipal leaders, federal leaders, and also here as provincial leaders – us to show leadership, to look beyond ourselves, and to look towards ways of co-operation where and when possible. By no means is anyone asking someone to drop the partisan colours here, but it is being asked that we find co-operation where and when possible. In that light I ask all members to consider, reflectively, how that can happen.

I thank the Premier, Executive Council, cabinet, public health officials, particularly Dr. Hinshaw, and everyone else, whether it be a volunteer community member or a health care professional, who has been striving to come together to fight against the COVID-19 crisis that has come upon us, and I ask everyone to do as much as they can in their own communities.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I see the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie rising.

**Member Loyola:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Always a pleasure to rise in the House and speak to issues before us and, in this particular instance, Standing Order 30 on behalf of – well, I can't say his name – the Minister of Environment and Parks. First of all, I just want to demonstrate along with my colleagues on both sides of the House the amazing support that we all have for the health care providers and other front-line staff that are working so hard to protect the health of Albertans during this COVID outbreak.

I think that we all know that we're here working on behalf of Albertans, but I think that a group of people that we often forget that we're actually helping in this is children. I just wanted to express a couple of ideas here because, of course, the World Health Organization actually put out a short little document to share with parents regarding helping children cope with stress during the COVID outbreak. I just want to read some of those things into the record because, of course, I wouldn't mind sharing them with my constituents. Being a father myself of, actually, five children, it's important for me to express this.

The World Health Organization in its document says that children, like all adults, do respond to stress in different ways. Of course, children, specifically, may be more clingy, anxious, or they could withdraw or be angry or agitated. It's important that we look at the children's reactions in a supportive way and listen to their concerns and give them extra love and attention at this difficult time. Children, of course, need our love and attention, and we need to make sure that we provide that extra time for them. I mean, as many of my colleagues have gotten up and stated, it's a difficult time for some parents because, of course, child care during this is problematic, but for those parents that do have the opportunity to

stay at home with their children, it's important that they provide that love and attention to them.

It's important to speak kindly to the children, reassure them, and if possible make opportunities for the child to play and relax during this time. Try to keep children close to their parents and family, and avoid separating children and their caregivers to the extent possible. If separation occurs, for example hospitalization, ensure regular contact via phone and reassurance. Keep to regular routines and schedules as much as possible, and help create new ones, a new environment, however that may be, so that the children can continue learning and have time for playing and relaxing as well.

I think it's really important, too, that with a lot of children – it has been my experience and I'm sure the experience of many of the members here that, you know, often we think of children as not really paying attention, but really they are. So it's important that we provide facts to children, explain what's going on in very clear and concise information, and really share with them, as we are sharing amongst all Albertans, of course, how to reduce the risk of being infected by the disease. This also includes providing information about what could happen to them, but in a reassuring way, making sure that we don't add extra anxiety to the children as well.

Thank you for providing me the time to actually share that, which I think is really important to me and to many of my constituents. I think it's important that we take that into consideration as we continue having this discussion.

I would say that for me the most important concerns that are being brought up with this standing order – it's true that we want to make sure that we're there to support Albertans during this crisis, this global pandemic, and we want to make sure that all resources are being provided. But, for me, what I call into question is the fact that the government is taking this opportunity to push through their budget. Regardless of being in a situation where we're in a global pandemic, where there is a crisis, we still need to respect the rule of law and democratic process.

The fact that estimates for a number of ministries are now going – the opportunity for the opposition to ask questions of the government regarding several ministries being shrunken down to now only three hours for all those ministries is something that I find very questionable. I understand that we're in a crisis, but jamming through the budget – well, this whole process – I find very undemocratic. The opposition not having the opportunity to question ministers about their estimates, which is something that's part and parcel of our democratic process: we're going to be circumventing that based on this . . . [interjections]

I hear some members from the other side saying: no, we're not. But to shrink it where each ministry – as you well know, some ministries have two hours, some ministries have three hours, some ministries have up to six hours of time allocated for members of the opposition and private members of the government to ask questions of those ministers, and now we're going to be shrinking that period for all the remaining ministries through this process down to three hours. How is that fair? How is that just, when there's already a designated process to actually cover the estimates when the government is presenting a budget? This is something that I think, for me, is absolutely important for us to know.

Also, I'd like to just mention that, for example, the government of Ontario has just decided that they're going to delay their budget. Even though they're experiencing the same crisis that we are, they've decided to postpone presenting their budget, I believe, until the fall if I'm not mistaken.

Now, I understand that the members on the other side are concerned about having monies available to be able to address the actual crisis, and of course we're also very concerned with that as well. For that, we could take a different approach of having interim



supply to deal with these very urgent matters. So the government doesn't need to push through this budget. It has the other option of being able to introduce interim supply so that they can deal with this. Then, that way, we have the time, and we can respect the democratic process by which members – all members, whether private members on the government side or opposition members – will have the opportunity to question the ministers regarding their estimates for this budget.

5:10

It's not as if there are no options on the table and that this is the only option in order for us to move forward, in order to address the health of Albertans during this global pandemic and this crisis that we're experiencing right now. It's important that we have a well-thought-out and publicly considered approach to interim supply, and then we can deal with the very urgent concerns that Albertans have as a result of this coronavirus pandemic.

As many of my colleagues on the opposition side have stood up and stated, there are a number of economic issues: the wage replacements, immediate health care and prevention, child care, which I raised, which is important. I know that there are a number of parents in my constituency that are very concerned about this. When the schools actually announced that school will be cancelled, that classes will be cancelled, I heard from a number of constituents, friends of mine who reached out to me right away and were like: "Well, what am I going to do? I just don't know what to do here." It's important that we have a well-thought-out approach to this as we continue to move forward.

I think that the other thing, too, that we need to consider is the fact that, regarding this budget, from what we can estimate, there's probably at least about a \$15 billion short on revenue.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I drop my notes here and do up my shirt while I'm getting up, it shows the preparedness I think I should have had but didn't have the foresight to stand up and do that.

Honestly, Madam Speaker, I think we've heard some really good debate today. There's been probably the most fulsome dialogue since me being a new member here to this place, to hear, you know, the opposition actually bring together some pretty salient points, some other ones straight off to the side, but I'm not going to touch those too much because, again, that would just lead us down to that partisanship.

There are a couple of things that come to mind here in this current circumstance that we're in. I was given some advice way back when in my career, and it was little points about surviving a battle. Back in the day it was surviving project teams, it was surviving different elements that came up. Number one was keeping your head while all others are losing theirs. I mean, that would make a lot of sense. You can keep your wits about you. You can do the right things. That's one of the keys to success of doing, you know, something that's good and carrying on. The other one was leading by example, so literally don't ask somebody else to do something that you weren't willing or capable or able to do. You lead by example by stepping out front, not necessarily getting someone else's back and pushing them out front.

The other one that came to mind, and it didn't really resonate as much as it should have – it was kind of hijacked partway along, and, you know, Bill Murray was along in those lines – but it was keep calm and carry on. You know, we've kind of seen that pasted here and there, and it wasn't until recent events that that really started to

resonate and have some salience for the members in my community and what I've been seeing in social media.

Out there we are dealing with unprecedented times. We have at the height of cold and flu season, when we're typically dealing with the common cold and the common flu, this COVID-19 that's taking place. Now, honestly, on a pandemic level this is something – we're in uncharted territory. So we're all trying to deal with this right now, and the worst thing that we can do for our constituents and the worst thing that we can do for our countrymen and fellow Albertans is to heighten panic.

The best thing that we can do is to keep our heads. The best thing that we can do is to have clear communication and messages. The best thing that we can do is stand shoulder to shoulder right now, regardless of political stripes, keep calm and carry on, understanding what was brought forward today. Maybe instead of – I don't know – taking potshots at what we're presenting, it's literally to try to get the budget through to add that extra \$500 million that we're going to need for our front-line workers in the health care system. It's to understand the basic things. They're not nefarious.

If we're looking at how long it takes, literally now, again, looking at this objectively, how long would it take to do interim measures and budgets, to try to get it through here? We've already gone through that once when we were first elected. It took us about two months to get that through, and then we had to go into a budget cycle which was out of sync, and then we had another rapid succession of a budget. Now we're actually in the queue at a normal time, when we should be presenting our budget – and we are – and we have circumstances that are brand new to all of us on an unprecedented scale, a pandemic sweeping the globe. We're trying to deal with that. We have it coming into our own borders and boundaries, and we already have the budget pretty much halfway through the queue. You know that saying "half pregnant"? Well, we're kind of there. It's already there. It's in the queue.

What we're doing is taking the natural process it would have gone over the next two or three weeks, and we're trying to accelerate that so that we give opportunity. We as private members from the government caucus would give up our position to our opposition so they could ask all the questions they could. We're really trying to get this through so we can concentrate on governing, so we can concentrate on taking care of our constituents – heaven forbid that this thing gets out of control or gets worse on us – so that we have the ability and the time to be in our constituencies to help the other groups that are dealing with it, to have that clear, concise message: keep calm and carry on.

Now, I want to thank the leadership and everything that they've done up to this point in communicating those clear messages, working countless hours, taking the necessary protocols, not ramping up the height of emergency too quickly until it was warranted, taking the advice of the medical community, working together with them, not amplifying some of the differences we have. I haven't met a single doctor or nurse – and my family, my wife's family is full of them – that would fixate on the dollars and cents that they take home any day over their patient care. These are folks that dedicate their lives to doing that. We've all stepped up out of our normal things to help support this system. We're not going to leave those folks swinging in the wind either.

Again, this is not the time for the political conjecture or the partisanship or the other games that are being played. It's time for us to demonstrate wholeheartedly and honestly to all the constituents that got us there that regardless of our political stripes we can actually work together, that we can actually have a government that's functional, with an opposition that does their job accordingly.

I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. She spoke eloquently. She raised concerns that she had, and that's the type of stuff that we need. We might differ on some of the nuances, but the end goal is always there. The Member for Peace River spoke about this as well quite eloquently, and I thank him as a colleague. He always hits it on point. I kind of ramble and go on, and this guy is smooth and polished. I want to send out some more thanks to the businesses that I've heard of in my community. Academy Fabricators sat down – they have about 300 to 400 people working at any given time – and took it upon themselves, before we as government even stepped forward, to say: stay at home. They got their folks together. They had a safety meeting at each one of their plants that they're working in, and they said: "Hey, if you're feeling sick, don't worry about it. Stay home. It's more important that we get through this together."

The whole idea of flattening the curve: yeah, it's pretty important. In all likelihood we're all going to get sick at one point or the other. It's how bad you get sick and when it happens. We're going to do everything we can so that we can't get sick and so that we don't have a bunch of us. Again, as a farm guy, it's inoculating your herd. We can all talk about the herd immunity. Once you inoculate so many of them, you're all good to go. But there is that risk and that potential. The biggest thing we're trying to do right now is to make sure that we don't have a bunch of people all getting sick at the same time. That's the crux of it, so everything we're doing is in measured steps.

You know, as a father of four kids, those little sandwich-grabbers will bring home every bug in the fall when they go back to school. It's simply because the kids don't have the hygiene. They do those things, and they're everywhere. Everyone loves to bounce them on their knees. Everyone loves to spend time with grandpa and grandma. My 16-year-old, who's about this big: you know, you can't bounce him on your knee anymore, but the guy is everywhere. He's into sports. He's into different activities. The fact that it got to the point where we had to take that measure: thank you to the teachers for working with us on that. Thank you to the school boards for taking that step with us. Thank you for acknowledging and recognizing. Thanks to the minister for having the boldness and the courage to do that. These are the things that we're taking care of.

Now, working out the details with the EI program and figuring that out: yeah, we want to get our money back from the feds. We've sent a whack-load of it over the years down there. This is the time when the federation is supposed to pull together, and we're supposed to get some of that back. These are unprecedented circumstances, and we want to respect the rule and the order of governance. Again, it's a federal jurisdiction when it comes to those EI premiums. When we're looking at the taxation structure and everything, this is how it's supposed to work.

Now, for folks to get the fear going and say that we're going to leave Albertans swaying in the wind: we know that won't happen, so let's stop making people be worried and concerned about that. It's going to take place: Canada is going to step forward. Regardless of our friction that we might have with them, I still believe strongly in the country and the flag, and the feds are going to do the right thing. We have lots of MPs that represent the west, and the last thing that the feds are going to do is leave us swaying in the wind out here either. Now, we might have our fights, like every family does, absolutely. If you've got a bunch of thoroughbreds all working and doing this together, you're going to get a few stall doors kicked once in a while, but everyone is pulling together.

5:20

What I'm encouraging and very encouraged by is that some of the opposition is actually coming to the trough, as you would. They're actually coming to this place to talk about the pressing needs, and they're leaving a lot of the partisanship that we've seen here in the past parked. I'm hoping and encouraging those members that want to keep working with us that we talk about the issues where we might have a few bumps, that we work through those. But we don't have much time. We have to make sure that we don't squander the time we have here in this House to do the right things to make sure that we're prepared and we're set up to go in the event that our attention has to be paid elsewhere.

What can you do? Well, let's work together here, folks. Let's get this through the gate. We have to get through some rough points. Let's do that together. Let's get the funds in place so the government can function, and we can make sure that there's no concern or questions that the health care community doesn't have the resources that they need.

For the folks at home, real basic stuff: wash your hands. Be paranoid to the extent where you're singing *Happy Birthday*, like all those people that prepare our food. The food industry already knows how to do that. Keep your distances. If you don't have to travel somewhere, don't. Just relax, take your time, and do the right things. Stop grabbing every piece of toilet paper that's on the shelf. I'm sure we're all stocked up enough at this time. Stop that goofiness. Those are the types of things that start acting out and, honestly, obscure behaviours, so calm down. Do the right things. Take care of each other. Work together. If you see a senior that's out and about, go shovel their walk. Maybe call them up on the phone and see if they're doing okay, if they need something. If you're sick, stay at home. Don't spread anything. Just do the right things. Take the next steps.

You know, Keep Calm and Carry On: that was during World War II, during the heights of the bombing campaign and everything else. There was an enemy that was sitting across a channel of water, and you would have these buzz bombs whipping over in the middle of the night. Keep Calm and Carry On. You didn't know if the next building was going to get slammed. You didn't know if you were going to school the next day. You didn't know if loved ones were there or not. Those folks – our grandparents, our seniors – lived through all of that, and that's what we have to do: Keep Calm and Carry On.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will be brief with my comments. You know, it's an honour to rise and speak on this day because it truly is extraordinary times. I wanted to start with my sincere thank you, gratitude to all those who are on the front lines right now: health care workers, teachers, education workers, small-business owners, obviously all the public health officials, including Dr. Hinshaw. Thank you for all that you're doing.

I just want to touch on a few items that are of deep concern for me, the first being vulnerable populations. I've spoken in this House many times about the uniqueness of my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. We are home to many of the homeless shelters in our city: Hope Mission, the Bissell Centre, multiple emergency shelters, women's shelters – I won't even be able to name them all – Operation Friendship Seniors Society, which offers supports for seniors who are in the most need. I worry so much about the folks accessing those services at this exact moment. I worry about them. I worry about the workers. I mentioned women's shelters. I mean, we are seeing, you know, the number of women and children fleeing violence. It's on the increase, yet supports are not also on the increase. Again, I just worry so much about these

folks, who are already in very vulnerable situations and now are at the risk of a serious, serious pandemic in their midst.

So what happens to all these folks? You know, I've heard from a few folks about partisanship and politicizing things. This is certainly not that. This is standing up for my constituents, many of whom rely on these services: on shelters, on emergency services. I just urge this government very much to consider those folks, consider what supports we can offer. I know the minister spoke today about how she is working with the shelters, but they're going to need answers really, really quickly, because if the unfortunate thing happens and COVID does hit some of those shelters, it's going to move quickly, and it's going to have huge, huge impacts on folks who already have immunocompromised systems and not just those in shelters.

I just want to echo some of the comments made earlier. You know, I've had folks reach out to my office already, worried about being evicted. These are folks who are already living paycheque to paycheque, who are wondering how they're going to cover bills. They need answers as well, right? Those folks who can't make rent due to lost wages: what are they going to do? Again, they need those assurances now. They really do.

I want to speak about mental health. We know that any sort of large disaster has a huge impact on the mental health of many. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora asked earlier in the House – the Education minister was asked – about mental health and supports for students, and, you know, she didn't get a fulsome answer. That's okay. We don't need an answer right this minute, but we need it very quickly. We need it very quickly. And it's not just for students; it's for staff, for adults. We already are facing a mental health crisis in this province, and this is going to certainly compound that. I'm hoping that tomorrow we'll get more clarity around what those specific supports will be for mental health resources.

I want to just as well touch on the certainty needed around paid leave. You can see that all my points are speaking to the need for certainty, the need for answers. It's not just us in the opposition that are raising these flags. Every one of us – I'm certain the members opposite as well – has heard from countless constituents who are concerned and who are struggling and are just wanting answers, right? Self-employed folks, folks who are, you know, contractors, artists, those in the gig economy, as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods spoke about earlier: they just don't know what they're doing tomorrow. They may have kids at home. They're not sure how they're going to pay rent. It's very, very, very precarious right now. Again, echoing the need for certainty, we've heard that this government is waiting on Ottawa. We can't. We need certainty now for those folks who just don't have answers.

I think I will just end by mentioning the budget. My colleagues have shared some really important points about the fact that, you know, we're wanting to do what's best for Albertans here, and what's best for Albertans are investments in all the supports that I've just listed. This budget will not give those investments; in fact, it will make cuts. It's an opportunity to do the right thing, for this government to do the right thing. Truly, when we look back in a number of months, a number of years, I think everybody in this House will want to know that they did the right thing and that they responded as best they could in their roles to this unprecedented pandemic. I'll just end by urging all of us to think about doing the right thing for us and for Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank all the members today who had comments in regard to this crisis that we're facing not just here in Alberta but around the world. I think that's a little bit of what I just want to speak about. You know, I can appreciate very much comments such as those made by the previous speaker, which I thought were very thoughtful. I thought they were constructive. I think that it's only a government who is arrogant, quite frankly, who does not consider the comments made by other people no matter where they are and what side of the fence they may be on.

You know, the comments that were made here today made me even reflect a little bit on the Fort McMurray fires. I remember, just going off memory – and I know, Madam Speaker, that you were, of course, part of the opposition when this fire had broken out in Fort McMurray. I mean, this was dynamic. It was another dynamic, fluid situation, and I'd like to believe that as opposition we provided constructive, thoughtful comments. I remember us asking questions in regard to insurance, insurance for those people who were deeply impacted as a result of those fires.

5:30

What I don't recall, Madam Speaker, was the absolute and utter criticism of the government at that particular time when it almost seemed like every single thing that they were doing was wrong. I don't believe that. I think that they were faced with a very dynamic situation, which was an unprecedented fire at that particular time, and I think that they did their best, which is the only thing, I think, that anybody can ask of anybody in these situations.

Now, other than the security staff that are here and maybe my friend from Leduc-Beaumont, I don't know anybody else in this Chamber that has critical incident command experience. I do, Madam Speaker, and I can tell you that these are dynamic, fluid situations. When we say "unprecedented," let's not take this word lightly. When I say "unprecedented," that means that it's not just unprecedented in the city, it's not just unprecedented in the country or North America. This is unprecedented around the world. That's why we need that level of co-operation. We need the co-operation so that we put the people's minds at ease in the communities to the point where they understand that they have a government that is dealing with the situation as it unfolds.

I mean, this thing is changing by the hour. Just when you think you might be trying to get ahead of a particular curve, you know, you're met with some other barrier. But that is part of critical incident command. You have to prepare yourself for every single scenario, every single dynamic situation that may be unfolding. This is not just something that is isolated to Alberta, not something that's isolated to Calgary or Edmonton; this is something that every government in the world is trying to get a hold on. Quite frankly, in many of these situations, many of these questions that are coming up, the answer is: I don't know, but we're looking into it, and we're trying to get the best advice from those who are in charge or those who have expertise in those particular fields so that we can make the right decision that's going to benefit the people.

So when I hear comments from the previous speaker or my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods, I mean, those are constructive comments, comments that I think the government needs to ensure that they look into to ensure that all bases are covered. I think those are important. I don't think what is important is to, you know, criticize the government in a scenario or situation, should I say, such as this and make it seem as though every turn or every decision that they're making is wrong. I can tell you that there are good people that are trying to do the right thing for everybody in this province.

I can tell you that it is not easy. It is not easy. I have been in command of hostage situations. I was one of the first people on the

Red Mile when it broke, and to sit there and criticize the Calgary Police Service, saying, “Why didn’t you do this?” or “Why didn’t you do that?”, was unfair. We weren’t expecting 20,000, 30,000 people to hit the streets. Are you kidding me? Again, it was an unprecedented situation, but we learned, we adapted and – you know what? – we overcame. As our Premier has said, we are Albertans, we are resilient, and we will overcome. We will overcome the situation, and we will come out better. We will learn from this, and we will continue to do better each and every day.

With that, Madam Speaker, I want to thank again everybody for their comments. I’d like to thank the members of the opposition for some, of course, very constructive and thoughtful comments. I’d like to thank my friends on the government members’ side, and I’d

like to thank our folks in government, in cabinet, who are faced with tough decisions each and every day.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 17.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other speakers?

Seeing none, hon. Member for Calgary-West, you can now move to adjourn the House.

**Mr. Ellis:** Madam Speaker, thank you for recognizing me once again. I’d like to move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 17. Thank you.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:35 p.m.]





**Table of Contents**

Prayers..... 141

Transmittal of Estimates ..... 141

Members’ Statements

- COVID-19 Response ..... 141
- COVID-19 and Physicians ..... 142
- COVID-19 and Community Supports ..... 142
- COVID-19 and Helpers ..... 142
- COVID-19 and Health Care Workers..... 143
- COVID-19 and Seniors ..... 143
- COVID-19 Community Response ..... 151
- COVID-19 and Workers..... 151
- COVID-19 Protective Measures..... 152

Oral Question Period

- Income Support for Persons Affected by COVID-19 ..... 143
- Health Budget 2020-2021 Revision..... 144
- Health Care Workforce and Budget 2020..... 144
- Kindergarten to Grade 12 Class Cancellation..... 145, 146
- COVID-19 Response and Long-term Planning ..... 145
- COVID-19 and Small Business ..... 146
- COVID-19 and Homeless Shelters ..... 146
- COVID-19 and Seniors ..... 147
- Support for Persons Affected by COVID-19..... 147
- Support for Persons and Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19..... 148
- COVID-19 and Child Care..... 148
- COVID-19 and Indigenous Communities ..... 149
- COVID-19 Diagnosis and Treatment Resources ..... 149, 151
- Job Protection and Income Support during Self-isolation for COVID-19 ..... 150

Presenting Petitions ..... 152

Notices of Motions ..... 152

Tabling Returns and Reports ..... 154

Tablings to the Clerk ..... 154

Emergency Debate

- COVID-19..... 154

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