



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 17, 2020

Day 9

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and to 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.

Please be seated.

Members' Statements

Health Budget 2020-2021 and COVID-19

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, yesterday was a sad day in the history of this province. That's because yesterday this Premier and his government showed Albertans that they are not above using an ongoing coronavirus pandemic to push through a budget of austerity; a budget that will see fewer health care workers when we need more; a budget that will see fewer hospital beds, not more; a budget that will see less financial support for doctors when they need support and certainty the most.

Now more than ever we need to protect our health care. This government is capitalizing on the crisis to pass a budget that doesn't meet the needs of Albertans in the midst of this pandemic.

As hundreds of doctors call on this government to reverse their plans to change doctor compensation, this government is continuing their fight with our province's doctors and health care professionals and insisting on bringing chaos into the health care system. Instead of pulling together with our front-line health care workers, this government is stubbornly doubling down on their efforts to pick a fight with them in the face of an ongoing pandemic. Changes coming to doctors' compensation on April 1 still make it so that doctors don't know how they're going to get paid in just two weeks.

Despite the uncertainty created by this government, our front-line health care workers will continue to step up and fight against the ongoing pandemic, and it's about time that this government did, too. Mr. Speaker, the World Health Organization has called the coronavirus pandemic the health care crisis of our time, and it's of the utmost importance that we rise to the challenge and do everything in our power to combat this pandemic and to protect the lives of Albertans.

COVID-19 Community Response

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, our world is facing unprecedented times of uncertainty. The outbreak of COVID-19 has caused panic and fear among Albertans, but as the number of affected individuals has grown, so has the solidarity that Albertans have shown for one another. Many Albertans have taken measures to protect not only themselves but to protect those around them, to protect those who are more likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, it has been proven that older adults and individuals with serious chronic medical conditions are more likely to become very sick should they be diagnosed with COVID-19, but thankfully – and not out of order but out of choice – many Albertans have decided to socially isolate themselves to prevent the spread of the

virus. This is not because these individuals are only worried about catching COVID-19 themselves but because they are worried about spreading the virus to someone who is more vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, social distancing is but one example of the solidarity that Albertans have demonstrated during this time. Almost immediately individuals in Calgary created a Facebook group called the YYC COVID-19 Volunteers. These volunteers are picking up groceries, medicine, and other necessary supplies for those who are in self-isolation or quarantine and are unable to do so themselves. As of March 15 this group has over 2,500 members. Over 2,500 Calgarians have volunteered to help those in need.

Mr. Speaker, we are experiencing trying times, and at this point we still don't know what is to come, but if we continue to look out for one another, we will get through this. I plead to all elected officials in this House, no matter what side of the Chamber you sit on, to show leadership, put partisanship aside, and stand in solidarity as we navigate this difficult time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River has a statement.

COVID-19 Precautions and Self-care

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Though we are in uncertain times, I want to remind Albertans that life will continue, and today that means wishing everybody a happy St. Patrick's Day.

While Albertans are preoccupied with the COVID-19 pandemic, I think it's important to keep in mind that we have gotten through much worse when together. It's important for our emotional and mental health that we take a break from the 24-hour news cycle and do things that bring us joy. Of course, we need to take precautions in the midst of this. We need to listen to the advice of our chief medical officer, who is doing a tremendous job of keeping us all safe, and we need to follow the recommendations of our public health authorities. Wash your hands, use hand sanitizer, stay home if feeling ill, avoid large gatherings, use the self-assessment tool, and drink a pint of Guinness or green beer on St. Patty's Day.

It's the responsibility of all of us to end this pandemic, and one step at a time, day by day, we will do that. Albertans will persevere, I have no doubt. In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, use this opportunity to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, the day named after the fifth-century Irish saint responsible for the conversion of much of Ireland. Not often does the hustle and bustle of 21st-century life grind to a halt, so take some time to block out the negatives and focus on the positives in your life. Whether you're Irish or not, we're all green on St. Patrick's Day.

So blow the dust off those board games, tell stories, watch a movie together, bake some green St. Patrick's Day cupcakes, and whatever your family enjoys doing, just take this time together. More so today than ever before we hope that people celebrate responsibly. But just remember that as the days pass, things will get better. We will overcome this virus, and our lives will come back to normal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and happy St. Patrick's Day.

Health Budget 2020-2021

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, I rise to address a serious concern brought forward by constituents. They're concerned about this budget, a budget that's being forced through this Legislature in record time, a budget that isn't needed when interim supply and special warrants are available to the government, and a budget that obviously charts the wrong path for our province. My constituents are concerned about real cuts to health care as proposed in this

budget. At a time when Alberta and the whole world are facing a virulent pandemic, it is unconscionable to my constituents that this government would make real cuts to the health care budget.

My constituents are also concerned that this budget doesn't provide the necessary support for our front-line health care workers, who are risking their own health to protect their fellow citizens. They find it odd, perplexing, and downright confusing that the Health minister decided to tear up contracts with doctors, and they find it bewildering that he announced additional changes to radiologists yesterday.

Simply put, my constituents are concerned that we're passing a budget that is making real cuts to public services when we need them most. During a pandemic all citizens of our province become acutely aware of just how important these public services are. These programs and services provide our economic security and the security of people. Now is not the time to cut. Let me say it again: in the face of a pandemic now is not the time to cut. This government still has time to do the right thing and hold off on their ideological agenda until after this crisis has passed. On behalf of my constituents I'm asking the government to do the right thing: reverse course, and protect our front-line services when they're needed the most.

COVID-19 and Seniors

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, seniors are a large and very important community in my constituency, and I am proud of the younger population in my constituency stepping up to help our seniors. I've seen many people posting on Facebook or making phone calls asking how they can help those who can't do things for themselves in our current situation regarding COVID-19. The best thing that those who are healthy can do for our seniors is to offer their help. I was happy to hear that there has been lots of support for our seniors throughout Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember that COVID-19 can affect seniors tremendously compared to a younger individual. This is why some of the province's first recommendations were for seniors and those who have compromised immune systems to prevent the spread of this virus at a higher scale. It is important to remember that the best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among seniors in Alberta is to limit contact. Only essential visits to any continuing care or long-term care facility in Alberta are recommended. Individuals over 60 years of age and those with pre-existing health conditions are most at risk for severe symptoms of COVID-19, and families and friends of those in these facilities are asked to think of other ways besides visiting that they can support and encourage their loved ones through this difficult time.

1:40

It is also important to remember that our elderly are unable to go grocery shopping because of the incredibly high volumes of people that have been present in grocery stores across the province. Grocery stores have had lineups of concerned and scared individuals waiting to get their groceries and supplies to last through this pandemic. To accommodate seniors, some grocery stores have opened early or set time aside specifically for seniors.

We will be able to get through this together, helping one another. After all, it is our nature as Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Support for Persons Affected by COVID-19

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have questions. Small businesses want to know how they are going to pay rent with reduced cash flow if landlords can evict them, how to pay for sick

leave, how to access credit. Individuals and families want to know why, if they have to self-isolate, the Premier told them that they would have paid leave when no such thing exists. People want to know if there is a plan from their UCP government for income replacement. People want to know if this government will take action to ensure that they will not get evicted or have their utilities cut off. And what will happen with homeless shelters?

People want to know who is going to help their elderly relative in long-term care now that visitors are no longer allowed. People want to know what's going to happen to people with disabilities, many of whom live in group settings with outside caregivers. People want to know how to handle home-schooling their kids. Count me as one of them. Ultimately, all Albertans want to know: where is the plan for some form of universal income replacement program that will keep us going through this emergency? All of these matters are under provincial jurisdiction. Instead, this government has told Albertans that we should wait for Ottawa to take care of wage replacement.

In the news conference announcing school closures, this Premier did not spend enough time talking about how he was going to help families whose kids are suddenly at home. And he's singularly focused on ramming through a fairy-tale budget using undemocratic procedural means that still falls short of population growth and inflation in health care but also institutes massive cuts to social services. Forget basic income, Mr. Speaker; this government needs to focus on basic job description.

Albertans have legitimate questions, and this UCP government seems to be the only provincial government in Canada that is not giving those answers. The NDP will continue to fight for Albertans. This government will be held to account for how it cares for Albertans during this pandemic.

Chief Medical Officer Dr. Deena Hinshaw

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, the past few weeks have been confusing for Albertans. Many people are scared because they don't know what's in store. We hear stories on the news of what is happening in other countries, we wonder whether airports are secure, and sometimes we're not sure who to trust for information.

In Alberta we've been turning to the chief medical officer, Dr. Deena Hinshaw. The chief medical officer has the highly important responsibility of providing public health advice and expertise to our government. Dr. Hinshaw completed her undergraduate degree at Augustana university college in Camrose. She then pursued her medical degree, a master's in public health, and residencies in family medicine and community medicine at the University of Alberta. Dr. Hinshaw has been a trusted adviser to her patients for many years, and in recent weeks she has become a trusted source to all Albertans. Dr. Hinshaw served as a medical officer of health in the central zone of Alberta Health Services. At times she has specialized and led the public health surveillance and infrastructure teams for AHS.

For over a year Dr. Hinshaw has held her role of chief medical officer, a role that often goes unrecognized as our province has not experienced a public health crisis like this in many years. Yet in these times of great uncertainty and fear Dr. Hinshaw has become a calming presence for Albertans. Thousands of Albertans have been watching her press conferences every afternoon to find the latest, most up-to-date information from a trusted adviser. We know that her decisions and her advice are calculated and that she has considered the many factors at play as our province faces and combats this pandemic.

Many Albertans, including those in West Yellowhead, have expressed their gratitude for Dr. Hinshaw's updates and wisdom. They appreciate having an honest source for scientific information

and the facts about this virus. Now I ask that my colleagues join me in recognizing her work, her diligence, her compassion, and her empathy as she helps Albertans get through this very difficult time.

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

COVID-19 First Responders and Decision-makers

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in gratitude for those first responders who put their lives on the line every single day. In a time where it has been recommended to work from home to contain the COVID-19 virus, these selfless people don't have that option. I'd like to thank them again for continually getting up and facing this unknown threat, this invisible enemy, this pandemic that is deeply affecting so many of us. These brave souls are the first point of contact for scared, injured, and sick Albertans. They deal with this rapidly unfolding situation in real time to ensure that our safety is provided and medical services are attended to. These people are the voices of reason during times of crisis. They are that calming voice and that reassurance during times of great anxiety.

Mr. Speaker, every call is an unknown threat with an unknown risk. These people do not expect to be thanked. These people are society's everyday heroes. No jurisdiction could get through this harsh new reality without them. The world is facing such an extreme global pandemic, one that is truly unprecedented. It is times like these that reveal how necessary it is to have such a strong, capable first response team. The boots on the ground are truly the backbone of any organization.

Mr. Speaker, lastly, I would like to say a special thank you to Dr. Deena Hinshaw, to the Minister of Health, and to the Premier for being able to react to this challenging, evolving, and critical situation. These decisions are not easy for anyone, and it is with gratitude that our government has been able to make such courageous decisions, certainly, under extraordinary circumstances.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

COVID-19 and Tourism in Banff-Kananaskis

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, a lot has changed this past week. With COVID-19 on the rise, our government took swift action by bolstering health care with an additional \$500 million, tripling 811 call line capacity, creating a self-diagnosis website, and extending job-protected leave for those needing to self-quarantine. But it's time that somebody said it: we need to treat this not only as a health crisis but as an economic crisis, especially for Banff and Canmore.

My riding of Banff-Kananaskis is bracing to be one of the most impacted by COVID-19. Banff and Canmore have never hesitated to welcome guests from all over. Our Rocky Mountains are the foundation of our country's tourism industry, and they welcome 4.2 million guests every single year. Nearly 90 per cent of Banff's GDP is based on tourism and the continued business that these visitors bring. But in times like these Banff and Canmore are uniquely vulnerable. The high visitation puts our communities at a very high risk of contact with the virus, yet we are economically reliant on that visitation, and without it our local economy is threatened. As international fear grows, flights are cancelled, and borders are closed, Banff and Canmore's primary industry collapses. We've already had major conferences, events, and hotel stays cancelled and, as a result, decreased sales at souvenir shops, boutique stores, and restaurants. Being a small-business, tourism economy caught in the middle of a scrambling global market and a health pandemic disproportionately hurts Banff and Canmore.

We absolutely need to focus on combatting COVID-19, but we need to ensure Alberta's economy survives, too. We need a strategy that addresses COVID-19 but also addresses our economy, with Banff and Canmore's unique vulnerabilities at the forefront. We are in uncharted territory here, but our tourism communities and their unique exposure to these health and economic concerns cannot be ignored. Banff and Canmore need test kits, and we need a protective and proactive small-business policy. We need a balance of support for our industry and safety for our residents. We will get through this, Mr. Speaker, but we need the government's backing.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition has the call.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the interest of serving all Albertans in this pandemic, the Official Opposition shared all of our questions with the government this morning so that more detailed answers could be provided.

Income Support for Persons Affected by COVID-19

Ms Notley: Yesterday the Premier advised that he was awaiting the federal government decision on an expansion to EI to help those unable to work due to the pandemic. Meanwhile, however, other provinces like Quebec have already announced specific supplementary income programs for their citizens. To the Premier, who I let know we'd be asking this question: will the government of Alberta provide income support to those Albertans not currently or subsequently covered by EI expansions by the federal government?

The Speaker: The hon. the President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working right now, firstly, with the federal government as EI is a national program, and our federal government has a responsibility through that program to deliver it to Canadians. We're working to understand, firstly, that the program will be able to cover the exact situations that the member opposite identified, and we will follow that up, in the event that the response is insufficient in our view, with measures from our own government.

1:50

Ms Notley: Well, thank you to the minister for that answer. Now, while Albertans on average have higher incomes than other Canadians, we also have a higher percentage of people working paycheque to paycheque and struggling to make ends meet. For most Albertans employment insurance pays them about \$2,000 per month before taxes. In many cases families will have bills and other obligations that far exceed that amount. My question again to the Finance minister, then, is: will the government of Alberta be considering any form of EI top-up to support Albertans beyond the EI rate?

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

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, at this point in time we're advocating hard on behalf of Albertans to the federal government for expansion and enhancement to the EI program so that that program can adequately meet the needs of Albertans. Albertans have paid into EI, a net amount, by the billions of dollars in the last decades, and we really believe that it is the federal government's responsibility to ensure that program, in fact, pays

out and provides the support that Albertans need at this point in time.

Ms Notley: I get their position with respect to the federal government. The question was: would the Alberta government consider backstopping if the federal government doesn't step up? That's the question I asked.

My question now is along the same line. If EI does not cover small-business owners, people who are laid off due to business slowdown because of the virus in particular, or people who are at home caring for their children because of the school closure and the daycare closure, will the government of Alberta consider providing income support to those people?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, our government will be looking at every individual situation where Albertans may fall through the cracks from federal programs, and we will be looking at and considering a provincial response. This government will not let Albertans fall through the cracks of insufficient programs.

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

COVID-19 and Health System Capacity and Resources

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In times of crisis public health officials have the ability to take hotels or other infrastructure and use them to respond in the public interest to this pandemic or any other. Now, we've just heard that we have a declaration of a state of emergency. If COVID-19 spreads and we see thousands of Albertans requiring hospitalization, I assume this may be the only way we can ensure there is space. To the Premier: have you made any plans to take over hotels, in which locations, and how many additional beds in total will it provide?

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

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS has contingency plans in place that consider all aspects of resource planning, of assessment, of response. That includes allocation of scarce resources and assessing what services must continue, such as cancer care, and what can be safely postponed, such as elective procedures. There are about 550 ventilators available today, to answer the member's question from yesterday. Another 50 are on order currently. Hotels are an option to expand community capacity, and – oh. Sorry.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that answer.

We'll also need a good deal of medical supplies should the pandemic worsen and Albertans are hospitalized. To the Premier: I'm hoping we can get some specifics on these supplies because, having seen your letter to Prime Minister Trudeau, you stated that you were seeking 90,000 swabs, 500,000 N95 masks, and 600,000 face shields. I am wondering. Why do we need such large orders? Are we short hundreds of thousands of masks and face shields? And what steps have we taken to otherwise secure those vital supplies?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, AHS is seeing an increase in requests for supplies and equipment related to the risk of transmission, such as the N95 respirators, hand sanitizers, and the cleaning wipes. It's important to be clear that precautions are based on the evidence that COVID is transmitted by droplets, that it's not airborne. These products are critical for AHS staff to safely

perform their duties and maintain a safe workplace. AHS is using its advantages as a single purchaser to ensure that access to these needed supplies is there and implementing controls to ensure that critical supplies are used appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, some provinces have sought to have retired front-line health care workers return to our hospitals during this pandemic. I have certainly expressed some concerns about the actions that have been taken by this Premier and the Health minister that have potentially driven some doctors away from this province and perhaps made it difficult to recruit more workers. To date the Premier has dismissed my concerns, though I understand that he did reference this during his recent presser today, so I'll ask a different way today. To the Premier: what steps are you taking to add doctors and other front-line health care workers to our ranks during this public crisis? Please be specific.

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maximizing staffing is an essential part of our planning for physicians and for nurses, for all health care providers. Planning has to consider that health care workers themselves are subject to COVID-19 as well as being needed to care for others who might be infected. As an example, Alberta Health is working with AHS and the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, the CPSA, to determine how many recently retired physicians are available. The college has developed an emergency register of everyone who has retired over the last two years to streamline the way that they may be able to get their accreditation back quickly and get back to working.

COVID-19 and Homeowner and Renter Concerns

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government of Ontario announced it was suspending evictions during the coronavirus pandemic. Frankly, if people are encouraged to stay home, they need a home to stay in. More needs to be done, such as putting in controls or outright banning rent hikes during this crisis and providing mortgage protection for homeowners. To the Premier: will you immediately ban evictions and rent hikes and provide homeowners with the certainty that they, too, won't end up without a home during this crisis?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this question and the concerns the member opposite raises about Albertans and renters and homeowners and the concerns they have about their homes at this difficult time. As we're all aware, COVID-19 is a rapidly changing health crisis, and all of government is actively monitoring a number of emerging issues and concerns. As mentioned yesterday, we are looking into a number of different items that we are hearing about from Albertans, and I thank the member opposite for raising this to us.

Thank you.

Mr. Carson: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that families are struggling to make ends meet. Many have been forced into self-isolation or staying at home to take care of their kids. Bills are tight. The last thing families can afford at this time is utility hikes. Now, I've seen that EPCOR has said it's willing to work with customers on payment options should they be unable to pay their monthly bill immediately. This is good, but there are still other providers. Premier, will you ban utility rate hikes and utility shut-offs until this pandemic is over?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. The government's first priority is to ensure that Albertans are supported during this unprecedented time. Our government is working with industry and the AUC and AESO to make sure that our utilities are running and that electricity is provided. Companies like Enmax and EPCOR have come out with programs and policies for payment flexibility and have ensured that there will be no disconnections during this downturn. Our department and our government are working to ensure that Albertans' needs are met during this very difficult time, and we'll make sure that electricity is running.

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, we know that some businesses have chosen to temporarily close as part of efforts to encourage physical distancing to stop the spread of COVID-19. Some lease agreements, however, do require a certain level of business activity to stay open, or the owners can risk eviction. To the Premier: is this something you've looked at, and will you commit to banning any evictions of businesses until this crisis has been resolved?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta is rising.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I appreciate this question and the concern raised by the member opposite for Alberta's job creators. We will continue to work to support Albertans and Alberta job creators as we navigate the rapidly evolving situation with COVID-19. I thank the member opposite for raising this concern with us.

Provincial State of Emergency

Member Ceci: On Friday the United States government declared the coronavirus pandemic a national emergency. Earlier today the government of Ontario declared a provincial emergency. Now that Alberta has also declared a state of provincial emergency, can the Premier tell us what threshold or conditions were reached to prompt him and his cabinet to declare a provincial state of emergency?

2:00

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

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure my learned colleague is aware that there are two different ways that a province can declare a state of emergency. One is under the emergency – I can't remember if it's measures or management – act, actually in response to a pandemic. In the situation that we're facing right now, a much more appropriate response would be to declare a public health emergency, which is what our government is going to be considering so that our province is going to be prepared to respond to the COVID situation and making sure that the health of all Albertans is our primary concern.

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I understand that they already did it, and it's a provincial state of emergency if my information is correct. Emergency powers include the ability of the government to take immediate action to protect Alberta families from eviction from rented homes and from price gouging and protect Alberta families and businesses from many of the other most pressing and urgent economic harms that are happening right now. To the Minister of Health: when will you use your emergency powers or cabinet use its emergency powers to introduce these and other protections?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I can advise the learned colleague that our Emergency Management Cabinet Committee is meeting on a regular basis to be able to make sure that we're taking all steps to ensure that the health care of Albertans is our primary concern. As

the member noted, we have now declared a state of public health emergency so that we can be responsive and make sure that resources are there, including the \$500 million that we've recently announced, to be able to respond to the pandemic situation that we're in right now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Ceci: Thank you. That's two questions not answered, Mr. Speaker. Albertans were hearing a number of different messages regarding the severity of the situation. The city of Calgary has declared a state of local emergency, but the city of Edmonton has not. While we respect that each city has weighed that decision very carefully, now that a pandemic response is centralized with the province, can the Minister of Health describe the full scope of powers given to cabinet and the CMO now that the state of provincial emergency is existing?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are working very closely with our municipal partners in being able to respond to this. The Premier himself is meeting on a regular basis by telephone and otherwise with our municipal leaders to make sure that they have the resources they need through the Provincial Operations Centre as well as AHS, working through their Emergency Coordination Centre, the ECC, and working with our municipal partners, and all five zones in the province and their emergency operations centres are working closely with our municipal partners to make sure that they and AHS are able to respond.

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

COVID-19 and Workplace Safety

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the spread of COVID-19 many Albertans are worried about their health and safety within the workplace. Job creators are concerned with keeping their employees safe during this time as well as keeping their workplaces healthy and available to clients and customers. To the minister: can you please tell us what resources are available to job creators so they can best protect their employees?

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

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Occupational health and safety laws require employers to identify and control existing and potential hazards in the workplace. We're asking employers and workers to work together to identify dangerous conditions and ensure safe practices at the work site. There are a number of online resources for employees and employers on how to control and limit the hazards involved with COVID-19 on the work site.

The Speaker: The Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for the answer. Given that our health care workers could be put in situations where they might be exposed to individuals diagnosed with COVID-19, which is regularly the case for my wife and her colleagues at the Chinook regional hospital ER, and further given that these front-line workers are absolutely vital to providing varying levels of care for those afflicted, to the same minister: what is being done to ensure the safety of our front-line health care workers?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I would like to thank the dedicated front-line health care workers who put themselves at risk to care for Albertans every day. Alberta occupational health and safety is focusing on inspections of health care facilities, senior care facilities, and assessment centres to ensure that workers and Albertans are protected. Our OH and S officers that perform these inspections are trained in the unique hazards of health care facilities and are ensuring that the appropriate personal protective equipment is available to protect health care workers today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the ministry has a responsibility to help business owners and job creators create and maintain safe work environments and given that the COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving by the day and the hour, to the same minister: how many calls have Labour and Immigration contact centres received related to COVID?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our dedicated occupational health staff have been working tirelessly to ensure Albertan workers are protected and have the information they need. As of March 13, 2020, Labour and Immigration contact centres have received 468 COVID-19 related calls, occupational health and safety contact centres have received 132 calls, and employment standards contact centres responded to 336 calls. We continue to urge Albertans to visit alberta.ca/covid for more information.

COVID-19 and Social Service Delivery

Ms Renaud: Vulnerable populations, including homeless Albertans, are at great risk. Boyle Street Community Services reported to the media today that they're still awaiting AHS direction on what the procedure would be should they need to isolate a homeless Albertan. As of Monday there was not a plan for this eventuality. Can the Minister of Health please update the House and give a clear date as to when shelters might have contingency plans in place? Will he commit to holding a conference call or meeting with shelter leaders today?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm advised that AHS has been in contact as recently as today with many of our nonprofits who are involved in those who are experiencing homelessness, making sure that they're aware of the steps that AHS and the ministry are taking to make sure that if, for example, containment was required for anybody in that community, there are going to be steps that we're taking to be able to make sure that containment and isolation are going to be available to all Albertans, especially those who are experiencing homelessness.

Ms Renaud: Given that the food banks in Alberta are working to address the difficulties that the coronavirus is placing on their ability to serve Albertans in need and given that they were looking for guidance on Monday as to how best to serve Albertans while maintaining social distance, can the Minister of Community and Social Services share what support and resources she's made available to Alberta food banks, and will she commit to a conference call today with the heads of all food banks to best

understand and address any and all concerns they might have during this very pressing time?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all of those who are stepping up to assist their communities, and food banks are a key example of civil society organizations that provide vitally important services to Albertans, especially now. Today the Premier announced \$60 million to support civil society to help vulnerable Albertans and the organizations that are responding to COVID-19. We are continuing to work urgently with all of our partners and community-based organizations to understand their needs and concerns.

Ms Renaud: Given that I do understand that additional money was made available to civil societies but given that I also understand that over \$40 million was taken out of income support and other supports were really devastated with your budget, I'm asking you – Albertans just are fearful right now, they need reassurance, they need to know that you will reach out to all of these folks to make sure they get the supports they need. They just need clarity right now; that's all. That's what we're asking for. That's why we gave you the questions. They just want clarity.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, definitely, we are going to – we are providing clarity. We are committed to providing supports to vulnerable Albertans. Today's announcement of the civil society COVID-19 fund will go a long way to help those who are working around the clock to ensure that all Albertans, including people with disabilities and those on income support, will get the help they need during this pandemic. In addition, emergency benefits are and always have been available through our programs. Let me assure Albertans that we are working with an extreme sense of urgency, and plans are in place to ensure that we have additional supports.

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

2:10 Kindergarten to Grade 12 Class Cancellation

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked the Education minister what mental health supports were available for the hundreds of thousands of students who are home and will be home for the foreseeable future. These students are living with a lot of stress, adapting to the new way of learning and being isolated from friends and teachers. Many of their families are also dealing with great stress about their health and economic well-being. Can the Minister of Education describe what new mental health supports are being provided for students because of the pandemic?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question, and thank you to the hon. member. We understand how this situation may adversely affect the mental health of our students. We really do understand that there's a great deal of anxiety out there. I'm working closely with my colleague the associate minister of mental health as we continue to monitor this issue. I would encourage any student who is struggling to call the Kids Help Phone at 1.800.668.6868. Right now they are fielding roughly 2,000 calls per day, and we thank them for all their very, very hard work in guiding our young people through this . . .

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

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, given that that's the same answer we got yesterday and given that it wasn't sufficient – Alberta parents

and students are reaching out to us because they are experiencing significant anxiety. That's why we gave the questions to the minister ahead of time this morning, so she could come here with more concrete answers. The budget that was in place last year is not sufficient for the pandemic we are facing now.

Given that students with special needs are also at home for the foreseeable future and that they've relied on specialized supports in order to learn, can the Minister of Education describe what arrangements she is making to support these students while they continue their education from home during the pandemic?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, supporting our students with disabilities is top of mind. I am a former rehabilitative practitioner. I've worked with the disabled all my life, and I know how important it is to have that early intervention. This is something that I've spoken to our education system about, our partners about. It is something my department is currently working on with school divisions and partners. I do know that school boards and ECS operators have tools at their disposal, and a lot of great minds are looking at this very challenge. We are in uncharted territory, and ECS operators do have tools at their disposal.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that that was essentially the same answer as last week and given that a lot has changed in the last week, parents are needing new, additional supports.

Another thing that's changed is that last week 30,000 Alberta students were receiving food through the school nutrition program. Given that these vulnerable students will not be able to receive these nutritious meals at school during this pandemic, how will the Minister of Education redeploy the resources for the school nutrition program to make sure these kids don't go hungry while they're away from school? Mr. Speaker, we gave this question this morning because we expect a real answer this afternoon. Kids are going hungry today.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we are giving real answers. As a government we understand the importance of good nutrition for our students. School authorities across this province are developing innovative ways to provide this service to their students. For example, Prairie Rose school division is using their nutrition funding to develop food packs for families who need it. Bus drivers under contract will deliver these packs to the front steps of families. This is just one example. I would encourage every school authority to look at how they can continue to offer these services to their students in these difficult times. I know our education system is stepping up, and they're going to continue to step up.

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

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The decision to cancel classes indefinitely is truly unprecedented. However, I firmly believe that this was the correct course of action taken by our government. Since the decision has been made, parents have been calling and e-mailing our office and asking on social media if this only applies to public, separate, and francophone schools. Can the Minister of Education please clarify if class cancellations are only for schools in the public system or if it applies to every school within the province?

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, class cancellations apply to all schools, including charters, independents, First Nations school authorities as well as our public, separate, and francophone schools. This decision was made following the advice

from the chief medical officer of health. The safety and well-being of all our students, as always, are paramount, including the staff as well.

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

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that the advice from the chief medical officer of health was provided on a Sunday and given that students have not returned to school yet and given that many students will still have personal belongings such as shoes, backpacks, and toys left in their desks and lockers and given that students are expected to stay home, can the minister please explain how students and parents can go about gathering their personal belongings?

Member LaGrange: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to provide that information. We know that this unprecedented situation has caused a lot of uncertainty for our parents, our students, and our staff. Parents are encouraged to work with their local school authorities to determine when they can pick up their students' supplies and belongings. I would encourage all schools to do this in waves to minimize the number of people coming and going at any one given time. I want to thank all of our parents, students, and teachers for their patience during these uncertain times. It's greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the minister. Given that there are over 750,000 students in Alberta and given that there are 61 public, separate, and francophone school authorities and given that there are numerous education stakeholders reacting to these class cancellations, can the minister please explain the efforts that have been taken to ensure that every stakeholder and school authority is receiving the same information from our government?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. My office and my department have been in constant communication with school authorities and education partners since this situation began. We have also worked with Dr. Hinshaw's office to provide updates to our school authorities from the chief medical officer of health. Communication between Alberta Education, school authorities, education partners continues to happen daily, and we are committed to keeping them as up to date as possible as the situation evolves. We are doing this day to day, minute to minute some days.

Thank you.

COVID-19 and Women

Member Irwin: Women make up 45.5 per cent of the workforce here in Alberta, with 80 per cent of them specifically working in fields like health care, child care, education, and social assistance. Women are telling us all that they are in need of work security and various other supports from this government in the midst of an unprecedented health crisis. To the minister responsible for status of women: what are you doing to help women impacted during this time?

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that we are taking a crossministry approach on this. I'm very

grateful to be working with some amazing people here to be able to provide supports for women not only in our regular communities, our large cities, but for our rural hard-working women in this province as well. We will continue to help and support women across this province, and those impacts: we are working with our partners to look for solutions. This is a priority for us.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we gave these questions this morning in advance, we really are looking for concrete measures here.

Given that Alberta has had the third-highest percentage of immigrants in Canada – and the majority of those are women – and given that Alberta's labour profile notes that many of those women, as I noted, work in health care and social assistance, to that same minister: what protection measures is the government putting in place to support our front-line health and service workers here in Alberta, many of whom are women?

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

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. COVID-19 and this pandemic affect all Albertans, and we're acting urgently to protect the health workforce, including ensuring supplies of appropriate equipment for our staff in the hospitals, who will need to manage potentially a large number of patients who are going to be seriously sick. We also recognize that the emergency poses added challenges for new immigrants who face language barriers. We're having key information translated, and I want to remind people that translation services are available on Health Link and at all AHS facilities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Irwin: Thank you. Given the impact that COVID-19 is having on the women of Alberta and given the vital role that those same women play in Alberta's economy, can the minister responsible for status of women please speak specifically about the steps she's taking to ensure that there will be supports for women, crossministry supports for those women to access during and after this pandemic? Can she inform this House that, you know, she is listening? What specific supports and programs will there be in place to support those women?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again for the question. Included in the announcement today was the \$6 million to civil society but also to women shelters. I would like to also thank the Minister of Community and Social Services and the Minister of Children's Services for working to support and protect vulnerable Albertans and also working with the child care sector. I'd also like to say thank you very much to the partners that are working with us right now. There are a great number of women and, as the member had said yesterday, helpers that out there that we're working with. I hope that the opposition will work hard to help us pass this budget so that we can get the dollars into needed support areas right away.

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

2:20

COVID-19 and Seniors

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The needs of seniors encompass a range of issues that cover various ministries and

require a carefully planned-out response. Seniors are at higher risk during this health crisis. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: what steps are you taking to ensure that seniors continue to have access to reliable transportation, housing, food, medication, and urgent health care needs? Please be specific.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The health and well-being of seniors and vulnerable Albertans are my top priority. I am working very closely with the Minister of Health, and I'm taking direction from the chief medical officer of public health on how to best protect seniors throughout this epidemic. I'm also having a daily call with my department and receiving updates on issues and actions taken. I am sure and I can assure you that we are acting quickly as we receive information to best protect our seniors.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that there are no details given in that answer, we'd like those updates that the minister is referring to.

Given the extra risk that seniors face from the coronavirus and given that the chief medical officer recommended that seniors take extra precautions due to this risk and given that many seniors are on fixed incomes, which could impede their ability to get supplies in the event they need to self-isolate, can the minister please outline in detail how she is planning to address the needs of seniors and, specifically, low-income seniors during this pandemic?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As advised by the chief medical officer, seniors are to limit their interaction with large groups to reduce exposure to COVID-19. We are asking seniors to think about that and to consider staying home and for family and friends to look at ways to support seniors that do not involve in-person contact. We will protect our most vulnerable and ensure that they receive the care they need to be healthy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that these questions were given ahead of time to the minister, it's disturbing to see that there are no real answers.

Given that during times of social isolation seniors in seniors' homes and long-term care facilities face additional challenges and given that we have seen tragic cases in Canada already that show that seniors need care that takes their specific risks into account, what current protections are in place in seniors' homes for seniors in long-term care? Can you please outline the steps that you are taking and what additional resources are available for seniors . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An additional \$500 million has been committed that will give Alberta public health officials the resources they need to respond to the COVID-19 epidemic and to keep Albertans safe. Our government is taking steps to protect Albertans in seniors' homes and long-term care by asking visitors to limit the visits deemed as essential to close family and guardians. Visitors may be asked to wear masks as a precaution. As the situation evolves, we will . . .

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

COVID-19 and Construction Work-site Safety

Ms Glasgo: Mr. Speaker, many Albertans are feeling the strain of having to stay home or having to find ways to have their children taken care of in the wake of class cancellations and daycare closures. Many of these Albertans are employed in the trades, and a large number of these people are employed through infrastructure projects and the construction industry. As the situation continues to develop, many more tough decisions like this will have to be made in the upcoming future. My question for the Minister of Infrastructure is: what measures are in place to ensure these projects can continue so that workers can continue to support their families in this tough time?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, we are keeping in close contact with the contractors on infrastructure projects to ensure there is no disruption to the supply chain. With all that is going on with coronavirus, continued investment in vital infrastructure is critical to supporting jobs and the economy. To get Albertans back to work and deliver all of the capital projects on time and on budget, it is very critical to pass the budget today.

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

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that we are facing an unprecedented health crisis in this province and given that Albertans are being advised to practise social distancing and given that infrastructure projects not only require a large number of workers but also require people working together in close proximity and given that infrastructure projects are vitally important to the Alberta economy, to the same Minister of Infrastructure: what measures are being put in place to protect the safety of workers working on major and essential infrastructure projects?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely making sure that our contractors have protocols in place to protect the health of their employees during the epidemic. We are in touch daily with the government property managers to ensure proper maintenance and cleaning of buildings managed by Alberta Infrastructure and also changing those protocols where required. In government buildings we are ensuring that hand sanitizers and soap are available adequately along with signage on proper handwashing and social distancing.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you again to the minister. Given that many projects are scheduled to begin in the upcoming construction season and given that institutions, like hospitals, where these projects are scheduled to take place are experiencing new challenges and given that one of these infrastructure project upgrades is taking place at the Medicine Hat regional hospital in Brooks-Medicine Hat and given that health and economic conditions change daily, to the same minister: at this time are infrastructure projects going forward for the upcoming construction season?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, my ministry officials are doing everything to ensure construction continues as planned. We are also identifying areas where processes can be expedited so we can get the shovels in the ground and Albertans back to work. I'm confident that Albertans will emerge from the uncertainty caused by this global pandemic and our province's best days still lie ahead.

On that optimistic note, I would like to congratulate the hon. member on her engagement.

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

Income Support for Persons Affected by COVID-19

(continued)

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I was on a Facebook Live as a way to connect with constituents while also social distancing. One of the things that came up on that Facebook Live was Alberta artists. We know they contribute so much to our culture and to our communities; however, they are a class of worker who may not always have an employer and may not be able to access income support or employment insurance. These Albertans are especially vulnerable today. Can the minister of labour explain what steps are being taken to support artists with income and what programs are available to artists who are not able to support themselves at this time?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much for the question. We're actually reaching out to a lot of these associations right now, and you're right. There are some serious issues and concerns that need to be taken into consideration. Thank you very much for the question. We look forward to working with our partners. As you know, government partners with many of these associations to make sure that artists are supported. This government will continue to support the arts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans are making critical decisions about their own health right now and are worried about financial security and given that workers in the gig economy such as freelancers, independent contractors, Uber drivers, delivery drivers, and other project-based workers may also not have contracts and may not have access to employment insurance and given that they, too, just like artists, are more vulnerable at a time like this, what assurance can the minister offer that these workers will also be supported by the government and receive financial help to make ends meet during this pandemic?

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

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for really putting a voice to the concerns of many, many Albertans at this point in time. Again, we are working with our federal government right now to ensure that they deliver the most appropriate supports at this time. After we have determined what they're able to put together, we will ensure, as a provincial government, that no Albertan falls through the cracks.

2:30

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

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans are anxiously waiting for the financial support and the answers that they need and given that Alberta also has a high number of temporary foreign workers, another class of worker that is particularly vulnerable at times like these, and given that these workers, too, will be impacted and may have families to take care of and given that they may now be unable to return to their home countries as per their employment agreement, can the minister outline what steps are being taken to support temporary foreign workers and how that information is being distributed to temporary foreign workers in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. I can say that temporary foreign workers do fall under EI support under the national rules, and we will be ensuring that we're communicating that fact to temporary foreign workers.

Trucking and Freight Transport Industry Safety

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, our transportation network is crucial for our ability to move supplies and personnel to wherever they're needed most, and keeping these supply lines operating efficiently and safely is vital, particularly as demand for food and medical supplies intensifies. Can the Minister of Transportation describe what steps he and his department are taking to protect Alberta's critical transportation corridors?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier and Alberta's chief medical officer said earlier this week, it's critical that we manage the supply chain of goods we need for our everyday lives. Commercial carriers, as a result, crossing the Canada-U.S. border are essential to that supply chain and are not subject to the 14-day self-isolation travel requirements. Truck drivers play an important role in our economy. As the hon. member said, they bring food, medicine, and everything else we need in our lives, and we are working with the chief medical officer to make sure that they know what they need to do to remain safe.

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

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the answer. Given that truck drivers and employees at freight-forwarding facilities cannot work from home and indeed must interact with strangers on a daily and hourly basis and given that truck drivers who carry goods across the U.S. border or to the other provinces are at increased risk, what steps is the minister taking to protect drivers and warehouse workers, and what contingency plans does he have in place to maintain Alberta's trucking and freight-handling workforce?

Mr. McIver: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, our government and the chief medical officer are using education as a major tool to keep those key workers safe. The Alberta Motor Transport Association and other leaders in the industry are sharing important health and safety messages with drivers that outline the protocols that we should all follow. In addition, they're being advised to make sure that they clean the rigs inside and out whenever they stop for food and gas along the way and practise social distancing and other things to keep themselves safe. In these times many goods and services are needed, and those truck drivers bring them.

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, given that the questions were actually given to the minister ahead of time, we were expecting more detailed answers. I know that you're putting more of the responsibility on the stakeholders themselves, but we're asking you what you are going to do. Given that the training and testing of drivers for any licence and classification requires two strangers to spend about an hour together inside a vehicle and given that trainers and examiners may interact with many different people in the course of a single day, what is the current status of driver training and testing in Alberta, and can the minister describe what

contingency plans he has to limit testing if the pandemic intensifies?

Mr. McIver: Okay. Well, I'll thank the hon. member for a good question. I'll say that I've been very detailed with the answers. Our government and the chief medical officer are working with industry officials to make sure that safety measures are in place. For example, when somebody goes and does a test for a driver, we make sure that the tablet that they use is sanitized before and after and that they have sanitary wipes to help clean the vehicles. We're continuing to provide road tests because Albertans need mobility, especially during these times when transit might be very crowded.

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

COVID-19 and Registry Services

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The coronavirus pandemic is changing the way that Albertans conduct their daily lives. This health crisis is rapidly changing situations. We do not know yet how long or widespread self-isolations and other business disruptions will be. This weekend I needed to transfer plates on a vehicle and was happy to see that the registries were open and I was able to conduct my business in person. However, with many people unable to leave their homes due to illness or self-isolation, regular practices like going to the local registry office may not be possible. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how are you supporting Albertans who need to access registry services throughout this pandemic?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for the question. One thing that we've been actively working on right now is helping Albertans who need to renew their drivers' licences or vehicle registrations and other related documents. We will be providing some specific information on this later today. We know it's important for Albertans to self-isolate and to practise social distancing, so we're extending due dates on items like driver's licences and vehicle registrations. That's all I can say about that right now, but I encourage the member to tune in to our daily update later today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Albertans are being advised to avoid close contact with other people due to the pandemic and given that changing some of our routines and habits for services will be required to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and given that many other businesses will be taking precautionary closures or hour changes to ensure the safety of staff and clients, to the same minister: what measures are registry offices taking in Alberta to reduce the risk of coronavirus transmission?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've all heard some excellent advice from our chief medical officer of health and from other government officials. I'll just reiterate some of that here. It is important for all of us, whether we are providing or accepting a service, to practise good hygiene and to practise self-isolation and social distancing. Albertans should stay at home if they're feeling sick. If that's you, please stay at home; you should not go to work or the store. Some of the simplest measures Albertans can take are to wash their hands regularly and vigorously; cough or sneeze into

your elbow, not your hands; don't touch your face or eyes. Businesses should be more diligent in cleaning and disinfecting, and the government has posters available that they can post to provide customers with . . .

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that many Albertans are concerned about having to wait in public spaces such as registry offices during this pandemic and given that Albertans will still require important services throughout the pandemic like renewing their driver's licences or vehicle registrations and given that many who need these services are required to self-isolate and might wonder, like myself, what other options are available to those that need these services, to the same minister: what services can be accessed online to bypass the need for an in-person meeting at a registry office?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great question. As you've probably all heard me say more than once, my goal is to take Alberta from worst to first in terms of online services. Right now Albertans are able to pay fines and process vehicle renewals online at alberta.ca. We are actively working to bring more services online, and this clearly underscores the rationalization for what we're going through right now. It clearly underscores the rationalization for needing to modernize our service delivery. It's important that Albertans continue to self-isolate when they feel sick and that they practise social distancing. A greater availability of online services will help Albertans to be able to do this, and that's why we're working so hard on this.

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

Postsecondary Class Cancellation

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As of March 15 all in-person classes of postsecondary institutions have been cancelled. This includes the NAIT campus located within my riding of Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. This action has required university and college classes to be moved online. Now, this rapid move presents new challenges to meeting the needs of students and providing sufficient access to resources completely online. To the Minister of Advanced Education: how will the minister ensure that postsecondary students are still being given the adequate tools that they need to finish their winter semester?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, ensuring that our students are able to continue their academic programming and advance with their studies is a top priority. I was speaking with our postsecondary institutions as early as Friday, before the decision of the chief medical officer to suspend classes, to encourage them to look at online delivery, to look at alternative mediums of delivery so that our students can continue to advance in their academic studies with as little disruption as possible.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that postsecondary institutions are research and practical institutions as well as schools and given that postsecondary institutions employ many people who serve in

capacities beyond teaching, such as researchers, and given that these institutions possess the tools that will support online instruction to students, to the same minister: are postsecondary institutions being closed completely, or will researchers and other professionals be able to access these institutions?

2:40

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to provide some more clarification. At the moment university and all postsecondary campuses are to remain open to ensure that vital services that students need are available and accessible, everything, of course, from library services to mental health services and, furthermore, other learning resources, whether they be computer labs and research labs. Of course, all precautions should be taken to limit large gatherings of individuals if they are accessing computer labs on campuses, but we're continuing to work with our universities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we also have thousands of students who are set to graduate from postsecondary institutions this year and given that the cancellation of classes has interrupted the required work of many students to complete their programs and given that many postsecondary programs require access to materials or facilities that are only available at these institutions, can the Minister of Advanced Education please inform the House of the measures being taken to mitigate the potential negative effects that the cancellation of classes could have on graduating students?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been speaking quite frequently with our postsecondary presidents and other administrators and reiterated to them that, of course, one of our top priorities is to ensure that students are able to graduate, that they are able to finish their academic programming. As we head into final exam season, we're looking at online mechanisms to deliver final exams and, where appropriate, of course, encouraging instructors to look at changing some final exam requirements where possible so that we can ensure that students are able to complete their studies on time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Assembly and Committee Measures

10. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:
- 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 the 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 an 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 that 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 consideration of the 2020-21 government estimates tabled on February 27, 2020, are deemed to be completed 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 3 hours by the Committee of Supply;
 - (iii) only members of the Official Opposition and members of the 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 the consideration of the 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 the main estimates has concluded or there are no members who wish to speak;
 - (h) the afternoon sitting on Tuesday, March 17, 2020, shall continue 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, 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 in on report of the 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 on 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.
- Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move Government Motion 10 on the Order Paper. I'd ask your instructions on whether you want me to read it first.
- The Speaker:** Hon. members, we will accept Government Motion 10 as it appears on the Order Paper, which should be located on your desks. I'll spare us the reading of it. You can proceed with the debate.
- Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recognize that the measures that we are taking are unprecedented, but the virus that we face, the pandemic that this province faces, is also unprecedented. I think nobody would disagree about that. The public health emergency that we face in this province, this country, and indeed the world is significant. The moment that we face together as a province now is not dissimilar to some of the big moments in the history of our province, including the Great Depression and World War II. It calls for unprecedented action and important work by this Chamber.
- Across the country I've seen for the last several days significant co-operation between opposition parties of all political stripes and governments to be able to make sure that stability is provided to jurisdictions, to our country, to our province, and indeed to other countries, states, and jurisdictions across the world. In New Brunswick the Official Opposition removed, withdrew a confidence motion to make sure that that government can continue

to work. The House of Commons parties have been co-operating in unprecedented ways.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a political issue. We face a significant fight in our province in the weeks to come and indeed probably the years to come. It is our responsibility to make sure that we are ready to do that. Each and every one of us, including yourself, was elected by our constituents to come to this Chamber to be able to represent them in this very building, and for moments like that, that is even more important.

The reality is that the number one thing we can do right now to help Albertans is to make sure that the government is funded for the months to come, to make sure that our health care system is funded. I was happy to discuss yesterday in great detail the step that the hon. Health minister and the Premier have made. We're already bringing in an additional half a billion dollars in health care funding to help us through these next several months. We must make sure that we are stable, and we must make sure that the government is funded going forward, Mr. Speaker.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, inside the Mother of Parliaments during World War II, famously, as bombs were falling on the city of London, the House of Commons still stood. In fact, when the House of Commons was hit by bombs, the Members of Parliament met the very next day in a different building to make sure that the seat of democracy could continue. It is our objective and the clear instructions from the Premier of Alberta to me as his House leader to make sure that this Chamber can sit as long as possible, to make sure that we can do the work as a seat of democracy inside this province in the months to come.

But the reality is that we face an invisible enemy, and I cannot guarantee to this Chamber any more than today that we be able to sit. I don't know what the status will be of your health, Mr. Speaker, of your staff's health, or of any member of this Chamber's health. We don't know what will take place, so our number one responsibility is to get this budget passed and to make sure that we are able to fund the Alberta government going forward.

In addition to that, inside this motion, Mr. Speaker, we also give me as the Government House Leader and the government the ability to adjourn the Assembly while not inside the Chamber. As you know, once the government passes a motion that allows the House leader to adjourn, we stand here at the end of a sitting, the Government House Leader gets up and says that we're done the sitting business, notifies you – there's no vote on that – and then we move to adjournment. The reality is that in this unprecedented situation that we're in, we may, if we go home on Thursday night, be in that spot by Sunday, where we are putting people in danger by even trying to bring back the Chamber, so this motion will give us the ability, in consultation, of course, with yourself as well as the Official Opposition House Leader, to be able to take that step if we need to for the safety of the Chamber or for the House. That's what we are trying to accomplish with this motion.

I should add one more thing, Mr. Speaker. We are putting the ability to remove oral notice for the next several weeks and be able to bring legislation in while removing that one day. That does not take away the legislative process but allows this Chamber to react with speed, if we need to, in an urgent moment going forward.

At the end of the day, I want to stress again that this is not a political moment. This is essential for this province, for the nurses of this province, for the doctors of this province, for the hospital system that is going to see increased demand – it already is – in the coming days, for our emergency services, and for the things that we are going to have to do economically in the weeks to come. The most important thing that we as one of the 87 elected members of this Chamber can do for Albertans right now is to pass this budget, Mr. Speaker. As such, I am taking unprecedented steps to make sure

that can happen as soon as possible because Albertans are depending on us.

I will start that process now by moving to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

2:50 Time Allocation on Government Motion 10

12. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

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.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I am, as discussed in my earlier comments in regard to Motion 10, taking the steps to make sure that there's appropriate time to be able to debate the motion. The opposition may not even need a full hour, and that's fine, Mr. Speaker, but we are providing the opportunity for that hour to take place as we discuss Motion 10. At the end of the day, the goal will be to move the Chamber forward as fast as possible to estimates and to be able to pass the budget tonight.

With that, I will yield the floor.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 12, which does allow the opportunity for one member of the Official Opposition to speak to the motion should they choose to do so, and I'd be happy to recognize a member of the Official Opposition now if they would like.

The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will rise on Motion 12 in regard to time allocation. You know, I appreciate that the government has an agenda that they would like to push forward and that there are things that we need to do today. I appreciate that.

What I do not appreciate is the fact that the Government House Leader stood up and had an opportunity to stand and talk all about Motion 10, did not give me an opportunity to then stand and speak to it without a time allocation allotment on it, which actually removes more time from the opposition side, which would have been something that we could have worked on together had we had communication back and forth across the floor. I will say what I have to say, and I will probably say this again many times this afternoon. The best way for us to move forward in this House to get anything done is to actually have a conversation with the Opposition House Leader so that we're able to do this together and not find out stuff on the floor.

[Motion carried]

Assembly and Committee Measures (continued)

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the support of the Chamber on time allocation and moving forward in a speedy way.

I'd like to briefly address the Official Opposition House Leader's comments in regard to Motion 10 and co-operation across the aisle. It is my hope that we are able inside this Chamber, inside the 30th Legislature of Alberta, to work together as we work through this crisis. I think Albertans are depending on this Chamber to work in partnership between the government and the opposition. The reality, though, is that this past Friday when the Premier met with

the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Leader of the Official Opposition was clear in a press conference afterwards that her party and she would do everything possible to block the budget.

Ms Sweet: Point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order has been called.

Point of Order

Speaking Twice in a Debate

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, a point of order. First, I just need clarity as to why the hon. member gets to speak twice to the motion that we've already had when he should be only speaking once.

Two, under 29(2)(a), clarity around making statements in the House to create disorder. If we are going to work collaboratively, which I have just clearly said on the floor, it would be great if the House leader would stand up and speak to Motion 10 and to how it affects the daily Routine for the rest of the day and potentially the weekend. Let's work together instead of bringing up historical rhetoric as we try to get through this pandemic and deal with the Orders of the Day.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader to respond to the point of order. I think that it's reasonable that we all endeavour to have a productive afternoon.

Mr. Jason Nixon: A hundred per cent, Mr. Speaker. I agree completely with the need for that. The reality is that I am speaking to Motion 10 and the decision points for the government to bring Motion 10, which I am directly responding to and will continue to as soon as you work through this point of order.

To also be clear, I adjourned debate on the previous motion. I did not stop speaking to it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader.

I would concur that he did adjourn debate and as such is continuing the time allotted that he had left in the 20 minutes that comes with being the first speaker to any government motion or any piece of legislation. The first speaker always has 20 minutes, of which the hon. Government House Leader has 12 minutes and 50 seconds remaining.

I would say, as I cautioned in my initial interjection, about sticking as much as possible to the content that's before us and less about the hows and the whys of how we got here. I think that has the best possibility of producing a very productive afternoon. There is no point of order.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Debate Continued

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am almost done and am prepared to yield the floor to be able to give the opposition as much time because we only have an hour to be able to debate this motion.

To be clear – I will finish with where I opened, Mr. Speaker – the government of Alberta, Alberta's government, will take every step necessary in the coming days and weeks to be able to protect our province and the people of this province as we face this unprecedented crisis. As I said, the number one responsibility of this Chamber is to get this budget passed and the government funded as soon as possible. I assure you and I assure Albertans through you that their government will take every step necessary to make sure that happens and that our front-line services are fully funded, and this House will not rise until we do just that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as you know, Government Motion 10 is a debatable motion. Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I would like to start by acknowledging that we are in unprecedented times, and we in the Official Opposition absolutely do support the recommendations of the chief medical officer of health, especially as it relates to a number of issues that she's brought up. We do support and understand the government's need to move quickly and potentially move differently in these circumstances. All that being acknowledged, I do not think that what is outlined in Government Motion 10 is in any way necessary.

To begin with, let us address what is occurring in other jurisdictions. The government claims that the same thing is happening in all other jurisdictions. That isn't the case. In other jurisdictions they are passing interim finance bills. It is very different than forcing a budget through on short notice with little public scrutiny. In my view, Mr. Speaker, we as elected representatives here in this House serve a number of functions, but there are very few functions of this job that hold us to a higher responsibility than to be transparent and honest with the public about how we are spending their money. I don't think there is any duty that falls upon us more heavily than that duty.

The idea that while in every other jurisdiction they passed temporary finance measures, we are dealing with Government Motion 10, a motion which will allow the passage of the budget with an unprecedented lack of oversight and scrutiny by the opposition, by the media, and by the public – fundamentally what this motion does is that it removes any ability for public scrutiny on the budget. That is a deep concern to me, particularly when it was the case that even a year ago we saw the Premier publicly, in the media, acknowledging that they didn't need to pass a budget in the spring because the government can operate on special warrants. He's well aware of the procedure. They did it just last year. They can't possibly have forgotten. In addition, there are a number of other options open. We could pass an interim supply measure. Those go through the House in three hours, the same amount of time that has been left to debate this budget.

So I think that I have very, very deep concerns about what it is that's happening in this motion because, again, if there's one function – you know, it's been said, and I wish I could remember who had said it: don't tell me what your values are; show me your budget, and I'll tell you what your values are. It's true. I think that removing the ability of the public to see through that messaging, to see into the budget, to see into what's most important about this role in government is deeply, deeply disturbing to me. This motion removes over 30 hours of budget debate and compresses it into three hours. That's a significant shortening of the time that the opposition has to consider the budget.

3:00

Now, again, I acknowledge that we're in unprecedented times, and I'd be more than happy to work on unprecedented measures like bringing in an interim supply and moving it very quickly if, for some reason, cabinet didn't feel it had the authority to operate on special warrants, which in my view it does. Instead, we have this. Mr. Speaker, I don't want to assume the reason underlying it, but the effect is that when this pandemic ends and we return to business hopefully as usual as possible, the public loses that opportunity to have scrutiny and to have oversight of the budget, which – again, one of the single most important things that a government does is allocate the money, the money that belongs, as members of the opposition are no doubt as familiar as I am, to all of us, not just

those of us here in the Chamber, not just those of us in the government but every single citizen in this province. So I think that watching this is an incredible concern for me.

In the absence of passing the budget, the government has a number of mechanisms at its disposal, and I think the concern that I have here is that it is a step. It is a step further on a path to reduce transparency. Again, I understand that it's the fact that right now we are in a crisis. We are in unprecedented times. We need to act quickly, but I think that we need to be very aware that while we are acting quickly, while we are reacting to the crisis, the measures that we bring in to limit public oversight, to limit the rights of the citizens of this province, are measures which are temporary. Removing scrutiny of the budget in its entirety is not a temporary measure. An interim finance bill would be a temporary measure.

In addition, you know, it is my belief – and obviously the government members disagree – that this budget was based on economic forecasts that were unrealistic in the first place. Those forecasts were – normally, the government takes the average of all the private-sector forecasts. In this instance the government predicted higher than any single one of those private-sector forecasts – that's not the standard methodology – which means that the budget was based on unrealistic assumptions. Even that budget, which two weeks ago was based on unrealistic assumptions, which was unlikely to come to fruition, has now been proven to be wildly unrealistic. Between the drop in the price of oil and now the pandemic, this becomes even worse.

Mr. Speaker, I think I will close by saying that I'm incredibly concerned at this time that this is the measure that's being taken when there were so many other measures available to us.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise on Government Motion 10. Let me just say that I appreciate the debate from the hon. member across. Let me say that what was higher than our estimates for revenue in this budget was the previous government's estimates when they did it, which were \$6 billion higher than what we estimated. Just for an interesting point.

Further, with the comparison to what Ontario did, Ontario didn't even move their budget yet, so they went with warrants. Ours, of course, was moved and under way with some estimates ahead, so not necessarily a fair comparison. What I'm given to understand is that New Brunswick passed their budget and all their estimates in under 20 minutes because of the COVID-19 situation.

Mr. Speaker, having said all of that, back to . . . [interjections] I can hardly hear myself talk. The members across can't – I guess they don't want to use the hour. They'd rather yell across the aisle for the whole hour.

Nonetheless, we're going to move on with it, Mr. Speaker. I have an amendment to offer, with your permission. I have the requisite copies here. Shall I wait?

The Speaker: If you can get it to the table, we'll get it distributed to a few key people in the Chamber, and then we'll proceed, if we can do that.

Mr. McIver: I'll rise with your permission.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will refer to this as amendment A1.

The hon. Minister of Transportation has the call.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Government Motion 10 be amended as follows. Part A is amended (a) by striking out clause (a)(ii) and substituting the following:

(ii) if the Assembly stands adjourned, advise the Speaker, following consultation with the Official Opposition House Leader, 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, following consultation with the Official Opposition House Leader, advises the Speaker that the Assembly must meet to transact its business;

and (b) by adding the following after clause (a):

(a.1) at any time during the 2020 Spring Sitting of the Second Session of the 30th Legislature the Government House Leader may, upon providing a minimum of 24 hours' written notice, advise the Speaker that the public interest requires the Assembly to sit extended hours as follows:

- (i) beyond the normal adjournment hour on Thursday;
- (ii) on Friday, Saturday or Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. commencing with prayers followed by
 - (A) the ordinary daily Routine business consisting of the items set out in Standing Order 7(1), with Oral Question Period commencing at 10:20 a.m. and, for the purpose of Standing Order 7(7) and (8), the daily Routine shall be deemed completed at 11:30 a.m., and
 - (B) Orders of the Day, with the order of business for consideration of the Assembly to be those items set out in Standing Order 8(2)

and the Speaker shall give notice that the Assembly shall meet at that time to transact its business.

In clause (c) by adding “, following consultation with the Official Opposition House Leader,” before “advise the Speaker or the Assembly in accordance with clause (a)”; and in clause (d) by adding “the Speaker and” before “the Official Opposition House Leader”; in clause (g)(vi) by striking out “, upon notice given by the mover of the amendment to the Clerk of the Assembly,”; and by adding the following after clause (j):

(k) in respect of each public bill other than a government bill that is shown on the Order Paper as referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills, the application of the time period for the committee to report back to the Assembly under Standing Order 74.11(2) to that bill is suspended.

Part B is amended as follows: in clause (b) by adding “, (a.1)” after “clause (a)”; in clause (c) by adding “and (k)” after “clause (b)”.

So it is, Mr. Speaker. I hope that members of the House will see fit to approve this amendment so we can get on with the business of the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Official Opposition House Leader and the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

3:10

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and to speak to the amendment. I was, you know, smiling away at the hon. member who was introducing the amendment, the Minister of Transportation, while he was speaking about consultation with the Official Opposition House Leader as if he felt that maybe he was giving me a gift that I didn't know about. I think that, again, we should be aware that when we work across party lines, it isn't just something special to have consulted with the Official Opposition; it's actually part of democracy, so I've been told. I know that this is

a learning opportunity for all of us to realize that working with the opposition exists.

Also, the fun fact about this amendment is that your House leader and I actually worked together on the wording of it, so this is co-operation. [interjections] I know; it's great. The only thing that we did not talk about and that is part of this amendment that I do want to highlight is the changes to the spring sitting and the Friday, Saturday, Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. I'm just looking for a point of clarity. My understanding is that this does not necessarily come into effect this weekend although it may, depending on how things progress. This could be another weekend at any time. I'm just wondering if the House leader would actually be able to let us know if we would be sitting tomorrow, if we're going to be sitting on the weekend. Is there a plan for the rest of the week given that we may be here this weekend?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Opposition House Leader is one hundred per cent correct. The intention is not necessarily for this weekend or, quite frankly, for any weekend. We'll have to determine that as we go forward. As for the specific question of whether or not I could inform the Chamber if we would need to do that this weekend, I'm not prepared to do that yet at this exact moment. I think we're going to have to get through this afternoon, but I will commit to having a meeting with the Official Opposition House Leader tomorrow, and then we'll discuss the rest of the week after we get through this afternoon.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else wishing to provide a brief question or comment under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: Is there anyone else wishing to speak to Government Motion 10? I see that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to oppose Government Motion 10, and that is because there is no need for this motion and there is no need for these actions. Cabinet and the Legislature have all of the tools that they need to ensure that our health, social services, and other systems are appropriately funded through an emergency. There is no need to push through at this time an austerity budget, where once we are through the worst of the pandemic, hopefully in the next couple of months but who knows, we will revert to a situation where we have proposed cuts to income support, to seniors' benefits, to our public health agency even, which is a line that we're being asked to vote on.

There's absolutely no need to lay before this Legislature a budget – a budget, first of all, is called a matter of confidence because the Legislature must have confidence, like back when the Westminster system was developed, in the advice, the messages that they are giving to the Crown, for their requests for supply, Mr. Speaker. We don't have confidence in any of the revenue projections. The revenue projections are wrong. The deficit projection is wrong. The commodity price projections are wrong. The unemployment rate projections are wrong. There is no way – there is not an expert, a commentator, a market participant in this province that thinks that the WTI forecast is at \$58 a barrel, which even this updated request for supply assumes. There is not one analyst, one trader, one expert that thinks that that number is in any way, shape, or form reflective of reality; therefore, I do not have confidence in any of it.

A budget must be something that is appropriately debated. There is a reason why it has a different process than bills, Mr. Speaker, and there is a reason why it needs an appropriate time with real numbers, not fake numbers, to guide us through this period.

Now, we have just seen even the government of Saskatchewan enact special warrants about three, four weeks ago to take them through what they thought was going to be an election period, which it's not now, so they may have to go back in for interim supply. But there is no reason why the Lieutenant Governor would disallow this cabinet from issuing a special warrant. Absolutely none.

I mean, there have been times in the Westminster system, Mr. Speaker, where governments have essentially used special warrants as a way to avoid bringing a matter of confidence into the House, generally speaking, sometimes in minority parliaments, where they think they can't get their budget through, so they've abused that process a little bit, tried to colour outside the lines, and then the Queen's representative, whether it's a Governor General or a Lieutenant Governor, has to say: no; you have to bring this before the Legislature. We've certainly seen that in Canadian history, but this is not that. This is a legitimate public emergency, and we would work with the government on using whatever tools they need, whether it's a special warrant, whether it's interim supply, to get through this so that we can have the right kind of debate on the right kind of budget when the time comes.

Now, as my hon. colleague for Calgary-Mountain View indicated, I'm not going to speculate on the government's motivations for ramming through this budget, but I will talk about what the outcomes will be, and that is: this fall we will be moving towards a bargaining mandate that has been given through this budget and through the amounts that have been voted on for health care, that pursues layoffs in general support services, for example, in the health care system, that pursues an agenda of privatizing lab services – that was also given in the government's bargaining mandate – an agenda that proposes the reduction of 500 FTE nursing positions plus 60 in the home-care sector. That's going to be the reversion to the status quo that we're being asked to vote on, well, today, I guess, and all enabled by this motion, Mr. Speaker, that is unprecedented, indeed, in its attempt to short-circuit the institutions of democracy in this province.

We have already seen far too much of this in this Chamber, with the firing of the Election Commissioner, with a number of the standing order changes, even down to the smallest thing like taking away introductions. But this is a bridge too far. This is short-circuiting the budget process, and that is why there is no need for it, as I have outlined. It is certainly a dangerous road to walk down, Mr. Speaker, with respect to not even allowing government backbenchers the time to look through the budget, to query the various budget lines. In fact, some of these measures even take it further with respect to what the government has done in terms of short-circuiting their own backbenchers' ability to vote.

So I cannot – absolutely cannot – support this motion just as I cannot support this budget. I will not look at my constituents come fall and say: "Yes; I do think it's appropriate to cut \$40 million out of the income support line when we are looking at a massive recession." I will not look at my constituents come this fall and say: "Yeah; I think it's appropriate to have all of those layoffs at SAIT and NAIT when we might be in a position where we need to be retraining workers in a massive form of economic stimulus." I will not turn around and look at my constituents and say, "Yes; I do think it's appropriate that tuition is skyrocketing, your personal income taxes are going up, or at least the amount that you're paying is going up, your seniors' benefits aren't indexed – neither is your AISH – you have a number of other new fees and other stresses on your budget, and oh, by the way, we're laying off people by the dozens out of the University of Lethbridge and the college, and I

think that's the right way to proceed" as we're trying to dig our way out of an unprecedented pandemic and subsequent recession. I'm not going to look at my constituents and say: "Yeah; I voted for that." Absolutely not.

3:20

The other thing I'm not going to say to my constituents is that I allowed this government to circumvent the normal workings of democracy to make that budget happen. Absolutely not. So that is why I rise to oppose this, Mr. Speaker. I am urging the government to use the well-worn tools of Westminster parliaments everywhere in terms of getting through emergency times or times when the government requires supply to bridge over a fiscal year. This is really straightforward stuff – I think I learned about it in either poli-sci 101 or Canadian politics – really, really straightforward stuff that any layperson can understand.

I was shocked to see some of the government's response or rationale for doing this, relying on some kind of Americanized version of spending bills and so on. That is a complete misread of how our province works and how parliaments work that are run like ours. There is no need for that kind of disinformation to the public, and there's no need to take away the opposition's right, the people who elected us, to examine the government's budget papers through the normal workings of estimates once we have a real budget to examine come the fall. There's no need.

We will still have our usual debates in this Chamber. I will still have been elected by the people of Lethbridge-West to ask certain questions about the provision of public health care and public education. That part won't change, Mr. Speaker, but what will change are these totally crazy economic projections, these total lunacy assumptions for WTI, for employment, for revenue. That will change because it will be an honest document that we will be laying before the people, and we will have arrived at this process in an honest way that does not undermine our democratic right and our obligations as opposition members.

With that, I conclude my remarks.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise under 29(2)(a). First of all, it's always shocking to me to watch – clearly, it was shocking to me when I was in opposition to watch how the NDP treated the members of their government caucus. Again, you see a member of, I guess, what that member would call her front bench of her caucus showing how they feel about caucus members, obviously, in their caucus. Let me be clear. From our perspective inside this party, we don't have backbenchers; we have government caucus members, and we're very proud to have them as part of our team. If that hon. member would like to test this Chamber to see if the majority still have confidence in the government, she's welcome to, and I suspect in the coming hours she'll find out that this Chamber still has confidence, certainly, in the government.

As for some of the member's comments, the reality is that she referred specifically to warrants. I want to talk about that. What that hon. member would be calling for, if we were to go with warrants, is that we would have had to adjourn. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we would have had to adjourn yesterday in order to be adjourned long enough to be able to bring in warrants in time for the next fiscal year. That's a fact. That hon. member knows that, so what she is proposing would be that we would shut this Chamber down at the very moment that Albertans need us to be here doing our job that they elected us to do. That hon. member may be in a hurry to run

back to her constituency. This government is not. We are here to fight for Albertans each and every day. We will not prorogue the House unless we absolutely have to. Let me be clear about that.

In addition to that, she then referred to interim and supplementary supply. I won't bother, Mr. Speaker, to go into the differences between those two because of time, but the reality is that that would add time to the process. That would add significant time. It would require Treasury to go back and go through a documentation process that would take days and weeks, weeks that Albertans do not have. That is the point. That is the reality.

What the NDP are proposing is attempting to shut down government, Mr. Speaker, to stop the very people that they say that they're here to support from being paid to do the work that they need to do right now during an unprecedented emergency inside our province. It is extraordinarily disappointing to continue to see the opposition go down this route, Mr. Speaker.

Now, lastly, I want to address the accusation that this somehow goes against democracy. Mr. Speaker, this House is democracy. We were elected inside this Chamber. We are the elected representatives of Alberta, and this House will make a decision, including those members, who will have the opportunity to democratically vote on the budget and, assuming that this motion passes, will have every opportunity to be able to question the remaining ministers who have not gone through estimates processes right here.

Lastly, the government caucus members who have chosen not to speak to be able to give the opposition every opportunity that they can to participate in this process, Mr. Speaker, through you to them: thank you for your efforts in helping the opposition to do their role. I can assure you that you're a valued member of our team, and we are going to continue to do everything that we can to help your constituents. You know what? We're going to do everything we can to help their constituents, too.

The Speaker: Hon. members, does anyone else have a brief question or comment under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? There's a minute and 30 remaining.

Seeing none, I believe the hon. Opposition House Leader is rising on debate.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel like we haven't heard enough from me today yet. I am standing up in response to Government Motion 10. There was a lot to unpack there with the Government House Leader. I think now that we're talking to each other, we're quite enjoying it, so that's good.

In regard to this motion, you know, the Government House Leader just spoke about democracy, and he's right. This is a democratic institution, and I believe in democracy. It's part of my lovely critic title. To be clear, when we look at this motion that was introduced yesterday without any consultation with the opposition, this is where everything kind of starts to fall apart. The government will continue to stand, and they're using examples across the country and across the provinces about collaboration and these great examples of budgets being passed or Houses being adjourned and interim supply or no budgets whatsoever. There are a couple of things that I want to be clear about. The budget that the hon. member mentioned from – which province was it? – Nova Scotia, that budget that just passed had a significant increase to health. I think it was \$3.5, something like that, billion, million. I don't know. There was a significant increase in health on top of what it was to significantly address that piece.

The federal government had an agreement that was created between all four parties, where all four parties got together and they sat down and they had a discussion, and that discussion was able to

move through different things that each party needed to be able to work on the issues going forward. Yes?

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the member.

Ms Sweet: I have an amendment. How much time do I have?

The Speaker: It just looks like a large group of papers in yours hands. Perhaps you're moving an amendment. Given the lack of pages . . .

Ms Sweet: Oh, yeah. Okay.

The Speaker: . . . if that is your intent, if you can send it up here, we'll do some paperwork. I'll allow you to continue to speak, and then I'll rise again to address how we'll call the amendment a little bit later in your remarks. If that's your intent.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can move an amendment. I do have an amendment, and I recognize that it would be great for all the members of the House to be able to see it while I discuss it. Given that, I will have it handed out so everybody can have a copy. This is the original.

The Speaker: You send that. Yeah.

Ms Sweet: Thank you. Can I keep going?

The Speaker: Yeah.

Ms Sweet: Okay. Do I need to read it into the record, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: That would be helpful.

3:30

Ms Sweet: Okay. Given my time allotment I will read fast. Okay. I move that Government Motion 10 be amended in part A as follows: (a) in clause (b) by striking out subclause (i) and substituting the following:

The Government House Leader may file a revised sessional calendar with the Clerk only if the government has, during the 30-day period immediately before the date on which the revised sessional calendar is filed, conducted a consultation with the Official Opposition House Leader in respect of the filing of that revised sessional calendar, and if the Official Opposition House Leader has provided to the Clerk a written acknowledgement that the consultation has been conducted, the Clerk must receive and immediately publish the revised sessional calendar.

So if you consult, and I say you did, we can continue.

- (ii) by adding the following immediately after clause (ii):
 - (iii) each document filed under subclause (ii) stands referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and that committee must, within 20 days of the date on which the document is filed, meet to consider that document, and
 - (iv) the government must, in accordance with a schedule that is agreed to by the Official Opposition House Leader, provide regular informational briefings to the Official Opposition House Leader in respect of the [coronavirus] COVID-19 pandemic;
- (b) by adding the following immediately after clause (d):
 - (d.1) if the Speaker does not receive a copy of the notice referred to in clause (d), Standing Order 39(1) shall apply to the motion or bill to which the notice relates;
- (c) by adding the following immediately after clause (j):
 - (j.1) the government must provide to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts a report summarizing any expenditures under a special warrant issued during

the period from passage of this motion and ending March 31, 2021, and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts must

- (i) immediately conduct a review of that report, and
- (ii) report the committee findings, if any, with respect to the government's report to the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A2. Please proceed.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So A2. Now, the reason that we did this and the opposition was looking at this was for a couple of different reasons. One, we wanted to be able to have a 30-day period immediately before the date of which the sessional calendar came out because given the period of time, whether we end up having to leave this place at some point and adjourn, that we would give notice to all members of this House within 30 days when they have to return. That would help impact whether or not people are travelling, whether they would know what their schedule looks like. We would have constituency breaks figured out. The members of the House would actually be informed of the schedule, and, you know, work with the opposition on that. The document is filed with the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and the committee must meet within 20 days of the date on which the document was filed.

Let's be clear. These clauses around Public Accounts. If at some point the budget passes today, let's say that that does happen, we don't know yet because I don't want to presume the House and proceed with the decision. But if it does happen and there is a requirement still due to the pandemic, an additional requirement for special warrants, which this government will say they can't do, we know that they may potentially be able to do that. Public Accounts is the area and the committee that is responsible for ensuring the best interest of Albertans and that accounts are being used and finances are being used effectively.

There is no reason – this happened federally, and the federal government and all four parties agreed. We actually borrowed this from our lovely counterparts federally, that just agreed to all of this. This was something that all four parties agreed to. I encourage the government to do that. It's being open. It's being transparent. It's telling Albertans why you're having to spend extra money outside of your budget and giving an opportunity for oversight, and I think this government has repeatedly said that you're fine with oversight, you're fine with transparency, you're fine with consultation. Well, this gives you the opportunity to do that if you have to do special warrants as well as making sure that you're reporting the use of those special warrants back to the Legislature.

Again, this is just about open transparency. This is about informing Albertans, you know, what the outcome of this pandemic may mean for the overall budget of Albertans. If this budget is passed today, we won't have anything to reflect on, unless you are giving us quarterlies, in regard to where we will go and what kind of financial means this province is going to need in, you know, four months from now, five months from now. I would suspect that we may need special warrants. I would suspect that the government would be open and willing to be transparent about those special warrants.

I would like to encourage the Government House Leader to think about that. Then, finally, of course, we have heard numerous times from the government that you're willing to give regular informative briefings to the opposition in regard to the coronavirus; however, we've had one. We haven't had one since. It would be nice to have those actually happening, and this amendment would give a

goodwill to the opposition to say that you're willing to follow through on what you've committed to publicly and to the opposition and have that happen.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for a brief question or comment. I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise just to quickly respond to the amendment. Now, first of all, there are some things in the amendment that are quite reasonable to ask for, Mr. Speaker. I do want to point out, though, that in putting them in an amendment, it's actually problematic to be that prescriptive. First of all, we are required already to consult with the Official Opposition House Leader in regard to informing her caucus, and, through her, when we're coming back, or when we're leaving, and those types of things. That will continue to happen as it always does.

Well, I'll give you one example of why some of the good can't go through with this amendment because of some of the problems. One of the biggest is the section that says:

the government must, in accordance with a schedule that is agreed to by the Official Opposition House Leader, provide regular informational briefings to the Official Opposition House Leader in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, it is very reasonable for the Official Opposition to have access to briefings, Mr. Speaker. As I have previously indicated to the Opposition House Leader, I will make sure that those are happening on a regular basis. But, as I'm sure you can appreciate, the senior health officials that provide those briefings need to have maximum flexibility while they're dealing with this crisis situation, and I can't pass an amendment that would provide a prescriptive process for the Opposition House Leader to decide everything from schedule, along those lines. Through you to her and her caucus, I will commit to make sure those briefings are happening on a regular basis.

I would also point out, Mr. Speaker, that Standing Order 3(8) – I know the Official Opposition House Leader may not be aware of Standing Order 3(8) – already allows me as the Government House Leader and allows the government to be able to call the House back at any time. So what's taking place there is not abnormal and is a completely normal part of the process.

Again, while I won't pass this amendment because of the prescriptive portions of it, I will make clear to this House, Mr. Speaker, that we will follow the process that we have always followed, that is to consult with the Official Opposition House Leader so that she is well aware of the schedule and is able to understand what is taking place with the Assembly, so she can communicate to her caucus, the Official Opposition, who have an important role to play in this Chamber.

With that said, while there are some good intentions, I think, inside this amendment, there are portions of it that are extremely problematic, and I would urge my colleagues to vote it down.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for an additional brief question or comment. There are approximately two minutes and 30 seconds left. The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Government House Leader's response to our amendment, and I appreciate that he has commented on the sessional calendar – that's fine – and on the feeling of some of the briefings and lack thereof.

What I didn't hear from the hon. Government House Leader is the openness and transparency around Public Accounts and why the government wouldn't want to have any financial special warrants or anything that this government may have to do through the

pandemic, why he wouldn't want to be reporting to Public Accounts and being open and transparent with Albertans around any expenditures that maybe occurred outside of the budget that may or may not pass today.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'll be quick because I don't know where the time is on the clock, but Public Accounts will continue to have their role within our democracy to be able to hold us accountable. The problem, again, would be the prescriptive days that are within this amendment. The way it is written would focus us to have to be in on certain days. It could be the Easter long weekend, for all I know, the way that this has been written up. So, again, I feel more comfortable with the process that is already in place to make sure Public Accounts can do their work.

The Speaker: There's only one minute and 14 seconds left in Standing Order 29(2)(a) for a brief question or comment.

Seeing none, I've noticed the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is very keen to get in on debate. We are debating amendment A2.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to amendment A2, which has added a number of, I think, quite simple and clear steps for us to ensure some transparency and some accountability into the process, as the Opposition House Leader has suggested. These actually aren't new steps; they provide clarity and transparency, which apparently the government is wishing to avoid. In fact, the whole intention of Motion 10, for which this is an amendment, is an attempt to avoid transparency and accountability by this government. The Government House Leader, just moments ago, suggested that it was a terrible thing that maybe somebody was suggesting in this House that the intention at this point was to shut the House down. That would be a terrible thing, I heard him say. He was accusing us of wanting to do that, but, in fact, the reality is that's exactly what Motion 10 is doing. Motion 10 is shutting down the democratic process in this House so that we can shut down the House so that the government can avoid accountability and transparency.

3:40

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The very person who is complaining about these activities is in fact the primary perpetrator of these activities, and I think that's very disconcerting, that we would have a government move forward in such a way as to remove the rights of members of this House, including the backbenchers on the government side, who are literally, here in this case, voting to remove their own right to speak to the government on the issues of the budget. By taking the estimates process, which should have been providing those members participation in a 30-hour process, reducing it to a three-hour process, taking it away from committee, where there is immediate interchange with the minister involved, to the House, where you have less control and you cannot do a back-and-forth; instead, the time is controlled, this motion actually excludes those members from having participation in that process. So they were voting to remove themselves from the democratic process here in this motion.

Of course this motion needs to be amended. It actually defies the whole basis of Westminster democracy that has been used in this Legislature since the day of its inception. You know, I'm very disconcerted at what I see as this enabling act of 2020 that is inside this government motion. I think that the public needs to be aware of

what is happening and why this motion needs to be amended in this way, because we need to bring transparency and we need to bring accountability back into this Legislature at a time when the government is trying to avoid both of those things.

[The Speaker in the chair]

If they indeed understood their budget to be reasonable and defensible, they would simply keep the House open and engage in the processes of arguing that their budget is reasonable and defensible. But we know that they don't believe either of those things because they are trying to, at this time, reduce the amount of access that not only the opposition members, a very noble part of Westminster democracy, but the backbench members as well from actually having a chance to speak to the budget that is being brought forward. That's a very callous move by a government that is seeking to impose a budget which they know they can neither defend nor properly demonstrate to the citizens of the province of Alberta is necessary.

Now, there have been comments that other places around the country have found ways to move forward on this. I want to speak to that a little bit. The reality is that in the other places in the country of Canada, they have found ways to move forward because they have not been introducing such a regressive budget as we happen to see here. For example, it's been mentioned by the Minister of Transportation, I believe, that New Brunswick passed their budget. But I also want to point out that in the New Brunswick budget they were increasing health costs by more than population increase and by inflation. So, in fact, they were voting on a budget that was 3.9 per cent greater than the budget they had previously in their Legislature.

Had we had the same kind of budget with a 3.9 per cent increase, we might have something new to talk about, but that's not what we're doing. In the middle of a pandemic this government is ignoring both population growth and inflation, and therefore is offering real cuts to health care in this province. Even with the hurried and quickly thought over, written on the back of a napkin addition of \$500 million into the Health budget, they are still less than they should be. They should be much closer to a billion dollars. Albertans are still going to be receiving fewer dollars available for the citizens to ensure their safety at a time of significant crisis in this province. It's something that's completely unacceptable.

Now, had they brought forward a reasonable budget that was based on reasonable estimates of income and reasonable estimates of demand such as in the health care budget, then of course we'd be sitting down having these discussions with this government and their backbenchers. But I cannot stand here and support a budget that does exactly the opposite, that threatens the well-being of our health care system, that has been tied together at the same time with the actions of a Health ministry that has been ripping up contracts, that has been announcing in the middle of a pandemic not only the removal of contracts from doctors but change in their payment schedules, and now we have the radiologists as well that are being involved.

This is the kind of misbehaviour by this government that makes it impossible for us to support this kind of budget, and as such I really feel this budget needs to be amended. I believe that the government should be supporting amendment A2, and as such I will cede the rest of my time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to amendment A2?

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Speaker: We are back on Government Motion 10. Is there anyone else wishing to speak? I see the hon. member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll just continue on where my colleague from Lethbridge-West and my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford left off, and that is the budget before us and the process that's been outlined. You know, I think that the recent events, namely COVID-19 and the drop in the price of oil as well as the international shock that we're all in, really give an opportunity for pause for the good people at Treasury Board and Finance to take another look at what they've got before us here. The people of Alberta want to know that they have faith in the fiscal plan of the province of Alberta. The 2020-23 fiscal plan as it's identified here and that I'm looking through now is far off in many respects. Not only has the economic outlook drastically changed from what's identified in the government's budget, the economic outlook which, we all know, talks about \$58 oil over the forecast period. That forecast period, you know, looking at the price of oil, of course, is challenging. Today it's around, I think, \$27, and that's less than half of the identified forecast amount that the government has put in their budget.

A budget like this takes several months. They would have started probably in mid-fall to put the numbers together. The energy and economic assumptions probably took them until Christmas to firm up with the private-sector forecasters and others that do this. Then they would have probably tried to push to get the latest forecast just before they dropped the budget on February 27.

We know that, you know, January numbers were very different than what we're looking at today, March 17, St. Patrick's Day, Mr. Speaker. The March 17 numbers on all of these economic assumptions are far, far, far off. It behooves everyone in this Chamber to have the best set of numbers before us, and we don't have that. The economic indicators, as I've indicated, are far off. We've got \$58 oil, WCS \$51.20. It talks about a real GDP positive change, Mr. Speaker, of 2.5 per cent. Canada is on the verge of a recession. Alberta has not called that yet, but 2.5 per cent GDP growth in this province is unrealistic for this forecast period. That is what is identified here, and that's part of what this budget is built on.

3:50

As well, if you look at the unemployment rate, it talks about this being 6.7 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Does anybody – does anybody – have an accurate estimation today of what this is going to be? No. We don't have the numbers today. We'll get those soon from Stats Canada, but 6.7 per cent is going to be eclipsed by a far higher number.

Mr. Speaker, the revenue projections in this budget look like – of course, I haven't been able to find the sensitivities for every dollar up or down. It might be taken out of this budget. We always included sensitivities to all of our economic indicators, and I don't see them here. Perhaps they're here, and members of the government, if they want to 29(2)(a) me, can tell me where those are in the budget. I don't think they're here. But we do know that the revenue projection, at a conservative estimate of difference, is \$8 billion in revenue. Eight billion dollars on the revenue that's here is profoundly significant and should be a cause for concern to members on the other side as well as the expenditures. We haven't seen the full expenditures package that will come as a result of COVID-19.

In the federal government's announcements that are upcoming in the next few days, there will be a fiscal stimulus package, and this

budget should be delayed if only for the reason that I'm going to talk about now, which is that there will likely be a fiscal stimulus package in this fiscal year, but it's not identified in the budget. We know about half a billion dollars for Health, Mr. Speaker, but that's not fiscal stimulus. That's caring for COVID-19 effects in this province. Fiscal stimulus, real fiscal stimulus, will look like billions of dollars that will go to the capital plan, that will go to other ministries here in terms of addressing this economic shock that we are going to be in.

Mr. Speaker, the actions of the government are nothing less than irresponsible in bringing forward and pushing this budget, which is so far off in its estimations and forecasts to be somewhat laughable. So I would say that from the revenue side, the estimates side, it should be rewritten. I won't support this motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 12, which was passed earlier this afternoon, I am now required to put all questions to the disposal of Government Motion 10. That said, I will now put the question.

[Government Motion 10 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are coming to Committee of Supply. Given that there are a number of government officials coming to the Chamber to assist with supply today, we will take an up-to-five-minute recess to set the Chamber for them and allow the opposition to have their full three hours of debate.

[The Assembly adjourned from 3:54 p.m. to 3:57 p.m.]

Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to call the committee to order.

Hon. members, guests, Ben McKay in particular, welcome to this Chamber. I will outline the process for this afternoon. The speaking order and times are prescribed by the standing orders and Government Motion 10 passed earlier today and are as follows:

- (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 consideration of the 2020-21 government estimates tabled on February 27, 2020, are deemed to be completed 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 the 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 the consideration of the 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 the main estimates has concluded or there are no members who wish to speak;

- (h) the afternoon sitting on Tuesday, March 17, 2020, shall continue 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 would now like to call on the hon. Government House Leader or member of Executive Council to start.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Madam Chair, we're ready to proceed. We have no opening remarks.

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise today. I want to begin by expressing my real disappointment that this is the process we are undergoing, that for our largest ministry, our largest expenditure, in the middle of what might be one of the largest pressures we have ever seen on that said ministry, we are being reduced from the six hours of estimates that were to have been allotted for this ministry to give Albertans the opportunity for the honesty, scrutiny, and transparency that this government owes Albertans, that that is now being compressed and has to be contained within the singular three hours.

It's unfortunate, because what we're seeing with this government, indeed, with this budget and their response to this pandemic is a lot of half measures. They are waiting on Ottawa. They are standing back trying to determine how they can spend the fewest dollars possible at a time when Albertans are looking for their government to step up, be clear, and have their backs. What we need, Madam Chair, are full measures.

4:00

This government is listening to medical experts when it comes to responding to this pandemic. I applaud them for that. I appreciate Dr. Hinshaw and all that she's offered and that this government is taking her advice, but they also need to listen to them when it comes to the health care system as a whole.

So I will get to it. I'd like to begin with a few questions specifically on the numbers. Question 1. A significant change to Budget 2020 since it was tabled on February 27, 2020, is the \$500 million increase to Health, the Health budget forecast, the baseline for 2019-2020, as noted on page 126 of the fiscal plan, at \$20.828 billion. With the extra funds put in place, as announced on Sunday, the Health budget for 2020-2021 is now set at \$21.116 billion. Now, let me be clear. This amounts to a real cut to Health in the amount of \$462 million in the midst of a pandemic. My first question to the minister: why are you cutting the Health budget in real terms during a pandemic?

My second question. In late December 2019 the COVID-19 outbreak occurred in Wuhan, China. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization declared a public health emergency of international concern. We learned from Finance officials that the government finalized their budget for 2020 in mid-February. My question is this. During a global health emergency you decided to table a budget that included cuts to funding for population and public health. It's on page 126 of the fiscal plan. First, I want to know if you stand by that decision, Minister. Second, why did you choose to cut the funding for public health in the face of a pandemic?

Question 3. In Budget 2020 as presented on February 27, in the face of the World Health Organization's declaration of a global health emergency the minister put forward a budget that cuts funding to acute care. On page 126 of the fiscal plan it notes that acute care is being cut by \$117 million in nominal terms. That's a cut of \$255 million in real terms. Any way you slice it, the minister has decided that in the face of a then epidemic, now a pandemic, it was a good idea to cut funding for acute care – that is, our hospitals – in Alberta. To the minister: do you stand by that decision? Can you tell this Legislature and all Albertans why you considered it good public policy to cut hospital care in the context of a pandemic? Can you tell our front-line health care workers why, in the face of a pandemic, you were cutting the funding that supports them in hospital?

Question 4. The minister knows well that population growth and inflation are real factors . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order, probably more of a point of clarification. Is it the member's intention to list questions like this, or did the member want to go back and forth?

The Chair: There's no back and forth for the procedure. It's up to 10-minute speaking spots per member.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Could we choose to go back and forth?

The Chair: Not for this process . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, here, I will move, then, for unanimous consent of committee to go back and forth, and if the Chamber has consent on that, then we can move back and forth . . .

Mr. Shepherd: That is not my request, Madam Chair. I'm quite content with the 10-minute blocks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Okay. Fine.

Mr. Shepherd: If I may continue, Madam Chair, without further interruption.

Question 4. The minister knows well that population growth and inflation are real factors that influence his budget. This is a reality known by any basic student of economics and confirmed on page 52 of this government's fiscal plan, which estimates that population growth will be 1.6 per cent and inflation will be 2 per cent for a total of 3.6 per cent. Simply put, for the Health budget to simply stay even in real terms, it would have to increase by \$962 million. Now, we know that in real terms, adjusting for population and inflation, this minister is in fact planning to cut the Health budget by \$462 million, again, in the face of a pandemic.

And it's that pandemic that I'd like to focus on in terms of this budget and these questions. In a normal year, well, we can keep that system whole by simply adjusting for population and inflation. But, of course, with the advent of COVID-19 and the pandemic we know that we have an additional budget pressure. To the minister. You've amended this budget to account for COVID-19. Your estimate is that you need to invest an additional \$500 million into the system. To put that another way, that's an incremental cost to the health care system of about 2.4 per cent. So is the Minister of Health suggesting to Albertans that the total incremental cost for COVID-19 to our health care system will be only \$500 million?

And if you do not believe it will merely be \$500 million or less, what, in fact, is your estimate? If we use Italy as a COVID-19 comparison, what would be the incremental cost to the Alberta health care system? Likewise, if we were to use South Korea as a COVID-19 comparison, what would the incremental cost be to the

Alberta health care system? Simply put, what I'm asking the minister to tell Albertans is how he came up with this estimate of \$500 million. What modelling did he base, if any, on other jurisdictions and their costs so far? Let me be clear. I'm asking these questions because the experts that I've had the opportunity to speak with have suggested that \$500 million is – and I'm using their words here – a laughable sum to fight COVID-19. They can't fathom how the minister came up with this number, and they asked me to ask this minister, so I am. Minister, what is the answer to this very serious question?

Question 5. The government has put forward an amendment to deal with COVID-19 and allocated \$500 million. The Premier has suggested that this is a historic response to the pandemic. I assume that the Health minister put some careful thought into this decision, as did his colleagues in government. Of course, the government has now tabled their revised estimates, which allocate, indeed, \$500 million more to the Health operating expense.

Now, the government has also tabled a revised consolidated fiscal summary to the fiscal plan, so my question to the Minister of Health is this. Inventory consumption in that fiscal summary was set at \$3.856 billion. In the revised fiscal summary inventory consumption stayed exactly the same, at \$3.856 billion. Those numbers are the same. Can the Minister of Health explain how the health system would not actually see an increase in inventory consumption during a pandemic? Surely we are using more supplies. For example, front-line staff must be going through masks and protective equipment at an incredibly fast rate. It only stands to reason that in the midst of a pandemic you're going to be consuming your stockpile of resources, consuming your inventory. That's what they're there for. To the Minister of Health: can you explain how in your revised Budget 2020, that's designed to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no increase in health inventory consumption? How is that possible? And if that figure just happens to be wrong, then how can Albertans trust any of your other Health estimates given that you've already amended the budget to address COVID-19?

On the question of mental health I'd like to ask about mental health supports, which, of course, is a part of outcome 4 of the ministry's business plan. I'd like to discuss that plan going forward in fiscal year '20-21, which is only two weeks away. Now, this budget includes additional resources for the COVID-19 pandemic, so I'd like to ask the minister: in fact, what systems, plans, strategies do you have in place to increase mental health supports for seniors that are living in long-term care and in continuing care as a result of the pandemic? Could we have some specifics, please, recognizing that for these individuals isolation and a decline in mental health have profound impacts on their physical health? If we could get some clarity on what funding, what supports are in place for those individuals.

What systems, plans, and strategies do you have in place to increase mental health supports for front-line workers in the health care system? Just this morning I retweeted an emergency room physician in rural Alberta who was expressing the severe impact of just the preparations for dealing with COVID-19 on top of the ambiguity that still exists about what you intend to pay these individuals after April 1 and the other things that are present within the system. What do we have in place, what systems, plans, and strategies, to support these workers in their mental health? They are essential partners in our responding to and supporting and protecting Alberta's health.

How many full-time employees were allocated before the crisis, and how many full-time employees will be in place for fiscal year 2020-2021? I'd like that information broken down by AHS zone,

please. Of course, if that does not fit within the 10 minutes, I will take that in writing.

Further, at a system level, how much more is being planned on being spent on mental health supports for front-line health care workers in this coming fiscal year as a result of the response to COVID-19?

What systems, plans, and strategies do you have in place for those vulnerable Albertans, folks, for example, that are living on AISH, who have serious mental health concerns that are increasing as a result of the pandemic and may need to access resources such as Access 24/7, the mental health support line, or other mental health supports through the Alberta health system? For example, can you tell us how many additional full-time employees are allocated in Budget 2020 to help specifically folks that are living on AISH? Again, please, if that could be broken down by AHS zone.

4:10

The Chair: We'll now enter the 10-minute portion for the hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: First of all, as a matter of procedure, Madam Chair, it's difficult, I think, to comprehensively respond to about 25 questions asked in a serial fashion like that. At least in my 23 years of parliamentary experience . . .

An Hon. Member: Your system, Premier.

Mr. Kenney: . . . it is much more conventional to allow for questions and answers, so we'll do our best.

Having said that – and it's interesting that they're already heckling, Madam Chair, which is so sadly in keeping with the divisive approach of the Official Opposition at a time of provincial crisis. In my 23 years of parliamentary experience, when facing public health emergencies, times of war and conflict, 9/11 – and I've had the advantage of being on both the government and opposition side of legislative Chambers – I have always seen an effort, an effort at unity, constructiveness, and coming together until this place with this opposition.

Last week in New Brunswick, the Official Opposition was on the cusp of a vote of nonconfidence to force an election because it disagreed deeply with the government's agenda. But realizing the imperative of government operations and broader political unity at this time of a public health crisis, they instead decided to support the government and its budget, much as the B.C. Liberal opposition is doing with the New Democrat government in British Columbia right now, working constructively in a nonpartisan spirit.

Instead, what we get was that tone, frankly, that kind of tone of negativity, of snarkiness, of division, which is totally unbecoming of any member of this place at this time, from a party that just sent out – the Member for Edmonton-Glenora just sent out a fundraising e-mail today mentioning COVID-19, not a fundraising e-mail for a hospital but for her political party. Raising money for a political party in the midst of a public health emergency: what is wrong with these people, Madam Chair? A member of their staff, on social media yesterday, directed her fellow partisans to attack me personally on social media for having commented about the need for stronger public health protocols at our airports, saying: let's go over there and make their lives difficult, shall we?

While the government is doing its best under enormous stress as the situation is changing by the hour, as Albertans of all backgrounds expect some show of at least a modicum of effort at social and political unity, they are saying, "Let's make their lives difficult, shall we?" and issuing attack ads online. If that's the tone that we're going to see here for the next three hours, Madam Chair, well, I can say that it's a comment on the nature of the opposition.

Secondly, Madam Chair, the member opposite has raised his disappointment with this process. We are in the midst, in case the opposition has not yet come to a reckoning with this, of an unprecedented public health emergency. In fact, I signed an instrument earlier today, which has just been cosigned by Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, declaring a public health emergency under the Public Health Act of Alberta on the advice of officials. This is literally an emergency.

Madam Chair, the House of Commons suspended its sitting, a week ago tomorrow, indefinitely. At least two other Legislatures have done so, and others are planning to do so. I understand that the United States Congress is effectively preparing for a quarantine. At least 14 members of the government caucus in this Assembly have been in self-isolation. I'm told that number has reached as high as 16. We don't know at what point we will be able to – in fact, we had to write into regulations today an exemption from the prohibition on gatherings of over 50 people simply to allow this Chamber to continue doing its work.

The government would have been well within its rights, Madam Chair, to have suspended this legislation and, instead, simply moved with total executive fiat and zero legislative accountability to fiscal appropriations through special warrants. Now, that would have been difficult and time-consuming. We would have had to adjourn the House on Monday in order to allow those fiscal warrants to kick in on the 1st of April for the beginning of the fiscal year. Instead, we decided to come back into this place as a government to be accountable, in the hope and expectation that there would be some spirit of comity, co-operation, and unity. Nevertheless, it is necessary for us to ensure that as long as this Assembly operates, we get the essential urgent work of the people done. That begins, most importantly, with the passage of the budget and the authorization of \$56 billion in spending, which is, I believe, the highest absolute level of spending in the history of the government of Alberta.

If we do not pass this budget bill expeditiously, we will not have the certainty that come April 1, the first day of the new fiscal year, we will have the funds required to pay our doctors and nurses at this time of crisis. Playing games with this process is absolutely grossly irresponsible, Madam Chair. Grossly irresponsible. The member is yawning in exasperation. But if tomorrow the public health officer comes to us and says that she recommends we suspend the Legislature and this budget is not passed, we will not have the legal power to pay doctors and nurses on April 1. That's not an opinion. It is a legal fact.

It's time to park the politics, Madam Chair. What we are proposing through this extraordinary process – and I thank the Assembly for the opportunity to do this; I thank the officials for attending with us – is an opportunity to ensure that the funds are there as needed, including the additional \$500 million, the extraordinary half-billion dollars added to the appropriation bill by the hon. the Minister of Finance yesterday.

Madam Chair, on some of the specific points the member talks about a cut in the budget for population and public health. Again, completely misleading. In the last full year of the NDP government the budget for population and public health was \$551 million. As page 126 of the fiscal plan indicates, that is projected under this budget plan to increase to \$600 million in '20-21. Now, you don't need a PhD in mathematics to understand that that is a \$49 million increase, not a reduction; a 10 per cent absolute increase, not a real reduction.

The member talks about overall cuts in health care, which is simply not true. Last fiscal year, 2018-19: \$20.4 billion. This year in this budget: \$20.616 billion. Add another \$500 million to that: \$21.16 billion, the highest level in the history of Alberta, the highest

real level in Canada. In fact, the member can look at page 124 and see that in 2018 health spending per capita was \$5,254 in Alberta versus \$4,100 in B.C., \$4,300 in Ontario, \$4,300 in Quebec. The average, in other words, amongst our peer provinces: \$4,257. That is to say that we spend about \$1,000 more per person than comparable provinces. As the Ernst & Young independent report on efficiency for Alberta Health Services confirmed, as did the MacKinnon report, chaired by former NDP finance minister Dr. Janice MacKinnon, we are not getting better outcomes than these other provinces. In many respects our outcomes are worse with respect to critical surgical wait times for many procedures, life expectancy, infant mortality, et cetera.

4:20

Madam Chair, it is true that our government has begun to try to control the overall growth in what is the most expensive health system in Canada, a country that has amongst the most expensive publicly insured systems in the world. Why? Because we need to get more bang for the taxpayer's buck, and we make no apology for doing so.

However, let us be absolutely clear that in the context of the pandemic we will make every resource available that is necessary for our health officials to fight and defeat the spread of the coronavirus. The \$500 million included in this budget is effectively an initial instalment on that. We await the response of the federal government to increase transfers to deal with COVID, and we want to give our officials enough time to give us estimates of what the full cost may be.

The Chair: Proceeding to the Official Opposition, a 10-minute block of time. The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. What is an embarrassment is this Premier in the fact that I spent weeks preparing for this opportunity to sit down with this minister to do my due diligence as critic on behalf of the people of Alberta to ask real questions about this budget, this government's spending. I listed those questions now. Those were all directly taken from this budget, from the line items, and this Premier is choosing to waste the time of this Assembly with his regular stump speech, with his opprobrium that we as the Official Opposition would choose to actually do our job.

There are other options for how they could have chosen to approach this, Madam Chair, as my colleagues listed in debate this afternoon.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

The Chair: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Madam Chair, the content of Motion 10 that brings us to this process in the Chamber has already been debated in the Chamber and has been decided by the majority in the Chamber. I would ask that you instruct the member to focus on estimates and the budget that we're here to discuss today, not to relitigate Motion 10.

Mr. Shepherd: If I may respond, Madam Chair, my remarks were no further outside the topic than the Premier's own and were simply in response to his.

The Chair: Hon. members, there is a limited amount of time available to discuss the government estimates, and I would suggest that arguing the way in which one answers or asks or in which the rules are made is moot, and we should avoid these conversations. Please stick to the estimates.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, please proceed with your questions.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd be happy to continue with the estimates and ask questions. I would hope that we will receive actual answers.

Madam Chair, within this budget we have the first steps towards the implementation of a new framework for physician compensation. Now, over the last few weeks we have heard numerous calls for changes to that in regard to the spending within this budget and that particular line item. Indeed, we saw opinion columns run in the *Edmonton Journal*, the *Calgary Herald*, the *Globe and Mail* this morning calling for that, and I acknowledge and appreciate that this minister has taken one step towards that in restoring the complex modifiers for physicians. It's an important step, I think, in supporting outcome 3 in the business plan, that "Albertans have increased access to health care professionals and the mix of professionals that best meets their needs," and indeed 3.1, to "work with the Alberta Medical Association to manage spending growth and modernize physician funding models to improve quality of patient care and accountability for results."

I will just take a moment, Madam Chair, to note that for any of the questions, again, that the minister did not have the opportunity to answer due to the Premier's interjection, I would be happy to receive those answers in writing that are directly related to the estimates.

As I was saying, speaking of outcome 3 and point 3.1, the negotiation that was conducted with the AMA, I'd note, was opened by passing legislation which allowed the government to unilaterally break their contract and closed by doing precisely that with no notice while they were in the midst of preparing a new offer. Indeed, if the minister calls that working "with" as noted in the business plan, I'd hate to see what he would consider working against.

I do have a question. To the minister: how do you consider it working with the AMA to unilaterally impose a deeply flawed funding framework that every medical expert says will utterly undermine your key objective 5.1, that being on page 92 of the business plan, to prevent chronic conditions, injuries, and infections by developing policies that reduce risk from environmental and individual risk factors, by making it completely unaffordable for doctors? Well, in many senses I appreciate that some of that has been addressed today by the restoration of the complex modifiers, but there are still concerns around the patient caps, the removal of stipends for emergency room physicians, and some of the other steps that this government is taking.

Now, I fully anticipate that the minister will rise, and he will again make the claim that he must absolutely make these profound changes and cuts in order to stave off \$2 billion in cost overruns. That is a claim that the minister has made again and again and indeed repeats on page 125 of the fiscal plan. In other words, he's claiming an increase of about 37 per cent. I'd ask the minister: is it your contention that without your imposition of this new funding framework in the 2023 budget, the total amount for physician compensation, section 3 of your estimates, would have a total over \$7 billion? Minister, you've yet to provide any actual concrete data to support that forecast other than your own word. Indeed the forecast for 2018-19 was \$5.296 billion, and the actual as presented in your 2019-20 budget actually came in slightly below that at \$5.282 billion. That is a reduction, not a growth.

If we look at the history from 2015-16, the actual being \$4.857 billion, the forecast \$5.036 billion; 2016-17 \$5.082 billion actual to \$5.296 billion; 2017-18 the actual \$5.197 billion, the forecast \$5.296 billion; 2018-19 the actual being \$5.282 billion and the forecast being \$5.295 billion; and then the actual in 2019-20 being

\$5.311 billion, I see no exponential growth, Minister. So on what basis are you claiming – could you provide that data? Can you show your work to justify your claim that you are staving off \$2 billion in cost overrun? Can you break down where that's from, what that contains, how you're calculating that number?

Now, the minister has also repeatedly claimed that the physician compensation will be maintained this year at \$5.4 billion, but his ministry's estimate on page 126 of the fiscal plan is, in fact, just below \$5.3 billion. That's a difference of about \$100 million. Can the minister explain this discrepancy and why he continues to claim a figure that is not in fact represented within his fiscal plan?

To be clear, Minister, despite the utter lack of justification, transparency, or clarity, these claims are ones you have been defending vigorously despite the fact that I believe it threatens to utterly undermine your objective 5.3, that being to safeguard Albertans from communicable diseases. In fact, in doing so, I would say that I've heard from many who work in the fields you need to accomplish these objectives that you have left them feeling disrespected, insulted, and utterly demoralized, indeed more or less the entirety of the thousands of health care workers that we are going to need to help us not only through this pandemic but indeed to protect the health of Albertans and achieve your objectives. How difficult is that damage to that relationship going to make it for you to actually achieve your objective 3.2, to develop and implement modernized, fiscally sustainable distribution and funding models for health care providers?

Indeed, I have to ask if that's why you don't include any actual targets for your performance metric 3(a), the percentage of alternative relationship plan payments of total physician payments. You have no metric to track if you have any success. Is that perhaps because you anticipate that after having torn up the agreement with physicians in the face of a global pandemic, there aren't going to be many that are interested in signing another agreement with you and perhaps even more so given that just this past Friday you chose, with the pandemic actually here and cresting, to unilaterally end the contract you just signed with radiologists this past November, less than five months ago, in which they agreed to a 17 per cent cut?

Minister, I think it's going to be very difficult, given the choices you have made and indeed your approach on many of these issues, to achieve these goals that you have set. You spent the last few months undermining and attacking the very doctors, nurses, workers we're going to need to support this health care system, that you need to work with you to achieve your objectives, which, again, you have set no metric to actually track. Indeed, in some respects I'd say that you've scorched the earth and completely lost their trust.

4:30

A few more questions that I've received from MDs themselves. If the \$5.4 billion or \$5.3 billion, whichever it may be, is in fact exceeded, if physician demand and physician billings rise above that amount, how do you intend to address that? Will there be additional funding? Will you make further cuts? What steps will you take to ensure you remain within that envelope? How will you manage cost overruns due to increased emergency room usage and hospital ICU admissions, both due to the potential repercussions of some of the decisions you are making in how you're adjusting fees for family doctors as well as the ongoing pandemic, COVID-19?

How much of this \$500 million which you have allotted is for specific purchases, for personal protective equipment, for ventilators and other essential equipment? How much is for increased staffing or other costs that we know will need to be elastic and can't accurately be forecast? How much are you anticipating you will need to have available for that? Will there be additional

dollars if this \$500 million proves to not be enough, or will you seek to recoup those costs through further cuts or reallocations in other areas or funding envelopes?

I will stop there and allow the minister an opportunity to answer.

The Chair: The government will have up to a 10-minute block. The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Maybe I'll start, first, by addressing a theme that I think we saw from the previous estimates, last year. From questions that my learned colleague had for us back then, some difficulty occurred in the reconciliation that the learned colleague had in interpreting and comparing between the fiscal plan and the ministry financial statement. Again, in trying to provide that clarity for the hon. member, this stems from the hon. member confusing the difference between the net operating expense only in the fiscal plan after the interministry consolidation adjustments by the major program areas while the statement of operations and the ministry financial statement reflect the total expense by major program before interministry consolidation adjustments.

The total expense is, of course, Madam Chair, the combined total of operating expense, capital grants, amortization, and, because the member mentioned it, inventory consumption, where applicable, where the interministry consolidations, in plain language, eliminate the payments between the ministries such as the payments that our ministry makes to Advanced Education related to physician compensation. So to provide that clarity for the hon. member.

To return to some of the previous questions that the member had, as my colleague knows, our response to this pandemic is this government's number one priority, and we are going to do all that we can to minimize the risk and to keep Albertans safe and healthy. The additional \$500 million that the member mentions will give Alberta's public health officials the resources that they need to respond to the pandemic, the resources that they need to keep Albertans safe.

This funding is going to be allocated as needed as the pandemic evolves. This would include funding, for example, for Alberta Health Services for staffing or other costs such as the assessment centres, that they are working very hard at establishing throughout the province; lab tests; other operating costs; as well as inventory such as the masks and other personal protective equipment, or PPEs, that the member mentioned; and capital assets for any equipment that's needed. As well, it could include funding for physician compensation costs. It could include as well ongoing efforts to provide information to all Albertans so that they're up to date on the current situation as well as the best ways to prepare for and the best ways to prevent the spread of the virus and other costs as needed, Madam Chair.

Now, I'm going to skip ahead to a question that the member had about inventory consumption and no increase for inventory consumption. Quite frankly, the reason for that, Madam Chair, is because we don't have a vaccine at this time. Inventory consumption would be for the vaccines or the drugs that would be needed for this response. Now, if there are vaccines, if there are drugs that are needed in our response, then, of course, that would be accounted for at that time, and we would disclose that, but for simplicity all of this is included as an operating expense at this time.

I want to speak to population and public health, Madam Chair. The budget for population and public health reflects the net result of a series of adjustments, the savings related to enhanced vacancy management and operational best practices in AHS, the potential additional savings from the Ernst & Young review as well as an increase of nearly \$8 million related to the Canada-Alberta

emergency treatment fund to expand the opioid agonist therapy treatment in provincial correctional facilities and facilitate transitions to community settings.

Now, regarding the member's questions regarding acute care, this budget line reflects the savings from enhanced vacancy management, incremental savings from operational best practices as well as the expected savings from the Ernst & Young report and their performance review of AHS. The budget also reflects the continued focus on shifting care to the community, with a combined increase of \$38 million: to community care, up to \$31 million; to continuing care, which would be \$5 million; and to home care, \$2 million.

This budget also includes additional funding to implement the Alberta surgical initiative as well as a portion of the additional \$20 million included in the fiscal plan as part of the \$100 million over four years toward a mental health and addictions strategy.

Subject to the impact of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, we expect a few key metrics to be maintained, Madam Chair. I can advise that for the fiscal year 2020-2021 we would expect 2.3 million emergency department and urgent care visits, as an example. We would expect 51,700 births. We would also expect an additional 17 and a half thousand surgeries related to the Alberta surgical initiative.

Now, regarding population and inflation, I'd say this, Madam Chair. The government committed to maintain or increase funding for health care in our campaign, and Budget 2020 provides \$20.6 billion in the fiscal year 2020-21 for the Health operating budget before the additional \$500 million that was provided for the COVID-19 pandemic response. We're going to make some far-sighted decisions that reduce variation in care, that will reduce waste in the system, but our efforts to find savings will be reinvested to offset growth pressures and fund priorities, quite frankly, like the Alberta surgical initiative, that are going to improve care and that are going to put patients at the centre of this system. This is the most ever budgeted for Health operating expense.

Then there was a question about modelling for the \$500 million, and I would say this, Madam Chair. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic is an unheard-of situation that we've never seen in recent memory. We also have to work incredibly fast for us to be able to respond to this. Now, we do know that the 2009 response to H1N1 cost the provincial government \$80 million at that time. At this time we are estimating the response to this pandemic to be \$500 million, but we've also made it very clear to folks in the health system, including AHS, that politics and resources are not going to figure into our response to this pandemic, that our priority is going to be making sure that Albertans get the care that they need and that our health care workers on the front line, our public health officials are going to have the resources that they need to be able to respond, whether that's doing the surveillance, whether that is doing the tracing, whether that is actually doing the care in the hospitals, to be able to provide that care for people who need that acute care, or for our physicians, who need to be able to have flexibility.

4:40

We've activated a code known as 03.01AD, Madam Chair. Now, this provides our physicians flexibility in being able to treat patients throughout Alberta. This was a code that was developed in 2009. We've reactivated this code, and it'll allow physicians to be able to charge \$20 so that they can – and it's not just for treating patients who have been diagnosed with or are suspected cases of COVID-19 but anybody, to be able to protect patients that the physician thinks need to be protected from coming in to a regular visit. We

provided that flexibility to our physicians for them to be able to provide that care over the telephone on an unlimited basis.

Madam Chair, I would like to thank those physicians for bringing that to our attention, regarding 03.01AD, and we were very quickly able to provide the opportunity to respond and reactivate that code so that those physicians have that flexibility and those patients know that they can get that care.

The Chair: We will now move on to the next up to 10-minute slot and the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate those answers from the minister.

I note that he did not get the opportunity to address the questions I had around his estimation of the \$2 billion cost overrun on physician compensation. If he has an opportunity to address that in the next 10 minutes, I would appreciate that. If not, I would appreciate it if he would have the opportunity to submit that in writing along with any other questions he was not able to get to.

I'd like to talk now a bit about diagnostics, Madam Chair. Now, over the last year we've seen an explosion in wait times for diagnostic scans. That's an issue, I think, that is essential to many parts of this minister's business plan and his success in that regard. Indeed, even in endeavours, I'd say, like the Alberta surgical initiative, which this government is quite proud of, the foundation of the success of those initiatives depends on a robust system, where patients are able to get their diagnostic scans done in a reasonable length of time.

Now, under outcome 3 in particular, ensuring that "Albertans have increased access to health care professionals and the mix of professionals that best meets their needs," objective 3.2: "Develop and implement modernized, fiscally-sustainable distribution and funding models for health providers that support high quality [health] care and collaborative practice within interdisciplinary team-based environments." Objective 5.1, of course, as well is: "Prevent chronic conditions, injuries and infections by developing policies that reduce risk from environmental and individual risk factors."

I will provide a bit of context before I get into my questions, Madam Chair. We first started hearing about this issue last summer. Many patients began to speak out about concerning long wait times for even urgent requests for CT scans or MRIs. By the fall the media was reporting that patients were waiting seven to nine months for a CT scan. Indeed, one urologist spoke out to say: I have indeed run into prolonged wait times for patients to get into an outpatient CT scan; even the highest priority are waiting for months to get in; when I discussed this with the radiologist, the reason for the recent change is due to decreased funding of OP CT scans.

Following that, more doctors and specialists began to speak out. Dr. Ernie Schuster spoke with several media outlets and said: it's a jeopardy for the patient; it basically makes community and family physicians, when it comes to imaging like that, ineffective. That, again, ties directly to the objectives I noted in the business plan, indeed, Madam Chair, directly connected to objective 3.2 in the minister's business plan.

Now, at that time, in November, Dr. Schuster stated that urgent MRIs should take place within seven days and that semiurgent should be within 30. But at that time wait times for urgent MRIs and CTs were indeed exceeding 30 days, and semiurgent were at about 200 days. Throughout December and January doctors and patients continued to speak out, and physicians and specialists, Madam Chair, were absolutely clear that the drastic spike in diagnostic wait times came after the election of this new government. Indeed, representatives from AHS themselves spoke out and confirmed that the explosion in wait times was due to this government and this minister's decision not to continue the

additional investment our government had made to increase the number of scans being done, and without that funding the number of scans dropped, and the wait times shot up.

Now, this was an issue I brought up multiple times with the minister in the House. He denied that there was a problem. He criticized our government for simply throwing money at the problem. He insisted that his government has maintained AHS's overall funding at the same level as last year and that we have given no direction to AHS on CT or MRI funding or volumes. He ignored a request from radiologists that he invest \$10 million to \$12 million in savings that he gained from rollbacks to their pay in reducing wait times, which they estimated would cover roughly about 30,000 more CT or MRI scans per year. Finally, in late February, after an unprecedented callout by the Edmonton zone Medical Staff Association, the minister admitted that there was, in fact, a problem, and he stated that he was, apparently just at that point, asking AHS to develop an action plan to address it.

It was with some anticipation that I awaited this government's budget and this ministry's estimates, which they tabled on February 27. Now, to my surprise, when I looked at the line for diagnostic, therapeutic, and other patient services, I saw a cut in real dollars – and this is in the fiscal plan – of \$46 million.

My first question to the minister is: why is there a cut in the budget for an area in which you've acknowledged there have been ongoing issues that severely impact the lives of Albertans, that impact the very objectives of your business plan, and that physicians and specialists have been very clear are putting lives at risk? Let's be clear. The need for diagnostic scans is only going to grow. AHS's own numbers show the demand for CT scans is increasing by 5 per cent. MRI scans are going up by 3 and a half per cent a year. Alberta already does 60 per cent as many scans as the national average. We're already well below, so it's not a question of us doing too many.

In the event that the minister wants to claim that additional dollars aren't necessary to increase the number of scans and address the severe increase in wait times, I'd note that there was an interesting note in the recent AHS release announcing his plans to tear up the contracts of radiologists, that he signed less than six months ago. That note says: "Savings from this initiative will be directed to providing additional scans for patients. This is being done in the interest of patient care to redirect resources into additional scans."

So setting perhaps a backhanded swipe against the radiologists, who had actually made an offer along those lines back this fall or late in the early winter, it makes it clear that in order to provide more scans for Albertans, to bring down these unacceptable wait times that grew under this minister and this government, they need to invest additional dollars: more funding, more scans. After all, the minister himself noted here in this House that we have the machines, that we have the trained personnel to run them, so it seems clear that the issue lies, in large part, with the available funding.

Another question to the minister might be on why he chose to risk the health of so many Albertans for so many months by refusing to make this investment sooner? That said, as I noted, the fiscal plan does contain a \$46 million cut in real dollars to diagnostic, therapeutic, and other patient services this year. The savings he intends to gain and reinvest from tearing up his five-month-old contract with radiologists won't be realized until the next budget year. So my question to the minister is: having acknowledged that any effective action plan to address the diagnostic wait times will require more and not less investment, can you clarify if you are in fact cutting, maintaining, or increasing the funding specifically for diagnostic scans within that line item and where the \$46 million cut in real dollars is coming from, how that's being realized, where you're pulling that number from? If indeed you're intending to

maintain or increase the funding, are you taking that funding from another portion of the health care budget? If it's the minister's contention that it's possible for him to meet his commitment of reducing wait times without additional funding, could he please identify the specific obstacles, bottlenecks, or other obstructions that he has observed within the system and how he intends to address those to reduce wait times?

I would also note that in the AHS review from last year, page 66, it noted that

diagnostic imaging at AHS is challenged by aging equipment, 32% of which is past its recommended replacement year. The majority of [diagnostic imaging] equipment is due for replacement in the next 5-10 years.

If the minister could clarify: how much are you providing to AHS in capital funds to address the currently failing equipment and plan for future replacements? I would also note that this minister has put forward changes as part of the physician compensation framework – I'm not sure if it's exactly part of it, but he has made changes – which mean that now physiotherapists and chiropractors can no longer make requests for diagnostic imaging.

4:50

I would note that objective 3.4 says: "expand scopes of practice of other health professionals, reduce red tape and remove barriers that limit health." It seems that this minister is introducing further red tape which indeed reduces the practice of health care professionals and introduces barriers that will in fact limit health. Indeed, if he is looking to save on physician compensation, forcing a chiropractor or physiotherapist, who are experts in the musculoskeletal system, who identify an issue which should receive a scan – to say instead that he is making it easier by that patient then having to go and see a family doctor and incur an additional charge for a visit, that that is saving the system money, that seems to go against this objective. I would appreciate it if the minister could provide some clarification on his decision to make that change.

I'll give the minister an opportunity to respond.

The Chair: The minister has up to 10 minutes. The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I will start with MRIs and CT scans. I'd point this out, that wait times increased every year under the NDP when they were in government. They are, as I've said before in this Chamber, expecting government to fix in one year what they failed to fix in their four. CT and MRI wait times in particular have increased in the last five years. The performance review of AHS, conducted by EY, found that 1 in every 10 patients waits more than 40 weeks for an MRI, which is months longer than what residents in B.C. and Ontario receive.

If a patient is in an emergency in Alberta and needs an urgent scan, they're able to get one quickly. If a patient is in a hospital, they're able to get a scan within 24 hours. We began to work, our ministry along with AHS, to develop an action plan to be able to address the wait times for MRIs and for CT scans. Part of the difficulty is this, Madam Chair, that AHS's total costs – as an example, we'll talk about CT scans. The average cost per CT scan is up to 50 per cent higher than in other provinces. The average fee for a CT scan in Alberta is \$188, significantly higher than in other provinces. CT scans are 48 per cent lower in B.C.; they are 41 per cent lower in Ontario. That's not money. That's other people's care. I think that the learned colleague has made it very clear to this Chamber that he would rather have that care spent on that markup than actually providing that care to other patients in the system.

Fees for MRIs are similar. Alberta pays approximately \$218 whereas in B.C. it costs approximately 30 per cent lower and in

Ontario 16 per cent lower. It is true that we are going to develop an action plan. We have developed that. We are going to begin implementing that action plan so that we can be able to work with AHS to make sure that patients in this system are going to get the care that they need in the time that they need it. And, yes, that means, Madam Chair, that we have to make the tough decisions that the previous government didn't. Their response to this was just to throw more money and more money at a problem rather than make the tough decisions to be able to correct and fix the systemic issues that we have with MRIs and CT scans. Demand for CT scans is going to continue to increase. We know that. We know that it's going to continue in the future, and we are committed to working with AHS to ensure that they have the resources that they need but also that the system itself is going to be able to work in a way that patients can get the scans that they need in the time that they need it.

I'll speak as well about physician compensation and the colleague's questions regarding physician compensation and the February 20 announcement that we had regarding the new physician compensation framework. As the member knows, in September, after the MacKinnon panel report was tabled in August, we began a conversation with the Alberta Medical Association, the AMA. We let them know that we wanted to begin negotiations with them. We gave them two months. Those negotiations began in November, Madam Chair. We then worked with them until January, when it became clear to both us and them that negotiations were not going to be successful.

We suggested and they agreed to being able to move to mediation. We agreed to a mediator. We were meeting throughout the end of January until February 14 with the AMA in that mediation process. There were 11 consultation proposals outside of the AMA agreement. They asked for those 11 proposals to go to the mediation table, and we agreed. We allowed that to go to the mediation table until February 14, when it became very clear that mediation was not going to be successful either.

Now, the new and current physician compensation framework, admittedly, is mostly the previous one evergreened. The AMA master agreement, which was referred to by the learned colleague, provided the AMA with a veto, through a Physician Compensation Committee, from any amendments to be made to the schedule of medical benefits, which is a list of rates which physicians in this province can bill to according to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. They continue to be able to bill to the schedule of medical benefits, the SOMB I'll call it for the rest of the afternoon. They're continuing to bill to that.

To clarify some of the misinformation that was provided by the colleague, the master agreement with the AMA included a negotiated termination clause. That termination clause made it very clear that the agreement can end in two ways, Madam Chair. It can end either by mutual agreement of the parties or by operation of law. Now, operation of law can be three different things. It can be operation through legislation, it can be through orders in council, or it can be through ministerial order. We provided clarity in legislation in 2019 to make it very clear that that operation of law would occur through order in council. We let the AMA know from November, when we began negotiations with them, all the way to February 14, when we received their last offer in mediation, that all options were on the table if we were not able to come to an agreement with them in mediation, including termination or operation of a negotiated termination clause with the AMA.

Now, we did execute that termination clause, but the compensation framework for our physicians mostly is the previous framework just evergreened. It is true, though, that now there is no veto through a Physician Compensation Committee that the physicians have. We have still, though, since February 20, when we announced the new compensation framework, met both informally

and formally with the AMA. We are going to continue to meet with them.

Just yesterday I spoke again with the president of the AMA, Christine Molnar. We met with them. They asked – and we agreed – for a working group to be struck for us to begin conversations with them on the new compensation framework and amendments, getting their feedback on amendments that they may want to see to this new framework. We're very happy to have spent two days with them through that working group process and happy to get that feedback.

Today we took that feedback and announced changes to our plans to change one of the complex modifiers. Complex modifiers, as you know, Madam Chair, are for a physician an additional amount, after a basic visit, that goes from minute 15 to minute 25 and then 10-minute increments after that. We were proposing to change the \$18 payment at minute 15 to be reduced to \$9 this fiscal year. We heard from the physicians when we met with them in this working group process, and we have announced, starting today, that we are not moving forward with that change to that complex modifier.

The AMA, I think, has other feedback for us. As I told Dr. Molnar yesterday and again today, we are very happy for them to continue through a process. Now, instead of a Physician Compensation Committee, we're going to have a physician compensation advisory committee. Through this forum we'll allow the AMA to be able to come to us with issues that they might have, whether it's the continuing medical education grant, whether it's the share that government and physicians share in their liability insurance fees that they pay for, or other changes that they might have. I think they have suggestions for us on changes they might actually want to see in the SOMB.

We're providing that forum, then, for them to be able to come to us, have those conversations so that the committee can hear them and be able to come back to the Minister of Health with suggestions on what might be changed with physician compensation. I'm very happy that we are able to provide that forum for those physicians to continue to be able to give that feedback to government and to the Minister of Health.

I look forward to continuing to meet with Dr. Molnar and hear from her and other members of the AMA, whether in a formal or an informal way, whether through this new advisory committee or otherwise, for them to be able to work with us on our priorities, especially on how we can implement ARPs, as they are called, physician contract plans, so that we can move towards . . .

5:00

The Chair: Now the Official Opposition for up to a 10-minute portion of this evening. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I have some questions for the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance. As the Minister of Finance knows well, the Official Opposition had serious concerns with this budget the day it was presented, on February 27. We were concerned at that time about cuts to health care, education, and, obviously, social services, advanced education, among other programs. We were deeply concerned about the economic growth strategy outlined by the government. At that time we expressed concerns that economic diversification ought not be labelled as a luxury and that a budget that presented a blueprint for jobs that actually estimated lower levels of employment in Alberta than were estimated in Budget 2019 was quite problematic.

As we are all acutely aware, circumstances have indeed changed. Just hours after the budget was released, days, perhaps, the Minister of Finance told the Calgary Chamber of commerce that Rome was burning around him. The obvious implication was that his budget would no longer add up. Since then, we are starting to see markets

price in the effects of COVID-19. We've seen the collapse of the OPEC Plus deal, that was propping up global energy prices. Clearly, we are facing a new normal.

Question 1 – and I will be reading all of my questions in, Madam Chair – to the Minister of Finance. First, the minister is asking the Legislature to approve a revised Budget 2020 that pegs the deficit at \$7.3 billion. Does the minister stand by that number today as Albertans are watching? And if the minister cannot stand by that number, can he provide this Chamber and all Albertans with his best estimate right now of what the deficit will be for 2020-21?

Question 2. In the revised Budget 2020 consolidated fiscal summary provided to this Legislature yesterday, the minister estimated that direct borrowing for the fiscal plan would be \$5.276 billion for this coming year. Let me be clear and emphasize that again. This \$5.276 billion is the revised estimate that the minister provided to the Legislature yesterday. Albertans are watching. Does the minister stand by that number? If yes, why? If not, why not? And if not, why is the minister presenting a budget when he does not know what the borrowing requirements will be?

Question 3 to the Minister of Finance. Alberta currently has the following credit ratings from the major credit-rating firms: Moody's at AA2, stable; S&P, A-plus, stable; Fitch, AA, stable. Based on the budget that the minister is trying to pass in historic fashion this week, Albertans deserve to know: does the minister believe that Alberta's credit rating will be downgraded in fiscal year 2020-21? If yes, can the minister please point to where those increased credit costs are identified in the fiscal plan that he is asking this Legislature to adopt? If not, can he please explain to Albertans why the credit outlook of the province remains on track based on Budget 2020?

Question 4. The Premier of this province in the past few days has stated that the worst possible strategy right now is to increase the cost burden on families. To be specific, he has stated on record that now is not the time to increase taxes on Albertans. To the Minister of Finance, then. All Albertans have questions about Budget 2020 and its accuracy, particularly with the issues that we are facing economically now as a province. The budget that this minister has asked the Legislature to adopt, revised in light of COVID-19, asks this Chamber to raise the effective amount paid in personal income taxes on every Albertan through the pausing of income tax brackets. It asks this Chamber to sign off on a plan that raises fees on Albertans. This budget and this Finance minister are asking this Chamber to sign off on a plan to raise insurance rates on Albertans. This budget and this Minister of Finance are asking this Chamber to sign off on a plan that has no plan in it for rising utility rates for Albertans. This fiscal plan is raising the education portion of property taxes on Albertans.

If one adds up all these costs, Madam Chair, that is approaching \$1 billion in extra money out of the pockets of Albertans when we are facing a historic recession, extremely challenging economic times. To this Minister of Finance: please share with the Legislature and this committee and all Albertans why now is the time to take this money out of Albertans' pockets as outlined in Budget 2020. And if the minister now thinks, in the face of economic challenges, that this plan may be wrong, will the minister commit to amending the budget in the budget implementation act? If not, why not?

Question 5. The city of Vancouver yesterday announced that all late fees are frozen and that the city is authorizing reimbursements for any previously purchased government services like space reservations. The Premier has indicated that during this crisis, now is absolutely the wrong time to increase government burdens on families. To the Minister of Finance, a few questions on this matter. Will the minister halt all fee increases proposed in Budget 2020 to

provide relief to families? Over the course of both this current fiscal year, in 2019-2020, and next year, in 2020-2021, will the province provide full refunds to Albertans for any services that they have purchased from the government of Alberta that are no longer required? An obvious example would be camping fees in provincial parks, but there are many across government. Will the minister issue refunds for unused government services? If yes, what is the process for Albertans to claim a refund? If not, why not?

Question 6. Many Albertans are worried about their economic future, and a number of Albertans are worried about the provincial budget and, certainly, its accuracy. To put it simply, as one of the leading energy jurisdictions in the world, a subnational government that is responsible for roughly 4 per cent of global energy production, Albertans and the energy sector globally are looking to this Minister of Finance to outline his projections for energy prices. As this House knows well, Budget 2020 also served as the third-quarter fiscal update for the fiscal year 2019-2020. The minister provided yesterday a revised consolidated fiscal summary amendment to the fiscal plan 2020. I have a few questions about 2019-2020. Does the minister stand by the revised deficit projections of \$7.54 billion that he tabled in the House yesterday? What is the minister's projection for WTI for 2019-2020 on a fiscal year basis, and how does it align with the revised consolidated fiscal summary that he tabled yesterday?

Does the minister stand by the document he tabled before this House yesterday, where his revenue projection of February 27 of \$50.984 billion is identical to the \$50.984 billion that he projected on March 16? If yes, how is that possible with rapidly declining energy prices and demands on government programs in light of COVID-19? If this minister cannot stand by the revenue projections he tabled yesterday, why is the minister asking this Chamber to approve a forecast that he knows is wrong?

Further, what is the expected decline in employment embedded in the revised consolidated fiscal summary that the minister presented yesterday? Albertans need to know if the Minister of Finance is presenting to Albertans accurately and honestly what is going on right now in this province.

5:10

Question 7. As a major energy producer Albertans and the rest of the world are looking to what this minister honestly believes the WTI price will be. What is the minister's best guess for WTI this year? Can the minister explain to this Chamber why he tabled a document yesterday that maintained a \$58-a-barrel forecast? There is not one analyst, one trader, one expert, one Albertan who believes this number. It is just not reflective of reality. How much revenue is the minister expecting to lose based on his real WTI forecast? It cannot be \$58 per barrel, so Albertans want to know what it is.

Next question. Yesterday the minister tabled an update to the . . .

The Chair: We will now proceed to the government. The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. You have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to make a response to those questions and allegations.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Firstly, I need to correct the record. The member opposite indicated that our expenditures in Health and Education were, in fact, cuts. That's just simply not true. That's been well documented. It's in the fiscal plan. Our budget forecast for '20-21 for Health spending was \$20,616,000,000. It is now \$21.1 billion, and that's

higher than any other year, than any other Health budget in the history of the province and quite considerably higher. Our Education budget that we tabled is \$8.322 billion, Mr. Chair, and that is, again, record spending in K to 12 education.

The member opposite also alluded to the fact that we were cutting spending on social services, Mr. Chair. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our social services budgets rose in Budget 2019, and they've been maintained or have risen, in fact, in Budget 2020. I think it's really important to set the record straight. Budget 2020, in fact, protected funding to our key deliverables to those vulnerable Albertans that this government has committed to protect.

I also want to respond to the member's comments around our economic indicators and perhaps even revenue projections, job-creation approaches. As you know, Mr. Chair, we ran on a platform of job creation, economic growth, pipelines. We remain committed to that platform in spite of the fact that we've found ourselves in uncharted territory. But I do want to say that in early 2020, when, in fact, we were really working to finalize this budget, the economic indicators for the province looked good. They actually looked consistent with the indicators that would point to the fact that the economic initiatives and policy initiatives that we brought forward with the job-creation tax cut, with the effort around red tape reduction, with the effort to manage our fiscal house responsibly in spite of the fact that we took on what I would suggest was a very challenging fiscal situation in this province when we took office – the economic indicators that we observed in early 2020 indicated that we were on track.

In fact, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers projected a \$2 billion increase in investment, the first increase in energy investment in Canada since 2014. Alberta was going to take 75 per cent of that increased investment, or \$1.5 billion. We had seen a dramatic increase in drilling rates across the province, which, again, we viewed as positive. Alberta was set to lead all other large provinces in the country in nonenergy investment.

Mr. Chair, as we were finalizing our budget and projections, this was the environment in which we were finalizing our assumptions. In fact, WTI prices were north of \$60 at that point in time. Again, our economic and revenue projections were very defensible and very sound. In fact, I would like to point out that in the previous government's last budget, of which the member opposite was a minister, the WTI forecast was for \$65 oil in the upcoming year when we had projected \$58 and, in fact, \$70 for the out-years when, in fact, we were just over \$60 for those years. I just want to point out that certainly at the time when we were finalizing the projections, we were bringing forward a cautious and prudent revenue outlook based on very realistic and credible economic assumptions.

But as the member pointed out, in the last few weeks the world has changed. In fact, daily the world is changing, hourly, in fact. Our goal, the concern we have, the responsibility this government has at this point in our history is to pass an appropriations bill so we can fund the necessary activity of government in the upcoming months. It's absolutely essential, Mr. Chair, to get that job done. Our concern is that we have a passed and approved appropriations bill so that we can fund health care at perhaps the most critical time for health care delivery in many generations in this province, in over the last hundred years. We absolutely have to pass this appropriations bill.

In terms of our deficit, Mr. Chair, again, right now we are focused on passing an appropriations bill. We're focused on concentrating on those factors that we can manage and control in a world where everything is changing hourly. I would challenge the member opposite to make a prediction about where WTI will average this year. Right now we have \$4, \$5 swings within a day. We are dealing with unprecedented volatility and uncertainty, and in that

environment we will manage what we can manage, we will manage responsibly on behalf of Albertans, and we will pass an appropriations bill so that we can fund the critical activities of government over the upcoming months.

In terms of credit ratings, Mr. Chair, right now our focus is on getting an appropriations bill passed so that we can fund the critical deliverables of this government. I can't predict what the economic environment will look like when COVID-19 passes. I can't predict what that will look like, but what I do know today is that we need to resource our health care professionals, that we need to resource front-line workers within government so that we can deliver responsibly and appropriately. That's what Albertans expect, and that's what this government will deliver.

Mr. Chair, we will also be continuing to manage responsibly in this environment. We inherited a spending regime from the previous government that in nonemergent times, I would suggest, was incredibly irresponsible. It was a spending regime where expenses were going up by approximately 4 per cent per year yet revenues were flat. Unfortunately, that has left our government even additionally challenged to deliver well in a time of crisis, but we're committed to providing sound fiscal management in spite of the challenge that we've inherited from the previous government.

5:20

We will focus on continuing to find every efficiency, remove every redundancy. We will look to ensure that we're reallocating resources to the front lines in every ministry, whether it be Health or Education or Community and Social Services. We have found another \$60 million – and the Premier just announced that – so that additional funds can go to civil society, to charities and nonprofits who work on the front lines to deliver services to our most vulnerable every day. Mr. Chair, we're absolutely committed to ensuring that we deliver services in this time of crisis, and Budget 2020 and the related appropriations bill are necessary to deliver those services.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Moving on to a number of other questions, yesterday the minister tabled an update to the fiscal plan. All members got to see the new consolidated fiscal summary, delivered on March 16. It was a magical update. Notwithstanding COVID-19 reaching global pandemic levels and an energy market going through a deeply challenging time, the minister kept virtually everything the same. His revised update, then, to this House and to Albertans is that on the economy nothing has changed. Can the minister explain how over the past 20-odd days, in his view and in his formal presentation to this Chamber, absolutely nothing has changed based on his forecast? How is that possible?

The next question: can the minister confirm for the House that the minister and the government understand the concept of the time value of money, that the same dollar figure last year is worth more than the same dollar figure this year because inflation is a real thing?

Question 9. The minister is tabling a revised Budget 2020 in light of circumstances. I think most Albertans honestly, really get that everything has changed. They are experiencing it in their daily lives, and that's why they are asking for income replacement programs and other investments by their provincial government so that their provincial government can demonstrate, through the money it spends, its values and that it cares. Now, the minister told the House yesterday that Budget 2020 was good to go, with one

amendment, \$500 million in additional spending to get through COVID-19. Can the minister explain how he arrived at this number? Can the minister explain how his estimate for Health is only \$500 million more in light of a pandemic, which, when one adjusts for population and inflation, still means that the ministry is falling short by roughly \$460 million in health care alone, taking into account just population and inflation, not pandemic. Can the minister explain why there was no additional investment authority for things like income support, which will undoubtedly be required?

The next question. On February 27, on budget day, the minister stated that Alberta's real GDP for 2020 would be 2.5 per cent growth, which was higher than every single private-sector forecaster cited in his budget. It's right there on page 80 of the fiscal plan. The day that Budget 2020 was introduced, I said that that was not real, that it was a fiscal fairy tale, and I don't put that mildly as Albertans are frightened and concerned now that it has turned into something of a horror movie and not a fairy tale. In times of real uncertainty one of the few things that the government can do for people is to communicate real facts. That kind of transparency breeds confidence. It breeds confidence in the markets, it breeds confidence in consumers, and it breeds confidence in citizens. Yesterday the minister presented a revised consolidated fiscal summary, which implies that all of the numbers embedded in his Budget 2020, as released on February 27, still hold. We know that that is simply not factual.

To the minister: can he share with Albertans what he now expects for GDP growth in 2020? I just went and looked at how China did things during the crisis. In the beginning of January international forecasters were forecasting 5.9 to 6 per cent growth. By mid-January that had been downgraded. By the end of January that had been downgraded again. We know that this work is being done by private-sector forecasters right now, and we know that 2.5 is not at all correct and should never have been in the documents presented yesterday.

Now, we know that also there are estimates moving all the time and that, at least, 2.5 is wrong. We also know that the estimates for employment growth are wrong; for retail sales, wrong; for housing starts, wrong. I think Albertans want a new update because the opposition cannot be expected to vote in favour of a budget that the government knows is incorrect.

The next question. I would like to ask about staffing levels in the government of Alberta, which are outlined in schedule 21 of the fiscal plan. We are facing a pandemic, and now more than ever Albertans are relying on their government. The most vulnerable in our society – people, for example, on AISH – are having trouble reaching staff in the Ministry of Community and Social Services to get emergency payments. I think all members of this Chamber have constituents that are reaching out in various degrees of panic; I know I do. So my question to the Minister of Finance is this. The budget that the minister has tabled proposes to, for example, eliminate 136 social worker positions. The minister is responsible for the Public Service Commission and overall staffing in the government of Alberta. Will the minister commit for this year, in light of this pandemic, to cancel the planned layoffs in the civil service that are effective April 1, when Budget 2020 takes effect? If not, can the minister share with this Chamber why it is a priority to lay off staff when government staffing levels are already showing signs of severe strain? If yes, will the minister commit to sending out a notice to GOA employees on April 1 letting them know the change in direction?

Question 12. The minister, again, is responsible for the Public Service Commission and overall human resources in the GOA. Has the minister stress-tested the capacity of government if self-isolation is increased in response to the pandemic? What do the

models show? Does the minister have full confidence that the government of Alberta, outside of the health system, is ready to respond to what is coming with the Budget 2020 plan that has been put before this Legislature?

The next question to the Minister of Finance. The minister is ultimately responsible for Budget 2020 as a whole, so I am here to ask a question about the budget as a collective entity. In addition to spending authority, the minister is asking this Legislature to approve and to adopt business plans that will take effect on April 1. Now, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be a public health emergency on January 30, 2020. China had already downgraded its economic forecast by that time. We learned from Treasury Board and Finance officials that the budget was finalized in mid-February. Of course, it was tabled in the Legislature on February 27, but there was that lag period, and there were many things known about the impact on the global economy by mid-February.

Despite being in a global health emergency, which had been declared by the WHO at the time, in 176 pages of government business plans across 20 different ministries there is not one mention of this risk to business planning. There is not one mention of the word "epidemic" or of a global health emergency or other risk management tools that were known at the time. This minister is asking this Legislature to formally approve and adopt business plans which are literally the operating guide for government for the coming year, plans that say nothing about the historic challenge we are facing today and for the coming months. So my question is: knowing that we were in a global health emergency as of January 30, why did the government table business plans on February 27 for a government that doesn't speak in any way, shape, or form to the crisis that we are now facing?

5:30

My second question is this. These business plans are – even if it was not known, which it was, these plans that the Legislature is being asked to adopt and how ministers and deputies are being asked to direct their department over the next year are no longer relevant. So is the minister going to instruct ministries to ignore their business plans, implement them, change them in some way? If the plans are going to change, when will the minister inform the Legislature and all Albertans of new ministry business plans? I am mindful that the next fiscal year starts in two weeks.

My next question. This budget also serves as the third-quarter update for Budget '19, so I want to ask about Budget 2019 decision-making. On March 5 at the estimates for Transportation we learned that . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has risen to speak.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Chair. Pleased to respond to, again, some of the questions and assertions of the member opposite. The member started out with saying: notwithstanding COVID-19 and global energy prices. Well, notwithstanding COVID-19 and global energy prices, we would be in a different scenario. The world has changed, and it's changing by the minute right now. I might sound repetitive. At the risk of sounding repetitive, I need to state time and time and time again that it is our responsibility as the government in office, as the government that Albertans are depending on right now to deliver, that we manage what we can manage. We need today an appropriation bill so that we can fund government activities and services in the weeks and months ahead, full stop.

I do want to point out a couple of things in response to the member's criticism of our revenue projections. A full week after we delivered our budget, in fact in the first week in March, the Conference Board and Scotiabank were predicting that real GDP growth in Alberta would lead the nation at 2.2 per cent. Quite honestly, at the time we delivered our budget, while there had been a shift from the time we finalized our revenue projections based on economic assumptions that we used – even though there had been a shift, at that point it was still very plausible that we would see WTI prices in the high 50s for the upcoming year, that in fact we would see real GDP growth of just over 2 per cent, and that in fact our revenue projections would stand.

Let me point this out. In fact, the Quebec budget, which was released on March 10 – things had shifted by March 10. They were still assuming that WTI was going to be at \$56 a barrel, and there was no mention of the coronavirus. I'll say this, Mr. Chair. We recognized in our budget, even in our fiscal plan, even in the document itself that there was risk around coronavirus, that there was uncertainty around COVID-19. In fact, we know that with Alberta's revenues there is increased volatility relative to perhaps some other provinces, and we have made an effort to be transparent with Albertans. In our fiscal plan, both in 2019 and in 2020, we have gone out of our way to provide a chart in that fiscal plan which would show a plausible range of revenues given economic global recession risk or given risk around no additional pipeline access. We have worked to be transparent with revenue volatility.

But, Mr. Chair, none of us could have anticipated the challenges this province is facing today, both from a health crisis standpoint and from an economic standpoint, as we've seen two black swan events converge, two now turning into three as we will no doubt be facing a global recession on top of a global pandemic and on top of a falling out at OPEC, which is resulting in a burdensome oil supply at a time when the global economy is slowing drastically and demand is dropping. Everything has changed. Again, we are focusing on what we can manage, focusing on the need in front of us.

Mr. Chair, the member opposite pointed out that we were insufficiently budgeting for health care. I just want to again point out the MacKinnon panel report per capita health care spending, that they drew conclusions around in their panel report, that they provided to us last August. These are based on 2017 numbers, but the general quantum of the numbers continues to be relevant. Alberta on a per capita basis spent over \$5,000 on health care, B.C. was \$4,267, Ontario was just over \$4,000, and Quebec was at \$4,300. On top of this per capita spend, we've added \$500 million to Budget 2020 for Health. That amounts to an additional approximately, rough math, \$125 per capita on top of our unusually high per capita spend in health care.

Mr. Chair, we're not only spending the most per capita on health care, but even more importantly we have a Health minister and a team that are looking to find efficiencies, that are looking to deliver more efficiently and effectively and moving health care delivery to a 21st-century model, which is what Albertans expect of this government.

Now, over the next weeks and even months we will be focused. As you've heard the Health minister state, we will be focused on dealing with the COVID-19 challenge before us. We will not be distracted. But over the course of the year my expectation is that with the minister's tremendous effort and focus on finding efficiencies and delivering more effectively to Albertans, there will be savings that will be found within that health care budget that can be moved to front-line service delivery. I want to assure the member opposite and all Albertans that regardless of the challenge to our health care spend as we face COVID-19, this government will

provide the resources necessary to ensure front-line health care workers can deliver responsibly to Albertans in this time of crisis.

Mr. Chair, quite frankly, there is not time today to redo this entire budget and all of the revenue projections even if we could in this time of uncertainty land on defensible economic assumptions that would inform revenue projections. I would assert this afternoon that that would be a virtual impossibility given the change that we see hourly, much less daily, much less weekly. The challenge before us and the great responsibility before this House is to not get distracted with nonessential activity, activity that at the end of the day would provide no more certainty, but in fact to focus, again, on what we can manage, what we were elected to do, and that is to pass an appropriation bill so that we can deliver necessary key services to Albertans at this time of crisis.

Mr. Chair, we will be working to develop measures, economic measures to respond to the economic challenge that Albertans are facing. Again, we're seeing a dynamic, a rate of change that I've never witnessed in my lifetime. We are working, officials are working 20 hours a day right now on developing measures that we can put forward to ensure that Albertans don't fall through the cracks. Our number one priority is funding health care front-line delivery. Our number two priority is to ensure that Albertans' basic needs are covered, that they have basic shelter, that they'll have enough groceries for themselves and their families, that emergency services are in place.

5:40

Mr. Chair, we are working at measures, and we're working with our federal government, who also shares in that responsibility. We're working together to ensure that we have the programming in place so that no Albertans fall through the cracks in this time of crisis.

Mr. Chair, we're also looking to ensure that businesses can manage in the best fashion possible during this incredible time of economic challenge. We've identified business liquidity as a critical risk. Again, we are advocating on behalf of Albertans to our federal government, who has the great responsibility and the resources to backstop essential liquidity in our financial system, in our financial markets. I'm pleased to say that based on our advocacy and the advocacy of other provinces, they've come forward with an initial measure that will provide a backstop for Alberta businesses, but we're not done. We're continuing to advocate for an energy- and airline-specific measure that will ultimately ensure liquidity for our business sector.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen to speak again.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In Budget 2020 it also serves as the third-quarter update for Budget 2019, so I want to ask about Budget 2019 decision-making. On March 5 at estimates for Transportation we learned that the government of Alberta engaged in an in-year saving exercise that was never publicly disclosed. This was surprising to us given that Budget '19 was tabled in October. It was like the government told the Legislature they wanted to expend X dollars and then immediately went to cut more. Can the minister provide for the House a list of the supplementary savings targets assigned to each ministry that was part of this in-year savings exercise? Those are cuts that are happening right now. We are still in the '19-20 budget year, and right now we are also dealing with a pandemic, so if the minister could commit to providing to Albertans a detailed list of all the savings found in each ministry that are happening right now as we respond to that pandemic.

Next, we have heard a lot about the changing of AISH payment dates and how that was reflected in the Budget 2019 deficit. We know that the Auditor General is looking into this issue, so let me ask this. Did the decision to change the AISH payments date come to the Treasury Board committee of cabinet for decision?

I'll let the minister answer.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance to respond.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I need to provide a bit of context to properly answer this question. Again, Albertans elected this government to bring fiscal responsibility and fiscal order to the province, so we presented a budget in Budget 2019 with estimates and ministry expenditure totals and immediately worked to deliver on that budget, but we will never apologize for continuing to look for efficiencies even during the course of a fiscal year. We will not apologize or believe that we have to make fundamental changes to find some savings that could be reallocated or, in fact, in the event we can do things more efficiently, simply leave funds unexpended.

Albertans expected this government to deliver responsibly from a fiscal standpoint, and I have encouraged ministers in every ministry, if there's a little bit of extra budget room at the end of the year, not to race out to spend it for the sake of spending it, because Albertans expect better from this government. Albertans expect us to manage this province in a not dissimilar way as we would manage a business or even a household, and that is that as we can find efficiencies in-year, then in fact we should take those efficiencies and either reallocate those funds within reason and go through the proper channels, through Treasury Board approvals as required, or leave funds unexpended, which keeps and maintains a debt level that's lower than it would have otherwise been.

We know what excessive debt levels do to a province, and as we're facing a time of unprecedented economic crisis, we are disadvantaged as a government relative to what we would have been four years ago. We've inherited a debt level of approximately \$60 billion as opposed to \$13 billion, the debt level the previous government inherited. Unfortunately, we will see a rise in the debt level from \$62 billion because, again, we are facing an unprecedented challenge. It's at times like this where a strong balance sheet puts an organization on a solid footing, Mr. Chair.

Unfortunately, we've inherited a balance sheet that isn't as strong as it could have been, so now we will make the best decisions on behalf of Albertans with what we've been given. We will see our debt increase, but while we are making responsible decisions, we will not depart from ensuring that we're providing the most and greatest value for Albertans. To ensure that we're continuing, even while we have to respond to emergencies – while we have to and will develop measures to ensure that Albertans are cared for and Alberta businesses, as much as possible, can manage, we will continue to look for every efficiency, and we will continue to reallocate resources and apply restraint wherever we can responsibly do so. That should never change and should never change for any government.

Mr. Chair, I'll conclude with this. We remain committed to managing those factors and variables that we're able to manage. We're committed to passing this appropriations bill so we can fund the necessary and critical deliverables that Albertans will be depending on in a mere few days. We are working in an environment of incredible uncertainty, not only economically, not only from a health care delivery standpoint but also within an uncertain time relative to the health of the members in this House, and that is why our House leader very creatively and courageously led by finding a path forward to get this budget and appropriations bill passed exponentially.

Mr. Kenney: Expeditiously.

Mr. Toews: Expeditiously.

Mr. Kenney: The change is exponential.

Mr. Toews: The speed. The speed is exponentially increasing.

I want to thank our House leader for finding that path forward because ultimately we are delivering for Albertans today to ensure that we have an appropriations bill that can ensure responsible delivery of services to Albertans at a time of critical and great need.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen to speak.

Ms Hoffman: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I was trying to social-distance, but I see one of my colleagues has done that for me, so I can return to my seat in accordance with the standing orders.

I want to begin by acknowledging that the world has changed a great deal since this budget was presented, as I know many have already referred to, specifically as it relates to the implications of a global pandemic, a public health emergency, a provincial state of emergency. The criteria continue. We saw this start to emerge in January with the earliest cases. But, of course, more specifically, recently when – I think it was 11 days ago – we called on the Premier and his cabinet to withdraw their budget and present a new one, I think I said in the question: you know, there's 11 days between now and the end of the constituency break; it seems like a perfect opportunity to go back and revisit the numbers that you've set forward here.

The reason why is because we acknowledge what the Finance minister said when he said that he was presenting this budget and Rome was on fire. Rome was burning behind him, were his words. I don't think that that's a very confident place for the people of Alberta to be receiving the provincial treasury at this time. So I really must echo the sound counsel that's been given earlier this afternoon about the projections being off and, of course, moving forward with what I would say are a number of significant and deep cuts that can have very negative implications on the people of this province. I can't in good conscience say that I supported a process that would result in, most estimates show, at least 1,400 fewer teachers in this fiscal year, because at some point kids will come back to school. We know that. I have every confidence that they will.

5:50

This budget is being asked to be in place until March 2021, and this budget has a number of implications that I think are not in the best interests of Albertans, so I will ask a few questions that I think lead to some of those questions as we proceed here.

First, actually, I'll start with Health. I just have one I want to get to, and then I'll move to Education. With Health I just want to acknowledge that I appreciate that there has been an introduction, through this amendment that we had yesterday, of \$500 million. That's certainly a good step, but as was mentioned by my colleagues, it is not anywhere near population growth and inflation, population growth and inflation if there wasn't actually a universal, international, global pandemic. I know that \$500 million would be more than enough, probably, for most of us in this Chamber, maybe all of us, hopefully all of us, to be able to retire comfortably for the remainder of our long lives. But \$500 million divided by 4.371 million Albertans is \$114 per Albertan. As I understand, the cost of an average test, according to the Internet – I'm happy to get better information from our colleagues here in Health today – is about \$100. Basically, this introduction of new funds is about enough to

test every single Albertan, but of course many Albertans will require more than a test during this pandemic. Many will require higher degrees of care.

Of course, public health will bring in whatever warrants they need to, and they will move forward in a way that ensures that they can respond to this crisis, but what will also happen is that other areas in the budget will be pinched between now and March 2021, areas in the budget like home care, like dementia care, like other community-based supports. I have deep concerns about that. I do sincerely appreciate that \$500 million was introduced, but in terms of fighting a global pandemic for the health and well-being of Albertans, I think most Albertans would say that they want to make sure we have all the money we need to be able to keep people alive and safe in this province. I'm certainly one of those, and so are the people who are reaching out to my office.

In terms of Education I want to start with the fiscal plan. On page 110 of the fiscal plan it talks about education property tax revenue. It says that it's forecast to be \$2.6 billion in 2020-21, an increase of \$102 million from '19-20, and that the requisition was based on Alberta's population growth and inflation. We're passing on increased property tax acquisitions to municipalities to render on behalf of the province so that we can achieve that additional revenue, but we're not actually funding for population growth and inflation in schools. Many ministers repeat over and over again that the budget is being maintained, but revenue from property tax is certainly going up, and that's not being passed on to Albertan kids. "Why are we using that rationale for increasing property tax revenue at this time?" would be my question. And if we are fine with that rationale, then surely that revenue should be passed on to kids, who the ratepayers assume it's going to. Again, that's fiscal plan page 110, if anyone is wanting to verify that. Education property taxes are going to increase by \$102 million. That's money that's not being passed on through the general revenue fund, so why are we passing that on to ratepayers and kids?

There's also a mention about letting oil and gas companies avoid paying \$10 million. This, I think, has been in the media recently and is referred to in this document. It says in the budget that there is \$10 million this year in education requisitions that will not be acquired from oil and gas. My question is: if we are in the position before all of this happened – and I imagine that it may even be bigger now – that more companies, a variety of companies, aren't paying their education portion of their property tax, what are we planning for in terms of the impact to revenue again? This is oil and gas revenue through the rate acquisition there.

Also, we have many families that are in periods of hardship. We have many businesses that are in periods of hardship. We've already made the assumption before all of this happened, as the Minister of Finance rightfully says. The assumption was made that \$10 million wouldn't be collected from oil and gas companies. How is that being amended as we move forward now? And if we aren't thinking about other businesses being impacted, I certainly think we should be. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic is upon us, it seems likely that homeowners and small businesses, again, will have this additional burden, so I want to know what we're doing in terms of projections as well as what we're doing to ensure that we do collect where it is possible.

This budget has a new funding formula that eliminates RCSD, regional collaborative service delivery. This was a joint investment between Health and Education to ensure wraparound services and that allied health workers could be there to support students throughout our province. This includes mental health therapists, who would have been particularly useful for kids dealing with severe anxiety, uncertainty during this time. The staff were being given notices already, prior to this happening, that their contracts

were being terminated. How much was the total RCSD funding last year, and can we have a breakdown by school jurisdiction, school district? I'd be happy to receive that in writing if it isn't handy here today. Yesterday I received the written responses from last year, so I look forward to receiving more from this year.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

Again, COVID-related: parents across the province are asking for advice on how to home-school during the shutdown. Many are being very serious and rigid in developing timetables and making sure that their kids have as much structure and confidence and are continuing to move forward academically. Many are reaching out to me for advice on online resources and to one another through the parent network that exists in our province.

I would appreciate some information – I know, again, that it was decided before COVID began – on why it is that we are on a path to completely eliminate supports for ADLC when ADLC is one of those resources that parents are turning to today in particular, on why we're taking away those resources from supporting students and learning in a variety of settings. There are students who are unable to be in large class settings: who knows for how long? Taking away those supports, I think, will be very important. I think they are important supports for students and for families. I would like to know a little bit more about the decision that went into the two-year transition away from ADLC. Honestly, are other boards to expect that they're also going to see their supports cut from government as they relate to students who are learning remotely or learning in alternate types of settings?

I'll maybe pivot now to the general revenue fund, which is the government's estimates. The pages and the values are the same for Education, I believe, so I'll be referring to the not-yesterday version. If they've changed, my apologies. In terms of the general revenue fund, I'm starting on page 77. Don't lick my finger. Sorry. I'm really trying hard to not touch my face, not lick my finger. I hope you all are, too. I'm on page 77, and I want to begin by acknowledging that the general revenue fund is going down in terms of educational expense and investment for youth. One of my questions would be: do you agree that on page 77 the amounts . . .

The Chair: It's time for the government to have up to 10 minutes.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you for those questions. First, I want to correct, right off the bat: the 1,400 fewer teachers is incorrect. There are approximately 100 teachers, and they are due to retirements and just the natural course of how education operates.

In regard to the property tax, the differentials that you were talking about, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I understand, has recently answered those questions, so I won't bother going into that.

But in terms of when you were talking about the fact that we are funding education at a different level, I want to draw your attention to the graph that is on page 128 of our fiscal plan, which very much highlights the fact that we, as a whole, have been very much compensating education on a very high level. We have record spending in education. When you look at the fact that over the last 15 years we've gone from 25 per cent enrolment growth, 33 per cent inflation, yet our operating costs have grown by 80 per cent – 80 per cent – this is unsustainable. That very much told us, as well as the system, that we need to do things differently.

6:00

What I heard over and over again – and I know that the opposition member is a former school trustee as well – was that what the system was looking for was sustainable, predictable funding. That is certainly what we looked for in providing this new funding

formula that we came up with. I want to give kudos to my staff. Gene Williams is here – he is my ADM – and he led this particular endeavour, which took hours and hours and hours and hours and days and days and weeks of his life, because we knew how important it was to have that sustainable, predictable funding to look after our most vulnerable, to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our students. This was critically important to us.

In our new funding formula – and I can address the questions that you were talking about – the RCSD model was something that we heard about from our administrators across this province. They found that it was, for the most part, not meeting their needs. They asked us: please, please put those dollars – and those dollars were \$71 million, to answer your question – back into the system so we can utilize them better. They have gone into the specialized learning support grant. We've gone from 36 grants to 15 grants. We are now able to manage the system much better. Administrators are already commenting on how positive this is for them. In the \$600 million that we're spending just in specialized learning supports, that RCSD model, now the administrators have the flexibility to use that as they see fit, and I know that they're going to utilize it effectively.

The ADLC program that you're referring to: again, that is something where we heard overwhelmingly from the school system, from administrators, from trustees and beyond saying: this isn't meeting our needs. It was good for the time when it was first developed, because at that time there were no other options, but now we have 32 school divisions out of 61 that are providing distance learning. It doesn't negate the fact that ADLC can, in a different form, continue at Pembina Hills. They will be able to provide distance learning. They will be on the same playing field as everyone else.

When I look at the new funding model that we have introduced, I am so very proud because this is a fundamental, transformational change, one that our school divisions were very much asking for. The new model will deliver more efficient and sustainable funding to the kindergarten to grade 12 education system to ensure all schools in Alberta have adequate resources to deliver programs in an equitable way. That's something that we kept hearing. We saw disparity across the province. If you lived in a rural area, you didn't necessarily get the same things that you would if you were living in a metro area. This provides that sustainable, predictable funding in an equitable way.

This new model reduces red tape and administrative costs by reducing the number of funding envelopes while maintaining the overall funding level and giving school authorities more autonomy and flexibility to invest in classrooms based on their student needs. Madam Chair, we at one point had a school fee grant that was so onerous that school divisions had to hire extra staff just to administer that particular grant. They have been speaking to government to say: let's reduce the administrative burden.

I have heard over and over again from numerous school divisions. I'll give you a quote from one in particular, and that would be the board of trustees of the Canadian Rockies school division.

For many years we have been asking successive governments to review the funding formula, as it has significantly disadvantaged small rural school divisions such as ours. This budget has recognized those long-term challenges.

Another quote, from the chair of Golden Hills school division:

We are pleased to see that [the government] has been responsive to our concerns for less red tape as well as targeted supports for small rural schools.

A predictable funding model will also allow school authorities to do better long-term planning by making more informed budget decisions well ahead of the start of the school year. As a former

school trustee, as a former school board chair I know how important it was for me to know what the numbers were, but often we didn't know what our student number counts were until well into the school year, typically the end of September or later, and we wouldn't have our funding envelopes until then. Now, as of the budget, school divisions will have a budget that they can look to.

For everyone's information, this particular year every single school division will see an increase in their overall funding, so for the first time ever school authorities will be provided with funding commitment letters in spring 2020 for the upcoming school year to support effective planning of service delivery for our students. Per-student funding will now be allocated on a weighted moving average, which will see enrolment funding based on three years of enrolment: the previous year's actual enrolment, an estimate for the current year, and the projection for the next year. We are already hearing many positives about this. Rural school divisions in particular are saying – this is from the superintendent of Clearview public schools – that “the new funding model for education contains many positives for Clearview Public Schools. We will receive additional dollars over [last] year's budget, and also increased flexibility in how those funds are expended.”

The projected enrolment is the most heavily weighted element in the formula, at 50 per cent, followed by the current year at 30 per cent and the previous year's enrolment at 20 per cent. This new approach allows us to address enrolment growth. School authorities with growing enrolment will see more money while those with declining enrolment will see a decrease in funding. All boards, whether they are growing, shrinking, or remaining the same, will benefit from the much greater predictability and sustainability of our new system.

We also expect school boards to continue to find efficiencies and eliminate unnecessary spending. Without question, education funding should be spent in the classroom. That is something that we have advocated for and that I'm continuing to advocate for. I've said from the very, very beginning that I want to ensure the integrity of the classroom, and that means getting as many resources in front of the teachers and in front of the students so that those students can learn better. We want more teachers in front of students. Without question, education funding should be spent in the classroom.

Not all grants, however, will be based on the weighted moving average. Generally we have used the weighted moving average to calculate the funding allocated by the grants that have a per-student component while some grants use the block-funding approach where appropriate. And as I've just said, one of the key benefits of using the weighted moving average system is that it ensures funding will be more predictable for both school authorities and the government.

School authorities will no longer have to wait until they have a final, confirmed number, as I said previously, which usually occurs at the end of September, when the school year is already under way. This will reduce the need for school authorities to dedicate time and resources to estimating funds for each coming year. The hon. member will remember, from when she was a board chair, that in June there would have to be budget estimates. This took a lot of time to put together, so this is something else.

We've reduced additional red tape and resources that now can go back. Those dollars can go back into the classroom. This predictability . . .

The Chair: Now the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. I'd like to talk about the actual budget estimates and specifically page 77. On page 77 it shows that the amounts to be voted on for the government expenses for education

have been reduced from \$4.919 billion in the last NDP budget to \$4.915 billion in the previous year's UCP budget and now a further reduction to \$4.810 billion. Again, that's page 77 of the estimates. On page 79 that's broken down further, so let's take the \$4.8 billion from the general revenue fund and talk about what happened here.

Last year I was told by the minister that base funding was maintained or increased, but again it was line 3.1, which shows \$1.928 billion under the last NDP budget, then \$1.905 billion under the UCP – so that's a \$23 million reduction – and then this year it's being cut an additional \$177 million to \$1.728 billion. I'd like the minister to confirm that those numbers in her budget are indeed as are printed and that, as the facts clearly demonstrate, those have been reduced. Specifically, those are the base grants for early childhood services to grade 12 programming.

6:10

Line 3.2 on the same page talks about learning support funding. It is going up slightly, not nearly as much as the funding was cut. It's going up \$6 million versus a \$177 million cut. Would the minister please tell us how all of the grants under LSF are being administered? The weighted moving average: is it per pupil? Is it going back to coding? Those specifics would be appreciated by parents who have written to me who have students with special needs in particular. How is that different from the way that it was funded under the last NDP budget, the difference between how students with special needs were funded and how they will be now? Again, there's a significant reduction to the base grant, which a lot of people will be struggling with.

Transportation, 3.4: has the funding model changed this year? I know that there's a slight increase, so I'd like to know how that's being actually distributed to boards. Is it consistent based on per pupil? Has it changed based on different criteria?

We talked about education property tax, so I'll go to the next section there, which is premiums, fees, and licences. I'd like the minister to say how much per jurisdiction she expects premiums, fees, and licences to go up and to define each of those. I know that it was said that there's been a lot of consultation on this, and I appreciate that. What are the ways that boards are planning on increasing premiums, fees, and licences for families?

Also, please define fundraising gifts and donations. Again, those are being leaned on very heavily in this new budget.

Then I'm going to touch a bit on the funding matter. Before I do, I appreciate the minister reflecting on the sustainable, predictable part of the advocacy that the ASBA and many individual boards engaged in for years. The part before that was "adequate": adequate, sustainable, predictable funding. I think that that is what we are here today to debate. Of course, if you know six months ahead of time that you'll have more than enough money, that would be great. That is a nice way to plan. But if you find out six months ahead of time that you will get funding based on last year's enrolment and enrolment for the year before, not based on the number of kids that are actually showing up, for growing boards this is a significant point of distress. I appreciate that for shrinking boards, the weighted moving average does give them a cushion.

Did the minister consider a weighted moving average for boards that are experiencing declining enrolment to support them in sustainability but look at a per-pupil model for boards that are experiencing growing enrolment? It certainly doesn't seem equitable to boards that are seeing their funding based on far fewer students than they had previously. Rather than pitting board against board, a number of people said to me – you know, nothing against rural boards; I grew up going to a rural board, and many of our caucus members did – how can we make sure that the weighted moving average doesn't punish growing boards? Right now it does.

Right now they will have less money if they have more students than they would have under the former model.

I'm going to touch on the funding manual now. This is something that I think got released the day after the budget was originally presented, and there are a number of pieces in here that are of deep concern to me and to many other folks who've had a chance to go through it a bit. I'm going to try and keep it focused, though, right now on page 20, which is around the high school base instruction grant. The manual says, "School jurisdictions must provide students with a minimum of 1000 hours of instructional time for Grades 10-12, timetabled for both the student and the teacher." I'm well aware that the old manual used to say that they must make available "1,000 hours of instruction" time.

That's a full schedule of four blocks each semester, no preps for any kids in grades 10 through 12. That needs to be available to them, but that certainly isn't timetabled for both the student and the teacher. Students have always had the ability to choose their timetable and have some preps built in, or spares as they like to call them, and teachers have actually had a lot of – they've had a collective agreement that ranges somewhere between about 890 hours and 906 hours of instructional time. So the interim funding manual, which is put on the website in relation to the government's estimates, is absolutely in contravention of the collective bargaining agreements that TEBA has ratified in the past. There are a lot of schools and school jurisdictions that are deeply concerned about that. Again, if you're looking for it, it's in the Interim Funding Manual for School Authorities 2020/2021, the allocation criteria on the bottom of page 20.

I also want to talk about high school funding not being tied to credits. I know that we've gone to a variety of models in a number of areas, and I think that having choice and flexibility made a lot of sense. I am concerned that if we go back to not being funded on credits across the board, we are going to see a number of students who are typically harder to educate be encouraged not to be at school. This is something that happened previously a lot, that students would be encouraged to stay until September 30, and then as soon as October came, it was, "Did you know about the opportunities to work at a business away from here?" or: "Do you know that you don't have to be here? You know that you're old enough to drop out."

I worry that going to a weighted moving average for high school is going to have some of those same unintended consequences. I sincerely hope that they are unintended. I don't think we want to encourage kids to drop out of high school, but this interim funding model certainly does nothing to discourage it. I think it is important that we know why it is that the minister has moved full steam ahead on this as the funding model for high schools.

I also think there are two other pieces I want to highlight that relate to high school, and that's specifically as they relate to the year 4 and year 5 funding for high school. It's going to have a significant negative impact on high school completion.

Here are some schools where kids often go for a fourth and fifth year of high school: Braemar school here in Edmonton, where it's focused on pregnant and parenting teen moms; Cardinal Collins high school, also here in Edmonton, again with an academic focus on helping some of the kids who are facing the most severe hurdles in life get an opportunity to complete high school; Louise Dean school in Calgary, which, again, focuses on pregnant and parenting teen moms. The new interim funding manual gives them one rate of funding for the first three years that they're in high school, usually grades 10, 11, and 12, but many of these students stay in high school an extended period of time. Centre High is another example. They're going to be funded now in their fourth year at 50

per cent of what they were funded for their first three years and at only 25 per cent for their fifth year.

I imagine that the minister was a school board member, and maybe she knew some of these kids who did a fourth and fifth year. I can tell you that often the kids that I've met who've done a fourth and fifth year of high school are some of the ones that we need to invest in the most. They are the ones that if they get a chance to break the cycle of poverty, complete their high school, and move on to postsecondary in some way, they will certainly have a greater sense of self-confidence, but also they will cost all of your other ministries significantly less money. [interjections] Premier, I appreciate the side conversations, but I'd really love to have my questions heard.

I'd also like to ask about the PUF changes. I know that the funding manual has said that it is important that PUF be funded, but I also know that GRIT and Edmonton public and many other jurisdictions have told us that their funding is going down 40 per cent. When I asked about this in the lock-up, I was advised that there were changes to that third year of PUF, that the third year wouldn't be funded the same way that it was previously. For example, I would like an answer to the question around students who were in programs for their second year right now who are code 40, and next year they'll be in their third year, five-year-olds previously funded under PUF. My understanding is that right now if you're code 40, you get about \$25,000 and that next year it'll be about \$15,000 under the new funding model. I would like that confirmed or corrected.

I would also like to point out that already we are hearing about school closures as a result of this. One is Tevie Miller here in Edmonton, that is an early-learning site, and it is already slated for closure next year. These are the kinds of closures that I know are inevitable in this budget, and this is why I certainly won't rush to approve something that is going to do harm to children and families. Those teachers received their notice yesterday in the midst of the coronavirus epidemic that's happening in our district.

The Chair: The government has up to 10 minutes. The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. First, I'll start by addressing that I think the hon. member misunderstood that the interim funding manual is not the same as estimates or the fiscal business plan, but definitely, you know, I appreciate that perhaps she would like to rephrase her questions in the next go-around.

As far as the interim funding manual, we know that it is only an interim funding manual at this time because it is a whole new formula that we're working with, and we're still fine-tuning. So thank you for that.

We'll start with your first question. The question was in regard to page 77. The decrease of \$105 million, or 2.1 per cent, is primarily due to the increasing education property tax revenue, which is nonvoted. Of course, we are looking at the voted pages, and the \$105 million is nonvoted. Of course, you've already spoken to the Minister of Municipal Affairs on that particular piece, so I won't go into that any further.

6:20

For the 2020-2021 school year Education will be implementing a new assurance model, as I've said, which will contain cost, will allocate funding predictably, increase the share of funding going into the classrooms, assure the long-term viability of rural schools, and foster collaboration between school authorities to realize economies of scale, create centres of excellence, encourage best practices. Government is also committed to account for the

remaining enrolment growth for the completion of the 2019-2020 school year.

Your next question was in regard to base funding. In the new model base funding is going from \$6,679 to \$6,064, but that is because we have a new system. Those dollars are now where other grants were wrapped into that base funding before, particularly the system admin cost. We have now increased O and M. We've got a separate system admin grant. We have transportation. We have the specialized learning supports and the FNMI supports. These all now have additional dollars allocated into that area. I can get into the details of that if you would like me to get into that particular one. The \$176 million is divided by a \$102 million increase in educational property tax, \$6 million into learning supports funding, \$38 million to operations and maintenance, \$15 million into transportation, \$10 million into education system support, and \$3 million into the accredited privates and ECS programs.

The next question you had was in regard to the learning support funding. The learning support funding, of course, you would know, is where we allocate funding for our special needs programs. Again I would caution you about comparing the old formula to the new formula. The old formula, the old funding was totally different. We went from 36 grants to the now 15 grants, which has resulted in a completely new element structure. The \$176.6 million decrease in funding is primarily attributed, again, to the \$102 million increase in property tax, \$6 million increase to the learning supports funding. In our whole learning supports we have \$1.315 billion, which is much higher, if you notice on page 79, in comparison to the previous one of \$1.285 billion.

Is there anything else here? Let me just see. I think I'll just go on to your next question on fundraising. Excuse me for just a minute. While we're finding the fundraising one, I do want to highlight that the weighted moving average is something that we are hearing very positive remarks from across the system as they are aligning with this new funding model.

I'm going to continue on with the high school. You've discussed high school at length, and what I really wanted to highlight is the fact that in our new funding and assurance model school divisions and school boards have the ability and the flexibility to utilize those dollars to meet the needs of the students. We have eliminated so much of the red tape that they're finding it much more effective.

To go back to the model itself, while we're looking for the school fees, I'll answer it in the next round of questions or get that to you afterwards in writing. I would be happy to do that.

Our new funding model for high school also uses the weighted moving average enrolment methodology, which will replace the Carnegie unit and the credit enrolment funding. However, the high school funding base rate will be 10 per cent higher than the base rates for kindergarten to grade 9, so there is something there. It is an actually higher base rate than the kindergarten to grade 9 because we understand that there are additional costs associated with high school programming.

The new funding model reduces the number of grants, as I said, from 36 to 15. Each of the grants, with the exception of the base instruction grant, is designed to help address specific needs within the education system. However, most of the grants are not restricted to just a single given use, and school authorities are empowered to use their funds as they see best to meet the needs of their students and their communities. This is something we heard very, very strongly from the system, that they want that flexibility. School boards want the autonomy to be able to direct the dollars to meet the unique needs of their unique realities. While the goal is to help ensure school authorities can divert resources into the classroom, it will be up to individual school authorities to determine how to best allocate those resources. All students in Alberta deserve an

education that prepares them for success no matter where they live. We believe that. I know that everyone in this Legislature believes that as well.

We know that rural schools often face unique challenges such as declining enrolment and serving students from across large geographical areas. Again, we're giving them the flexibility to meet those needs. In fact, I have an anecdotal story that I've heard where there was a school division looking to close a rural school, and now because of the new funding model they are actually looking at being able to keep that school going.

We also know that supporting rural schools based on per-student funding wasn't sustainable as small rural schools are disproportionately affected by fluctuations in enrolment. Our new funding model provides consistent, predictable funding to allow rural boards to ensure their remote schools can be well maintained and operated even if they never reach full capacity. We want rural communities to remain vibrant and rural students to continue to receive a high-quality education. It shouldn't matter where you live.

When I was travelling the province – and I'm happy to say that I've been to 95 per cent of the school divisions right across this province in less than a year, many of which said that they have never seen a Minister of Education during their whole time as trustees. Many boards were commenting on that, that it's been a long, long time since they've seen a Minister of Education in their area, if ever. They were very appreciative of the fact that we are addressing the needs of rural schools.

Mrs. Aheer: Hear, hear.

Member LaGrange: Pardon me?

Mrs. Aheer: Hear, hear. That's all I said.

Member LaGrange: Oh, thank you. I thought my time was up. Sorry.

We are addressing the needs of our rural schools. We are listening to school divisions right across the province. One thing I have heard in my travels is: thank you; thank you for listening; thank you for bringing forward a new funding formula, new funding model that really has taken into account the needs of school divisions and what they've been asking for for a very, very long time. The new funding formula guarantees funding for small rural schools through block funding, so boards will not have to make significant adjustments to staffing levels due to changes in student enrolment.

We're also committed to improving education outcomes for our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. In Budget 2020 we are providing approximately \$75 million to assist school authorities to provide system programs and instructional supports that improve educational outcomes for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and support also the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations. This was something also that as I travelled across the province, I visited with many of the First Nations . . .

The Chair: We'll now go to the Official Opposition for up to 10 minutes. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks very much. Because we are coming close to the end of our time together this afternoon, I am going to ask a number of different ministry-related ones and then welcome you to figure out how best to respond to those.

I'm going to start with Service Alberta. I have two here that I want to ask. Does the minister have a plan to support public servants working from home by supporting them with IT equipment? The same question applies for students, actually. In the budget estimate

for 2020-2021 there is a \$25.4 million cut to information management and technology. With this cut how is the ministry prepared to assist public servants working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic? Why are you cutting resources for civil servants to work from home when the Public Service Commission is directing employees to work from home whenever possible? Simply put, how does Budget 2020 cut supports for Albertans during the COVID-19 pandemic? I'm having real difficulty understanding, and I need serious, honest, frank answers, please, from the minister.

6:30

The next one is also for Service Alberta. As self-isolating increases across rural Alberta, are network services in the ministry prepared to handle the increased use of SuperNet? We have seen in Italy, for example, that IT systems have gotten overwhelmed and collapsed for a period of time. Can the minister assure us there will be no service interruptions for the Internet during the COVID-19 pandemic?

I'm actually going to do a third one here. Albertans are being told to self-isolate if they have any symptoms, and obviously they should. This means that many Albertans might be unable to renew or register their vehicles. I think something was mentioned about that today in question period. We'd like more detail on that if possible. In light of outcome 3 in the ministry's business plan and how that relates to COVID-19, is it now okay for Albertans to drive in an emergent situation without an updated licence or vehicle registry? If not, what's the plan with Budget 2020 to ensure that regular Albertans can obey the law and renew while still heading to the office or self-isolating if they have symptoms whatsoever?

A couple of Education ones that I promised other people I'd ask on their behalf. Last year there were replacement grants that were called one-time funding. This year there's bridging funding that's a significant amount. It seems clear that the funding formula doesn't work, and that's why the bridge funding had to be put in place. What formulas were used to determine how to distribute the bridge funds, how to distribute them specifically to urban-rural-metro boards, and how were those established? There is a line item for bridge funding when you look at the actual funding sheets. Again, I just want to reiterate that the interim funding manual and the actual individual board allocations are government documents that are created as part of the process to fund education, which is flowing from the budget.

Another one, from Cheryl. This one's a mom: "Why are public dollars going to private schools? I was shocked to learn that it was 70 per cent before the budget. If parents choose to send their children to private schools, shouldn't they pay the full cost?" This is Cheryl's question. I said that I'd pass it along to the minister. Another one. Laura said: "Please speak to the issue of equity around public schools receiving the same money per pupil as separate or charter schools when public schools are required to accept all students. Statistically, public schools have a greater percentage of students with special needs, who are learning languages, et cetera." These two moms would really appreciate that their questions be answered. The other one, I think, was an education stakeholder, but I did promise that I'd pass those questions along.

I want to touch on two from Environment and Parks. The first is with regard to TIER. The government has publicly committed to spending the first \$100 million plus 50 per cent of all TIER revenue above \$100 million on emissions reductions initiatives. This estimate shows revenue this year at \$413 million, which means that they should be spending roughly \$256 million on emissions reductions, yet section 10 of the expenditures shows a total of \$147 million being spent on emissions reductions. Where is the extra

money from TIER being spent if not in accordance with the \$100 million plus 50 per cent?

And then for parks: what data was used to determine utilization rates to close or sell off the 164 parks on the list? What consultation process was followed to determine which parks were put on the list? What happens to parks that are closed or don't find a partner for management?

And then Infrastructure questions. We have some. Budget 2020 shows a lapse in capital plan spending of \$400 million from Budget 2019, as outlined on page 208 of the fiscal plan, line item 18, in just four months from when Budget 2019 was presented. It seems like that budget wasn't managed properly. Planned spending was down by 6.5 per cent in just four months, which is likely the biggest prorated lapse in history – if it isn't, feel free to let us know when it was – so we'd like the minister to explain why this significant lapse occurred.

The next question is also for Infrastructure. Would the minister provide an estimate for the number of construction jobs not created because of this lapse for the fiscal year 2019-2020 as a result of the \$400 million lapse in capital spending as outlined on page 208 of the fiscal plan, line 18?

The third Infrastructure one is that we would like the minister to explain why we should believe the blueprint for jobs and in particular the Infrastructure component given the lapse in fiscal year 2019-20. Specifically, what systems have been put in place to ensure we won't have another historic lapse in associated jobs this fiscal year, acknowledging that I understand we are in a pandemic, but we need to know that there will be these jobs that are in this budget since we're supposed to be passing it and acting as though it is a legitimate budget.

Question 4. We'd like the minister to explain how there is any real increase in planned spending in 2020-2021, as we have learned from his colleagues in other estimates that spending was moved out of 2019-20 and into 2020-2021 in the amount of \$400 million. The government is claiming that spending is up by \$400 million this year, but it's simply a reprofiling exercise, it would appear, from conversations that we've had with other ministers.

Five. Infrastructure is a key element of the blueprint for jobs. Moreover, as the government made clear yesterday, this budget is in response to COVID-19. My question is this: what is the government estimate for capital lapse in 2020-2021, as construction workers will need to self-isolate, and what are the downward revised job projection numbers in construction for the capital plan in 2020-2021 because of COVID-19?

Question 6, also Infrastructure. The government of Alberta manages many construction projects throughout the year, and managing those projects well is a key outcome of the ministry. In fact, it is so important that it's listed twice: key objectives 1.2 and 1.3. With COVID-19 it's likely that many projects might be started that suddenly have to stop because of isolation protocols, so what systems are in place both in the ministry and in contracts awarded by the government of Alberta to ensure that taxpayers are protected? And what systems are in place both in the ministry and in the contracts to ensure that Alberta contractors are treated fairly for real, unforeseen health issues that could impede a work and delivery date?

Culture. I've been waiting for culture. Shoot. Sorry. It's out of order here for me because I was jumping around. Culture. Here we go. One of the hardest hit sectors of the COVID-19 pandemic is the arts and entertainment industry. The ban on gatherings of 250 or more – or now it appears 50 or more – impedes thousands of artists, venues, employees that are supported and earning a living. Again, we support the ban. We know that this is in everyone's best public health interests, but as the efforts to contain the spread continue,

this important area of the Alberta economy will continue to struggle. My question to the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women is: what mechanisms will she be putting in place through this budget in her ministry to support this sector of the economy during the pandemic and ensure stability afterwards? It relates to outcome 1 of the business plan, which is why I'm asking it in estimates.

Another one to culture. This one's about multiculturalism. To the minister of culture and multiculturalism. It's extremely important that every Albertan can access resources to combat the coronavirus. When the government of Alberta is providing advice to Albertans in writing and online, we see it on social media, through the media, in signage, and we thank the government for doing so. Dr. Hinshaw recently expanded a lot of that work, and the government took additional steps to provide advice on daily updates in sign language. Again, we think that is a really positive step. Of course, there's more work to be done.

Can the minister advise the House if there are resources put in place in this Budget 2020 to support multilanguage transcription of important health information related to this pandemic? Do Albertans have to wait until April before the funds can start flowing to support this work? Of course, it seems like it would be crucial to do so now. Again, we're mindful that you're in the middle of a pandemic, and the mandate of your ministry and your business plan is around equal access to full social participation for Albertans, and we really do believe that this is especially important in times of social isolation as well as in times of public health crises.

I have time to get one more Education one in, so I'm going to do that. I would like – and, again, I'm happy to receive it in writing – the breakdown for the funding for students learning English as a second language, where those numbers are, in which jurisdictions, and the weights, again, the number for students with special needs and for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. I think that this was provided as a tabling last year in estimates.

Thank you.

The Chair: The rule under which we are being governed right now is up to 10 minutes for a member, so there is an opportunity for all of the ministers to speak in relation to these questions should the Chamber be willing to do so, but each member will have up to 10 minutes to speak. We are up to 6:59 as our end time here.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you for that, Madam Chair. I will point out to the Chamber that we tried to provide an opportunity for back and forth through unanimous consent earlier, and the opposition chose to go this way, which makes it problematic for that way because we can now go and take the whole last half hour. I don't think that we will do that, but that's the point. Through you to them: if they'd like to finish off the remainder of their half hour back and forth, we would be happy to do that.

6:40

But, first, I'll address some of the issues that were raised by the hon. member. In regard to TIER – I'll start there – the hon. member is correct. The budget does show \$413 million in TIER revenues in 2020-21, which I will also stress is all from the industry, Madam Chair. Yes. She is correct that within the Environment and Parks budget there's \$147 million going to TIER. I want to back up and make sure that the Chamber understands what the platform commitment was and then ultimately how we have legislated and regulated around TIER. The first \$100 million in TIER revenues and 50 per cent thereafter is to go towards climate change reduction and GHG reduction. As well, the remaining 50 per cent after that

\$100 million is to go to deficit reduction and to fund a portion of the Canadian Energy Centre. To confirm, through you, Madam Chair, to that hon. member, the latter portion of that is being done exactly like that. The deficit reduction as well as the Canadian Energy Centre is taking place with that 50 per cent.

The reality is that the Environment and Parks department is not the only department that is working on GHG reduction. The portion that is within Alberta environment is from TIER. That will be spent on climate change. But other departments, including the Department of Energy and others, have climate change reduction projects going on, like carbon capture and storage projects, for example. You would be able to communicate about that through their ministries. I'm sure they would be happy to discuss that with you.

On to parks. The hon. member asked some questions about decisions that were being made about parks, particularly in regard to data. Madam Chair, I was shocked to find out, when my department provided me some of the data when it comes to campgrounds, and particularly in remote areas in our province, that some campgrounds that we were paying to maintain, having taxpayers pay to maintain, were having as low as 22 users a year come to that facility, some of those locations in remote areas, where parks officials were having to drive six-hour round trips to be able to service facilities that only saw 22 users a year.

Now, some of that confusion comes with understanding the difference between parks officials and public land officials. Alberta environment has almost two different divisions within it when you add parks to it. Areas that are designated under the Provincial Parks Act are serviced by parks employees. Areas that surround them on public land are often served by what I would call public land employees. The reality is that we determined that in some cases it would make more sense to have employees that were already in the vicinity be able to manage those landscapes. By looking at data, we made some of those determinations.

I do want to be clear, Madam Chair, through you to the hon. member, that there are nine facilities that are currently being deregistered as provincial parks, turned back over to Crown land, and will be operated under Crown land inside the province. The other 164 that she refers to are actually fully funded within this budget and are not changing, but they are being opened to partnership opportunities. We have seen requests for partnership opportunities from indigenous communities, nonprofits, and profit companies as well as municipalities.

We've seen some examples of where that's worked successfully already in the province. A great example is that the town of Sylvan Lake asked to take over a provincial park that surrounded Sylvan Lake, within the town limits of Sylvan Lake, several years ago, and that has worked well. Of course, an often-cited example is from my neighbourhood out in the Sundre west-side area, and that's the Friends of the Eastern Slopes, who've been managing provincial parks and federal lands in the area for decades quite effectively with us. We will continue to look for those partnerships.

I'm going to address one other issue, Madam Chair. The hon. member asked us who we consulted on that. Well, we were clear within our platform that we would move forward with partnership opportunities when it came to provincial parks. Who we consulted with were the people of Alberta, who overwhelmingly, in record numbers, elected this government to implement its platform. Alberta environment, when it comes to parks, is following that through and through.

I'm just trying to check if I got them all. I will close with this on parks, and then I'll turn this over to let some of my hon. colleagues answer your questions. The reality is that we were also shocked to find out that under the previous government they were using helicopters, as an example, to deliver firewood to remote

campgrounds, or that they were building yurts in remote areas at the very time that Albertans were out of work, Madam Chair. With this budget we've been able to stop some of those activities and will be able to spend Alberta's taxpayer money in efficient ways while still protecting our parks and protected areas going forward.

With that, I have a lot more I'd love to say, Madam Chair, but I do want to give the opposition as much time as they got in their last 19 minutes.

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to address the few questions that the member opposite had for Service Alberta. Maybe I'll just start with the comments and questions related to, you know, Albertans who are wrestling with the impacts of COVID-19 and potentially needing to self-isolate and maybe are having difficulty getting access to a registry, for example, and needing to renew or register a vehicle or renew their driver's licence, for example. We talked about this a little bit earlier in the House today. I'm pleased to say that my department officials have done a great job in a very short amount of time to ensure that we would be able to provide extensions for Albertans who are due for a renewal but are not able to get access to a registry because of COVID-19. This would include renewals of motor vehicle documents such as a safety fitness certificate, operating authority certificate, road test permits, load permits, knowledge test permits, in-transit permits, drivers' licences, et cetera.

Another category that would be important that's not related to the driving side is for corporate registries, for businesses that need to file their annual returns. I mean, if they don't file in time, they would be struck from the registry. We're providing a three-month extension there. We're working hard to make sure that in these difficult times and in the context of COVID-19 Albertans will have access to the services they require in a way that will work for this new reality we face today.

I appreciate that a lot of the member opposite's questions were related to the theme of COVID-19. I think that's very pressing and very appropriate, you know, as it relates to supporting public-sector workers who need to work from home or who may be under self-isolation while still ensuring that we can deliver services to Albertans. Certainly, that's a priority for us. We've been constantly testing our network to build capacity, to ensure that we have the capacity to support enough mobile and remote users. We currently have capacity for 23,000 users to work remotely on our network, and we continue to work on building capacity. We're committed to making sure that our public-sector workers have the tools they need to do their jobs and to ensure that Albertans will have access to the services that they require.

You know, just to give a little bit of context, I know the member mentioned that there was a reduction in overall IMT spending. I just want to clear things up there. You know, in the IT investment world there are always projects on the go, and there are different levels of projects on the go. As certain projects wrap up, there's naturally a decrease in the costs associated with those projects as they reach their natural conclusion. This reduction in the IMT spending is simply a reduction that comes from the natural conclusion of those projects that were ongoing. I am confident that my department and our public-sector workers will have the resources necessary to continue delivering the level of services required by Albertans and required by all of the ministries in the government that Service Alberta supports with IT infrastructure.

On the topic of the SuperNet and capacity, first of all, I just want to clarify for anyone who may be watching that the SuperNet itself

is not the Internet. It doesn't supply the Internet, and it doesn't supply services to residential users or businesses directly. It's a fibre-optic backbone that connects about 3,300 facilities. Primarily, they would be schools, hospitals, municipal buildings, libraries, et cetera. That was the result of about a billion dollars of investment over the last 18 years to ensure that rural and remote and indigenous communities across Alberta would have access to a high-quality, broadband-connected network. In partnership with Internet service providers like, for example, Telus or Shaw they're able to supply Internet services across that network as well as across their own networks.

6:50

You know, we recently renegotiated the contract for the SuperNet – Bell owns that infrastructure and that contract – and as a result of that renegotiated contract they are investing new resources into improving the capacity of the SuperNet. That was under way long before COVID-19, and it will continue. I am confident that between the private-sector fibre-optic networks that are owned by the telecommunications companies as well as the SuperNet infrastructure, there's a strong fibre-optic backbone that can support Internet traffic as required.

I'm just checking my notes to see if I missed anything. Just to wrap up, we are committed to ensuring that the government of Alberta can deliver the services that Albertans require. In this budget I'm confident that we have the resources we need in order to deliver the technology solutions that will support those services. We have an amazing team in our department, who has been doing some amazing work during a difficult time, through the COVID-19 health challenges. I just want to say to all Albertans and to the members opposite that we're in good hands. They've been doing their homework. They're testing the system to ensure that it can scale up and handle more remote use. We are in good shape.

With that, I'll turn over the time to my colleagues.

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

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. I'm sorry to have to stand. That was 14 minutes between the two speakers. We have more questions. I would love the answers to the questions, but we do have additional questions, so I'm going to get them into the record.

The Chair: Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Hoffman: I think the way the standing order was written was that it goes back and forth. That was 14 minutes. So I'm going to go again because we have more questions. I'm happy to receive responses to any and all of the ones that remain outstanding. I know that there were some, even in the sections where we had time to go back and forth, that the minister didn't have an opportunity to respond to. That's fair. We had 30 hours' worth of questions, and we're trying to cram them into an hour and a half. So thank you very much.

What I want to ask right now is around the pandemic as it relates to Economic Development, Trade and Tourism. The pandemic as well as the shock in oil prices have caused significant economic challenges. Many businesses are facing huge challenges. Can the minister lay out the plan to address the challenges for small businesses in particular? This is directly as it relates to outcome 1 in the ministry's business plan.

I think it was the Minister of Service Alberta who stood on the question earlier today around having to be open for certain hours. For sure, every mall has requirements around what hours they're open for. Are there going to be provisions taken to break those leases or to have amendments to the leases during this period of time?

As well, many small businesses are trying to stay open, and there's not enough business to sustain that function. What's the Minister of Economic, Development and Trade doing to address that?

If we get a quick answer, I might get one more in.

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

Ms Fir: Thank you. Our government is working hard with our counterparts at the provincial level and at the federal level, making sure that at this time we're taking a uniform, united, collaborative approach in terms of looking at what services and funding and what type of relief and stimulus may be available to help small businesses thrive. It's part of our investment growth strategy that we were working on rolling out prior to this crisis. We'll continue to work on that. We will also be implementing a small and medium-sized business growth strategy to identify how we can help make sure that small businesses thrive and make it through this difficult time.

Ms Hoffman: The next one is also with infrastructure, so feel free to answer the bundle if the minister is prepared and willing. This is one of the reasons why it's so much easier to do this in committee, because we can actually have a real back-and-forth, but I appreciate the succinct answer. I know businesses require more as we move forward, but I really appreciate the attempt at brevity.

One question is specifically for the Minister of Infrastructure. What's happening with regard to new school construction, particularly as it relates to high schools in desperate need in northeast Calgary as well as south Edmonton? These were announced as planning money in the last budget. We do desperately need these schools in both northeast Calgary as well as south Edmonton.

Thank you.

The Chair: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Panda: Thank you. There are schools, including high schools, in different stages of construction all across the province. There are about 90 schools in the planning, design stage, construction. If you have a specific school, I can answer on that, but all schools are under construction.

You talked about the capital plan. You were all over there, and you talked about the number of jobs, about COVID-19. I'll try and address all of them in two minutes if I can. COVID-19, the impact: we don't know yet, but we're talking to contractors. For example, on the Calgary cancer hospital we're talking to PCL. They put in their own protocols. So far the construction is not affected, but the supply chain might be affected because they had to receive some supplies from Italy and China, so that might impact. As we move forward, we'll update you with periodic status reports.

You talked about the number of jobs. In this economy, like our Finance minister said, we're going to invest in infrastructure because that's countercyclical, so we can keep building capital projects and create jobs in Alberta. We're going to do that. I don't have an idea on the number of jobs, but the capital plan, as you know, is a four-year plan. Some of these major projects like the Calgary hospital or the Grande Prairie hospital: based on the schedule, we have to reprofile. The difference you talked about, the \$400 million, the difference was mainly because of reprofiling based on the spending last year. If the contractor did not progress enough last year and the work scope is moved to this year, we're going to incur it in this year's budget. That's why there is a variance. We'll keep building infrastructure, whether it is health facilities or schools.

But what's weighing on our mind now, like the Finance minister said, is how to protect the health of people, how to get people gainfully employed. That's what is weighing on our mind. Also, if you heard the reports, you know that based on the historic data we got from other countries, from 30 to 70 per cent of Albertans could be impacted by this virus. That is what is weighing on our mind now. All these public service employees here: we brought them here for the last few hours, and they should have been focusing on protecting the health of the people. That's what we're concerned about, honestly.

From Infrastructure's point of view, for all the Infrastructure-managed buildings we put in protocols about how to protect public service employees so they can take care of the rest of Albertans.

I think I covered most of your questions, but I can assure you that our plan is to keep investing in infrastructure. Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Just to clarify, the question that maybe we can get the response to in writing was around that there was planning money for a high school in northeast Calgary, but there wasn't committed construction money in the last fiscal plan, so we are hoping for clarity and certainty that there is a new high school moving forward in northeast Calgary. There was planning money for a new southwest high school in last year's infrastructure and fiscal plan, but there wasn't construction money, so we want confirmation on that. There is also a desperate need for a high school in southeast Edmonton, that, again, hasn't been planned for or had construction money. The parents in southeast Edmonton, who are desperate for this high school, would really like – I was at a junior high recently that said: we would desperately like a new Catholic high school in southeast Edmonton as well. They say that they keep getting the runaround about whether or not there's land available and these types of things. There's certainly a great deal of anxiety.

We didn't want to be here debating this budget either. We don't think this budget is fair or appropriate, and we don't think it will give the public service the tools they need to deliver the care for Albertans during this pandemic. I appreciate the comments that were made.

The Chair: Hon. members, we have now concluded the three hours of estimates. We will take a five-minute recess so that the officials can leave. We can reset, and we'll start again.

[The committee adjourned from 7 p.m. to 7:04 p.m.]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee back to order.

Hon. members, members are reminded that there was an amendment introduced during the legislative policy committee meetings, so the committee will vote on the proposed amendment first. Following the consideration of estimates, the committee will then proceed to the vote on the estimates of the offices of the Legislative Assembly.

Finally, the chair would like to remind all hon. members of Standing Order 32(3), which provides that after the first division is called in Committee of Supply, the interval between division bells shall be reduced to one minute for any subsequent divisions.

The next item of business is the vote on the amendment introduced during the legislative policy committee meetings. There is one amendment, and it will be identified as amendment A1. Members have a copy of the amendments on their desks.

A1. Mr. Sabir moved that the 2020-21 main estimates of the Ministry of Energy be reduced for industry advocacy under

reference 2.3 at page 87 by \$29,999,000 million so that the amount to be voted at page 85 for expense is \$149,599,000 million.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:05 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Carson	Gray	Phillips
Ceci	Hoffman	Renaud
Dach	Irwin	Sabir
Eggen	Loyola	Sigurdson, L.
Feehan	Nielsen	Sweet
Ganley	Pancholi	

7:20

Against the motion:

Aheer	Long	Sawhney
Amery	Milliken	Schow
Dreeshen	Nally	Sigurdson, R.J.
Getson	Neudorf	Singh
Glasgo	Nicolaides	Smith
Glubish	Nixon, Jason	Toews
Goodridge	Nixon, Jeremy	Toor
Guthrie	Rosin	Turton
Horner	Rowswell	Walker
Hunter	Rutherford	Williams
Loewen		

Totals:	For – 17	Against – 31
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We shall now proceed to the vote on the 2020-21 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(5), which requires that estimates be decided without debate or amendment prior to the vote on the main estimates, I must now put the following question on all matters relating to the 2020-21 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021.

Agreed to:

Offices of the Legislative Assembly	\$129,116,000
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The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to report the vote carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:23 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Long	Rutherford
Amery	Milliken	Schow
Dreeshen	Nally	Sigurdson, R.J.
Getson	Neudorf	Singh
Glasgo	Nicolaides	Smith
Glubish	Nixon, Jason	Toews

Goodridge	Nixon, Jeremy	Toor
Guthrie	Panda	Turton
Horner	Rosin	Walker
Hunter	Rowswell	Williams
Loewen		

Against the motion:

Carson	Gray	Pancholi
Ceci	Hoffman	Phillips
Dach	Irwin	Renaud
Eggen	Loyola	Sabir
Feehan	Nielsen	Sigurdson, L.
Ganley	Notley	

Totals:	For – 31	Against – 17
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[Motion to report the vote carried]

The Chair: We shall now proceed to the final vote on the main estimates. Those members in favour of the remaining resolutions for the 2020-21 government estimates, revised, general revenue fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

I would now invite the hon. Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report the 2020-21 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund, and the 2020-21 government estimates, revised, general revenue fund.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report the 2020-21 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2020-21 government estimates for the general revenue fund.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2020-21 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund, and the 2020-21 government estimates, revised, general revenue fund, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, have been approved.

Offices of the Legislative Assembly: support to the Legislative Assembly, \$65,348,000; office of the Auditor General, \$26,925,000; office of the Ombudsman, \$3,936,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, \$8,746,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, \$940,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$7,256,000; office of the Child and Youth Advocate, \$14,922,000; office of the Public Interest Commissioner, \$1,043,000.

Government main estimates.

Advanced Education: expense, \$2,805,458,000; capital investment, \$25,000; financial transactions, \$701,600,000.

Agriculture and Forestry: expense, \$614,401,000; capital investment, \$17,323,000; financial transactions, \$1,310,000.

Children's Services: expense, \$1,371,056,000; capital investment, \$483,000.

7:30

Community and Social Services: expense, \$3,947,052,000; capital investment, \$547,000.

Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women: expense, \$246,775,000; capital investment, \$2,331,000; financial transactions, \$1,551,000.

Economic Development, Trade and Tourism: expense, \$290,382,000; capital investment, \$1,525,000.

Education: expense, \$4,810,668,000; capital investment, \$565,000; financial transactions, \$16,506,000.

Energy: expense, \$179,598,000; capital investment, \$500,000; financial transactions, \$96,970,000.

Environment and Parks: expense, \$588,197,000; capital investment, \$67,252,000; financial transactions, \$4,019,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$16,644,000; capital investment, \$25,000.

Health: expense, \$21,582,198,000; capital investment, \$33,230,000; financial transactions, \$70,221,000.

Indigenous Relations: expense, \$221,516,000; capital investment, \$25,000; financial transactions, \$3,000,000.

Infrastructure: expense, \$486,670,000; capital investment, \$1,591,313,000; financial transactions, \$21,293,000.

Justice and Solicitor General: expense, \$1,344,514,000; capital investment, \$9,462,000.

Labour and Immigration: expense, \$210,563,000; capital investment, \$900,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense, \$1,429,335,000; capital investment, \$12,066,000; financial transactions, \$36,839,000.

Seniors and Housing: expense, \$546,354,000; capital investment, \$25,000; financial transactions, \$19,700,000.

Service Alberta: expense, \$554,941,000; capital investment, \$88,742,000; financial transactions, \$14,050,000.

Transportation: expense, \$1,106,590,000; capital investment, \$1,161,237,000; financial transactions, \$106,288,000.

Treasury Board and Finance: expense, \$217,729,000; capital investment, \$25,000; contingency and disaster and emergency assistance, \$750,000,000.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes my report.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly agree to concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion the ayes have it. That motion is carried and so ordered.

I'd like to alert hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(7) following the Committee of Supply's report on the main estimates, the Assembly immediately reverts to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of the appropriation bill.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 6

Appropriation Act, 2020

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 6, the Appropriation Act, 2020. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 10 A(i) I wish to remind members that upon receiving first reading of Bill 6, the Appropriation Act, 2020, we shall move immediately for second reading and debate without amendment by the mover of the bill and no more than one member of the Official Opposition.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6 Appropriation Act, 2020

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move second reading of Bill 6, Appropriation Act, 2020.

This act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government of Alberta for the 2020-21 fiscal year. This schedule to the act provides amounts that were presented in greater detail by the revised 2020-21 government estimates tabled on March 16 and the 2020-21 Legislative Assembly estimates tabled on February 27. Budget 2020 provides essential funding for the programs and services Albertans rely on. In this unprecedented time of global uncertainty it is important that we ensure funding is stable, predictable, and, most importantly, available.

The 2020-23 fiscal plan update includes an additional \$500 million provided to the Ministry of Health to ensure our health care system is prepared for the challenges ahead. Our priority is to continue government operations and provide services to Albertans during these trying times.

Amid the response to COVID-19 and the challenges we are facing, our government is preparing to invest in our province with our blueprint for jobs. The blueprint for jobs will invest in skills development and infrastructure projects to create the right economic conditions for good jobs for Albertans. Through the 2020 capital plan we are investing in new projects that will create opportunities for private-sector participation, supporting thousands of jobs for Alberta. We have a plan, and we are working hard to ensure that Albertans will have work, and we will see them through these times.

We know that things have changed since we tabled the budget, but as our amendment to Health spending shows, we're prepared to rise to the challenges that come our way. It is important that we approve this budget so that government spending can continue uninterrupted for the upcoming year.

I urge you all to support this bill today. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone from the Official Opposition that would like to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in order to outline the many reasons why our caucus will not be supporting Bill 6 and will not be supporting this budget. I will do so by touching on a number of issues.

I'll begin by talking about the many, many cuts which are embedded in this budget, which will hurt Albertans, hurt Alberta families, and significantly reduce opportunities for the future for Albertans of all ages. I will then go over the many ways in which this budget downloads significant costs onto Albertans, making everything more expensive for them, as a result of decisions taken by a government that actually ran on affordability.

I'll go on to talk a little bit about how this is not a blueprint for jobs; this is a certificate for demolition, Mr. Speaker. There are no jobs that will be created by this budget.

I'll then go on to talk about how, in fact, the budget is based on fantastical, fictional numbers and that the paper that it is written on is worth more than, unfortunately, the research that went into presenting it as it relates to the circumstances that we find ourselves in today. Inaccuracy after inaccuracy after inaccuracy and a huge, huge level of uncertainty being provided to all Albertans because we would go to such incredible lengths to pass a document that is so rife with error and miscalculation.

Finally, I will talk about the process that got us here and our view on the unprecedented attack on democracy that we have seen in this House by the members of this government. I will address in particular some of the comments made by the Premier earlier today as he attacked several or at least one of our members, actually, more than one, who were attempting to ask legitimate questions about this budget in the exceptionally limited time that Albertans and members of this opposition were given to review this budget. Those are the things that I'll be talking about tonight, Mr. Speaker.

7:40

Let me start. Overall, what we see in this budget is roughly \$800 million in cuts when adjusted for inflation. You can find them in a number of different places, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, this is a budget that purports to introduce to Albertans a \$6.8 billion deficit. Interestingly, it will be the second budget where in writing this government planned to introduce a deficit which is larger than the last budget deficit that was submitted by our government and, to be clear, then proven to be correct by people who look at facts and add numbers up. Nonetheless, that's kind of arbitrary at this point because, of course, the \$6.8 billion deficit is now a thing of the past, and, of course, we know it will be significantly larger than that.

Overall, this budget in no way, shape, or form is equipped to provide Albertans with the certainty that they need during these very, very difficult times. In fact, if this budget is allowed to operate in any way, shape, or form as a blueprint, what it will do is it will make the security and the stability of Albertans significantly more vulnerable. It will hurt them at a time when they need their government to have their backs. Now, I suspect it's possibly true that in many of those areas this government doesn't actually plan to do the things that the budget says it will do, but, then again, what that does is it underlines how ridiculous it is that we are reviewing this budget, passing this budget, and almost breaking parliamentary democracy to do so today.

Let me talk about a few of the places where in its current construct the budget is very problematic for Albertans. Of course, because we are on, well, not even the eve of a pandemic – we are officially in a pandemic – we know, of course, that a state of emergency has been declared, certainly, in this province as well as many other provinces. I'm not sure if it's been done nationally yet or not. Either way, we know that we are headed for very, very tough times. Of course, because it is a pandemic, the Health budget is critical to how we move forward.

So what does this budget do? What does it do? Well, it was revised yesterday in a very unorthodox manner. As a result of that revision and the addition of \$500 million to the Health budget, what we see in real dollars – and that takes into account population and inflation – is a 2.1 per cent decrease from status quo as defined by the '19-20 budget. Even with all the extra money that was put in, taking into account population and inflation, which typically underestimate the cost pressures in health, we are 2.1 per cent behind where we were this time last year, where we were in November of last year, a few short months ago. Put another way, we are short \$462 million just to deliver status quo services relative

to what we delivered in 2019-2020 in terms of health care services for Albertans and their families; \$462 million short.

Just to be clear, in case it's not obvious for those here in this House, this is not a status quo year. This is not a status quo year. This is a year where our health system will be challenged like it probably has not been challenged ever and certainly not in decades and decades and decades. But this government thinks it's appropriate to almost, if not completely, break parliamentary rules in this House and parliamentary traditions in order to jam through a budget which amounts to a cut from the status quo, as we had in place in 2019-2020, when it comes to health care.

Now, this government likes to argue that, well, we've been spending far, far too much on health care, you know, so we've got lots of room to play with in our health care system. We've got way too many nurses. We've got doctors being spent way too much on. We've got lots of extra money in health care, so it's no problem. We can have 2.1 per cent less. We can be \$460 million short and still deal with the largest health crisis in the last several decades in this province and potentially in the history of this province and be fine. I don't agree. In fact, I don't even agree that in the absence of the pandemic we spent too much on health. I do believe there were some places within health that we might have been spending too much, but I believe that overall we did need to spend what we were spending before and we needed to be increasing on the basis of population and inflation.

What we needed to do was control spiralling costs that the public health care system was facing as a result of private-sector delivery of certain services within our health care. What we needed to do, then, was to reinvest in ensuring that more Albertans had access to affordable pharmaceutical treatment and also to reinvest in ensuring that Albertans had access to meaningful mental health treatment, both of which are primarily privately delivered and privately funded in our province. As a result, we don't do well on either, so our health care system could have been improved on that front, not to mention the many ways in which our health care system needs to be improved when it comes to long-term care.

Nonetheless, this government seems to believe that the notion of making a cut will make health care better. I believe the notion that a cut will make it better is wrong. I believe that the notion that a cut will make it better in the very middle of a pandemic is immoral and unconscionable, and under no circumstances can we support that line of thinking, not now, not ever.

Now, where are some of the cuts that we see coming from? Well, we know that the real cut to acute care right now is approximately \$250 million, and this is after the \$500 million add, just to be clear. We know that's what we're looking at. We know that population and public health was cut by \$29 million. We know that coverage for pharmaceutical drugs for our seniors, the most vulnerable Albertans when it comes to the current pandemic as well as many other illnesses, is roughly \$70 million. We know that, basically, we are not planning to provide the health care that Albertans need, and that is even with the addition of \$500 million.

I'll talk further about the questions we have and the pressures that exist as a result of the pandemic, but I just want to make it clear that this is not enough to address current health care needs even without the pandemic. Now, the government seems to think that that's okay, that we'll find that money somehow through a series of reorganization efforts, operational best practices, where we push nurses out of hospitals and replace them with nurses' aides. They seem to think that we can save money by attacking doctors and pushing family doctors out of the province. They seem to think that we can save money by taking huge amounts of money off the paycheques of emergency room doctors and hospitalists, who now have to pay overhead for the privilege of going into an ER in the

middle of the night. They seem to think that we can make these changes, save the money, and somehow preserve the quality of our health care system. Frankly, those assumptions are wrong at the best of times, but they are, of course, utterly wrong in the current times. This budget fails profoundly when it comes to health care, Mr. Speaker, completely letting down Albertans, completely setting up Albertans to be more vulnerable.

7:50

What else does this budget do? It cuts education. It cuts education in a number of different ways. Fifteen thousand new students will walk through our school doors next September, hopefully, and those new students will not see a single extra teacher hired to support their arrival in our schools. In fact, what those students will see, according to calculations by the ATA, is the loss of about 1,400 teachers. So we have 15,000 new students, and we are letting go 1,400 teachers, and if the folks over there don't understand how that works, I suggest they ask their Education minister for a briefing because those are not made up numbers. That is what happens when you flatten out spending without being aware of inflationary pressures that you have no control over, which they do not. We see that in our Education budget, so we are planning, therefore, to increase the class size dramatically throughout our schools.

We're planning in this budget to build, I think, nine or 10 new schools. While we were in government, we built 250 new schools. There is a huge demand for new schools in growing communities, communities that the members opposite actually represent, communities that are wondering why they were so happy to vote for a motion that meant they would not stand up for their communities and their schools when Education estimates were presented to this Legislature. Nonetheless, that's another consequence of this budget.

One of the things in this budget as it relates to Education that absolutely appalls me is the approach of this budget to supporting special-needs children. I still remember – I was shocked actually – that every time I've tried to ask the Premier about this issue, he refuses to answer. He hands it over to the Education minister. It's as though he has that little concern for the future of Alberta's youngest and most vulnerable students.

Mr. Schow: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: I rise under Standing Order 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives." The member opposite is suggesting that the Premier doesn't have any care for the students and that that's why he's deferring questions to the Education minister. We, of course, in this Chamber know that that is false and ask the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition to retract that comment.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition to respond to the point of order.

Ms Notley: I retract the comment. I will simply redescribe what happened and suggest that people have contacted me and asked if that was the case.

The Speaker: I appreciate the Leader of the Official Opposition's comments. I also think that there could be a wide swath of debate available to all members of the Assembly this evening, so I encourage you to continue with your remarks.

Debate Continued

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, in particular, the issue in question is one that is profoundly troubling to anybody who has children with special needs or has relatives with children with special needs or who themselves just care in principle for the future of children with special needs. This budget takes away PUF funding from kindergarten children.

It is PUF. Nobody knows what it means. They often go: what are you talking about; nobody cares what this is; nobody even knows what it means. Let me tell you what it means, Mr. Speaker. This is special funding of up to \$25,000 a year that is dedicated to one particular student to give them the supports they need when in kindergarten to learn to be able to deal with the classroom situation, to learn coping techniques, to learn behavioural techniques, to get additional supports in learning those fundamental first steps that all kids need to learn in kindergarten in order to establish the foundation on which all of their future education will rest. It makes an absolutely magical difference in their lives, Mr. Speaker. It is revolutionary. A child that gets that kind of support in kindergarten can find a way to move through the system, cope and learn and succeed. A child who does not get that kind of support in kindergarten or grade 1 will fall through the cracks. They will not reach the same outcomes as the other kids in the class, but they could.

It was a wonderful program when it was introduced. It was in part unique to Alberta. Many people used to say: wow, Alberta has that program. It was a very good program. I guess what we care more about is moving to the lowest common denominator, and if that means doing less for our most vulnerable, then so be it. Nonetheless, it is a program that's been in place for almost two decades, at least. It is a program that will no longer be available to kindergarten kids across Alberta, after 20 years, as a result of decisions taken by this government in this budget because that is not one of their priorities.

What else do we see cut in this budget? Well, the Finance minister referred to the budget as a blueprint for jobs. How is that working out? Well, we see significant cuts to the tourism budget. As it turns out, this year we're probably not going to need that as much anyway, so that is fine.

We see significant cuts to the agriculture budget, a 14 per cent cut to ag processing, trade, and business development. Those programs were absolutely focused on both product and market diversification for those Albertans who still make a living and continue to grow our economy and drive our economy through the work they do, growing and selling our agricultural resources in every corner of this province. Fourteen per cent cut at a time when our province needs to diversify, at a time when we need to find other ways to contribute to our GDP, when the oil and gas industry is going through so much. Why would you cut 14 per cent from product, trade, and business development in agriculture when agriculture should be one of the key targets for investment and diversification as we move forward as a province? So no jobs there.

What else does it do as it relates to jobs? Well, we already know, of course, that this budget does not reflect a response to calls to this government from business leaders around this province, including the Calgary Chamber of commerce and others, who specifically called for a return to the investment tax credit and the digital media tax credit and the capital investment tax credit. They all asked for those. You know, we saw statements from the Calgary Chamber of commerce saying that the corporate tax cut does not do what we need it to do. We need these tax credits. They were working. That's not in here.

What else is not in here? Well, postsecondary. My goodness. This budget continues the attack on postsecondary of at least 7 per cent every year. And we're starting to see the consequences of that particular decision. Just on Friday, barely noticed by anybody because of the very significant and worrisome news around the pandemic, we heard that the University of Alberta would be firing a thousand people. That's on top of the 240 or more people being let go I believe it was at SAIT alone and 250 at NAIT.

8:00

It's very interesting. This budget document, which we're told is absolutely the most accurate possible, projected that these cuts would result in roughly 400 jobs being lost in the postsecondary system. Well, this budget hasn't even been passed, and we've actually seen 1,500 jobs lost in the postsecondary system, and I have no doubt there are more to come. Again, the projected job losses inherent in this budget are wrong, and they're not wrong because of the OPEC-Russia oil dispute. They're not wrong because of the effects of the pandemic. They are wrong because this government, even before those things, projected things inaccurately and is not being upfront about the consequences of these significant cuts to postsecondary.

Going back to the point that I was talking about before, economic growth and economic diversification, we need a budget that actually has a meaningful strategy towards that, and that does not exist in this budget at all. At all. What we did have was the \$4.7 billion corporate handout and roughly 50,000 jobs lost since it was introduced. That's what we had. That was the state of play before we had the combined challenges and crises of both the collapse in the price of oil and the pandemic. But to be clear, even before that – this must be very clear. I know folks over there are going to work very hard to make any bad news on the job front over the course of the next three years be entirely the fault of the very difficult times that we are heading into right now. But let us be very clear. Prior to those times their plans were failing dismally, and the budget never planned to deal with that. So it's not a blueprint for jobs; it's a certificate for demolition.

So what other things are we seeing cut in here? Well, we see income support down by about \$45 million because, of course, we anticipate massive economic growth. That's brutally out of date. It was out of date at the time, and it continues to be out of date. We see a tax on seniors. Oh, I think I actually already mentioned that, the \$70 million coming from seniors.

We've seen attacks on parks. Now, this is interesting. It's only about \$5 million of cuts to parks that we see in this budget, yet that has spawned the full or partial closure of 20 parks across this province and the potential privatized delivery of park management to a further 160 parks across this province. That is for \$5 million, my friends. If you wanted \$5 million, I could have told you how to find \$5 million without blowing up something that is fundamentally in the bones of the vast majority of Albertans, something that they all care about, something that they all want to know they will always have access to, something that matters to them going back generations. For \$5 million we are making Albertans very concerned about the future of 180 parks across this province. Wow. What would you do for \$10 million? I can't even begin to imagine.

Those are some of the cuts. I don't have time, obviously, to list them all because I have such an abbreviated time to speak, but the other part of the budget that we need to talk about a little bit more is the way in which it is also seeking to add costs to Albertans. So it's not enough that we're attacking their health care system, jeopardizing the quality of care in most parts of rural Alberta, undermining the future of students in this province in every community, failing to move forward in terms of providing schools

for fast-growing communities in certain parts of the province, picking on special-needs students in a way that is jaw dropping in its cold approach to fair decision-making, but on top of all that what we're doing is that we're actually asking Albertans to pay more. Now, in the last election, Mr. Speaker, we used to hear nothing from these folks except how paying the carbon levy was killing the economy and making it impossible for people to live their lives.

But I need to be very clear that the amount of money that this government is now downloading on to Albertans and extra costs absolutely, completely makes the previous costs that I just described pale in comparison. What are some of the things that we see in this budget that Albertans are going to pay more for out of pocket? Well, we're going to see \$436 million more in premiums, licences, and fees, almost half a billion dollars coming out the pockets of Albertans. This year alone we'll see another \$100 million paid by Albertans for income tax through a sneaky income tax grab. I hope you don't get up and call a point of order on that. I'm just using the language that your leader used to describe that very strategy when he talked about it in the House of Commons many times in the past, declaring that he would never do such a thing. Just to be clear, that one goes up every year. It's \$100 million this year, \$200 million next year, \$300 million the year after that. It just grows and grows and grows.

A hundred and two million dollars in education property taxes this year alone will be paid for by Albertans out of their pockets. We've estimated that as a result of a variety of different downloads onto municipalities, general property taxes above and beyond the education property tax will also have to go up at least \$100 million. What that does, Mr. Speaker, is that it adds up to about three-quarters of a billion more this year out of Albertans' pockets. That's what they're paying. Lots of cuts, lots of pain, lots of suffering, lots of sacrifice: why? So that they can pay more, almost a billion dollars more this year alone. That's what this government is doing inside this budget.

Then what does that do? Well, we're making Albertans pay more. We are making vulnerable Albertans and regular Alberta families lose more, more vulnerable, more at risk. Presumably, we must, then, be actually getting rid of the deficit. We must be on track to balance the budget. Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not true either. Now, we'll talk in a moment about what the real numbers are as a result of the oil price collapse and the COVID-19 pandemic, but even before those – let me be very clear – these numbers were never accurate. It was never going to work this way. This budget is written on the basis of projections that were secured in January. They projected \$58 oil. That was a very generous and optimistic estimate in January. It's ridiculous now. It was ridiculous on February 27, when this was introduced, but it was actually even generous and optimistic in January, when they picked it.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

In addition, it relies on 2.5 per cent GDP growth. That was never a real number, my friends. Nobody was projecting that, not in January, not in February, not in December. No one has been projecting 2.5 per cent GDP growth in this province for a very long time, but that's what's in this budget. Using those pretend numbers, we came up with a deficit of \$6.8 billion, which, as I've already pointed out, once again, would be the second deficit in a row which is larger than the actual deficit we actually delivered in our last year of government. Why is this such a big hole? Well, you've probably heard me say it before, but it's because you guys have decided to give \$4.7 billion of revenue away to corporations that have since moved out of the province. Nonetheless, what we see here is that people are more vulnerable. They are suffering more. They are

getting less. They are paying more, a lot more, and then they are left with a deficit which is bigger than what we had before but, moreover, way underestimated because it was based on economic projections that were wrong in January, let alone wrong on February 27, when this was introduced, let alone wrong now, on March 17.

8:10

All this, and, of course, here's the big thing that's not in this budget. The big thing that's not in this budget is a response to COVID-19. The big thing that's not in this budget is a response to the collapse in oil prices. It's not there. It's not in here. It's not in here. Nope. Not here. We've already talked about Health. As I've said, you're short. Then you do have your contingency, but let's be clear. I mean, that contingency in the past has been used to pay for crop insurance and for fires. I don't think anyone here ought to bank on there being no need for crop insurance or fires in the next year, so your contingency also already has a thing it's designed to do, which means there's no money in this budget for COVID. There's no money in this budget for responding to the OPEC-Russia price war.

How short are we? Well, I would argue, just based on the oil price alone and the impact on our economic growth just as a result of the news that we had last Monday, eight days ago, with respect to the breakdown in the OPEC deal, that at that point we were on the path to sub-30-dollar WTI. The fact of the matter is that conservative estimates with respect to that would suggest that the deficit will not be \$6.8 billion; it would be roughly \$15 billion. That's what you're headed towards just with that.

Now, that didn't take into account what we have learned in the last week about the depth and breadth of the impact of COVID-19 and the very, very hard consequences that we will feel economically as a result of it, which will further suppress growth and likely put us into a pretty significant recession. I would suggest that, at best, you're looking at a budget with a \$15 billion deficit. That doesn't include additional economic recession as a result of COVID and, of course, doesn't include the additional spending that will have to happen in order to actually respond to COVID.

All of that comes together, then, just so far, if you're following along at home, to a budget that is fundamentally broken. It's broken. It's not true. It provides no blueprint of any kind because there's not a single line item in it that can be used to guide decisions for the next 12 months by any way, shape, or form. It's a disaster. It's an ultimate disaster. As the Finance minister said, Rome was burning as he delivered it on February 27. Since Rome started burning, the whole country of Italy has gone up in flames, and the appropriateness of this budget essentially follows suit.

What's not in here are the income support programs that we have talked about and repeatedly asked the Premier to give us details on. That's not in here. On Friday he announced the Alberta government will provide 14 days of paid sick leave. Then six days followed of profound confusion. What he really meant was: we're going to ask the federal government to step in and provide Albertans 14 days of paid sick leave. That's what he really meant, but, strangely, that's not what he said, and he wouldn't admit it.

Now, today I will give credit to where credit is due. The Finance minister did in fact say something that was a little bit more detailed than what we've heard from the Premier, which is: where the federal government fails to expand, the provincial government will step in behind. That's a small bit of good news, but, you know, we have to see the details to know if it's real because, unfortunately, we've seen the Finance minister and the Education minister both say that they would fund enrolment, and that never happened. I don't know. I don't want to suggest that the Finance minister is intentionally saying things that aren't true. I think it's very possible that folks don't actually know, haven't made the decisions yet, so

what happens is that there's confusion. I think that, at best, there is some goodwill and good intentions over there, but we have no details, and we certainly have no guarantees that it will happen. But just to be clear, should that happen, you're looking at at least a billion, if not more, dollars to provide that kind of income support that's necessary.

Then we need economic stimulus, big economic stimulus; as the Premier himself has said, 1 to 2 per cent of GDP in terms of economic stimulus. We're hearing rumours about \$25 billion from the federal government. That's about a quarter on a per capita basis of what we saw from the U.S. I don't know if we're expecting, if they're banking on another \$3 billion or so from the provincial government. The Premier has hinted that that might be a thing, but suffice to say that that's not in the budget right now. So we're at 3 and half billion or 4 and a half billion dollars, something like that.

Then health care. Health care. Well, health care is a biggie, my friends, because we are at about 95 per cent capacity on about 8,500 beds, and depending on the modelling, we could easily be in search of another 3,000 beds. You can cancel elective surgery, sure. That's great. That's going to free up a few beds. But I think we all know that cancelling elective surgery is not a panacea in terms of finding beds when they become necessary. We don't know whether we will be successful at flattening the curve so that those people who require hospital attention do so, very politely, over the space of 12 months, or whether, in fact, those people who require hospital treatment actually all show up in three months, in which case we have to invest now in those extra beds.

I was troubled today to hear that we have about 500 ventilators – or is it a little under? – the Health minister said in response to a question from our Health critic. I was briefly watching TV today. Well, I was watching what the federal government was saying and heard that Nova Scotia has over 250 ventilators. That worried me because Nova Scotia is not half the size of Alberta, my friends. It's significantly less than that. So it makes me wonder: why are we so short on a per capita basis relative to Nova Scotia? Do they have a particularly robust ventilator program, or are we behind in general? I don't know. But what I do know is that it's going to cost.

Long-term care: we talked about this earlier. For good reason our chief medical officer of health is suggesting that families should remove themselves from long-term care in order to keep our most vulnerable loved ones safe. But we know that the current staffing levels in long-term care will not be adequate in the absence of family care and paid-by-family care. If those folks cannot come in, then we need more staff in long-term care, and we're going to need more staff because the staff who currently work in long-term care will have to isolate, quarantine, or take sick leave. We'll have to pay them sick leave because, presumably, that is the plan. Then if that happens, we need to pay them, and we also need to pay more staff. So we need much more staff, not less.

We need to retrain doctors and nurses to give them the skills to be able to provide intensive care because we don't have enough intensive care doctors right now. We need more beds. We need more doctors who are differently trained. We need more nurses. We need to do more training for them. We need more nurses' aides and LPNs in our long-term care sector. We need more beds. We need more infrastructure. We can't do that with a 2.1 per cent drop in real dollars in health care, which means that this budget is pretend. I am going to give folks over there the benefit of the doubt and assume that they will put the money in that is necessary. I hope they will put the money in that's necessary. We won't be able to hold them to account for it, we won't be able to see it, it will be very untransparent, but presumably they will do that, which means that this budget, again, is completely off.

8:20

What we see, then, is that we have a budget with about a \$15 billion deficit, a pre-COVID-based economic recession, and, you know, another billions of dollars of expenditures that are going to be required. So I would say, on a conservative basis, that we have got a budget document here that these folks over there are asking us to pass, Mr. Speaker, that's got about a \$20 billion deficit built in. Again, I suspect that that is a very conservative number.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Why are we rushing to pass it, breaking many, many parliamentary traditions, making history in a way that should be embarrassing to the people who are insisting upon it? Why are we doing that? Why are we rushing to pass a budget with a \$20 billion deficit where the spending line items are absolutely unrealistic? Why are we doing that? Well, the government says we have to do it because government can't run without passing this budget. That, Mr. Speaker, is categorically untrue, and I really wish they would stop saying it because Albertans deserve now more than ever a government that will be honest with them. It is not true that it needs to happen that way. There are two ways in which this government could operate, at least two. They could go by way of special warrants. They could go by way of interim supply. They could go by way of supplementary supply.

Oh, here's an interesting thing, Mr. Speaker. The Premier said today in a press conference that he's going to introduce a \$3.5 billion economic stimulus plan tomorrow. That's nowhere in the budget. Nowhere. It's not there. If the government were being accurate or inclined to say things that they know are accurate, if that were the case, then it would be impossible for them to announce \$3.5 billion worth of spending tomorrow, the day after they pass a budget that doesn't include \$3.5 billion of economic stimulus. It's not in there, yet they can announce it tomorrow.

I'm not opposed to them announcing a \$3.5 billion stimulus program. We need stimulus. The point is that they didn't need this budget to do it because it's not in the budget, so we are here passing this budget for other reasons, not so the government can spend, because it is very clear that this government can spend without this budget being passed and that they can spend well past what's in this budget. They just don't want to tell Albertans about it, which comes to the real reason why we are here today, Mr. Speaker, passing this budget. The reality is that if this budget is passed, which it likely will be because they have the majority, and they have broken parliamentary tradition in a way that is shameful and likely will go down in history to do it – it will likely pass. But when this budget passes, it will mean that the government does not have to subject itself to oversight or transparency or reporting to the people of this province for a good, solid 12 months. They can do whatever they want for the next 12 months, and they don't have to report to us on it. They don't have to do it in a way that holds them accountable.

We are fighting very hard against that, Mr. Speaker, because this is a crisis, and Albertans should know what is being sacrificed in order to pay for other things. Albertans should know what money we are getting and not getting. Albertans should know what the likely fiscal consequences of these things are. Albertans should know what's happening to their schools. Albertans should know whether we really are doing what's necessary to prepare for this crisis on a financial basis.

The budget document is the fundamental document that is used by parliamentarians across the Commonwealth to hold the government to account, and this government is rushing to pass this one, which, I have just clearly outlined, is utterly fake, utterly wrong, utterly filled with errors and inaccuracies that provide no

guidance to any Albertans about the fiscal situation in this province. This is unprecedented.

Let's talk a little bit about how we got here, and I did say that I would end on this issue. I have to say that I wasn't going to do this, Mr. Speaker, but in yet another subversion of the debate process the Premier chose to ignore the questions that were asked to him by the Health critic and instead engaged in a long lecture on tone to the Health critic. He started going on about his years of experience and how he'd never seen anybody fail to co-operate like this opposition here in the Assembly. But, you know, I like to go on about my experience as well. Me, too. I like to go on about it. I've actually been a member of this Assembly since 2008. I've served as a third-party House leader. I've served as a fourth-party House leader. I've served as Premier and then as Leader of the Opposition.

In the last 10 months I have observed countless unprecedented attacks on the principles of parliamentary democracy in this House. Honestly, I could write a book on that subject alone. However, if one were to limit it to what we've seen in just the last 36 hours, I would say merely that we have seen the most aggressive use of closure in this House since the Depression. Since the Depression, Mr. Speaker. The tools for that aggressive imposition of closure, i.e. the four motions that were discussed earlier today, were introduced without allowing the Opposition House Leader to see them beforehand, and when she rose and challenged the Government House Leader on that issue, the House leader misinformed this House and claimed that written notice had been provided. It turns out that that was categorically untrue.

In addition, the Opposition House Leader was given roughly 15 minutes' notice of a plan to introduce at a very unorthodox change to the estimates with no written notice. She wasn't allowed to see it, but she was threatened. She was told: either you let this pass unanimously, or we will not put that \$500 million into the budget. That is the conversation that happened with our House leader 15 minutes before it was introduced, Mr. Speaker. That is unprecedented in any House. So I will not be lectured by this Premier about the tone and the relationship between folks in this House.

When you have an association that involves two parties, not political parties but legal parties, and one party has 99.9 per cent of the power, if that association goes south, it is absolutely the responsibility of the person with the 99.9 per cent of the power. In short, you reap what you sow, Mr. Speaker, and that is exactly what this government is doing.

Let's talk a minute about the decision to ram through the budget with three hours of estimates debate when the rules of this House required at least another 30. The government talks about how, because of the pandemic, it is necessary to pass this budget as soon as possible, and therefore the democratic rules of this parliamentary body are merely an unnecessary inconvenience, Mr. Speaker. Now, I'll talk about how this was handled in other jurisdictions in a moment because the Premier suggested that they were handled differently than, I would argue, is correct.

But let me point out the following. Because of their standing order changes this budget will pass tonight; however, in an act that I actually believe was likely out of order, the government also randomly cancelled 10 hours of estimates debate last night and this morning. Now, if the point merely was to pass the budget as soon as possible, i.e. tonight, why cancel 10 hours of debate? You know, we were down. We had gone from 30 to three. We could have gone from 30 to 13 and still passed the budget at exactly the same time. So is it really about passing the budget within the time? No, Mr. Speaker, I don't think so. It's about shielding. This whole exercise is about shielding. I've already talked about how passing the budget shields them from financial accountability and oversight and

transparency for the next year, but going from 30 to three, rather than 30 to 13, also shields other members of the government caucus from having to participate in and essentially endorsing numerous hurtful cuts that impact their constituents and about which they are not advocating to their leadership.

They're letting these cuts happen, and they are not standing up for their constituents, and the spectre of seeing that happen was just too much. So let's cancel 10 hours of budget debate absolutely unnecessarily. We'd still be here. We'd still be right here at this time getting ready to jam through this budget, exactly the same time, but we would have had 13 hours of debate instead of three. It just makes the point that the argument is facetious and ought not to be considered in any way.

8:30

Let's talk a little bit about how these kinds of issues have been handled in other jurisdictions through the COVID-19 pandemic. Nova Scotia was able to pass their budget according to the rules of their House in the normal course because they didn't have a constituency break, and they'd introduced it early enough, and they just got through it just the way you should. Good on them.

New Brunswick used their minority status, threatened an election, and ultimately negotiated a 4 per cent increase in their health care budget to get theirs passed. There was no negotiation in this House, Mr. Speaker. Let me be very clear. None. No good faith negotiation of any type attempted.

Meanwhile in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland, Yukon, P.E.I., and with the federal government they did three things. They all worked with the opposition respectfully, they adjourned their sittings, and they delayed their budgets. Why? Because what we know to be true is that they can actually spend what they need to spend without passing their budget.

When the Premier suggests that somehow what's going on here is out of line with what happened in other jurisdictions, he is correct. It's out of line because no other jurisdiction is using the ham-fisted approach that this jurisdiction is using to eliminate 30 hours of debate and pass a budget that is probably \$20 billion out. Albertans deserve to have a budget that takes their needs into account. They deserve to have a budget that is genuinely designed to have their backs and support them through these very, very difficult times, times where there is worry and anxiety: worry and anxiety about their kids, worry and anxiety about their jobs, worry and anxiety about their communities, worry and anxiety about their health.

There are many things that government can do in times like this. There are many things that government can't do in times like this. I've been there to a lesser degree, but I've been there. The drop in the price of oil was actually bigger when we first got elected, and I've been there in a major emergency. There are many things that are not actually things that the government can do, but there are other things the government can do. They can be honest. They can be straightforward. They can provide accountable, responsible, accurate, truthful leadership and reporting every day to the people of this province. And they can roll up their sleeves to do what absolutely is necessary to support those folks without sacrificing other services in dark corners that nobody can see and nobody is held accountable to. They can respect this Legislature, or they can do what these guys have done. You can do all those things.

Just as an example, you know – anyway, I won't get into that, but suffice it to say that there are different ways to lead through challenges which are mostly out of your control but within which there are many decision points that can be within your control.

This budget is not an example of the right way to do any of those things. It cuts services to many, many Albertans, it hurts families, it doesn't create jobs, and it is fiscally dishonest. Albertans require

better. It is absolutely, as I said before, unnecessary to the task that the government has before it in terms of spending what is necessary to support Albertans and have their backs.

I want Albertans to get through this. I want Alberta families to get through this. I know that we can. I know that despite the extreme acrimony in this House and the abuse of process that we have seen over the last 36 hours and the unfortunate spectre of passing a budget which is absolutely inaccurate on too many fronts to count, at the end of the day Albertans have what it takes to get through this, that we will as individuals and as community members come together and support one another.

Certainly, we will do everything we can to help that happen. We have to support all those important public sector workers who are going to be protecting Albertans over the course of the next weeks and months, we have to listen to them when they speak out about things that they need to make their work easier or more effective, and we have to listen to Albertans when they speak out about things that they need to make their lives safe and secure going forward. These are things that I know that we can do, and my hope is that, notwithstanding that this government has removed the ability of Albertans to really see exactly what they're doing or keep track of it in the normal course of things, they will listen and do what they can to support Albertans.

Certainly, if and when they are willing to work with us to develop a more collegiate and transparent relationship where we can all work together and talk about ways to support Albertans, we're certainly happy to do that. However, we do not believe that passing this budget is necessary for that to happen for the reasons that I have outlined, so we will not be supporting this budget. We will be voting against this budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance has moved second reading of Bill 6, the Appropriation Act, 2020.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:37 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Long	Rutherford
Dreeshen	McIver	Schow
Getson	Milliken	Sigurdson, R.J.
Glasgo	Nally	Singh
Glubish	Neudorf	Smith
Goodridge	Nicolaides	Toews
Guthrie	Nixon, Jason	Toor
Horner	Nixon, Jeremy	Turton
Hunter	Panda	Walker
Kenney	Rosin	Williams
Loewen	Rowswell	

Against the motion:

Carson	Loyola	Renaud
Dach	Nielsen	Sabir
Eggen	Notley	Sigurdson, L.
Gray	Pancholi	

Totals:	For – 32	Against – 11
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[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

The Acting Clerk: Pursuant to Government Motion 10 Bill 6 is deemed referred to the Committee of the Whole on division, deemed considered in Committee of the Whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in on report of the Committee of the Whole on division, deemed read a third time and passed on division.

Bill 5

Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 6, the Appropriation Act, 2020.

The Speaker: We've already moved third reading of Bill 6. It's been deemed voted on and moved forward.

We've just called second reading of Bill 5. If you'd like to move second reading of Bill 5, you'd be welcome to do so. The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to move second reading of Bill 5.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am rising to move second reading of Bill 5, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020.

It proposes five amendments across three different ministries, each with the aim to get better value for Alberta taxpayers. I'd like to start with changes in my own ministry, Treasury Board and Finance. The first proposed change would apply the existing 4 per cent tourism levy, which already applies to hotel rooms and similar temporary accommodations in Alberta, to short-term rentals booked through online services. This will be accomplished through an amendment to the Tourism Levy Act. We announced in Budget 2019 that this change would be forthcoming, giving operators time to prepare. While we don't expect this to generate a large amount of revenue, it does level the playing field for temporary accommodation businesses in Alberta. If passed, we expect the levy to begin being applied to short-term rentals offered online as early as this summer.

Next, we are proposing an amendment to the Insurance Act that clarifies how side accounts can be used. A side account is attached to a universal life insurance policy. It maintains the policy's tax-exempt status and keeps the policyholder insured if the value of the policy becomes too low. The amendment would clarify the primary purpose of side accounts and prohibit their use for investment purposes. Greater certainty in this area will ensure consumers and insurers are protected from potential harmful practices affecting life insurance policies.

Lastly, for Treasury Board and Finance, we're proposing changes to strengthen how government and school boards work together to ratify collective agreements. These changes will require amendments to the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act, including changes to oversight of the act. If passed, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act would transition from Alberta Education to Treasury Board and Finance and with it the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association board. At Treasury Board and Finance the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association will benefit from the expertise and efficiencies offered by the provincial bargaining co-ordination office.

The amendment would also give the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association board the final authority to ratify agreements with teachers, and school boards would have an additional representative on the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association board.

Finally, this will enable the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association board of directors to determine if, when, and how to implement a fee to school boards for services and ongoing operations of the association.

I want to make it clear that there are no plans to implement a fee at this time. This amendment is about ensuring that government and school boards can better represent all taxpayers' interests. School boards will continue to have the opportunity to influence collective agreements and will have increased representation on the board that will make final decisions.

On the topic of education, the next amendment proposed in Bill 5 would change the Education Act, adding a provision that will require school boards to obtain ministerial approval to transfer and spend their operating reserves. This would help ensure that tax dollars go to the classroom, where they can improve outcomes for students. With respect to the autonomy of school divisions, this will allow them to manage their resources and make decisions that reflect local priorities. We also need to balance this with a prudent eye towards respecting taxpayers' dollars. With this in mind, each request will be considered with the particular needs of school boards reflected in decisions. This will also be a temporary measure over the next two years, beginning with the 2020-21 school year. In September 2022 maximum operating reserve amounts will be set for school boards to ensure public dollars go to the classroom.

The final change proposed in Bill 5 will implement outcomes-based funding for postsecondary institutions. Advanced Education has already outlined this new vision for funding higher education in Alberta. If passed, Bill 5 will amend the Post-secondary Learning Act to legislate these changes. Under this model postsecondary institutions will be required to enter into three-year investment management agreements with the government of Alberta. These agreements will include a set amount of base-level funding as well as outcome targets for additional funding. These metrics align with recommendations of the MacKinnon panel and will promote efficiencies as well as focus on labour market outcomes, innovative programs, and research.

9:00

Additionally, amendments to the Post-secondary Learning Act will allow postsecondary institutions to sell or lease land and borrow money with approval via ministerial order rather than order in council – this was also a recommendation from the MacKinnon panel – and will allow postsecondary institutions greater ability to generate revenue.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 5 is a set of clear and thoughtful decisions that reflect our promise of fiscal responsibility. I'd like to thank the House for their time and attention, and I look forward to debate moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, for clarity of the House's sake, the hon. Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board has asked to adjourn debate. This is not a vote on second reading, merely a vote on the adjournment of debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition deputy House leader, I believe, has a question to ask the Assembly.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent of the House to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of the evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Motions

(continued)

Time Allocation on Bill 5

13. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:
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.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move time allocation today, something that I have not done often in my capacity as Government House Leader nor do I intend to do . . . [interjections] Well, up until this unprecedented moment, yes. But the process that we're doing here: we'll talk about that in a moment.

If you look to some of our predecessors in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, as House leaders – yourself, who was a House leader in this Chamber; David Hancock comes to mind. I know my friend the hon. Transportation minister served with Government House Leader Hancock, who is now Judge Hancock, appointed by the opposition, I might add, who served for a very, very long time as Government House Leader. He would move time allocation basically every day. We have a different approach.

Having said that, we are in an unprecedented moment. I want to highlight that. Now, I'm going to have to move time allocation three times tonight. I want to talk a little bit more in detail later on this evening, Mr. Speaker, on the difference between warrants and interim and supplementary supply in anticipation. I don't know for sure, but I assume those are some of the things the opposition will talk about.

What I do want to talk about in the brief time that I have on this allocation motion is about the reason why we have to do this. When the Official Opposition House Leader met with the Premier of Alberta this past Friday, she held a press conference shortly after that on her own. These are her words – I'm not even speaking to what took place in the meeting – inside that press conference, making it clear that she would do everything within her power as House leader of the opposition to stop the budget from passing, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that we know we need that budget to be able to finance the operations of government. I'm sure many of my colleagues will talk about the importance of that and the budget implementation bill in the time that we have on debate.

I do want to talk about how other oppositions have acted across the country, supporting the government, working together to be able to overcome this. If you think back, though, to also some other ways that oppositions have acted in the past, go all the way back to World War II – and I'm not saying that this situation is the same as World War II. We're not fighting the Nazi regime. We're not sending young men to war. But we are in a pivotal moment in the history of this province. Often when you look back to World War II and the Mother Parliament, you'll think of Winston Churchill, of course, that great parliamentarian, the larger than life individual who is remembered. But what is often forgotten is that in addition to him being the Conservative leader at the time, there were five opposition parties in the Mother Parliament who at the very time, in political chaos, could have taken down the Conservative Party at that moment. Instead, those opposition leaders chose to support the Prime Minister at that time to be able to shore him up to be able to overcome the challenge. Ultimately he saved the free world.

They're often forgotten. They should be remembered. That's, in my opinion, how an opposition should be approaching this situation.

They don't have to agree with everything that we are doing. That is their responsibility to do that. It's their responsibility to ask questions, frankly, Mr. Speaker. But it's also their responsibility to make sure they work with the government so that we can provide supply, so that we can provide implementation of this budget to make sure that the government is funded and to make sure that the people that are depending on those funds receive them, including the front-line medical personnel and the emergency personnel who are going to have to fight this pandemic. That's the process that has taken us to this spot.

The reality is, as I said earlier today, Mr. Speaker, through you to Albertans, that they can count on Alberta's government to get this budget passed and to make sure that Alberta's government is funded to be able to face this crisis in the coming months.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 21(3) a member of the opposition has up to five minutes to speak to the government motion. I see the hon. the Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't even know where to begin. I appreciate that we are in a time where we need to be responding to the needs of Albertans and that we need to be supporting Albertans to make sure that they are safe, that their health care needs are being met, that we are addressing the pandemic and ensuring that it doesn't spread and, as the chief medical officer will say, trying to fight the curve. I do, however, feel that it is slightly disingenuous of the Government House Leader to say that we as the opposition must be acting as if this is wartime. That is definitely an extreme that I think is not necessarily appropriate in this situation.

I also struggle with the government side trying to speak to the opposition and saying that the reason they're putting in time allocation is because the opposition refuses to work with this government. Also disingenuous is the fact that I have repeatedly tried to work with the House leader, who obviously doesn't feel like he even needs to listen to me when I'm speaking in this place, as he's doing right now, at a time when we would be willing to work towards doing what needs to make sense. We do not agree with this budget. We've made that very clear. This, again, is a debate around policy decisions and around the fact that we believe health care deserves more funding at this point. This is not about an unwillingness to work with the government. This is just a disagreement on the facts, a disagreement on a direction that this government has chosen to take.

The government, however, has decided that they will be using every tool in their tool box to shut down the opposition from standing up for Albertans and asking the questions that we have a right to ask. They can implement time allocation, as is their prerogative, as they are doing now. I think they are doing a disservice to Albertans by doing that. They have lots of questions right now. They don't know how they're going to pay their rent. They don't know how they're going to pay their mortgages. They don't know if they're going to have the doctors that they need. They have lots of questions. Our responsibility as the opposition in a democratic process is to stand up and ask those questions and hold this government to account.

Again, I would encourage the government to tone down the rhetoric when it comes to the us against them because if they truly believed they wanted to work with the opposition, they wouldn't continuously talk about the fact that the opposition doesn't want to work with the government. I've been here all day. I was here yesterday. Now they're just talking so loudly that they don't even want to hear what I have to say, which is not all that shocking at

this point. Again, Mr. Speaker, this is a misuse of the abilities of this House. It disrespects Albertans. It disrespects the opposition and their role in the democratic process.

I will conclude with that.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 13 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:10 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Long	Rowswell
Dreeshen	McIver	Rutherford
Getson	Milliken	Schow
Glasgo	Nally	Sigurdson, R.J.
Glubish	Neudorf	Singh
Goodridge	Nicolaides	Smith
Guthrie	Nixon, Jason	Toews
Horner	Nixon, Jeremy	Toor
Hunter	Panda	Turton
Kenney	Pitt	Walker
Loewen	Rosin	Williams

Against the motion:

Carson	Loyola	Sabir
Dach	Nielsen	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Pancholi	Sweet
Gray	Renaud	

Totals: For – 33 Against – 11

[Government Motion 13 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 5

Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on second reading of Bill 5.

I would just like to remind members that as we proceed into the evening, if we're going to have private conversations loud enough for the Speaker to hear, perhaps we can take those into the lounges and continue those there.

The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance does have some time remaining, should you wish to use it.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't use much of this time, only to say this. This province is facing a challenge of great magnitude. This province is facing a challenge that is unprecedented in modern time. Albertans have elected every member in this Legislature to ensure that government has the resources, the staff, and the ability to deliver services if ever for a time, for a time like we're in today.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to continue to work together this evening to pass this budget implementation bill, a bill that's essential in ensuring that we can deliver a budget and more importantly deliver much-needed, required, and necessary resources to ensure that front-line services, particularly today health care workers, have the resources required to meet the great need that is coming in days and weeks ahead.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it appeared to me that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was trying to catch my eye, and indeed she has. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has the call.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak on second reading of Bill 5, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020. I believe it's quite a privilege to speak on this bill since there's very limited time to do so. I will take this opportunity to first thank the Minister of Finance for his comments. He just mentioned, of course, that we are in unprecedented times, particularly challenging times in this province, and I agree very much with the Finance minister's comments in that respect. I don't think that anybody in this province has seen anytime recently the likes of what we are facing right now.

It is a great challenge, and it is the obligation of government to rise to those challenging circumstances and deliver the services and staffing and resources, which the Finance minister referred to, in a way that meets the challenges of the province but also the individual needs of Albertans who are going through incredible stress and anxiety right now. So many Albertans are facing significant risk of their livelihood, their homes. They're worried about child care and education. It is unprecedented times. Therefore, that is why we cannot and I cannot support Bill 5, which is also designed to support the budget that this government recently passed.

This bill, Bill 5, as well as its associated Bill 6, the budget, as stated by the Leader of the Official Opposition mere moments ago, is completely based on fantasy and on a situation that is not realistic or reflective of what Albertans are experiencing right now. Bill 5 is a bill which continues to undermine the ability of our education system and those who are responsible for delivering our education system. It undermines their autonomy, their authority, and it further challenges our postsecondary institutions in a way that is further hindering and holding back our province at the very time when we need to be stepping forward and encouraging and supporting our education and postsecondary education systems.

I'd like to begin by going through some of the provisions, which the Finance minister outlined, that are set out in Bill 5. I can't say that I agree with his assessment of those provisions; however, I do want to address them. First of all, probably the measure that I have heard about the most is the provision which is in section 1 of Bill 5, which requires the Minister of Education's authority prior to a school board accessing their reserve funds. It requires the minister's approval. It also allows for the Minister of Education to direct individual school boards as to how they will make payments from their reserve fund and whether they're permitted to do so and may even order them to do so in certain situations.

I note that this provision has been put in to be in effect for two years, which makes it very clear that the intention behind this provision is actually so that the government of Alberta and the Minister of Education will go in and clearly direct locally elected school boards, who have the autonomy to make the decisions as to how to spend their budget. It's designed for the next two years, for the rest of this government's term – I would posit for their only term – to go in and actually direct those school boards on how they're going to spend those dollars. If there was ever an example of why the school boards require the autonomy to make those decisions about how to access their reserve funds, the past year has been a classic example of that.

9:20

We have already seen, across the board, almost every school board in this province being forced to actually access their reserves to make up for the shortfall in education funding that was delivered by this government. This government was elected last year and

proceeded to tell school boards, parents, teachers, students across the province that they were going to fund for enrolment growth. They committed to that. The Finance minister did. The Education minister did. They stood up and said: we are going to be funding for enrolment growth, 15,000 students every year. Instead, what this government delivered with their fall budget, midway through a school year – school boards had already budgeted based on the promises made by this government. They had made determinations with respect to staffing, class sizes, transportation, the delivery of services. They made all those decisions based on the promises of this government.

Because the government operated for almost six months without a budget – so it is possible; we know there are tools available for government to operate without a budget – six months after being elected, they delivered a fall budget which absolutely broke the promise that the Finance minister and the Education minister made and, in fact, the Premier made when he was campaigning to be Premier of this province, when he said he was going to maintain funding for education. Therefore, guess what school boards had to do? They had no choice. They were already midway through a school year. Almost every school board had to dip in and access those reserves. They had to do that, and thank goodness they had them.

The reserves are meant to be there for emergencies, for planning, for bigger projects, to make up for shortfalls in services and funding. Apparently, school boards were wise in the previous years to put away money in their reserves, to plan for the election of a UCP government. This government underfunded them after promising them that they wouldn't; therefore, they had no choice but to access their reserves. That's what they had to do. In fact, Edmonton public school board, for example, had to access \$80.5 million of their reserves just to make up the shortfall in funding from this government, and now they actually don't have much left in their reserves.

Trisha Estabrooks, the board chair for Edmonton public school board, is quoted as saying: "The Education minister has a priority, and I would say Edmonton public has a priority, too, to direct as many dollars as possible to the classroom. We depleted all of our reserves so we could focus on providing the best education to our students in our classrooms. I think you would be hard-pressed to find a board in this province who hasn't had to dip into reserves this past year to cover the shortfall." If we ever needed an example as to why school boards need to have the autonomy and the authority to dip into their reserves and make those decisions as to how to spend them, this government has given them the very example as to why they require that authority.

This government cannot be relied upon to keep their promises and to fund as they say they're going to, and they certainly can't be relied upon to follow their promises when it comes to funding enrolment growth. We see that reflected in this budget that we've been asked to look at today as well. They've done the exact same thing. They continue to maintain that they have maintained education funding when we know that that is not the case because they are not funding for 15,000 new students every year.

School boards need to have the autonomy and the authority to go into their reserves to make up for the shortfalls in funding from this government. That would be the case a month ago, but we are now in a pandemic situation. We are in an unprecedented time for school boards. I don't recall in my 40 years in this province ever seeing anything like this, and most people here wouldn't. The idea that on Sunday night we hear that schools are closed across the province, which was the right thing to do in terms of public health measures, and the unprecedented chaos and questions and anxiety that that's

created for our education system, I don't think anybody could have prepared for that.

Right now we know, across this province, that teachers, school administrators, school board trustees, officials are all working tirelessly to determine how to continue without students in their classrooms, how to continue to deliver education. We know that that's been clear. That's the expectation from the Minister of Education. They have to continue to deliver, and I'm happy that they are doing that. I know they're going to rise to the challenge and be able to do that, but they now have to deliver education to students in a way that many of our teachers and our schools had never even conceived of. It's one thing to talk about distance learning for high school students, who may be used to that, and those options are there, but I have a grade 1 student in my household, and I don't know how his education outcomes are going to be delivered when he's not in class. I know that his teacher is working very hard to address that.

These are unprecedented times. We have said that schools need to be safe, that they need to be hygienic. We know all of that. There are all those extra measures that have to take place if we're ever going to bring our kids back into the schools when this pandemic ends. But now schools are also planning for the delivery of education in a way that's never really been conceived of, province-wide. Again, we are in unprecedented times, and school boards require the authority and the autonomy to be able to determine how to deliver programming with the reserves that they have and the funding that they have, keeping in mind, again, that not only was there the mid-year promise breaking of funding to school boards, but we also know that they are going to continue to be underfunded going forward.

The new funding model that's been proposed by this Minister of Education is going to continue to create a shortfall in schools, particularly in growing school authorities, like here in Edmonton, like in Calgary, where those school authorities are always going to be behind in terms of access to funding for the students that are in their classrooms. So those school boards need to have flexibility. This government has created situations where school boards more than ever require the flexibility to make those decisions.

I think that it is absolutely undermining the authority of school boards, but that's also, actually, the view of a number of other school boards. I want to highlight that an Elk Island public school board trustee also said: by having these reserves at hand and with local trustees having the ability to allocate these same reserves, we were able to maintain staffing levels at our schools, keep class configurations, and stabilize learning in the classrooms, thereby preventing a disruption for students in the midst of their courses. Here the chair, Trina Boymook of Elk Island public schools, is talking about the decision she had to make mid school year when the government deliberately underfunded education.

This is an issue that school boards are constantly confused about when it comes to this government. On the one hand, the Minister of Education seems to indicate that school boards are locally elected, that they have the autonomy, that they should be able to make the decisions about how to best deliver education, but then, when it suits the Minister of Education and this government, all of a sudden school boards can't be trusted, and the Minister of Education will either be ordering audits or stepping in or restricting their ability to be able to determine how to spend their own reserve monies.

In fact, Anne Marie Watson, who is the board chair of Red Deer Catholic regional schools, which is the same board that the current Minister of Education used to be the chair of just a year ago, states that she finds it surprising to see a government focused on reducing red tape giving school districts more work to do. That's precisely

what's happened. By requiring ministerial approval, this is actually creating more red tape for school boards.

Another measure that I want to speak about within Bill 5 that I think is objectionable with respect to school board autonomy is the changes to the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act. Now, the Minister of Finance spoke about how this is meant to give, I guess, greater clarity perhaps in the bargaining process, and I think that's become very clear. It's become very clear, with the way this government has approached collective bargaining with all public-sector entities and unions, that they are clearly wanting to hold all the cards and that they want to be able to veto everything. The changes that they have made to the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association, TEBA, do exactly that.

Yes, they've increased the representatives from school boards, but of course the government still remains the majority vote on TEBA. What does that mean? Well, that's important. The government, actually, always had the majority vote, but what's important now is that through Bill 5 this government has eliminated the final say that individual school boards had over the collective agreement that they are bound to. These are collective agreements entered into between individual school boards and the ATA local in their area. Now the government has removed the ability of those school boards, who are the employer in this situation, who are the bargaining employer, to be able to have a final say on the collective agreement that they're going to be bound to. Now it will be TEBA, which has a majority government membership on it.

What this is essentially saying is that the government is going to be the prime negotiating and bargaining partner with the ATA. It has essentially eliminated the role of school boards in any really meaningful way. School boards do not even get to have the final vote on the collective agreement that they will be bound by as the employer. It's now going to be the government of Alberta. Considering the bad faith in which the government has entered negotiations with nurses, with doctors, with public-sector employees across this province in just the short time that they've been in power, I think it's very clear what the government is setting itself up to do with respect to collective bargaining with teachers. They clearly want to continue to have the absolute veto on that. Again, as somebody who even, by the way, used to work for both government and school boards, I think this is appalling, to further undermine the authority of school boards. It's completely taking them out of the collective bargaining process, and that is shameful because they are the employer.

9:30

I also want to speak a little bit about the decision to incorporate in Bill 5 performance-based outcomes and relating it to funding for postsecondary institutions. I think it's ironic that this government would at this stage think that it's important to talk about performance-based reviews, to tie it to funding. If Albertans were to be asked right now about the performance of their government to date but certainly in light of how they're responding right now to the crisis that's been created by the pandemic, the crisis that's been created by the drop in oil prices, I certainly don't think that they would score very well on performance measurements right now. In fact, we know that to be the case.

We know that this is something that's been piloted before in this province. I believe it was piloted in 1997, this idea of tying performance-based outcomes to funding, and it was found to be useless. It did not actually result in any higher performance. And right now, at a time when, again, our province is facing unprecedented challenges with respect to our economic future, it's really, I think, challenging to actually hold postsecondary institutions accountable for things that are so much out of their

control, to tie it to employment outcomes, when we have a government that has created no jobs since they've been elected and has in fact been responsible for the loss of 50,000 full-time jobs. We are now facing a pandemic. We are now facing an epic drop in oil prices. These are particularly challenging times. So to tie postsecondary funding to things such as employment rates by their students – we know that that's setting postsecondary institutions up for failure, beyond the failure that they've already set postsecondary institutions up for by underfunding them. Fifteen hundred job losses just since this budget was introduced.

I'm deeply concerned about the fact that this government is pushing forward with the measures that are included in Bill 5, which are out of date with what's currently going on in this province. Even if we were to look back before the pandemic, before the drop in oil prices, these measures are undermining the actors that are responsible for doing what the government won't, for delivering strong education services, for making sure that students, whether they're kindergarten to grade 12 or in postsecondary, are set up for success and have every opportunity for success. The government is certainly undermining that at every step. Let's not also undermine the ability of school boards to do that by undermining their authority.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot and will not support this bill that continues to create and support a fictional situation in this province, that denies the reality of what's going on right now and even before, that continues to further support a budget that delivers nothing but cuts to Albertans, makes life far less affordable for them by increasing things such as levies and licences and fees on Albertans, fails to deliver on the jobs that they committed they would provide when they were elected. In fact, it's only actually put more Albertans out of work, has only served to make life more difficult and more challenging for Albertans, and does not acknowledge the realities, the fiscal realities of where we are right now.

Bill 5 further promotes the fiction that this government seems to be operating under. And while it's one thing to say, "You know what; you're not accurate about that," the problem is that it's Albertans who are paying the price. It's Albertans who are going to continue to suffer because this government is ramming through measures that are only going to make life more difficult and less affordable for them at a time when they need a government that is supportive, that is calm, that is providing stability, that is providing leadership, and that is actually going to look out to make life better for Albertans.

These are challenging times, and we need a government that's up to the challenge. Bill 5 and the supporting Bill 6 show that this government is not up to that challenge.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at second reading of Bill 5. Are there others wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020. It's indeed a privilege to get up and to be able to speak. Earlier we saw Motion 10 pass through this House, which restricted the ability of a good number of private members of this House to speak. So it's indeed a privilege to be able to speak.

Second thing, I do recognize that the Government House Leader has brought in time allocations. Although we are, I guess, smaller than 50, they cancelled committees, where we could have been sitting in a smaller setting discussing their budget in estimates. But here we are with a bill that is a supporting bill to implement the budget, which was also passed without debate and oversight, and

we are asked to pass this piece of legislation, which deals with the Education Act, Insurance Act, Post-secondary Learning Act, Public Education Collective Bargaining Act, Tourism Levy Act, a number of acts.

As my learned colleague already mentioned, what we have seen from this government from day one is that they have cut funding to education, whether it's K to 12 education or whether it's postsecondary education. In K to 12 education we were promised that there will be funding for enrolment growth, that there will be funding for staffing and other needs, but we saw a reduction in education funding, education everywhere. The government and their MLAs are saying they've maintained funding for education. Actually, there are 15,000 new students in our education system every year, and even if you maintain it, which you have not, it's still a cut to education. In particular, it's a concern in my riding because I represent a riding which has quite a few schools, and all of them operate at full capacity. Any cut to education funding will result in further overcrowding of classrooms, compromising the quality of the education they get.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

On top of that, what this bill is trying to do is give the power to the minister to reach into their reserve funds and essentially control how she can spend that money. We believe that teachers, administrators, trustees have the expertise. They are on the front line. They know how to manage those resources and what to do with these funds. First, the government cuts the funding for education, and now they are reaching into those reserve funds, which schools save for many different purposes to further kids' education and the quality of the education.

Second thing, with respect to advanced education: same thing. This bill is trying to concentrate more power in the hands of the minister. What we have seen in this budget so far is that the fees were increased by \$290 million, a 6.9 per cent, roughly 7 per cent, increase just in one year. That's a huge increase, and it's on top of other cuts that were made to student grants, scholarships, and those things along with a 1 per cent increase in student loans as well. That's on page 113 of the fiscal plan 2020-23 if you want to look it up. Again, when it comes to education and what we have seen so far, this government cannot be trusted. All across this province there were teachers, parents, students who were protesting these cuts, asking this government to put the brakes on. The same thing with advanced education. Students, student bodies, teachers were protesting against these cuts.

On top of that, as my colleague mentioned, they're also moving towards an outcome-based model where they're tying things to employment. So far in the last nine, 10 months under this government's watch we have seen almost 50,000-plus jobs lost across this province. More than half of those were in Calgary. As if that was not enough, because of these cuts in advanced education, the University of Calgary was forced to lay off employees. SAIT was forced to lay off nearly 250 employees. Mount Royal University had to make cuts. NAIT has to make cuts.

9:40

This budget, which this bill is supporting, has perpetrated deep cuts on our institutions, whether they are our K to 12 schools, whether they are our universities. That's why I think these measures contained in this piece of legislation cannot be supported. As the Minister of Finance mentioned earlier, we are going through challenging times. We are facing a pandemic. Let's not use this as an opportunity to further these austerity measures on our institutions, on our schools, and on our services. That's exactly what this budget is doing. So at this time, when we were already

facing job losses because of this government's policies – initially Albertans were told that that \$4.7 billion handout that was given to corporations would help us to create jobs, but that didn't create jobs. That didn't bring investments back. Instead, we saw huge job losses in Calgary and everywhere across this province. Now, when we are facing a pandemic and Albertans are concerned for their jobs, for their livelihoods in the coming days, we shouldn't be passing a budget or any supporting bill, like Bill 5, that will further this government's, the UCP government's, austerity measures on Albertans.

We know that discussion has subsided about these cuts because top of mind for people at this point is the coronavirus. They are worried about how they will get through it. They are looking for direction from government. But we know that once that pandemic subsides, these cuts are even more dangerous because they will be hurtful to our K to 12 education system. They will be hurtful to our postsecondary education system. These cuts are hurtful to our services that Albertans rely on. For instance, this budget also contains \$63 million of savings in AISH by disrupting everything for those 67,000 to 68,000 Albertans, just to save \$63 million, just so that they can book some deficit in next year's books. This budget is still bad for Albertans, and it doesn't contain anything to address the issues facing Albertans today. This doesn't address any concerns about the issues facing our economy.

We have heard many times from that side of the House that it's important that we ram through this budget. I don't think that's important because when they became the government, for six months they didn't have a budget. They had interim measures at their disposal. They had a special warrant at their disposal, and I remember that at that time they even delayed the budget for a while so that the federal elections were over, and after that, at that point, they would present a budget. Now we are told that, no, this budget needs to go through to keep things going. That, I think, is not the only way to keep things running. There are many other options that the government can pursue.

Especially, pushing it at the speed of light, curtailing debate, curtailing the committee process, even shutting down their own MLAs from being able to participate in any debate: that's not the democratic way of doing things. That's not the way of passing a budget, especially when we know that this budget has a lot more that still needs to be considered in more detail and that implications need to be considered.

This budget in this bill is just furthering this government's austerity agenda, and we know that so far their policies have not worked. This government, this Premier campaigned on getting Albertans back to work, getting their economy back to work. The job-creation tax they brought was supposed to create jobs and lower taxes, but it has done neither. Since that \$4.7 billion handout was given, as I indicated earlier, Alberta has lost more than 50,000 jobs. All this budget is doing is making Albertans foot the bill for that corporate handout. That is the reason, because of this bill and these fiscal measures, that we are seeing the income taxes of individual Albertans go up. That's why we are seeing property taxes increase by 11.3 per cent on the provincial portion of taxes in Calgary, because this government has off-loaded costs to municipalities and has left them behind. We also know – I have heard from many of my constituents, many Calgarians – that they are already seeing a hike in their property taxes.

But that's not all. There is a lot more that's contained in this budget. At the end of the day, Albertans will be paying more to get less. They are seeing their electricity price go up. In some cases it has gone up by 19 per cent. Ordinary Albertans are also seeing a skyrocketing increase in their insurance costs. The budget also contains around \$436 million more in premiums, licences, and fees.

There are apparently a lot of cuts that are in this budget that will hurt Albertans at a time when they need their government to stand up and provide them with supports so that they can get through this crisis.

At the core of our response to this pandemic is our health care system. What we have seen so far is that doctors, nurses across this province are opposed to the changes that this government is proposing. I understand that they added back \$500 million of what they cut from health care, but we are hearing that this is still not enough. Even in estimates, earlier, the Minister of Finance mentioned that H1N1 cost government around 800-some million dollars, and we are seeing a pandemic of bigger proportion than that.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise. I just wanted to talk about a couple of things that the hon. member talked about, three things in particular. First is, again, in regard to warrants. The opposition continues to make an argument in regard to warrants, that they want the government to use warrants. Well, first of all, while warrants are an appropriate thing to use in certain circumstances, they are certainly, probably, the least democratic way of bringing in supply. So this government doesn't want to do that. Essentially, the argument that the opposition is bringing forward is that they don't want to use the democratically elected Chamber to approve a budget, but they want to use the least democratic way, which is warrants. Of course, that's appropriate sometimes, but it's certainly not appropriate when the Chamber is available to have a reasonable debate.

9:50

The other thing they don't talk about, Mr. Speaker, and you may not be aware of this . . .

Mr. Kenney: Oh, I think he is.

Mr. Jason Nixon: But he probably is.

. . . is that if we were to bring in warrants – in fact, we're actually too late. What would happen for warrants to go through is that we would have to prorogue the Legislature. We'd have to actually shut down the Legislature . . .

Mr. Kenney: Prorogue.

Mr. Jason Nixon: . . . yes, prorogue the actual Legislature before midnight yesterday in order to be able to provide funding to Albertans on April 1.

Mr. Kenney: I don't think it's adjourned; it's prorogued.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Prorogued. I am 99 per cent sure it's prorogued. It's definitely adjourned to do that. By the time I talk later tonight, I will be a hundred per cent sure, though, to be fair. You definitely have to shut down the House, though. That's the point: you'd have to shut down the Legislature to do that.

Mr. Kenney: Fourteen days.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Fourteen days of the seat of democracy of the province not being able to sit. I don't know if the opposition is in such a hurry to go home or what is going on, but we're not going to accept that.

Let's be clear. What that hon. member is asking for is for hospitals, doctors, nurses, police officers, teachers not to be funded.

I'm sure that his supporters would be very concerned about that. But don't worry, Mr. Speaker. We're going to stand up for his constituents, too, just like we're going to stand up for ours.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The second thing I want to talk about, and I talked about this earlier, is that throughout the night those members on the front bench, as they keep referring to themselves, in the Chamber, the Official Opposition, keep referring to my government colleagues, Mr. Speaker, as backbenchers. I want to be very, very clear. We do not have backbenchers inside the Alberta government; we have government caucus members, and we're proud of all of them. They work with us, and nobody is stifling their ability to be able to debate inside this House. In fact, I've enjoyed listening to their presentations throughout the evening, and I'm proud to serve with each and every one of them.

The last one I wanted to bring up was the tough decisions – the tough decisions – that school boards are having to make. And then he talked about the hon. the Finance minister, my friend the Finance minister, because he has – and this is the accusation, Mr. Speaker; I want to be clear that it's not true – cut the Education budget.

Mr. Kenney: They claim.

Mr. Jason Nixon: They claim.

In fact, the Education budget this year is \$8.33 billion, if I am correct, Mr. Speaker, through you to the hon. Finance minister, and last year was \$8.223 billion, so it's actually an increase.

Mr. Kenney: It's right here, page 127.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I was off just slightly. It was \$8.222 billion, and now it's \$8.322 billion. It's an increase, Mr. Speaker. That's a fact in black and white in the budget, and that hon. member and his colleagues continue to go out of their way to say inaccurate statements about my friend the hon. Finance minister.

You want to talk about tough decisions, Mr. Speaker? That member was part of a government, just over a year ago, that left the hon. Finance minister with one heck of a mess, and now he's in a situation with the rest of his government colleagues where he has to clean up that mess at the same time as an unprecedented economic situation is taking place and health care crisis not only across the province but across the world. The tough decisions that the Finance minister has to make now are largely because of what that member did when he was a member of Executive Council, just under a year ago. So to continue to come up in this House and say over and over inaccurate statements is disappointing.

The reality is that the budget is clear, Mr. Speaker, and the truth of the matter is that this Assembly, and that hon. member as a member of this Assembly, has a responsibility to make sure that the government of Alberta is funded to make sure nurses, doctors, teachers, and all the rest of the public service and all the services that Albertans are depending on are funded. But you know what? Albertans do not need to worry, because we will not let the NDP stop the government from being funded. We'll make sure it's done tonight.

The Speaker: Hon. members, debate for Bill 5 is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand and debate Bill 5, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020. This is yet another omnibus bill of this government – they enjoy presenting these bills – and it does impact five acts of the government: Education Act, Tourism Levy Act, Public Education Collective Bargaining Act, Post-secondary Learning Act, and the

Insurance Act. Of course, we have one hour to debate it in second reading.

The Government House Leader has been saying that he is looking for questions from the Official Opposition and he wants us to engage in this debate, yet he has limited debate with a time allocation. So somehow there is a profound incongruence between his words and his actions. I just want to point that out, Mr. Speaker, if he indeed is sincere in those words.

I guess one of the major themes that I noticed in this government is just their attack over and over on the democracy of this province. Here, in this bill, they are doing it once again. Just sort of for reference, you know, our democracies are fundamental to people having fairness and justice. Really, there are four principles that are sort of accepted as principles of democracy: human rights and equality, free and fair elections, accountability and transparency, and citizen participation. Those are sort of the four basic principles of a democracy. This bill is eroding – and I'm going to really, I think, focus on accountability and transparency and how this Bill 5 is actually an attack on that.

First, we'll begin to look at the changes to the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act that are in this Bill 5. This, of course, is concerning collective agreements for teachers. Previously the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association would ratify agreements, and then a larger body made up of 61 school board trustees would be the final authority on that. So a very large group of, you know, duly elected public school trustees would review that.

But, of course, that has now changed with this Bill 5. Only the board of directors of the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association will be the final authority. That's a quite a bit smaller body. It's only made up of 15 members. Eight of them are government-appointed members, and seven are school board trustees. Of course, you know, the government-appointed members of the 15 are eight; school boards are seven. The government has it set up so that they have the majority. Now, disturbingly, Mr. Speaker, the government appointees are the majority, as I said. The larger body of 61 trustees is no longer the final authority. So, of course, this is challenging the principle of accountability and transparency, that this government is showing their attack on democracy.

You know, this is just one example. There have been repeated examples of this, sadly, by this government. I mean, one that's very close to me is just what has been done regarding the advocates. You know, the Seniors Advocate: that position was terminated and rolled into the Health Advocate. The Health Advocate was replaced with a new appointee, who is Janice Harrington. She is the previous CEO of the UCP party. To me, Mr. Speaker, and I think to many Albertans watching tonight, that's disgusting. They put in a very partisan political employee.

The process we chose to appoint the Seniors Advocate was rigorous. We interviewed many candidates, and we chose Dr. Sheree Kwong See, who has a PhD, is a sociologist, a professor at the university with deep roots in seniors work and seniors advocacy. To think that in this watchdog position is now Janice Harrington, and she is completely a lapdog of this government: it's disgusting and showing once again just the disregard this government has for any kind of fairness and justice, transparency, and accountability.

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, a point of order has been called.

Point of Order Reflections on a Nonmember

Mr. McIver: You've spoken to this yourself many times, Mr. Speaker, about disparaging members of the public in this House when they are not here to defend themselves. I think that's exactly what we are witnessing right now, and I would encourage you to have the hon. member stop disparaging an honourable member of the public who is doing great work on behalf of Alberta seniors.

The Speaker: Is there anyone that would like to speak on behalf of the Official Opposition? The hon. Official Opposition deputy House leader.

10:00

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member of our caucus was speaking about a very concerning trend that we've seen in appointments from this government and is obviously very passionate about the role and the importance of the people put in that role. That being said, on behalf of the member I would be pleased to apologize and withdraw for being overly enthusiastic in her remarks.

The Speaker: Thank you for the apology and the withdrawal. Generally speaking it's tradition of the House that if the member is present, they would withdraw and apologize on their own behalf, but given the spirit of collegiality, we'll take that, and the hon. member can continue.

Debate Continued

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another egregious example of just a lack of accountability and transparency by this government is with the firing of the Election Commissioner. I mean, these are just repeated attacks on our democracy and, you know, this is something that I know many Albertans, many constituents of mine have contacted me about and shows the, you know, real lack of care about what the foundations are of our democracy here in Alberta.

Another aspect of Bill 5 talks about sort of changing the control of how school boards spend their funds. You know, now they must have the permission of the minister to use their reserves, so this is to, I believe, control spending, reduce spending of schools, and really give extreme control to the Minister of Education. Approval is needed from the Education minister before spending any reserve funds, so this is creating more bureaucracy for school boards. I mean, I think the words that this government would probably be using were "red tape," and I know that they have created their own associate ministry regarding that, so that's kind of incongruent, once again, with sort of what they say they want and what they actually do. Words and actions are not congruent.

The Edmonton public school board chair, Trisha Estabrooks, is concerned about this. She is talking about how much it's reducing the board autonomy. She says: school boards and trustees are in the best position to make decisions on how we should spend our reserves; we know our budgets, we know our jurisdictions. Of course they do. They know them very well. In fact, the Edmonton public school board has spent all their reserves because of the cuts in the fall in the previous budget, so they do not have any reserves left. It seems to fly in the face of, you know, logic or any kind of planning because school boards may have many contingencies that they have to manage.

Oftentimes there are several students they serve in communities all across Alberta, and different things go on. Certainly right now we're experiencing this pandemic of COVID-19, and it's impacting different zones in our province in different ways. For school boards

those funds can be used to really support students, so this controlling power, really, now more into just sort of one person's authority – and he is not on the ground; he's not on the front lines in those communities – again, is, really, I think, eroding sort of fairness for these school boards, who have to manage so many contingencies. Like Trisha Estabrooks said so well: they know their situation best.

Another aspect of Bill 5 is talking about the postsecondaries, the 26 postsecondaries that we have. Now there are going to be three-year agreements that will be tying the public funding to performance. Fifteen per cent is, I guess, the number. Another term that is being used is "outcome-based." Of course, this is happening very rapidly. They're saying that by April 1 these agreements will need to all be, you know, decided. The indicators, the measures will have to be put forward, and that's a very short timeline for all institutions, and we have a diversity of them in that number of 26.

Certainly, the Council of Alberta University Students has talked. This is what the chair of CAUS, Ms Nazir, said: we're concerned that with this tight timeline there won't be time to create a fully fleshed-out model that doesn't lead to unintended consequences. I mean, there's someone who's obviously a student leader in the postsecondary system. She works with many other student leaders. This rapid – you know, April 1 is less than a month away. It is very disturbing.

Another concern, of course is, like: what will those measures be? Is it from a very narrow perspective? Is postsecondary just about getting a job, or is it about something else? Is it perhaps about developing a different view, a world view, developing citizenship, developing quality of life? There are so many other things. How will these be assessed and determined? Will it be a narrow perspective, when it's just about jobs, or just, you know, the faculties that support certain sectors?

I have my BA in political science. That's sort of a general degree; it's not a profession. Then I went on, of course, later to get my master's in social work, and that is a profession. That fundamental foundation of an arts degree supported me so much, yet the indicators – I didn't really get any kind of job out of that, you know, degree program although it was transformational for me in helping me develop myself and what I decided to do and how I decided to live and how I was contributing to my society.

I just caution the government very much to make sure that those measures, indicators that they're using – and they're tying it to funding – do encompass all the different kinds of learning and the importance of people's choices in what they pursue. It's not just about, you know, something that gets someone a job; it's much broader than that. So I really do caution the government to keep a broad perspective on that.

Having made these points about sort of the concentration of power in the minister's hands, the lack of time, really, and consultation with the larger community, developing measures with the April 1 – also, we're obviously in this pandemic with COVID-19. The institutions are just trying to manage the situation right now. They don't have time to be developing this. So it feels like this is something that should absolutely be postponed and should not be going ahead.

Really, a deep concern about the erosion of democracy and the lack of, you know, fairness in terms of eliminating the larger body of 61 school trustees to look over those agreements and just narrowly only ask those 15 members, the majority being government appointed – I think I made my point earlier about some of the concerns about who this government appoints. They're not using a rigorous process that really is looking for people with the best backgrounds. They're using people who are partisan and support their view without really understanding the larger situation.

Certainly, I am speaking against support for this bill, as are my colleagues. I will obviously not be voting for it and have, you know, real concerns about the lack of fairness and accountability and transparency, that this is a continued theme of this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, but I will remind all members of the House to keep their private conversations private or remove them to the lounges.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education has risen on Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of things I want to respond to, so I'm just trying to get my thoughts in order on where to begin. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was speaking a little while earlier and making some comments that I think require some clarity. The member pointed out and made some point to demonstrate that it has taken our government six months – we were six months without a budget.

10:10

I want to make sure it's clear in the Assembly that when those members were in government, it took them longer, in fact, to present a budget than what our government did. In fact, if you look at the amount of days it took from when those members became government in 2015 until their first budget, it actually took them longer. If they're complaining that we took less time, I'm not sure what the complaint is there. I think it's important to provide clarity over the specifics and the actual details. Let's actually just talk about the facts.

As well, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud talked about school funding. I know that this is an area where the members opposite are finding some challenges and are continuing to be confused. We were quite clear during the course of the campaign and as well in our platform. I have it right here in front of me. "A United Conservative government will: maintain or increase education funding." I know the House leader was speaking a moment ago and talked about how we're seeing a slight increase in funding. I'm still not sure how an increase in funding is a cut. You know, it's an interesting perspective. I've been listening for well over half an hour, maybe a little while longer, trying to understand it, but I don't understand how an increase in funding is a cut. Nonetheless, it doesn't make sense. Maybe you need a PhD. I don't know.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was talking about the new K to 12 funding model and said that this new model, quote, will create a shortfall. Again, let's look at the numbers. Every school division will be seeing an increase in funding. Again, I'm not sure. Increase equals cut, so maybe cut equals increase? I'm not sure what's happening here, but those are the facts. Those are the numbers.

Let's talk about performance-based funding as well, as it relates to our postsecondary institutions. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is correct. In 1997 the Alberta government looked at introducing a form of performance-based funding or outcomes-based funding, which was subsequently changed. Now, it's important to look at the dynamics and understand, of course, why that didn't succeed. The amount of funding that was tied to performance-based . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called. The hon. Official Opposition deputy House leader has risen.

Point of Order Relevance

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just very quickly, under 29(2)(a) it is intended to allow comments relevant to the speech. The member keeps referring to a speech that happened earlier, not the response to the member who has just spoken. If he could please, in my opinion, direct comments to the speech.

The Speaker: I'm more than happy to – I think there are significant amounts of record with respect to the Speaker's ruling on 29(2)(a) and the wide swath that's been provided over a long period of time for members of the Assembly to add into the debate. I don't think that there's a point of order here.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe that's the case. No worries.

I'm shifting to performance-based funding and investment management agreements, which I know that many of the speakers opposite have talked about. To provide some context and get a better understanding, as I mentioned, formerly, back in about 1997, the government looked at some model of performance-based funding and moved away from it. It's important to look at the reasons behind that and get an understanding.

I'd encourage the members opposite to look at the literature and look at a lot of the dynamics behind performance-based funding in postsecondary education. One will quickly understand and see that for any model of performance-based funding, the amount of at-risk funding must be significant enough to achieve a degree of behavioural change, if you will. Tying 1 per cent or 2 per cent, which was the case in Alberta back in 1997, of course, created some challenges in that it may not have . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 13 the allotted time for consideration of this item of business has elapsed, and the question now must be put.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:15 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Long	Rowswell
Dreeshen	McIver	Rutherford
Getson	Milliken	Schow
Glasgo	Nally	Sigurdson, R.J.
Glubish	Neudorf	Singh
Goodridge	Nicolaides	Smith
Guthrie	Nixon, Jason	Toews
Horner	Nixon, Jeremy	Toor
Hunter	Panda	Turton
Kenney	Pitt	Walker
Loewen	Rosin	Williams

Against the motion:

Carson	Loyola	Sabir
Dach	Nielsen	Sigurdson, L.

Eggen	Pancholi	Sweet
Gray	Renaud	
Totals:	For – 33	Against – 11

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

**10:20 Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

**Bill 5
Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020**

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I rise with interest to speak to this Bill 5 in Committee of the Whole. I have heard quite a number of concerns in regard to this bill specifically but also where we're at in the legislative agenda generally. I know that we've heard a lot of comment about the necessity of passing a budget and so forth, and we know, not just from the long history of this Legislature but the very recent developments in Legislatures and parliaments across this country and indeed around the world – I myself have been in this Legislature for quite some time – that as a matter of course, especially during difficult circumstances, it's very possible, with sufficient monies, to ensure that the smooth functioning of the government of Alberta is maintained and the integrity of all of the programs for which we are responsible, that they are financed correctly and adequately, especially considering the extraordinary circumstances that we find ourselves in here in the province of Alberta, indeed across Canada and around the world. It's very important to be nimble, to be dexterous, and to be answering and moving to the circumstances that are changing very rapidly in regard to the current situation that we have, the pandemic.

I know that this Bill 5 is somewhat attached to the budget, which we are in the process of moving through here this evening, and considering there's a majority government, this will come to a conclusion here this evening. But it's important for us to make sure that we have the tools that are appropriate to deal with the rapidly changing emergency that our province finds itself in here today. I find it very difficult to presume, in all honesty, that the government can reflect on the budget generally and Bill 5 and its supporting role in that budget and say with sincerity that that budget is the appropriate reaction to the circumstances that we find ourselves in here this evening. We know that the circumstances are changing by the day, by the hour. I can't underestimate the gravity of the situation, and we know that all Albertans are feeling that as well.

For us to be looking at very specific elements of, let's say, this Bill 5 – right? – talking about changing insurance policies, the school board collective agreements, performance-based funding for postsecondary institutions, changing the function of school boards and their budgets, this whole thing around the selling and buying of land for postsecondaries and so forth, I mean, these are all very interesting topics that I think deserve debate, and they deserve consideration. But is it the thing that we need to be dealing with now here in the province of Alberta, when we have literally the doubling of cases of coronavirus every few days, where we need to build our health care capacity and to provide for contingencies that we perhaps can only just start to understand over these last few days?

Honestly, we know that in other places, other jurisdictions – I just saw yesterday that the province of Ontario, in a very similar budget circumstance, said: "You know what? Our budget is not in keeping with the emergency that we're facing here today." I would humbly suggest, Madam Chair, that we're exactly in that same situation, so while we might find it interesting and relevant to have a fulsome debate in regard to the six or seven different elements of this Bill 5 here this evening, I really don't think that it is appropriate nor do Albertans think that it's appropriate that we would be doing so when we have to move on with dealing with an emergency that we are all facing here today.

We will move through this process. I think that all of us are feeling in their hearts what I'm feeling this evening, that we need to move on to deal with this emergent issue, that concerns all of us in the most existential way, I would suggest, more than anything that we've dealt with in this Legislature certainly in the time that I've been here and further back. Moving on with this, we will move through the process. But also I did want to say those few words to make sure that we understand, number one, that there's a way by which we can deal with this emergency in a very expeditious way, to deal with ensuring that the government of Alberta is funded both in the ministries that everyone is responsible for and for the emergent, difficult situation that we're facing, and we don't need to do it with a budget that was drafted months ago, before we were facing all of these emergencies. I think all of us know that in our hearts.

That being said, we're in the midst of a process which is now Committee of the Whole for Bill 5, and I would like to move an amendment to that bill now. If I can pass it around, I would be grateful.

Thank you.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment that I put forward here this evening in regard to Bill 5 is dealing specifically with section 3, if you can all turn to your bills here now. This is a specific element dealing with postsecondary education. We know the performance-based model that this government wants to move forward on. I would suggest that, again, given the circumstances that I just described, with the pandemic that we're facing generally but also with the speed and sort of the, I guess, rushed nature of how the government is bringing forward these performance-based measures – I've travelled around the province a lot, to many of the 26 or 27 colleges and universities, and everybody is throwing up their hands: like, what is this performance-based model, and how could it possibly be implemented in the very short time space that this government is suggesting?

Really, postsecondary education has experienced significant cuts already in the first budget and then the proposed budget of this government, and we already see quite negative effects in regard to positions being lost and programming changes and just a lot of instability. The performance-based element is something that's being added on top of that, Madam Chair, and really we find that to be both inappropriate and would ask that the minister might reconsider this tying of funding to outcomes for a single institution across the province. We really know that it's a mixed bag, this whole idea of performance-based funding, especially when you're not laying out clear parameters which postsecondary institutions can start to plan for.

10:30

The suggestions that have come from this government so far in regard to what those performance-based metrics are are terribly reductive and are punitive, quite frankly. They almost have a self-fulfilling prophecy built into them, Madam Chair, in that you have a significant portion of the funding that you depend on for operations, and that lies in the balance based on whether you can meet that performance target. If that institution perhaps fails to do so, then already they're at a disadvantage to try to make amends to maybe meet that performance target in the next year, right?

I think that considering, well, again, the circumstances that we're in, which I think supersede almost all of the elements of this bill in general and this section specifically that is in Bill 5, the wise and prudent thing to do at the very least would be to strike out section 3 and to move forward on that basis. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister . . .

Mr. Eggen: Oh, yes. I'd also like to move to adjourn debate. Sorry about that.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report progress on Bill 5.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Milliken: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 5. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried.

Government Motions

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 5

14. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:
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 the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to talk about a couple things as we move this important motion to be able to continue to progress on the budget and the budget implementation bill this evening. I was listening with interest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview as she presented her presentation in regard to this bill and went on at some length about the fact that she felt that the government moving forward and using allocation to be able to get this process through the House was in

some way stopping democracy and was interfering with the democratic process: it was not transparent, it was not accountable.

I found that a little bit interesting given that her point which she asked for was for us actually to shut the Legislature, to prorogue the Legislature. I want you to know that I confirmed that since I last spoke, that that's what it would take on warrants. So that hon. member and her caucus and her leader have asked the government of Alberta to prorogue the Legislature, stop the Legislature from being available to do the democratic process that Albertans elected us to do, and then use the most undemocratic process for supply. It has reasonable portions when you should do it – overtop of elections or in extreme emergencies – not when the democratically elected body of Alberta is available to do the work that we've been called upon to do, Madam Speaker.

I'm not concerned at all about what the hon. member is saying. I am concerned, though, about what the NDP's approach would have been, which was to stop Albertans from having a democratically approved budget for the next year at the very moment when they certainly need stability going forward.

As for transparency and accountability, again going back to warrants, what the hon. member was proposing is that we shut the Legislature, turn off all of the cameras, send all of the MLAs back, and then Executive Council goes into a room and sets a budget during a crisis situation. We reject that. I would say, Madam Speaker, that that is undemocratic, what is being proposed by the hon. member, and we will not accept that. Instead, we're going to move forward, making sure that the democratic process works.

One last point on that. She also indicated that for some reason this was not a democratic process within this Chamber. Madam Speaker, I reject that. This is the democratic process right here. Every member that is in this Chamber was elected by their constituents to be here, and the majority of this Legislature voting to continue with a budget is the democratic process. If that hon. member doesn't like that, she can take it up with the majority of Albertans that elected the majority of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 21(3) the opposition may speak up to five minutes in response. The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, I'm very happy; well, somewhat disturbed. But it's important to speak to these issues in a reasonable sort of way. This government continues to move forward with this fiction that they would be unable to function unless they would have passed this budget, which is patently and absolutely untrue. We know that there are plenty of mechanisms by which to move forward to deal with an emerging situation, like the emergency that we are dealing with here now, without having to use a document that is several months old, dealing with a situation that changes dramatically by the day.

We see other jurisdictions – as I've pointed out before, the province of Ontario moved prudently to recognize that their budget document was out of line with the circumstances that they're dealing with today. The circumstances that they're dealing with today are very much the same circumstances that we are dealing with here this evening in the province of Alberta.

To make that assertion and that presumption – we know that it's wrong, Albertans know that it is incorrect, and to continue on trying to spin that story, I think, limits the credibility of this government going forward at the very moment when we need the integrity and the credibility of the government to be intact to ensure prudent steps to deal with the pandemic.

In terms of the time allocations, again, what we've just witnessed is, like, duplicitous at best because you know that the government

failed to move on that allocation. We showed some, you know, good faith in trying to provide some space for them, yet they moved back to these talking points, spinning a tale of fiction and discord and so forth here in the House.

I mean, I would suggest that we move on to trying to create something that is functional in the House. I encourage all members to do so. I suggest again, with the time allocations, that the government limit their interjections, further eating up the time of the hour that we have allocated to debate Bill 5 in third reading.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 14 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:40 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Long	Rutherford
Dreeschen	McIver	Schow
Getson	Milliken	Sigurdson, R.J.
Glasgo	Nally	Singh
Glubish	Neudorf	Smith
Goodridge	Nicolaides	Toews
Guthrie	Nixon, Jason	Toor
Horner	Nixon, Jeremy	Turton
Hunter	Panda	Walker
Kenney	Rosin	Williams
Loewen	Rowswell	

Against the motion:

Carson	Nielsen	Sabir
Dach	Pancholi	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Renaud	Sweet
Gray		

Totals: For – 32 Against – 10

[Government Motion 14 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole (continued)

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 5 Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020

The Chair: We are on amendment A1. The hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'd like to thank all members of the Assembly for being here at this late hour, particularly our table officers and security officers for facilitating the Assembly at this very challenging and unusual time in our history. As I said in this place yesterday, I think – it's all a blur to me now – we are working through what is truly an unprecedented challenge. The only analogous moment in our history would have been the Spanish influenza of 1918-1919. Of course, that followed on the terrible and unthinkable tragedy of the Great War. It is remarkable to think how Albertans came through those twin tragedies, when both in the battlefields of Europe and here in the

homes of Alberta and Canada so many tens of thousands of Canadians lost their lives.

While this is a different time of extreme adversity, it is adversity nevertheless because this public health crisis threatens – let us be blunt – the lives of many Albertans. It could not be more serious. If the most robust public health actions are not taken with a great sense of urgency and common cause, then the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, could develop an epidemiological momentum that could result in a level of infection and hospitalization beyond the capacity of even the most advanced and well-funded health systems in the world to cope. That is the essence of the briefings that Executive Council has received from Chief Medical Officer Hinshaw and the leaders of Alberta Health Services and the Ministry of Health.

Thankfully, Madam Chair, those officials believe that, based on the robust actions taken by Alberta to date, we are likely on track to be able to control the spread of this virus so that at its peak it would not exceed the care capacity of our health care system. That is not a given. It is not granted. It is not a certainty, but based on the modelling of our medical professionals, that is currently their most expected outcome, that when the level of infections peaks at about a current projection of about 22,000 cases two months from now, the ratio of hospitalization should be below that of our medical system.

But that depends on a number of factors, one of which is expanding the capacity of our medical system, which is why today I signed an order in council with the Lieutenant Governor declaring a public health emergency so that we have all of the legal tools necessary to expand the maximum capacity of our health system. It is why we have embedded in the bill before this place an additional initial expenditure of half a billion dollars to support the critical health response to COVID. Until recently I understand from Alberta Health Services that we were spending roughly an incremental \$1 million a day in the public health effort. That will obviously increase significantly in the weeks and months to come.

One thing that Albertans need to understand, Madam Chair, is that this pandemic will not subside quickly. Most projections for countries like Canada, jurisdictions like Alberta with robust containment measures, including increasingly aggressive social distancing protocols, are an epidemiological trend that would reach its peak in roughly eight weeks' time, roughly 10 weeks from the onset from the first level of infection, which was about two weeks ago.

10:50

I shouldn't touch my face, Madam Chair. I'm sorry. We're all, I think, reminding ourselves of these basic – and let me just pause to say that one role that all MLAs can play is just constantly to remind our constituents, our fellow Albertans of the basic hygiene rules. When we start to get sick about repeating those messages of washing hands, of staying at home if you're ill, of social distancing, of covering your mouth if you're coughing, sneezing, or yawning, and all of those basic rules, when we start to get tired of repeating those messages, we've hardly begun to communicate them sufficiently. The leading epidemiologists in the world will say that those core basic and simple practices of personal hygiene are the greatest weapons that we have to defeat the virus. Closed parentheses.

My point, Madam Chair, was that this is going to be with us for a while. We don't know how long, but we do know this scientifically: until there is a vaccine or until a sufficiently large share of the population has been infected and therefore becomes immune, the virus will continue to spread. As with any influenza of this nature, the vast majority of people who will be infected will at

worst suffer mild symptoms. Most will likely never know that they had this infection. One thing I've learned in the last week is that about 60 per cent of our population was infected with H1N1. I think most of us didn't realize that. Thankfully, most of us are largely immune from the symptoms and certainly the fatal threat of this virus.

Sadly, however, it does have a fatality rate that is roughly 10 times that of the typical form of influenza. That risk is particularly acute for the elderly, for people who are immunocompromised, and particularly with those who have respiratory illnesses. When you combine those things, elderly people who are immunocompromised and who have respiratory conditions, the risk is very elevated indeed, Madam Chair. That is why it is so critically important that we protect our seniors and others who are ill. That is the single most important thing that people can do if they feel cold- or flulike symptoms: to stay at home in self-isolation, and then to go through the AHS online COVID-19 assessment tool, and if it indicates that they likely are exhibiting COVID symptoms, to call 811.

Madam Chair, I would like to once again commend the officials at AHS, led by Dr. Hinshaw, and their team for tremendous spirit of innovation and resilience at this challenging time. Let me give you two examples. Alberta is leading North America in testing. Based on the latest data I saw this evening, we are up to around 1,700 tests completed in the past 24 hours. To put that in comparison, Ontario is still slightly over 1,000 for a population nearly four times our size. As of a few days ago the United States – the entire United States – had only tested about 18,000 people. We were already at 6,500 tests in this province by that time. Our level of testing per capita is certainly one of the highest in the world and, I believe, the highest per capita in North America. That is in part because of innovation by our medical practitioners who found different kinds of swabs that they were able to apply to this particular test. They were able to modify both certain equipment and supplies to expand our testing capacity even when supplies are constrained, so kudos to them.

Secondly, Madam Chair, the innovation in terms of not only testing but also the online assessment tool itself, which has now been copied by several provinces. We, of course, have surrendered any copyright to that. We've shared the technology, the IT work. That was done just in a few days, and it's helped massively to reduce the call volumes on 811, helping more people to get through. I can report that already, I understand, over a million Albertans have used the online AHS COVID-19 preassessment tool. Somewhere in a government building, probably not far from us, there is an unheralded group of techies and coders who will probably never get an award or any public recognition. I don't know their names, but I'd like to thank them on behalf of all Albertans.

Madam Chair, tragically this enormous public health crisis comes on top of five years of economic fragility, which also means – let's be honest – a degree of social fragility in our province, that we see reflected in all sorts of sad and tragic ways. It comes with the onset of a major global economic downturn the likes of which, well, I'm not sure that we've ever seen because, you know, modern economic history is replete with conventional . . .

Ms Sweet: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order has been called. The Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Relevance

Ms Sweet: Thank you, hon. Chair. I have tried to be respectful of the Premier and the fact that he is speaking to the pandemic. I have provided 10 minutes out of the 60 minutes that we have to actually debate Bill 5, which is speaking to the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act. Although I appreciate what the Premier would like to do – I support him in his comments when it comes to the chief medical officer and the individuals that are helping with the pandemic – we have 60 minutes to debate Bill 5. We currently have an amendment in front of us that was introduced by my hon. colleague. So under Standing Order 23(b):

speaks to matters other than

(i) the question under discussion

(ii) a motion or amendment the Member intends to move, or

(iii) a point of order or question of privilege

With all due respect, Mr. Premier, I would ask that we please get back to Bill 5 and let the opposition have their ability to use the time allocation for this particular moment and that the Premier continue with his comments of support for all of our public-sector workers, nurses, and doctors at another time, which he has lots of opportunity to do.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I don't quite understand the concern from the Official Opposition House Leader. I'm happy to hear from the Premier. I think that what he's speaking about is very relevant to the legislation and to the amendment, and I'll tell you why in a second.

I'd also be happy to hear from the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Of course, it would be unparliamentary for me to mention that outside of a point of order, where another point of order cannot be called anyway, but the reality is that she hasn't been here all evening. Hopefully, she'll come back, and she'll be able to present to this Chamber.

With that said, Madam Chair, the reality is that the amendment talks about removing significant portions out of the bill. That bill is to implement the budget that we need implemented to be able to deal with the crisis that we face. That's what the hon. Premier is referring to. He absolutely has a right to address this Chamber. I do hope that we let him know how much time he has left, because his speech was interrupted, and that we rule this is not a point of order.

The Chair: Hon. members, with respect to the time that we have left, and in all honesty, the Premier's topic is extremely important to the future of this province however not entirely relevant to the amendment that we have on hand. The hon. Premier has nine minutes left of the 20-minute block, which I hope will be slightly more relevant to amendment A1.

Debate Continued

Mr. Kenney: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I was trying to offer the context of Bill 5 and this amendment. I'll try to offer my comments in a more truncated way to say this: the bill and the procedure in which we now find ourselves tonight, which has been basically the only subject spoken to by the opposition members, has been required because we are in a public health crisis and an economic emergency simultaneously. The reason why this amendment is undemocratic is because it's effectively a nonconfidence vote in the government. That is exactly what it is. If this motion were to pass, it would effectively be an expression of

nonconfidence in the elected government. I would be obliged by constitutional convention to offer the government's resignation to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor. I know that the Official Opposition seems to think this is all gamesmanship; nothing could be more serious.

11:00

Now, here is the context about this amendment that has been put forward by the opposition. Not only is it an expression of nonconfidence for a government that is trying to cope with multiple crises, Madam Chair, but it is also part of a strategy by the Official Opposition to diminish democracy in this province. Why do I say that? If this amendment were to pass and the opposition to achieve its goal of defeating the budget, not only would that force the resignation of the government and nonconfidence, but it would mean that we do not have supply for the fiscal year which begins in two weeks' time. Now, supply, to people listening at home, may sound like a technical parliamentary term, but let me give it a very practical expression, what this amendment is about ultimately. Supply means that the government has democratic authorization by the people's representatives to spend in this instance over \$56 billion over the course of the next 12 months.

If that does not happen, if this amendment and the other amendments with which it is associated by the opposition were to pass – you know, the opposition says that passing it under this accelerated or expedited process is somehow undemocratic. Why are we in this process, Madam Chair? Because COVID-19 poses a very real threat that this Assembly may have to suspend its operation at any given time. As recently as this morning or last night 14 members of the government caucus were in self-isolation, observing the chief medical officer's protocols. That could grow to 28. That could grow to mean less than a quorum of the Legislature. A member here might test positive, in which case, I suspect, the chief medical officer would immediately quarantine this House and its members and recommend that we suspend the Legislature. That could happen at any moment, as it did in the House of Commons when the Prime Minister himself was put under self-isolation not even a week ago, a few days ago.

Nothing could be more serious than this place right now doing its duty to ensure that the government has the funds to fight this virus and to deal with the economic crisis. The opposition's allegation is that somehow it is undemocratic to do this tonight rather than allowing them to try to string this out for two weeks, during which I estimate there is a fairly elevated risk of the suspension of this Legislature. What, then, would that leave us with? Let's walk down the aisle of this amendment before the House. If the opposition were to get its irresponsible way, Madam Chair, and we were to just carry on with the usual process and timelines – by the way, my friend the hon. Government House Leader knows perfectly well that I am a partisan of the conventions of the Legislature, and that's why I've only approved the use of time allocations, I believe, in one or two instances in the history of this government, in 10 months. This is an exception for obviously exceptional reasons, which is why I oppose this amendment.

If we were to revert to the status quo approach, which is essentially what this amendment is about, we carry on, and let's say that a week from today suddenly this place is suspended for obvious reasons. What then would we do? We would have no funding. No funding. We would not be able to write a cheque, make a payroll, fund a hospital, buy medication, provide emergency financial support to people. We would not be able to run the government of Alberta at least for the first several days of the new fiscal year, and we're talking about a government that spends – you can do the math

– whatever: 365 divided by 56, how many hundreds of millions of dollars every day.

This is not an opinion. This is an incontrovertible, legal fact. For us as a government, following suspension of the Assembly, to have authorization to spend that money requires that the House be prorogued, which means shut down, and then there has to be a 14-day period before I can recommend, as President of Executive Council, special warrants to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor. During that 14-day period: no money. In the midst of a crisis I have never seen a greater act of irresponsibility by a party in my lifetime in Canadian parliaments, Madam Chair.

Everywhere else in this country opposition parties are co-operating with governments to put the politics aside and do the people's business. The NDP in Saskatchewan is today supporting an accelerated process for spending. The B.C. Liberals are supporting an NDP government in the same respect. The separatists in Quebec and the Quebec Liberals are supporting the coalition avenir Québec. All across the country but in this place, where they actually want to risk shutting down the government of Alberta in the midst of an unprecedented twin public health and economic crisis.

So, yes, Madam Chair, I am speaking directly to the amendment. I could not be more relevant to the amendment in saying that this is pathetic, to see political games being – it's clear what's happened. The Leader of the Opposition had a temper tantrum, and her members don't even know how to defend it. They don't even know how to defend it, because they keep standing up and saying that we could run the government on special warrants. No, we couldn't. We are now past the 14-day constitutional period required to authorize a special warrant. I heard one of their members who's actually, I think, experienced in this place say: we could run it on supplementary estimates. First of all, neither the Legislature nor the government can authorize supplementary estimates until the main estimates are adopted. You can't supplement a nonexistent main estimate. This is unbelievable. This is Mickey Mouse politics coming from the opposition at a time of crisis.

Madam Chair, we are going to be in this, I regret to say, not for days or weeks but for months, and I hope that we will see a change of attitude from the opposition in this respect. [interjections]

The Chair: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a privilege to rise this evening to speak to the amendment that's in front of us on Bill 5, once again, striking out section 3. I just want to get back to the fact that we are discussing a bill that has many sweeping changes. In this instance we are talking about the changes to postsecondary institutions. My comments will primarily focus on the changes that we're seeing to performance measures or the implementation of those performance measures, as the minister has brought forward, as well as a few other things in that section.

First of all, a question that I continue to have through this debate is: why does the Minister of Advanced Education believe that he knows better than our postsecondary institutions and their boards? Why does the minister believe that he knows what's best when it comes to performance measures for these institutions? Once again, why does he think he knows better? Why is the minister giving himself so much power and asking us to trust him?

You know, there are certain regulations that we see before us in this bill, but, to be honest, with what we've seen in the past and how they, well, don't necessarily keep their word – when we look back to Bill 9 and how they rip up contracts even after they've been negotiated, the fact is that it's hard for me as an opposition MLA

and a representative of my constituents to take this at face value. Once again, I'm concerned that not all the regulations that may pass are actually in this legislation. I remember a time when the members of the UCP, when they were in opposition, would go on at length about the problem with legislation that is missing pieces of regulation. They seem to forget where they've come from, Madam Chair. They seem to forget that it wasn't that long ago that they were very concerned and were raising their voice in this House about those same issues, yet here we are.

11:10

I will point out relatively quickly, Madam Chair, the fact that during the election campaign there were members, that are sitting in this House today, that were going door to door, and at the time – you know, there are certain parts of this province where this Premier is not as popular as he is in other parts of the province – those members were saying that they would be a voice, that they would raise their voice in this Legislature and in caucus meetings to raise their concerns when they did not necessarily believe in the position that the Premier was taking. Unfortunately, as we've seen over the last week with the erosion of the budget estimates process and, overall, the erosion of fundamental parliamentary democracy, which we hold so close to our hearts in this province, they are silent. I do digress.

I'm once again wondering why this minister truly believes that they know what's best in terms of performance measures for postsecondary institutions. Now, we're supposed to vote on this, once again, with very little detail – well, actually, zero detail, as far as I can tell – about what consequences a postsecondary institution might face if they do not follow the arbitrary performance measures that are within this legislation. We have heard nothing about the consequences to those institutions.

Now, we've spoken at length and we will continue to talk about the fact that we are in the middle of an unprecedented pandemic, which will affect the budgets of these institutions, not to mention the fact that this budget and the budget before this budget had unprecedented cuts because of this UCP government, massive cuts to our postsecondary institutions. Now, how can they be sure that the minister will truly understand these extraordinary circumstances with the pandemic that is before us? How do we know that the minister will truly understand those circumstances and provide the supports that they need when the fact is that this UCP government hasn't even provided the basic funding to these institutions that they were expecting?

They talked in their election campaign about the fact that they would provide stable funding to these institutions, but we've seen anything but that up to this moment. You know, we've heard the Advanced Education minister stand up and say: the fact is that funding is maintained. Well, if that's the case, why are these institutions having to make 7 per cent cuts each year over the next three to four years, and why are these institutions forcing tuition up on students? The fact is that this government, in all of their mighty glory, has actually increased the interest costs on loans to postsecondary students, which is absolutely unbelievable. Once again, students are getting hit on tuition and getting hit on their interest payments because this government has no way to fill the massive holes that they're leaving in the budget, and they're doing it on the backs of students.

Now, hundreds of teachers and faculty members are losing their jobs right now as a result of the UCP budget cuts, not even to bring in the fact of the pandemic that's before us but just because of the last two budgets from this UCP government. Now the UCP has the audacity to say that they will measure their performance after cutting their funds. Well, Madam Chair, the fact is that with these

cuts and the forced hikes to tuition, I imagine the performance might be affected. I know that these institutions will do their best to ensure that students receive the best training possible, but there is only so much that they can do before the provincial budget cuts from this UCP government will hurt their performance.

Now, once again we've seen this week a UCP government who is unwilling to properly revise their own budget in the face of the COVID pandemic, but we're supposed to trust once again that they will understand the need for revisions to postsecondary institution budgets, Madam Chair. I have a question to ask the Advanced Education minister and, really, all the ministers. In the spirit of what we've seen this week with the erosion of our ability to ask questions in the estimates process, if one of these institutions comes to the Minister of Advanced Education and says, "We know that traditionally we would provide you an opportunity to review and comment on our budget, but at this time, under these circumstances, you know, we're not going to provide you that opportunity to review and look at our work and show the work," I don't think that that would go very well with what's proposed in this legislation. I'm not sure why, on the other hand, the government thinks it's okay to do that to the members that were elected to this Legislature to represent their constituents.

Now, the fact is, Madam Chair, that this UCP government has created a budget that is built on false promises – and we've heard that over and over again – and false projections, in the first place. Once again, in the face of a global pandemic, instead of going back to the drawing board through the estimates process to ensure adequate funding for important programs, they are making unprecedented moves to remove the ability for us to advocate on behalf of our constituents. The fact is that once again this government is expecting postsecondary institutions to show their work, yet on the other hand this government is doing everything they can to avoid doing the exact same thing.

Now, the fact is, Madam Chair, that I don't want to spend too much time on these comments because I know that other members do want to speak to this. We've seen time allocation now several times this evening, unfortunately limiting our ability as MLAs to represent our constituents, but the fact is that I have concerns, once again, that I didn't have the ability to advocate for the people out there that are concerned about programs within Service Alberta. Relating back to performance measures, when we go through the estimates process, it is about performance measures and ensuring that there is accountability of the government. The fact is that I didn't have that opportunity. Very little opportunity was afforded to me, which is truly, in my opinion, not democratic in the least bit.

When we look at a program like the Residential Tenancies Act and we look at the dispute resolution services that are provided within it, Madam Chair, the fact is that as we go through this pandemic that we are in the middle of, many tenants and many landlords are going to come to the table and have disputes. They are going to have issues that need to go through the dispute resolution services, but once again this government hasn't made any revisions to their budget other than the \$500 million that they've committed to Health. All of these other programs, whether it's in Service Alberta or whether it's PDD or whatever it might be, are going to be severely affected by this pandemic, but this government has done absolutely nothing to address those facts. Even worse, they haven't even afforded us the ability to raise those concerns to them because they've almost totally axed the estimates process, which is absolutely unbelievable.

Once again, Madam Chair, I fully support this amendment that's before us. I think that this bill and, truly, this budget overall need to go back to the drawing board. I understand that we are in unprecedented times with this pandemic ahead of us and that we

need to move swiftly, but the fact is, I would say, that we would have had enough time to discuss many of the estimates that were taken away from us. I think that we could have been doing that this evening, potentially. I imagine somebody else will rise to argue that fact, but the fact is that we have done Albertans a great disservice in removing the accountability of the Legislature through the estimates process. I would be very interested to find out what the Auditor General has to say about that.

Anyway, I will leave it at that, Madam Chair. Once again, it was a privilege to rise and speak to this amendment. I thank the Member for Edmonton-North West for bringing it forward. That is all.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you. I wanted to quickly respond to the hon. member, who was in the 29th Legislature, served with me. He is correct. We could light our hair on fire a little bit when we were in opposition. I'll be the first one to admit it. I see the hon. minister of agriculture nodding his head. He was pretty good at it occasionally. I always thought that, of the group, I was fairly mellow, but, you know, maybe some will disagree.

Mr. Kenney: Agriculture wasn't here.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yes, he was. Absolutely, he was in the 29th Legislature, the minister of agriculture. He won in a by-election and came to serve the good people of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, next to my constituency. Some people get confused because, of course, his dad is my Member of Parliament. Sometimes I get confused when I'm in here as well. But he was definitely here.

You know, the reason I bring that up is because there is a time for the opposition to light their hair on fire and to do their obligation as the opposition, but he referred to how we reacted in times of crisis. The only real comparable moment in the 29th Legislature to what we're dealing with now – and it is nowhere near the same level of a situation but certainly terrible for the people of Fort McMurray and northern Alberta – was the fire. At that time I sat in the opposition leadership team on the other side, and I watched the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Brian Jean, asking a question at the same time that his mother texted him – you could see it on the phone – to say that his house was burning down in Fort McMurray. He was asking a question on behalf of his constituents at that time, Madam Chair, and the Premier, who is now the Leader of the Opposition, got up, and her comments were, from my perspective, not very appropriate but certainly became a bit of a situation. From our perspective, we were very upset.

11:20

But, Madam Chair, did we react to that? No. We recognized what was taking place in Fort McMurray. We immediately reached out to the then leader of the third party, my friend the hon. Transportation minister now. We got together, and we went downstairs with the leadership of every party who stood behind the then Premier and said that the opposition and the third party and the fourth party, in that case, inside this Legislature stand with the Premier of Alberta and will do everything for the people of Fort McMurray. That's all that the Official Opposition had to do this time around.

Instead, they brought us through a process where they continue to come into this House and try to put forward an argument of why they want an amendment like this, that would basically say that they have no confidence in the government if we were to let that happen. That means that Alberta would not be funded and would be in the middle of an election, which is just something that really would not

work in the middle of a pandemic. It's irresponsible. The opposition can't defend that. They continue to get up and say, when they bring forward amendments like this, that they want to go to warrants, which they know would stop the funding of the government. They don't know the difference – or at least they don't seem to know the difference – between interim and supplementary supply. They say that in their own comments. It's disappointing, Madam Chair.

The main point of this is: do not try to compare yourself to the Official Opposition of the 29th Legislature, because that Official Opposition proved they could handle themselves the right way when Alberta is in a crisis, Madam Chair, and this Official Opposition has failed miserably at that since Friday.

The Chair: Are there other members? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to rise to respond to some of the comments that were made and speak, of course, to the amendment we have before us. I'll be, of course, voting against the amendment and encourage all members of the House to vote against the amendment as well.

I want to respond to some of the comments that were made as it relates to performance-based funding and as it relates to the metrics as well and how those will be developed. I've heard some comments saying that it's terribly unproductive, that the metrics are arbitrary, that the metrics could be counterproductive. Actually, I'm not entirely sure, Madam Chair, where the disagreement is. Is it that the members opposite do not agree conceptually with outcomes and performance evaluation, or is that they don't agree with the suggested metrics?

Of course, looking at the amendment, they want to strike out the entire section that deals with – well, fundamentally, it deals with two things. First and foremost, it deals with investment management agreements, and secondly, it calls for, of course, the implementation of performance-based funding. It leads me to believe and understand that conceptually they disagree with performance and evaluation of outcomes, which I can't wrap my head around. I'd love for the members opposite to walk me through it. I can't understand why we wouldn't implement a model that strengthens taxpayer return, transparency, and accountability. In fact, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview earlier talked about democratic principles and talked about accountability and transparency as foundational values. If we believe that, then we need to support and move forward with the implementation of a performance-based model.

Now, moving that aside, if that's not their concern and the concern is that they disagree with investment management agreements, I'm also a little perplexed. Why would we not work with our institutions to establish a three-year window to get a better understanding of government priorities and help work with our institutions in a long-term fashion to help orient their objectives in that long-term manner? I'm concerned. Obviously, the legislation doesn't deal with the specific metrics. Those specific metrics we are developing in consultation with student leaders, with our postsecondary institutions themselves, with our faculty. All have suggested ideas as they relate to metrics.

Again, I encourage members to vote against this, and I want to leave this last comment before I yield the rest of my time. If the concern is that they don't want to evaluate our universities against certain metrics, arbitrary metrics I heard, metrics that they don't have any control over, I'm sorry to shatter their world view, but they're already doing that, Madam Chair. I have right here in front of me the University of Calgary, which, of its own volition, is evaluating itself against key metrics. The reporting period is from

April 1, 2018, to March 31, 2019. They're already tracking and evaluating themselves against key metrics, including graduation rates, ones that we've suggested; time to completion, metrics that we're looking at; and employment rates. I believe this is one where the Member for Edmonton-Riverview said that they don't have any influence over employment rate. Well, if they don't, why is the university already tracking and evaluating themselves against this metric? It doesn't make sense.

The University of Alberta is also evaluating themselves against metrics very similar to these, as are many other of our postsecondary institutions. I'd genuinely be very interested to hear: what is it? Is it that conceptually they disagree with the concept of performance and evaluation when it comes to the significant investment that Alberta taxpayers make into our postsecondary system? That's what I seem to understand from this amendment.

Furthermore, there were also comments that, well, the metrics shouldn't be labour market oriented, that it's not just about getting a job. Now, I agree with that comment. It's not just about getting a job, which is why we're looking at metrics related to research and teaching. However, we know very clearly from survey after survey after survey – it's not my opinion; look at the surveys of students on their motivation, the primary motivation, for attending postsecondary education – that time and time again surveys from Canada and the United States demonstrate repeatedly that the primary motivation is to find a successful career, advance their career prospects, to lead to higher employment. Consistently, again, those are the primary drivers. That's what students are looking for. Why would we not move to a model to help strengthen those outcomes for our students? I can't understand it.

Madam Chair, I'll be voting against this amendment and encourage all members to do so as well. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I shall ask the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise in Committee of the Whole on Bill 5, Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020. I spent some time in second reading, what limited time we had available to us, expressing my concerns over the provisions in Bill 5 which add a layer of bureaucracy and red tape from this government, which is ironic considering they claim to be so committed to eliminating red tape, and over the decision on how school boards spend their school reserve funds. In particular, Bill 5 requires ministerial approval before a school board chooses to spend those reserve funds, which are really funds that the school board uses to basically pay for the things that are not funded properly, for example this entire school year, by this current government. They've had to dip into those reserves.

Bill 5 also requires that the minister may exercise her discretion as to how school boards may actually spend those reserves. She may require a school board to spend it in a particular circumstance, may prohibit it, may direct the school board to do so. Therefore, the minister is getting intricately involved in the decisions that are rightfully the authority of the school board.

I expressed that I was here today on behalf of my constituents but also on behalf of the number of school boards who have identified their concerns with this level of interference by the government into the way the school boards spend their school reserve funds.

11:30

More than ever, Madam Chair, we are seeing that school boards at this time, perhaps in a way that has not been seen in decades in this province, need their flexibility and the ability to be able to make those decisions about how to spend school reserve funds, particularly in times such as this, where it is very clear that there are many challenges facing school boards, our education system, students, parents, and teachers with the pandemic that we're seeing right now through coronavirus. More than ever school boards should be allowed to exercise their authority as locally elected bodies to make the decisions and to be able to have access without additional red tape, without interference from the Minister of Education, as to how to spend those dollars.

Right now they are focusing on things such as having to make sure that classrooms are clean, that they're sanitized, that they're cleaned out of all the belongings of students or dealing with students who are coming back to pick up their belongings, but they also have to be preparing right now, and many of them are, late into the night. I know first-hand of many school administrators that are working late into the night trying to determine how they're going to continue to deliver education to students that are no longer in the classroom. We're talking about not just online learning because online learning is not going to be the solution for all students. It's not going to work for a lot of our students who have special challenges or needs in terms of accessing education. It's not going to meet the needs of really young children either.

There's going to have to be some really creative thinking. They have to access resources that they perhaps never had to access before. They're going to have to be engaging technology in a way that perhaps they weren't having to do before on a scale that is completely unprecedented. More than ever right now school boards require the flexibility to be able to make decisions quickly and effectively to continue on with as little disruption as possible on behalf of their students. That is what school boards are doing every day when they make decisions about budgets, about spending the dollars that they have, whether in their budget or in their reserve funds, and they need to continue more than ever to have that flexibility and to be able to make those decisions quickly and effectively.

Therefore, Madam Chair, I am pleased to introduce an amendment that I'm hoping all the members of the Assembly today can support. It is responsive to what is happening right now. As Bill 5 was tabled, it was tabled in a world before the pandemic we are facing right now. It does not reflect the needs of the school boards. It reflects a time that currently we are not in, and we may not see that time for some period. Therefore, we need to make sure that the legislation we are passing is responsive to what is happening right now. Therefore, I'm moving an amendment, and I've got the requisite copies here. Would you like me to read it in first?

The Chair: The LASS will come pick it up.

Ms Pancholi: Would you like me to read it in while it's being handed out?

The Chair: Is it a long one?

Ms Pancholi: No, it's not.

The Chair: You know what? Just go ahead and read it. We'll see if it's in order once I get a copy.

Ms Pancholi: Sure. Thank you.

The Chair: This will be amendment A2.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment moves to amend Bill 5 by deleting section 1, which is the section which outlines the minister's authority to direct school boards how to spend their reserve funds as well as requiring ministerial approval whenever a school board seeks to access their school reserve funds. It's simply an amendment to remove that section from Bill 5. We believe that it is no longer appropriate. It does not reflect the current needs of school boards, who require all the flexibility they can get right now. Right now they need to be responsive, and the current Bill 5, as it stands, does not allow school boards to do that effectively. Therefore, I really strongly encourage all members of the Assembly to support this amendment to allow our school boards to do what they need to do.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there any other speakers to amendment A2? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to speak to the amendment put forward by my colleague to amend Bill 5, which – let's be honest – is another omnibus bill, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020.

Before I speak to the amendment, I just wanted to acknowledge some of the things that the Premier stood up and said. I think that there are some things that I agree with. This is an unprecedented time, and it is a challenge that I don't ever recall facing in my lifetime, whether it's just as a human being, a mom, a worker. It is really challenging, and I want to acknowledge that all Albertans are really stressed right now. I think they understand that there are all kinds of things happening, one of which is this pandemic.

The Premier was right when he said that there is the potential that a lot of people will be hurt. I just wanted to mention that some of those people that will be hurt are what we refer to as our most vulnerable, and those are the folks that we were sent here to ensure that we protect. Although we're not first responders – I'm not a doctor or a nurse, and I can't protect them in those ways, but as a legislator and as an MLA I can do my part to try to protect what is important to my constituents and the people that I was sent here to represent.

I also think that in times of crisis leadership is tested. Leadership is truly tested. I think that you are put under a spotlight, and people evaluate what you think is important and how you act. What is incredibly disappointing this evening and part of the reason why I'm happy to support this amendment – and I will support this amendment – is that it tries to stop some of what's happening. It sort of feels like there's this train coming at us, and it feels like the one time that we should actually stop and recognize the rules and the structures that are in place that keep order and that allow us to focus and do our jobs and make sure the systems are there for all the people, this government seems quite intent on using this opportunity to limit debate, which, in my opinion, Madam Chair, is actually an attack on democracy.

I think that not allowing the opposition – and I understand that we don't have the majority. I understand that completely, but we do represent people, and we do have the right to speak to things. So when our time is used up and when we are sort of yelled at and given a history lesson – albeit, I appreciate history like the next person, but it really goes to the core of this: what is this about? What are you doing in this moment of crisis when we should be bulking up our systems in order to protect our people? It feels like instead we're playing this shell game.

What this amendment does, in my opinion, is actually stops and says: listen to the people that this will impact. I'm very sad to see that government members, Madam Chair, not only don't appear to be taking this seriously, but they're using this opportunity to say: "It's a crisis. Oh, my goodness. We have to move fast. We have to

change that." That is incorrect about Bill 5. This is an ideological move that this government is pushing through to support a budget that will ultimately harm people. Now, had we not been shedding jobs like we are, had the price of oil not been tanking like it is, had people not been faced with this public health crisis that we are faced with, this would still be a really bad budget. It feels like this huge shell game.

What I want to bring up and what I want to say – and I have not been able to say it yet, and I will say it here – is: let me give you one example that I know quite well. I've repeatedly asked about Community and Social Services, and the Premier and the minister have repeatedly said: "No. We want to protect people. No. We have not cut. No. We haven't done anything of the sort." But that is incorrect. It's incorrect. It's a shell game that you're playing.

Let's look at that budget. You may have increased the overall amount of money that you're investing in this ministry, but you are moving money away from places that really, really need to be bulked up right now. They needed to be bulked up a few months ago, but they really need to be bulked up right now. Those are income supports. This government chose – chose; this was a deliberate choice – to cut \$45 million from income support.

Now, it's important to know that people who are eligible for this particular benefit are poor. They're not eligible for employment insurance. They are not employed. This is a group of people, tens of thousands of people, that are eligible for this benefit. That's all they have. They are trying to live and raise their family on under \$900 a month, and this is the benefit that's being cut. [interjections] I don't know what is funny about this at all. I really don't.

11:40

This is a budget that doesn't meet the growth of AISH. It doesn't meet the growth of PDD. It doesn't meet the growth of FSCD. You can say that you're investing another \$60 million in civil societies, whatever that's code for for you. I'm assuming it means nonprofit organizations and other public groups. But ultimately, you have moved dollars away from programs that we know work.

Certainly, I appreciate that this government can choose to make decisions about where they'd like to go, what they'd like to invest in, but in a time of crisis, when your leadership is tested, when it is truly tested, it is about preserving the things that keep people safe, and I will tell you that disabled Albertans and low-income Albertans – this doesn't necessarily make their lives better to the extent that we would like. [interjections] I just want to stop for a second. I don't really understand what's so funny over there. I really don't. In a time of crisis I'm actually genuinely trying to explain to you why I think this is dangerous. I truly am.

The Chair: Hon. member, through the chair, please.

Ms Renaud: I think that it is important to understand what we're trying to do and say here, that these structures are important. We are trying to amend this bill. We are trying to stop. We are trying to use the very limited time that we have to say that this is a dangerous move. You have not consulted the people who will be impacted by this. In this particular amendment are school boards, ultimately, their families, ultimately, their children – their children – that rely on all of us to do the right thing.

I don't believe that jamming through a bill like this, an omnibus bill, without truly stopping and thinking what the implications of this are and not allowing the opposition to truly do its job – maybe we have to wait, wait till later, when things calm down a little bit, when the risk is less high, that we come back and we debate this properly, and we get all of the information that we need. But this government, Madam Chair, seems intent on using this fog of a

horrific crisis to do things that ultimately are not in the best interest of Albertans.

So I'm pleased to support the other amendment, pleased to support this amendment. You know, I would like to let Albertans that are tuned in know – because, sadly, a lot of people are home, and a lot of people are afraid, and a lot of people are uncertain, so they're watching because they're looking to us as leaders. They're looking to us, to these old systems and old traditions that provide a semblance of rational sort of what you can expect in the world at a time when things are really, really moving at such a pace that it's hard to even get your bearings, and they're looking to us to strengthen democracy, not attack it, not do things like, say, fire the person investigating you or ram through a budget without appropriate debate and discussion about individual ministry cuts that we would have done through estimates.

Now, granted, we don't always get the answers that we are seeking, but at least it's a process, and it is a system that has been put in place by all of the people that were here before us. All of the people that were here before us designed these systems to withstand problems and crises like we're facing now. Instead of supporting and propping up those systems, Madam Chair, I feel like this government is set on doing everything they can quickly and using this incredibly stressful time on so many levels to attack the systems that were put here to keep us safe. That's actually sad to me.

I think these are unprecedented times, and I think it is all of our jobs to be watchdogs of democracy, and I don't believe the government is taking that role very seriously. I'm not the only one that thinks that, and I think you will find that out very soon. I believe you will find that out very soon.

I appreciate the comments from my colleague. She has spent a great deal of time thinking about this, reaching out to different . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt.

Pursuant to Government Motion 14 all motions must now be put.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

[The remaining clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report Bill 5.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 5. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, does the Assembly concur in the report? Those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. That motion is carried and so ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 5

Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 5, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, we are all aware that we're venturing into uncharted territory not only for this province or for this nation but, in fact, globally. We're experiencing a rapidly evolving situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and these times require steady and decisive actions, especially when it comes to this province's budget. It has become clear that taking measures to shore up our economy is of the utmost importance. We've recently added \$500 million to support our health care system, but we still need to be prudent and ensure value for taxpayers over the long term. That's why passing Bill 5 should be a priority for this House.

As I've said, Bill 5 proposes five important changes across three different ministries. This includes implementing the previously announced outcomes-based funding model for postsecondary education. Bill 5 will require K to 12 school boards to obtain ministerial approval before spending reserve funds, which will help ensure that tax dollars go to the classroom, where they can help improve outcomes for students. Bill 5 will also strengthen how the government and school boards work together to ratify collective agreements, and Bill 5 will implement the tourism levy to short-term rentals offered through online marketplaces, which will level the playing field in the accommodation industry. Finally, Bill 5 will amend language in the Insurance Act to clarify the primary purpose of side accounts in universal life insurance policies and prohibit their use for investment purposes, which, Mr. Speaker, will result in consumer protection.

Mr. Speaker, once again I need to stress that we are experiencing an unprecedented situation right now in this province. Our priorities are focused around ensuring the safety and health of all Albertans, but after that, we need to be proactive to protect our economy. Bill 5 is a clear and thoughtful set of amendments that contribute to fiscal responsibility and improved program delivery. I would encourage all members to support this bill.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

11:50

Government Motions

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 5

15. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

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.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think enough is on the record on where we're headed, so I'll leave it at that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 21(3) a member of the Official Opposition has the opportunity to speak for

up to five minutes. I see the hon. the Official Opposition House Leader has risen.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I will rise. I appreciate that the House leader feels like there is enough on the record in regard to time allocation and these motions, but I would disagree. You know, we've heard a lot this evening around democracy and the importance of democracy within the province. The government will speak to the fact that they have the majority in the House, and they do, and there's no disputing the fact that they have the majority in the House.

With a majority comes great power and great respect and a responsibility to represent every single Albertan no matter who they voted for. It is not about a government taking responsibility for what they believe to be their be-all and end-all agenda and pushing it through with no regard for the situation that is impacting the province, no regard for what the citizens of the province are saying, and zero regard for an opposition that has a full responsibility in the democratic process to hold the government to account, to be able to speak on behalf of the citizens that have concerns around the policies of government and to be able to be an advocate within the system of democracy.

Democracy is not about being able to dictate an agenda to its citizens. It's not. This budget that we are debating today clearly will impact every single Albertan in some way. We know that. It has fundamentally looked at touching every single piece of our structure and our institutions within Alberta, whether it be education, postsecondary, health care, personal income tax, and the list continues on. It is a budget that will touch every single Albertan.

What we see within this motion is a complete disregard for the democratic process and having Albertans' abilities to have their voices heard through the opposition. We saw only a few minutes ago the government side putting in time allocation for 60 minutes and then deciding that they were going to use a percentage of that 60 minutes to not allow the opposition to bring forward Albertans' concerns. Our responsibility in this House, whether the government likes it or not, whether we agree or disagree – and I love that the Government House Leader is laughing at this right now. It just shows the utter disrespect that he has for the fact that the opposition is responsible for being the voice for Albertans when the government chooses not to listen, which is what is happening here today.

The government is not listening to Albertans. They are not listening to the fact that Albertans are scared. Albertans are worried about how they're going to pay their mortgages. Albertans are worried about whether they'll have a job tomorrow. Albertans are watching the economic instability not only in our country but globally at this point and how that will impact this province overall. Our responsibility as the opposition is to be able to stand up and talk about it.

We went from being able to have six hours of estimates, where we got to ask the Minister of Health for six hours, to being able to ask for maybe 20 minutes today. We went from six hours of being able to ask about Education to now only being able to do that within a one-hour block with Health and Treasury Board and all of the different things that happen. Today we see again that this government is pushing forward a bill that will impact schools and school boards' abilities to be able to run their school boards. Duly elected officials will no longer have the same authority that they would have had yesterday once this is passed.

We have a responsibility in opposition to stand up for those people, to be their voices. Whether the government wants to hear from Albertans: that is their choice. They've made it very clear that they have no desire to do that. They can stand here and tell us that

this is what democracy looks like, but I'll tell you that it's not. This government has made a very, very clear choice today to erode our democratic process, to push through an agenda, to dictate to Canadians what they believe is their overall arching authority, with zero regard for the process of this House, the respect for the voices of the people that elected them. Every single one of your constituents will remember this today, and I can guarantee you as the Opposition House Leader that I will make sure that they remember what happened today.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 15 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:56 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Long	Rutherford
Dreesen	McIver	Schow
Getson	Milliken	Sigurdson, R.J.
Glasgo	Nally	Singh
Glubish	Neudorf	Smith
Goodridge	Nicolaides	Toews
Guthrie	Nixon, Jason	Toor
Horner	Nixon, Jeremy	Turton
Hunter	Panda	Walker
Kenney	Rosin	Williams
Loewen	Rowswell	

Against the motion:

Carson	Loyola	Sabir
Dach	Nielsen	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Pancholi	Sweet
Gray	Renaud	

Totals: For – 32 Against – 11

[Government Motion 15 carried]

12:00 Government Bills and Orders Third Reading (continued)

Bill 5 Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020

[Adjourned debate March 17: Mr. Toews]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has approximately 17 minutes remaining should he choose to use them.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been considerable debate tonight, considerable discussion, and I believe what I've heard is a recognition by every member in this House of the incredible challenge that Albertans are facing in the upcoming days, weeks, and months. Bill 5 is a budget implementation bill that's required to ultimately implement Budget 2020 and ensure that resources – much required, necessary resources – are made available to Albertans through our public service, through the delivery of programs at a time of great need in this province. This government has amended the budget to include an additional \$500 million to ensure that our health care system has the resources it needs to deal with COVID-19 and the extra challenge and the extra

effort that will be required as Albertans begin to face that pandemic in the days to come.

Mr. Speaker, again, I want to conclude my comments. I want to assure Albertans that this government will provide all the resources required in order for Alberta Health Services and our Health department to deliver the best care possible under the circumstances as we deal with COVID-19 in this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me this evening to add my thoughts to the debate around Bill 5, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020. As you know, I always get hung up on the language, the language that I've heard over the course of the evening. I've heard things like "uncharted territory," I've heard "unprecedented times," and so on and so forth. When I look at these kinds of things – uncharted territory, unprecedented times – that tells me that we don't know what's going to happen, we don't know how we're going to navigate through, and we don't know what's going to happen once we come out on the other side. When you have these types of unknowns, it's very, very hard to say that your plan, that is the budget, which was conceived before this uncharted territory that's been placed in front of us in these unprecedented times, to ensure that what has been put together is going to be sufficient because you just simply don't know. There are too many unknowns.

When I'm looking at some of the language that is currently in Bill 5, which, I should mention, Mr. Speaker, is the fifth omnibus bill that we have seen be presented to this Legislature from this government – you know, looking back, I can't help but remember that, as you served very honourably in the Official Opposition in the 29th Legislature, we heard at length how bad omnibus bills were. There was a perception that one bill that was brought in, which only affected changes in one ministry, was omnibus in nature. I look here, and we see five different changes across three different ministries. Again, I just can't help but mention that it seems rather ironic that one minute there were problems with omnibus legislation being brought in, and, well, now it seems to be okay to do that.

One of the first things that I want to look at is around some of the changes to the Education Act and, more specifically, giving more powers to the minister. Again, I remember members that are part of the government benches, that are part of the government caucus, who went at length in previous Legislatures that that was a bad thing, that ministers shouldn't be getting more powers to make decisions. Again, there's that conflicting message that we're seeing being given here in Bill 5, where one minute we're saying that our school boards are able to make decisions for themselves, yet in the next moment we're saying: well, no; you can't make these decisions. When we look at saying that school boards need to come to the minister in order to either spend money, move money, whatever the case may be, you're adding an extra step in the process, which by definition, I believe, is red tape. Being the red tape critic, if I remember right, the mandate of the red tape reduction ministry was to eliminate these kinds of things.

My first question is – I can't help but ask – did the associate minister of red tape mention this when this was being drafted, that this would create red tape? If so, why did they still proceed? Did they, you know, take his advice and quickly toss it into the garbage? It seems rather counterproductive, considering Albertans are going to be on the hook for this red tape ministry for \$13 million over the rest of this term, including what's already been spent.

This is completely counter to what the mandate of the red tape ministry is, which now, of course, leads me into some of the comments that I heard from the Minister of Advanced Education talking about performance measures and how you have to have performance measures. I would agree with you. You have to have good, solid performance measures. Why is it, then, that we have the red tape ministry, that's graded by an organization and given a letter, and that's all we've got to go on with whether that money is being spent properly? It kind of goes counterproductive to what you just said.

Confusing messages, Mr. Speaker, that lie within Bill 5, not to mention the fact that we have duly elected members, as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud very clearly said. They were elected to run our school boards. One minute we're saying that, well, it's all right for them to make decisions, but over here, no, it's not all right for them to make decisions. Counter messages that are being given here.

That now moves me on to more around the public education collective bargaining. You'll have to forgive me, Mr. Speaker, around the discussion of collective bargaining because some of the things that I have seen this government move forward on – I guess let's say that I have a lack of faith around their ability to bargain in good faith. You're probably wondering why I feel like that, and that's a great question. Hopefully, I'll be able to answer it here for you.

12:10

When I look at the track record so far, we've seen the government rip up contracts for doctors, which tells me that that's not really an effective way to bargain, okay? I know the Finance minister has gone at length about when they got together and when they gave notice and: well, we bargained for this little bit of time. My gosh, Minister, I can remember some contract negotiations that I was a part of where it took a year before we came to an agreement. We kept meeting. We kept changing things, give, take, here and that. To give up after simply a couple of months – because, you know, when I kind of look at the calendar, I'm willing to bet you didn't meet sort of in the last part of December and probably not in the first beginning part of January, so that starts to shorten that time around that bargaining period.

We see language that's been brought forward in the past around imposing wages. There's language in place that will allow the government to mandate these things without bargaining. Again, that's not good-faith bargaining. That is language counter to what I'm seeing here in Bill 5. We've also seen language around potentially imposing contract lengths. That is something that is supposed to be negotiated through the bargaining process, not mandated through legislation. I really struggle, looking at Bill 5, around the conflicting messages not only from the language that's located within Bill 5 but from what I've heard from the government in terms of what they believe in, what they stand for, what they should be doing.

We find ourselves in a situation where we can't seem to predict where things are going to go, and I wouldn't expect the government to be able to predict what's going to happen over the next little while. There's just no way. That would be an unreasonable expectation that anybody should put on the government to be able to do that. But, because of that, to sit here, hang your hat, and say, "No; this is the budget that's going to do it; we'll be fine; yeah, we'll throw in some extra money here; you know, hopefully that'll be fine": that is too uncertain. That is the reason why the Official Opposition has great concerns around the budget, the lack of estimates to be able to ask questions to understand what's going on and try to put in all the thought process as best we can to hopefully

make sure that we can come out the other side as unscathed as possible.

Not only are we going to see a rise in people being infected and having to care for them, but what about the people that are having to self-isolate at home right now and can't work? I have a friend. She works five jobs, Mr. Speaker, and they're either teaching or in daycare. She has lost all of that, yet all I hear is that we're waiting for the federal government to step up. To be quite honest, with the — you know, maybe I might risk here — animosity I see and I feel from the government towards Ottawa and the current federal government, I would have thought that maybe they would step up to back up these Albertans with their wages, the businesses that are potentially having to close their doors to do their part to slow the spread of COVID-19, that you would simply step up, help these Albertans, help these businesses almost even just to spite the federal government given the level of animosity I've seen and feel from this government for them.

I don't think the direction that we have right now in Bill 5 is the way we should be going. We should have pushed pause. We tried to bring in some amendments, some reasonable amendments, that I think could have helped this legislation. You know, one of the favourite lines I used to hear all the time, of course: the opposition is here to help. We actually are here to help, Mr. Speaker. We really do want good, solid legislation and good, solid language that Albertans can count on, and they're not getting that. What we're seeing is potential chaos that will be created during an unprecedented time as we try to navigate uncharted territory.

So I'm not in a position this evening to be able to support Bill 5, Mr. Speaker. We should have taken the time to look at this more clearly. We should have gone through to try to adjust the budget so that it reflected and made sure that it backed up Albertans not only in case they're losing their jobs but for our businesses that might not be able to continue during that period of time, and we would have been able to come out the other side as unscathed as possible.

I am disappointed that the government is taking the position of limiting the opposition from doing its job to be able to try to provide a different perspective for the government to be able to make as best an informed decision as possible and try to avoid some of the contradicting things that we're seeing, where the government says one thing, their language says another, and their actions say something else. This won't be of benefit to Albertans.

I know that some of my other colleagues want to get a word in here as well. So with that, again, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support Bill 5.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate this evening? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is now 12:17 in the morning on what would be known as March the 18th by most people. I'm assuming that we're still on the 17th under parliamentary rules.

I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 5, which is an implementation bill for a budget that should have been withdrawn and redrafted. Now, quite often in this place, Mr. Speaker, when I rise to speak or even when I'm just walking the halls and doing other business, whether it's in committee or whether it's simply meeting with other legislators about issues and serving constituents, I think about how privileged we all are and I am in particular to represent my constituents in Edmonton-McClung, in the west end of the city, who are among millions of Canadians tonight who are very, very concerned and very worried about the impending pandemic, the COVID-19 virus, that is afflicting the world right now.

They are looking towards this House, these people, towards us for true leadership and for reasons to hope that we're going to get through this, on the other side of this pandemic in the best shape possible, in the best shape of any country in the world. They're going to be able to have that hope and those worries allayed and their fears allayed by Legislatures and a government that acts in a way that respects the rules of this House and respects the way that Legislatures should be operating, where an opposition is respected, where debate is allowed, where different views are invited to the floor without ridicule, but that's not what's been happening here, Mr. Speaker, in the last few days.

12:20

You know, we had a recess, and we came back recently. There was ample time for the government albeit we've been in fast-moving circumstances with this pandemic, and there have been numerous decisions made by the federal government and this provincial government to react to the crisis that we face. But as far as this bill goes and this legislation, Mr. Speaker, what we're seeing here is an affront to this place that we all hold dear. I often think, when I come to this place, of folks who have gone before me. I think in particular of my great-grandfather Walter Horne, who emigrated here from England in 1911 and got on a train, a steam locomotive, and was coming out west and had to stop in Manitoba to allow his wife to give birth to my grandmother. It was about two or three months before she was well enough to continue that train trip across the country. They finally made it out to Alberta and then moved north into the Thorhild area on a homestead, where my great-grandfather ultimately became a farmer, a rancher, a cattleman, a butcher, a school trustee, a village councillor. I know that he, in fact, saw a need for a school in the village and actually moved an old granary, with the help of neighbours, into town so that it could serve as the first school.

That type of individual — and when I think back to him, I don't recall meeting him because I was only two when he passed away, but from stories I've been told about how honest a man he was and how he never had an enemy in his life and how respected he was. That man, from what I've been told of him, would be absolutely appalled by what's going on in this province right now with respect to how this government has doggedly hung on to maintain its desire to push forward with a budget that bears no resemblance to reality. I just think of a village council meeting that my great-grandfather might have chaired and if he'd brought forward a piece of legislation that resembled this budget or this implementation piece of legislation, this Bill 5, and tried to present it to his small-village council and expected them to swallow it, that group of farmers and small-business people and teachers, whoever happened to be on the village council at that time.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, having known that his daughter, my grandmother, Winnifred LaBelle, then Winnifred Horne, followed in his footsteps to become a village councillor and deputy mayor of that same village of Thorhild, I know, from knowing her, exactly how she would have reacted given the upbringing by her father and knowing conversations I've had with her. She would have rejected this entirely out of hand with total disbelief that a government or a mayor or an authority would bring forward such an incredible document that really bore no resemblance to reality. A small village would wonder where in the world an administrator was coming from putting forward a document which you could drive a hay wagon through as far as the holes in the logic of it and the numbers just not making any sense.

It doesn't make any sense to me how this government today believes that Albertans should swallow the same type of logic that a small-town councillor in a village wouldn't give the time of day

for. It behooves me to harken back to both my great-grandfather's and my grandmother's experiences as village councillors and think what they would do in a smaller government structure, Mr. Speaker, if faced with a similar conundrum, where they were being asked to accept and pass a document which they would have to defend to the constituents of that small village and say: "Well, goodness. It doesn't really show exactly the revenue that we're going to have. It's outdated. It's, you know, way, way beyond what the realities we face are today, but let's pass it anyways and just move forward." Bringing it down to that level maybe helps to explain the opposition we have to what the government is trying to feed us today.

I also think of another individual whose picture I pass in the members' pedway regularly, a member who was elected in, I believe, 1964 the first time. It might have been '71 the second time and lost the election in '75 when the PCs came in. Michael Senych was also from that small village of Thorhild. He was a Social Credit member who I knew as a youngster and as an adult as well, a highly respected man in the community. I know how he would have felt. He was a pretty common-sense individual. Unfortunately, he died in tragic circumstances, in a fiery crash, while still serving as the leader of the community for the Thorhild Stampede event that ran every year. But he would be rolling in his grave hearing some of the things that we're expected to swallow in this Legislature right now, coming from the government, who decides that we should be willing to accept a Swiss cheese budget that has got so many glaring holes and logic in it that even a village councillor such as my great-grandfather or grandmother would reject it out of hand.

I further think, as I stand here in the Legislature today in the early wee hours of the morning, about what individual families in my constituency are thinking right now as they're contemplating how they're going to shuffle their children to another place to stay because the daycare is closed – they would like to be able to work if they can still continue working – how they are going to make do if indeed their job is gone, whether or not this government is going to provide supports for them or if they're just simply going to wait for the federal government and maybe try to backfill a little bit, and not knowing exactly how they're going to make ends meet, Mr. Speaker, for the upcoming weeks and/or months, as the Premier has alluded to. We don't know how long this pandemic will last and what the full effect will be.

People are rightly concerned. This is a generational issue that we face, and it's something we need to face together, yet the government is using it to push through a budget that has some pretty distasteful elements to it, particularly with respect to health care, health care professionals, our doctors, and our educators. They're holding on to that document even though it's really worthless in so many ways as far as actual numbers that it's based on. They're holding on to that document, wanting us to pass this budget of theirs, including this Bill 5 implementation act, even though it is something that a small-village councillor would throw out the door if they presented it to them.

I further wonder what somebody else I know well would think about it. I didn't know him well, I should say. I only met him a couple of times, short meetings. I wish I'd known him a lot more deeply. But from what we know of the man and his history in this Legislature, I think Grant Notley, too, would be, really, one to be disgusted with the actions of this government in the last couple of days in this Legislature and would be vociferously, as we are as an opposition, opposing the government's desire to push through a budget that is really a document that has no real value. It's based on fiction as far as the numbers go.

I dare say, Mr. Speaker, that if we even look at the comparison as to what a family farmer or an agribusiness might consider – they're also facing very significant changes and challenges over the

past year or so. We know that our farmers have been involved in at least two if not three bad crop years in a row. Up to 30 per cent of some of our last year's crops still sit in the fields while we await spring. Many of our producers don't know if they're going to end up getting the crop off the field and if, indeed, there are going to be supports there for them. We've heard nothing about this government's intention to support the agriculture producers, who faced some particularly harsh challenges even before the pandemic hit. That's something that agribusinesses and our producers on our family farms want to hear something about from this government.

12:30

Also, our forestry industry hasn't been mentioned at all by this government in terms of supports and the workers that might be affected by it as well.

In terms of Bill 5, the implementation bill as part of this budget, all of these organizations, whether they be a lumber company, whether they be a family farm, whether they be an agribusiness, would have to change their financial picture and their reporting and their budgets when facing different circumstances. You know, I can't imagine a family farm that set up a budget a year ago having the same numbers on their balance sheet when they're deciding what to do for this year's crop given the circumstances we face right now, yet this government is expecting us as legislators on the opposition to simply open wide and swallow. No thanks. We're not doing that. We represent constituents who deserve a much better accounting of what the real picture is right now in Alberta. No family farm would ever consider accepting such a rotten meat sandwich, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Peace River has risen.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank my hon. colleague from the opposition from Edmonton-McClung for his speech, and I want to thank him particularly for the service of his great-grandfather, I believe it was, Walter Horne, in his immigration out west. I also had a grandfather who came also from eastern Europe and immigrated to western Canada, northern Alberta as well, to the Barrhead area.

Mr. Dach: He came from England.

Mr. Williams: England. Well, there we are. Thank you.

My grandfather had a similar experience, a pioneer setting up a homestead. Personally I don't know his politics. I never met my grandfather on my mother's side, but I do know that what he experienced in the years 1918 and 1919 was the same everyone else around the world experienced. That was the Spanish flu, Mr. Speaker. It was devastating. It was devastating and catastrophic to the world economy. I think it's important that we keep this in context right now as we debate this and we see opposition members standing up, again and again offering options that are not available.

The member opposite asked us why we're trying to feed opposition members this budget. They're not taking it. What we're trying to do is feed the shut-ins, feed the individuals who are in self-isolation with a \$60 million gift from the government to civil society so that we can go around making sure that people who are in a difficult spot have the resources they need. As we heard from the Minister of Finance – at the beginning of third reading we heard him say that all the resources necessary to fight COVID-19 will be provided by this government.

If we do not support this budget, if we do not pass this budget, as the Premier made clear earlier in Committee of the Whole today, it is clear that we will not have money to spend. The concern for his

constituents, I believe, is genuine. My concern for his constituents is also genuine, that they will not get paid if they work for the government, that we will not be able to provide services for those who are infirm, those who are affected, those who are most vulnerable, the elderly, the ill because we have no money.

These are the options in front of us, Mr. Speaker. We can decide to go down the route of what opposition is suggesting and have nothing to spend come the beginning of the fiscal year, on April 1. The fantasyland that's being lived is by the members opposite, and they're repeating these nonsense lines over and over again. We heard earlier from the Member for Edmonton-Decore the idea that chaos will be created by this budget. The chaos will be created if we do not pass the budget, if we do not supply the government with the funds to spend on the services necessary in the midst of a crisis. I believe the member opposite knows this.

I have a lot of respect for the members opposite from Edmonton-Decore and from Edmonton-McClung. We get along cordially whenever we interact. I ask them, just as they called on us, to demonstrate leadership, to demonstrate leadership in this place right now, just as the Member for Edmonton-McClung's grandfather demonstrated leadership. What does it look like to face the facts face on in this House, as he rightly said, that we all cherish so much? What does it look like for us to take seriously this role of elected office, not regurgitate talking points but consider truly what this means for our constituents and for the future of Alberta if we end up in a spot where they lose hope in our province because our Legislature cannot find common ground in the midst of the greatest crisis that we've seen in terms of health care in over a century?

That's what my grandfather would have been asking me. He would not have asked me about the politics in this moment. Like I said, I know not his partisan stripes, but I do know that he was a good man and an honest man that raised a good family. He contributed much to this province, and he would be rolling over in his grave were he to know that we sacrificed much of the progress that many Albertans who went before us have done.

The member opposite for Edmonton-McClung mentioned his respect for those who went before us. I, too, respect those who went before us. I respect the weight on the shoulders of every farmer, many of whom he's alluding to in his talk of the family farm, who have four or five generations on their shoulders, wondering: what will they do going forward? That depends on the response from this House. That depends on the response from the members opposite as well as those in the government seats right now, and I'm calling on them, just as they call on us, to exemplify that leadership, to look seriously at the facts in front of them, to be honest with their constituents, and to face the truth.

We were asked: is the budget worth the paper it's written on? It's worth something over \$50 billion to the people of Alberta. That's what it's worth. Without this budget passed, without this bill proceeding, we're in a spot where we cannot continue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say good morning. Good morning to everyone here in the House today as we continue to discuss Bill 5, Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act. It's always a pleasure to get up and speak in the House, of course, and address the issues that are before us.

One of the first things that I'd like to focus on is respect for democracy. We just heard from the hon. member on the other side that he respects the processes that have been established within this House, the traditions that have been established within this House,

but time and time again, you know, we see that this government, over the short period that they've been in power, has come in and turned over some of the traditions of this very House, making it so that they can do what they want to do when they want to do it. What that speaks to me is that it's not respect for tradition, because they think that they know best.

Here we are discussing one of the most important bills for Albertans, that is going to impact each and every Albertan, and the government imposes closure, not allowing members from the opposition to have full time to really be able to discuss the implications, the very serious economic and not only economic but social implications that this budget will have on the people of Alberta.

Now, the hon. minister and President of Treasury Board, you know, got up and eloquently spoke about how this budget will provide resources for programs, but this very same budget is going to be taking away the economic resources from specific programs that actually help the Albertans that need it the most. I'm talking about even in the prepandemic. We were going to see with this budget that this government was proposing a number of cuts. Now, the members on the opposite side have gotten up time and time again: "No, these are not cuts. These are not cuts." But as we can clearly see with the budget estimates that have been put before this House, they're taking money from one place and putting it in another. [interjection] Yeah, it is called management, but they're taking it from specific places, Mr. Speaker, taking it from specific programs.

12:40

And who's being affected? Well, seniors are being affected, those who are living on AISH, those who would have to access income supports. These are people that we see come into our constituency offices day after day after day. Mr. Speaker, I can speak to you and tell you that a number of people contact me – and this is even prepandemic – come in to speak to me about how the budget that's being proposed by this government is going to negatively impact them.

Now, pre COVID-19, like many of us, I was out door-knocking with volunteers in my constituency. I heard from a number of teachers, teachers' assistants, and nurses the very serious concern about how this government was going to be moving money out of some specific programs, and then where they were going to move it to, nobody knows. What is their plan? It's not very clear. These are Albertans. These are Albertans that have serious concerns. For example, PUF: I can't tell you how many people I heard on the doorstep that were concerned about this issue, the number of e-mails that have poured into my constituency office regarding not only that but a number of other topics. As I've already stated, this budget is going to be affecting seniors, affecting those living on AISH and those needing to access income supports.

What we see is a government that's circumventing the democratic process, and this isn't the first bill in which they're doing this. We see this repeatedly with this government in their short term – pardon me; their short time in office. I mean, we can hope that it's a short term, but it's a short time in office so far. We can only ask ourselves: okay; well, how much of this are we going to see? It's a repeating process.

Now, not only that; they're so focused on circumventing the traditions and the economic process that have been established in this House, but we see time and time again with bills that are being put forward in this House that they're taking over the autonomy of other governing structures within our society. They're pulling in and saying: "Okay. Well, you know what? It doesn't matter what agency, board, or commission." Now we're seeing it specifically

with school boards within Bill 5. We're seeing it with postsecondary institutions. What they are doing, Mr. Speaker, is putting more decision-making power in the hands of the ministers that actually sit in front of us. Now, how is that more democratic when we already have democratic institutions? We have agencies, boards, and commissions that are actually helping this society in making the decisions. This is the thing: when you have more people making more decisions, helping to make those decisions, no matter how big or small they are, you're getting more perspective.

Now what we see happening is that this government is taking this opportunity – by circumventing tradition and circumventing the democratic process, they're taking and they're putting more power in the hands of the ministers on the other side. They're just saying: "Hey, trust us. Trust us. We know what is best for Albertans." At the very same time that we have members on the other side that form cabinet saying, "Trust us; we know what's best for Albertans," we have Albertans themselves coming to us and saying: we are so incredibly concerned with the budget that this government is putting forward. More of that decision-making power is going to be in the hands of the ministers. To Albertans I say: be watchful; be mindful. We are here for Albertans. As an opposition member and along with my opposition colleagues we're trying to do our very best to bring this to the attention of Albertans. By implementing closure and not letting us discuss bills that are coming before this House, they're circumventing the democratic process.

Now, we had a government that said that they were going to promise jobs. You know what? This isn't me saying it. This is Albertans that have come to me. I've actually had a number of constituents that said: "You know what, Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie? I voted UCP." They admitted to me: I voted UCP. [interjections] And you know what? [some applause] I'm talking about the constituents. Relax. Relax. I'm quoting here, members. Constituents have actually come to me and said: "You know what, Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie? I voted UCP in the last election, but I won't be voting UCP again."

These are people who actually believed the members on the other side when they said: "We are going to fix Alberta. We're going to get Alberta back to work again." And what have we seen? We've seen a \$4.7 billion corporate handout with no jobs. Constituents are coming to me and saying: "They promised jobs. That's why we voted for them. They promised jobs. They said that they were going to turn this economy around and that things were going to get better." Instead, they're not getting better, and there are no new jobs. In fact, we see fewer jobs. Not only that, but we see the fleeing of capital from the province, monies that have been given out, and now corporations are happy to take the money and are going and investing it in other jurisdictions across this land and even in other countries. This is a reality.

Now, let's put on top of this proposed budget the pressures of COVID-19 and what Albertans are experiencing. They're scared. They're very scared. They're very concerned. They're concerned about the future. They're concerned about what's going to happen, and I understand. The government, on the other side, wants to get its budget passed, and I believe that their intention is good. They want to make sure that they have the money so that we can make sure that the government continues functioning. But let me remind you that with the proposed budget, they're taking money out of the programs upon which Albertans were depending, and now with the added pressure of the coronavirus pandemic, more Albertans are going to be depending on them. So you're actually saying: help us pass this budget, but the economic resources, those programs where Albertans can get the help they need, are still not going to be there.

12:50

And with this particular bill, not only that, but we're seeing that now, with school boards and postsecondary institutions, more of the decision-making power is going to be in the hands of the minister. So you're asking me, on this side of the House: "Come on. Play ball, Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. Play ball." The problem is that you're not passing the ball. That's the problem. You're not helping Albertans with this budget. You're not putting the money into the specific programs that are needed to help the people that are going to need it most, even more now than ever with the coronavirus pandemic at our doorstep. That is why it is absolutely impossible for me to support this bill.

So many of my hon. colleagues on this side of the House have gotten up and they've spoken to it. You know, I get it. We have a differing of opinions. You think you know what's best, and you have made that clear, but not all Albertans agree with you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. Is this under 29(2)(a), Mr. Speaker? On the bill?

The Speaker: Yeah. You're fine.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Great. Good.

The Speaker: You have about the same time.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you for the opportunity just to share a couple of last words in regard to this bill and the budget generally. I think that we all have recognized that the main part of the budget was in fact passed some hours ago – right? – so this bill is kind of a mopping-up, so to speak, aspect to that. Again, I think it illustrates how there's a disconnect between what is needed and what this government is trying to do.

They seem intent on retaining a budget that was written probably a few months ago, really, in much different circumstances compared to what we're facing here today. We, of course, don't have to describe that. We all know it. We're living it every day, and it's very difficult. We need all hands on deck to make sure that we mobilize to ensure the safety and the health and the economic security of all Albertans at this time. But for that, as a prerogative, I think that everyone knows in their minds and their hearts what is absolutely necessary for us to do for now and in these next few months. It's going to be difficult, but the government is in a position to be able to help.

But to be reverting to – I mean, again, as I said in my earlier remarks, some aspects of this bill are very interesting. I think that the issue around short-term rentals, the Airbnb phenomenon, needs to be addressed in this province to make sure that people are paying their fair share in regard to, you know, taxes and contributing to that part of our hospitality industry.

This notion of looking to, you know, the issue around reserves and school board reserves: again, it's something that needs to be looked at and to be debated and to be considered in a thoughtful sort of way. We know that the collective agreement protocols that our government set up a number of years ago to allow for provincial bargaining for teachers and so forth – I mean, these are all very important details that we can continue to visit and revisit as time goes on, but is now the time when we need a bill like this to move forward, for this government to be stubbornly sticking to a collection of ideas that they built that seemed more relevant a

number of months ago compared to what the circumstances are that we're facing here today?

The budget globally has lots of misrepresentations of what we are facing today. I believe that the oil price was in the budget at \$58, and now it's considerably lower. We know that we are facing a very uncertain economic future that requires an investment in capital, an investment in individuals to make sure that they can make ends meet during these difficult economic times. I fully expect that this government will look to make some of those investments in the next few days both for economic stimulus and for personal income security, for health care, and so forth. I expect that they will do so, and we can help to make sure that they make those appropriate choices to have the most positive effect on our economy, on our health, and on the economic security of Albertans.

But all of those things will happen tomorrow and the next day, Mr. Speaker. All of those things will happen, and the government has the capacity to make them happen, too. I think that at this juncture, as we move to closing this evening's session of the Legislature, we all need to take a couple of steps back and not be pushing forward these illusions about the budget and the urgency and how the money will run out and all that kind of thing. We passed the bulk of the budget a few hours ago, and we would expect, with a majority and so forth, that this last portion will move similarly. I think what's important now is to not carry on with this idea that the government seemed intent on trying, which is to write a story around the coronavirus and the budget, because that is now something that is in the past, and instead concentrate its efforts on helping Albertans and making those investments to ensure that we can move forward on debate in the future around our universities and performance and all of the issues around that.

Now, really, does it seem like the time to do that when all of our colleges and universities are closed for the foreseeable future? Is it reasonable to be talking about school boards and their reserves and so forth when all of our schools are closed – right? – in an unprecedented manner? I think it is necessary, but I think it speaks to the urgency of the immediate issues that we have before us and certainly less so with the details that do exist in this particular bill. I would suggest that as we . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 15 the time for consideration of this matter has now elapsed, and we need to dispose of all of the questions required.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader perhaps might like to provide some direction for tomorrow.

1:00

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, I was going to move this motion first, but if you'd like me to go that way first, Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to.

The Speaker: Either/or.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Pursuant to Standing Order 3(1.2) I wish to advise the Assembly that there shall be no morning sitting tomorrow, Wednesday, March 18, 2020.

Can I speak to the motion now, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Government Motions

(continued)

Evening Sitzings

11. **Mr. Jason Nixon moved:**
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.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 18 this is not a debatable motion.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Committees and Prorogation

16. **Mr. Jason Nixon moved:**
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;
 - (b) the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. If there's anyone wishing to provide comments, now would be the time to do so. The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader has caught my eye.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to Government Motion 16, about committees meeting outside the Legislature, including Members' Services, Legislative Offices. I recognize that there is business that still needs to be done in regard to some of those meetings. I believe we will be doing that sooner than later by the sounds of it for some of the meetings that I know members have been notified of. However, as we clearly heard from the Finance minister in many of his comments this evening, he did mention that the government will do anything and everything that they will have to do in regard to ensuring that the needs of Albertans are being met, which means that there may be potential other financial implications that will be required as we move through COVID-19 and the coronavirus pandemic.

Given that fact I would like to have an amendment where I will be adding the following immediate clause, which is: the Standing Committee on Public Accounts will also be given consent to meet outside of regular sitting dates.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you just want to wait – oh. No, go ahead.

Ms Sweet: That's all it says.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to move that Government Motion 16 be amended by adding the following immediately after clause (b):

- (c) the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this amendment will be referred to as amendment A1.

I'm not sure if the member has any additional comments, but she's welcome to provide them now.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very quick. I know we're all tired, and we've done a lot this evening. Just in regard to the amendment A1 I would like to move forward in speaking to the addition of the following immediately after clause (b): the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

This comes out of something that the Premier and the minister and his Government House Leader have talked quite a bit about, actually, today, the fact of opposition parties working with governments across the province, including federal, to come to a resolution when looking at the financial implications of what will need to happen over the next few months. One of the recommendations that was actually made and a compromise that happened at the federal level between all four parties, including their counterparts in the Conservative Party of Canada, was to have any special warrants that may be issued outside of the budget sent to Public Accounts to ensure accountability on behalf of the government so that Canadians, at that federal level, would be aware of if special warrants were being issued and what they were being issued for so that Canadians are aware and able to have scrutiny over those special warrants.

I'm sure the Finance minister appreciates the accountability requirements that individuals that have access to finances should have given his working history prior to being elected. I think that this would be a reasonable request on behalf of the opposition to ensure that if any financial special warrants are required as we move forward through this pandemic, he would be willing and open to being transparent with Albertans and come to Public Accounts to explain why he would be issuing those special warrants.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yeah. I'll be very fast, Mr. Speaker. I do want to note for the record that PAC can always meet when the House is adjourned. This motion that is before the House that the Opposition

House Leader is moving forward an amendment on is in regard to the brief period of prorogation, which is usually only a couple of weeks. With that said, as I have said all evening, the hon. member is correct. As the Premier has indicated to her leader, we are happy to co-operate when we can find ways forward in the House, and this seems very reasonable. I know the hon. Finance minister has no problem with going to PAC, and we'd be happy to pass this amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak? Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: We are on Government Motion 16. Is there anyone else wishing to speak to Government Motion 16?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 16 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just before I move this final motion of the night, I do want to thank you and your team for being here late tonight as well as all members from both parties, but in particular I think it's worth mentioning the pages this evening. I do hope that our regular pages, if they are listening . . . [applause] Yeah. Exactly. Let's give them a round of applause. I do want for the record to show that you guys were very good at it, and we really appreciate it. I don't know if you're quite as good as the regular pages, but you were pretty good. We appreciate it.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 Wednesday, March 18.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:08 a.m. on Wednesday]

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