



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 18, 2020

Day 10

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Second Session

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A Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 18, 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 or desire to please but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has a statement to make.

Blood Donation

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our world and our nation are facing a global pandemic. Here in Canada not only are we facing a global pandemic; we're facing a potential blood shortage. Our health care workers are amazing people that deserve our thanks, but at this time they also need our help to ensure they have some of the necessary supplies to save lives.

I've talked recently about people coming together and helping their neighbours through this difficult time; this is no different, Mr. Speaker. Understandably, some citizens have cancelled their blood donation appointments, likely in an effort to social distance for the good of their community. However, with the COVID-19 affecting the world as we know it, there's still a need for blood. Individuals diagnosed with cancer, folks who've been in trauma accidents, and individuals undergoing surgery all require blood donations. The need for the blood does not stop just because of COVID-19; in fact, you'll likely need more because of COVID-19.

Blood centres are still open, and according to Canadian Blood Services, eligible donors are still able to donate blood. Blood centres have not closed their doors. In fact, blood centres maintained a strict protocol in the cleanliness and guidelines of their centres even before the outbreak of the coronavirus, and given the current climate their protocols have amplified. A recent statement from Canadian Blood Services states that all potential donors are carefully screened both at the time of booking the appointment and at the time of donating blood. Potential donors exhibiting symptoms of any kind at any time are asked to leave.

Dr. Levy from the Canadian Blood Services stated that "donor centres [are] islands of wellness within Canada's health system. They are not places where sick people gather" but where healthy people gather to aid those who are sick. Canadian Blood Services is highly concerned about the blood shortage and is urging healthy, scheduled donors to keep their donation appointments.

Mr. Speaker, donating blood saves lives, so I would encourage anyone who is eligible to consider giving blood. And I'd like many of my fellow UCP MLAs – we wouldn't ask others to do something we weren't able to do ourselves. On March 31 all the UCP caucus is donating, and I encourage everyone else to do the same.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Next on my list is the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the Member for Calgary-Klein, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

COVID-19 and Indigenous Communities

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have heard concerns from indigenous communities about their inclusion in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We've heard the Premier and minister saying that he was impressed by the preparations done by indigenous communities for the coronavirus pandemic, following a conference call. While it was encouraging to hear that indigenous communities are taking all the steps necessary, it becomes more and more urgent for indigenous communities to receive updates on what exactly the provincial plan is to enable them to best combat this pandemic.

Unfortunately, so far we have heard little from the government on what specific steps they are planning to adequately support our indigenous communities. From what we understand from the Minister of Health, there is no extra funding in the updated budget that is targeted to indigenous communities to support them in this pandemic, and in question period earlier this week the House was notified by the Minister of Health that there are no dollars identified to be sent to on-reserve health centres to ensure adequate preparations.

I'm very concerned that this government is waiting yet again for the federal government to step in and meet the needs of indigenous Albertans. The misuse of the jurisdictional divide argument at this time is both problematic and worrying. Indigenous Albertans are Albertans. It does not matter where they live, on-reserve or off, on-settlement or off. Many indigenous people fall within the definition of high vulnerability to COVID-19. As Dr. Yiu agreed two weeks ago in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, it is not adequate to expect indigenous patients to simply attend programs designed for the general public because there are a number of systemic barriers.

We were told to wait for the budget to be passed and that it was urgent to pass this specific budget to have the necessary supports. The budget has passed now, and indigenous communities are, as far as we know, still waiting for specific information. I call on the government to let our indigenous communities know today what steps they are taking.

Thank you.

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

COVID-19 and Homeless Shelters

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I worked in shelters during the SARS outbreak in 2003 and the H1N1 outbreak in 2009. Fortunately, neither of these viruses had a devastating impact on the homeless population. At the time we installed hand-washing stations at every door. We made sanitizer available for every staff or volunteer. We did our best to promote social distancing and create a separate space for individuals with symptoms. We increased our staffing levels to assist with the nonstop task of cleaning and disinfecting. Most importantly, we worked together as a community. Staff, donors, volunteers, community partners, the guests in our programs, and even our politicians united in one cause.

Two days ago members of the opposition made statements about shelter funding that were factually untrue and are once again attempting to create undue fear for our most vulnerable citizens. This rhetoric creates division at a time when we should be united and working together. The truth is that we have maintained funding for all of the province's shelters. Government has also committed an additional \$11 million for expanding shelter spaces for both Red Deer and Edmonton. We've put \$140 million for mental health and addiction

recovery, which will have an impact. To make matters worse, the NDP insinuated negligence on the government's part in supporting the homeless and organizations that are set up to help. These comments were neither helpful nor constructive and are the complete opposite of what Albertans need from us at this time.

Yesterday I was named parliamentary secretary for civil society, and I look forward to working with the Minister of Community and Social Services and all of our civil society partners as well as with all members of this House. Now is the time when we need to come together, and I invite the NDP to join with our government in its response to this pandemic and protect those who are the most vulnerable in our community. Albertans need us to push aside partisan rhetoric and work constructively together to address this crisis.

Thank you.

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

COVID-19 Community Response and Resilience

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are in the midst of unprecedented times in Alberta. The pandemic of COVID-19 has sparked uncertainty for all Albertans. At this moment, cases of COVID-19 are mostly concentrated in cities, but the rest of the province must be prepared now. The time to practise social distancing is now. The time for the government to tell Albertans how they are going to make it through these economically anxious times is now. People living paycheque to paycheque need to know how they will be able to afford rent, to keep a roof over their head, and to pay for groceries to keep food in their fridge.

However, in these uncertain times, I am inspired by the resilience of rural communities. I think of the many droughts over time that farmers have experienced. I think of the many families who immigrated to Alberta because of their home country's experience with famine or war.

The days ahead look difficult, Mr. Speaker. In anxious and uncertain times friends and family want to spend time together and hold each other closer to make it through. Practices of social distancing and self-isolation change how we physically cope through this. Spring break and Easter trips to friends or family have had to be cancelled. Places of worship, which are pillars for many communities, have been forced to cancel services during some of the holiest times on their religious calendars.

Although we have had to create more physical distance between us, it does not mean we are not connected. We are connected through our proud history and our common values. By caring for each other collectively, we can get through this. Albertans have been creative on how they use technology and the Internet to stay connected with family, friends, and their religious communities.

Mr. Speaker, yes, these times are tough, and we need answers from the government on how we will make it through, but I am so inspired by Albertans taking this seriously and looking out for each other. We will make it through this by acting and working together as we have always done in the past.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

COVID-19 Response

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are concerned. They are concerned for their own health, that of their families, and their friends. With nonstop images of empty grocery store shelves and public spaces Albertans, Canadians, and people across the globe are left feeling scared, confused, frightened, and some in a state of panic. There's no question the COVID-19 pandemic is a serious situation,

but with simple personal hygiene practices and following the recommendations of Alberta's chief medical officer, we will get ahead of the virus and flatten the curve.

1:40

I want to take this opportunity to assure Albertans that our government is doing everything we can to responsibly monitor the COVID-19 situation and react appropriately. We are taking the recommendations of Alberta's chief medical officer seriously. And although the cancellation of sporting events, conferences, and other public gatherings may result in the next few weeks being a bit boring for many Albertans, they are necessary measures that will ensure the health and safety of all of us, as we are responsible for each other.

But where there is darkness, Mr. Speaker, there is also light. The stories have been seen on social media of friends helping friends, neighbours helping neighbours, and strangers helping strangers. It's truly heartwarming. It's the Alberta way. It shows that through uncertain times we pull together for one another, that our greater Alberta community is looking out for one another, and that no one in the community will be left behind.

Mr. Speaker, I know many Albertans are frightened and concerned, and certainly there's reason for it. The uncertainty of our economic future with the added stress of COVID-19 can be overwhelming for many. I know it's difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel, but together we will reach that light. Albertans will persevere, Albertans will overcome these challenges, and Alberta will thrive once again.

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

Calgary State of Emergency Declaration

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are going through unsettling times. With Alberta undergoing the growing spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must ensure that our hardest hit areas are given the supports they need. With the majority of reported cases of COVID-19 coming out of Calgary, we must keep Calgary top of mind.

As Albertans come home and travel through the airport, it is vital we are prepared. Critical steps and precautions are being taken, and we must continue to ensure that they are taken. Announcements today to limit travel from the United States and Canada are another crucial step. I also commend WestJet for cancelling their international flights. These are inconvenient but necessary steps to slow the spread of COVID-19 and keep Calgary and the rest of Alberta safe.

I commend the city of Calgary for taking crucial steps and declaring a state of emergency early to ensure necessary precautions are taken. I am grateful for the chief medical officer's advice and her leadership in telling Albertans how to act through this. We have taken smart steps to limit the spread.

However, we need answers from the government on how they will support Calgarians through these difficult times. Oil and gas spending has drastically decreased. Capital spending by oil and gas companies has been decreased by \$3 billion. Calgarians are anxious on how they will make payments to rent, utilities, and afford groceries.

We have heard today from the federal government that they are investing in ensuring that Canadians are able to meet their basic needs. Calgarians and Albertans need to know what their provincial government is planning to do to make sure that people get paid and are able to care for themselves and their families during these difficult times.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

COVID-19 Precautions

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, in recent weeks COVID-19 has spread across the world and into our province. My constituents, like all Albertans, are reasonable people. They just want to know the facts, and they want to protect their loved ones in these uncertain times. They understand that there is a lot of uncertainty, but they want to know what the risk level is. When they see large events being postponed and they get asked to work from home, they become concerned.

The reality is that we should be taking this very seriously. While the risk to Albertans remains relatively low for the time being, this virus will continue to spread through our communities. That is why it is important for each of us to share the facts surrounding the virus and to share the advice of our chief medical officer, Dr. Deena Hinshaw. Her updates and other pertinent information can be found on alberta.ca/covid. Our government MLAs and minister are constantly sharing these updates across social media, and I encourage my fellow Albertans to look for these updates.

It is also vital at this time that Albertans share the new travel advisory and policies with their friends, neighbours, and family returning from abroad. The cabinet committee on emergency preparedness has accepted her recommendations that all returning travelers from outside of Canada should self-isolate for two weeks. The Premier has been clear that Albertans should not be leaving the country for leisure travel right now.

Recently the Prime Minister announced our borders would be closing to most people who don't hold citizenship or permanent residency in Canada. Yesterday our Premier also announced that the government of Alberta would be declaring a state of public health emergency, bringing in new measures to increase social distancing. If we want to protect the most vulnerable in our community, including seniors, children, and those with compromised immune systems, we must respect these policies.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues and all Albertans to consider this a call to action. Inform your constituents. Inform your neighbours. Hold one another accountable. We must now consider a new normal.

Democracy in Alberta

Ms Renaud: When I look back at my life so far, some of the greatest lessons I've learned happened during and following times of enormous stress and change: the death of someone I loved, watching someone I love fight for their life against a horrible disease, fear of the unknown. Right now we're all facing an uncertain future, and we're collectively learning some important lessons. We're learning that although we're literally all trying to be alone by self-isolating, we're not alone because what each one of us chooses to do impacts us all. We're learning that we need each other to get through this, and we're learning that we need our public systems to be there for us, to give us factual information and leadership that will save lives. We're learning that we must appropriately care for those who are vulnerable, or we all become weaker. We're learning that we need transparent democratic systems now more than ever.

Last night I sat in this place and I watched this government put its own political agenda ahead of the people of Alberta when they chose to dismantle processes that keep our democracy intact, and that was tough to watch. I understand that we're in uncharted territory, but this is not the time to use the fog of uncertainty and distraction and fear to plow ahead with partisan goals. That's not leadership, and that is most certainly not the democracy that men

and women for a hundred years worked in this place to create, systems, albeit clumsy and time consuming, to protect democracy and our well-being. When we all get through this – and we will – we'll remember the leaders who bravely stepped forward and demonstrated their commitment to Albertans and democracy. Albertans are smart. They see what's happening here, and they will learn from it.

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

COVID-19 Community Response

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we continue to make tough decisions, businesses across Alberta and Canada are doing what they can to not only help all affected by COVID-19 but also do what they can to help reduce the spread of the virus. Some malls across Alberta have chosen to operate on restricted times along with closing some attractions they host in their malls. Other businesses have also taken precautions to protect not just their staff but their customers as well. Some service providers are allowing access to additional services at no extra cost or eliminated service caps to the services they already provide to their customers, not only in Alberta but Canada as well, to relieve the burden they may face in the coming days.

Many grocery stores are creating special hours to help senior citizens get the supplies they need. Utility providers are allowing consumers additional payment flexibility such as instalment plans, payment date extensions, and suspending collections for the time being. All these actions help relieve the burden that Albertans are facing and mitigate the damage the virus is causing in both the present and the future.

Having said that, I would like to remind everybody, Mr. Speaker, that we must observe all the necessary instructions and recommendations of our chief medical officer and other health authorities in the prevention of the spread of COVID-19. For these initiatives, I would like to ask my colleagues to join me in thanking businesses for not only helping those in a time of need but also helping to do their part in reducing the spread of COVID-19.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Support for Persons Affected by COVID-19

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the last three days this government has put off Albertans looking for details on income support, saying that they had to wait for Ottawa. Now that the feds have announced their details, we can see places where Albertans still need crucial provincial action. Federal support does not appear to begin until April 1, but utility bills and mortgage payments are coming, and it's 14 days until rent is due. To the Premier: will he step up and use his authority to legislatively ban evictions and utility shut-offs? He must do so before April 1.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we completely understand the profound anxiety of families about their capacity to pay bills in these extremely trying circumstances. We appreciate the announcement by the government of Canada today with respect to forthcoming emergency income measures and the significant expansion of the employment insurance benefits. The government of Alberta will be making additional announcements this afternoon at 4 o'clock in this respect.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, on that matter, we know the feds have offered \$1,800 a month in terms of income support, and they've also increased the child benefit. This is welcome, but we know it falls far short of the monthly help that most Alberta families will need for food and shelter and electricity. Perhaps the Premier could give us a little bit of a heads-up here in this House. Will he commit to matching the federal increase to the child benefit and providing some form of top-up to the income support in order to protect Alberta families otherwise facing fiscal challenges?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we saw the federal package only a few hours ago. The Department of Finance and Treasury Board is working on a detailed analysis of where there may be gaps which the government of Alberta could potentially fill, but we will be announcing additional measures later this afternoon that we are finalizing as we speak. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to understand that we have public servants literally working around the clock on these issues, as, quite frankly, are elected leaders as well, doing our best to deliver that support as soon as we possibly can.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would assume that there has been some conversation between provincial governments and the federal government to date, so some of that work would have been under way.

Alberta employers who are still open are struggling to make their payroll. We've seen that the federal government has offered payroll subsidies of up to 10 per cent. We know, again, that that is welcome, but it's a clear place where it's probably not going to be enough. So my question again to the Premier is on whether he will commit to matching the federal contribution or perhaps even add beyond that to provide subsidies to small-business owners who are staying open and still supporting their workers.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, our first priority is to protect people and their health, our second priority is to protect their financial well-being, and our third priority is to protect the broader economy, including the future of many businesses, employers that are now under massive stress. We are moving forward on a broad range of measures across the economy. Not all of those things will be in a position to be announced today. I expect a series of announcements over the days and, frankly, the weeks to come. Right now we are facing a cash crisis for households and businesses. Then there will be a broader economic crisis, from which we must recover. We must take every step in its own time.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Seniors' Drug Coverage

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the matter of prioritized issues that need to be addressed, on the same day the Premier declared a public health emergency, he also passed a budget that cut \$460 million from health care, taking into account population growth and inflation. Now, part of that budget is an absolute cut of \$72 million from seniors' drug benefits, including 60,000 older Albertans who no longer have coverage. Does the Premier plan to continue to withdraw this support to the most vulnerable sections of Alberta's population going forward?

Mr. Kenney: Let me be blunt, Mr. Speaker. Given the crisis with which we are dealing, which is deteriorating seriously by the hour today, I will no longer tolerate that kind of divisive and dishonest rhetoric from the Leader of the Opposition. It has to end. Trying to scare people at a time of great public anxiety must end now.

Sending out e-mails trying to raise money for a party off COVID must end now. Trying to create problems for a government coping to deal with this crisis must end now. There was an increase of \$600 million in the Health budget, not a cut.

Ms Notley: What must start now, Mr. Speaker, are genuine, authentic answers to questions that are being asked. The budget that we passed last night has a clear plan to cut \$72 million from the coverage of seniors' pharmaceutical costs. It is a reasonable question to ask whether under the current circumstances seniors will still be asked to pay that or not. Will they, or won't they? I will not be bullied out of asking questions on behalf of Albertans.

Mr. Kenney: It's like they're living on a different planet than most Albertans, Mr. Speaker. Listen to that: the heckling, the division, the derision. I've got the budget right here. Last year: \$20.4 billion in Health spending. This year: \$20.6 billion. An additional \$500 million was added to that. That's \$21.1 billion, the highest level in Alberta history, the highest per capita level in Canada. To the NDP: please stop trying to scare people in the midst of a crisis.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what people find scary are the few details that have been provided, some of which are included in the budget that was passed last night. One of those details is a plan to cut \$72 million from the cost of otherwise subsidizing pharmaceutical health care for seniors in Alberta. It is a reasonable question: is that still the plan, or will the government support seniors who need to get pharmaceutical health care now more than ever?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, once again, this government is increasing support for health care. This government will be announcing a series of measures in the days and weeks to come to focus financial support, to get cash into the bank accounts and the pockets and on the kitchen tables of families who have been laid off, who are having to take time off work because of self-quarantine or self-isolation, and we'll be joining the federal government in this series of measures. I ask the Leader of the Opposition to wait for today's announcement at 4 o'clock and subsequent announcements.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition for her third set of questions.

COVID-19 and Public Service Health and Safety

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many, many different public servants who are providing essential services across this province in health care and in other places. For example, we have people for the GOA who are working in the remand centre, who are processing AISH payments, who are going into homes to protect children. The question I have for the Premier is simple. They are essential, but they need special procedures to keep them safe. Can the Premier tell the people of this House whether those procedures are in place, and will he publish them either in the House or otherwise?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, public health officials work with the broader public service, in part through Executive Council and the Public Service Commission, to ensure that people who need it, who are performing essential services, have access, for example, to personal protection equipment. That has to be done on a prioritized basis. While we believe we do have adequate supplies to deal with the pandemic, we can't take that for granted. There has to be a careful management of the inventories of PPE, and our officials are tasked with that job.

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

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's not, again, exactly what I asked. We have thousands and thousands of government of Alberta employees who would be described as providing essential services who must be at work and, in so doing, put themselves at risk, in contrast to what is being recommended by the chief medical officer of health. They have not yet been provided with any kind of guidance about how they will fulsomely be able to keep themselves safe. My question is simply this: will the Premier, if he can't provide those details here, table those details in the House or otherwise post them publicly so that everyone can see them?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the Public Service Commission and managers in the public sector are responsible for exactly that, for ensuring that proper safety protocols are followed, that those are clearly in place. Of course, this is a situation that is unfolding by the day, and perhaps it's possible that in some corners of government managers have not passed on this information, that's all readily available from Alberta Health Services.

2:00

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the information is not readily available because this is an absolutely unprecedented situation.

Whether you are a corrections officer in the remand centre, whether you are a child protection worker called to go into a house or a home where you don't know if people are infected or not infected, whether you are working in a homeless centre, whether you are processing AISH payments and dealing with people in line, the fact of the matter is that there are not rules for this. They have not been put in place yet, and people are desperately worried. Will the Premier commit to tabling those rules in the House when they're ready or otherwise publishing them for all to see?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the chief medical officer and Alberta Health Services have been providing enormous amounts of information, both for the public sector and the broader civil society, on hygiene and safety protocols. Personal protective equipment is available as needed for essential services, as I've stated. Now, there is a finite amount of that equipment. We believe there's a satisfactory amount, but our managers have to be careful in what they distribute to ensure that it's there when we reach the peak of the pandemic.

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

COVID-19 and Small Business

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been over a week since COVID-19 and the oil price crash have wreaked havoc on the economy, but we have not yet seen any action from this government to support small business. Today will be the third day in a row that I rise to ask what this government is doing for small business. But the federal government has announced an \$82 billion aid package for workers and businesses struggling to make ends meet. Small businesses have not yet received any answer from this government about what their plans are. Hopefully, today will be different, so I'll ask again. It's been over a week since they committed to something. What is this government doing to support small business?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite has stated, businesses in this province are facing an unprecedented challenge. We've been certainly in communication with businesses from across the province and across sectors. Their most urgent

concern is access to credit and capital, and we've been working with provincial financial institutions to ensure that they have the flexibility to offer liquidity and capital during this time of need. We will be making additional announcements in the days to come to assist our businesses.

Ms Phillips: Well, honestly, Mr. Speaker, the federal government has moved much faster to meet people's needs.

Now, \$55 billion of the federal aid package was for tax deferrals, which is all well and good if you're making a profit and paying taxes, but if you're not, like those that I am hearing from, it does nothing for those who are struggling financially right now. Again to the Premier: will the government commit to providing loan guarantees, short-term credit measures, and banning evictions during this crisis? All you have to do is say yes and get on with the job.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we've been working with provincially regulated banks and credit institutions to ensure that they do have the liquidity and the ability to offer flexibility to their business clients and corporate clients to ensure that their customers can operate outside of covenants and ensure that refinancing can take place where needed. There will be additional measures announced in the days to come, but we know right now that the acute need is liquidity and access to capital. We're on it.

Ms Phillips: Well, that is not a satisfying answer for the many small businesses that are reaching out to me and my caucus colleagues.

Now, I'm hearing from businesses who are losing massive amounts of revenue. They still have to pay operating costs such as labour. They're not making a profit right now. The tax cuts or deferrals will not help them if they're not making a profit. The federal government has introduced wage subsidies of 10 per cent, but 10 per cent may not be enough to keep some of these businesses open. Will this UCP government commit to at least matching this commitment by the federal government, be at least as good as Justin Trudeau?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we are very well aware of the incredible challenge that Alberta businesses and job creators are facing today. We will be announcing additional measures, measures beyond the liquidity and capital announcements that were made by the federal government. We will be announcing specific provincial measures to improve access to capital and provide fiscal stimulus in the days to come.

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

Budget 2020

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the outbreak of COVID-19 our province and our world are on the verge of serious social and economic impacts. However, even before the COVID-19 pandemic the Alberta economy was facing several years of economic stagnation. This is why our government was elected with a mandate to get Alberta back on track. Given that Budget 2020 was created prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 and was designed to fulfill our mandate and given that this government has been in the middle of budget negotiations throughout the COVID-19

pandemic, can the Minister of Finance please explain to this House why an expedited budget process was a necessary measure to take at this time?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I think we can all agree that this is a time of great uncertainty, and what we need to be certain about is that our front-line services have the funds they need to deliver to Albertans. The expedited budget process was necessary to ensure government services continue uninterrupted. It's a possibility that we won't be able to continue to meet here in this Chamber in the near future, and we needed to be prepared for that scenario and ensure that we had an appropriation bill that was passed so that essential government services could be delivered after April 1.

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that COVID-19 will likely have negative economic implications for months if not years to come – and this impact has been felt throughout the constituency I represent in the Peace Country – and given that at this point, understandably, we are currently unable to fully measure the potential impact of COVID-19 on our economy and, in fact, the world economy, can the minister please explain to this House how our Alberta government's Budget 2020 will address economic concerns of Albertans in light of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's more important now than ever to have sound, responsible fiscal management. As has been mentioned, we passed a budget that included a \$500 million increase to what was already a record high Health budget in Budget 2020. We will be making announcements as early as this afternoon around additional assistance to Alberta businesses, and there will be continuing announcements in the days to come as we understand the effects of the economic challenge and the best measures to meet that challenge.

Mr. Loewen: Given that our Alberta government announced the additional \$500 million to be added to the budget for Health spending to aid necessary measures in handling COVID-19 and that the budget was passed just last night and given that the COVID-19 situation is in a continual state of change in Alberta and, in fact, around the world as it spreads and health professionals react to those changes, can the Minister of Finance please elaborate on other budget adjustments that this Alberta government is prepared to take or has taken to aid the fight against COVID-19?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier announced that \$60 million will be immediately distributed for services and to groups that support the most vulnerable in this province. Included in Budget 2020 were fiscal stimulus measures such as a virtual record infrastructure capital spending program, a program where we're moving forward key capital initiatives where Albertans can get put back to work. We've also announced additional funding to the Orphan Well Association to ensure that jobs can be created in those regions that need them most.

Income Support Programs

Ms Renaud: Yesterday the Premier announced emergency funding to municipalities and nonprofit organizations that are providing services to vulnerable Albertans. This is a step in the right direction. However, the Premier did not mention how the government would be making up for the \$45 million in cuts to employment income supports in the budget they rammed through last night. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: how will your government cover the shortfall built into your fictional budget, that contains projections that are at least, likely, \$15 billion off in terms of deficit?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, the benefits for income support for expected-to-work and barriers to full employment: those are legislated benefits, and those will be available to vulnerable Albertans who are eligible for them. Those are irrespective of any budgetary implications. I'm not even sure exactly what shortfall the member is referring to. But in particular to those supports, those are legislated benefits, and people who are eligible for them will receive them.

2:10

Ms Renaud: Given that I know what the shortfall is – it's \$45 million in a line item in the budget – to the minister: how do you plan to support Albertans who will not have access to the income supports due to the budget cuts of, like, 25 per cent over the next three years? There are going to be real ramifications of what's happening right now and what will keep happening for months, so we need some real answers. Albertans are at home, a lot of them, isolating. They want to hear from you.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take this opportunity right here and right now to speak to Albertans and say that we are going to take care of vulnerable Albertans. Income support is available for eligible clients, and those emergency support payments are available to anybody who might need them. I want to emphasize this again. Stop trying to create fear in vulnerable Albertans. We are going to take care of them.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not fear and smear when it's a budget that we passed, that we went through in estimates and we looked at the lines. We asked questions. We know that it's \$45 million less. It doesn't matter how you spin it. It's less. Please tell Albertans. Tell them about eligibility. Tell them who's going to be eligible. Be clear. Tell them, "Anyone that needs it will get it," and then we'll be good. I'll stop asking.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I'm not even going to answer that question. I'm just going to say that anybody who is eligible for these supports are going to get these supports. I also want reiterate. Yesterday this government announced \$60 million in additional funding to help vulnerable Albertans right here and right now. Thirty million dollars is going to FCSS to get to vulnerable Albertans, \$25 million is going to homeless shelters and CBOs, and \$5 million is going to emergency women's shelters.

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

Energy Industry Concerns

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta economy and the oil and gas sector are dealing with the impact of a number of factors, including the coronavirus pandemic and low oil prices. Energy

companies are reducing their capital spending, and the Premier himself reported that there will be layoffs. So what specific steps will the Energy minister be taking to make sure the supports are available to the energy workers laid off during these difficult times, and when will you announce them? And why is it taking so long to act?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. I agree with the synopsis that he has set out, that our energy sector is in a crisis. I met last week with over 65 different companies and organizations to understand the impact, and by the day it was getting more and more serious. Even today it's more serious now than it was this morning. WCS was trading around \$7.50. We're working with the industry. We're working with the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board to bring forward a full package.

Mr. Sabir: Given that those who have been laid off or those who are facing potential layoffs are looking to this government to take action and not wait for the federal government and given that the only concrete action this government has taken when it comes to the energy industry is work to fund their embarrassing war room at a time when workers are worried about paying for their rent, utilities, and mortgages, will the minister agree to defund the war room and use that money to support energy workers who are facing layoffs? Doesn't she think that's a better use of that money?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, we are focused full-time on finding solutions to help the energy sector. Over the past week myself and my department came up with over 44 different ideas and proposals to consider and move forward. We're testing those. We're making sure that they're not duplicated by the federal government, and we'll be announcing a full package that will help our energy sector. It is so important that we have a vibrant and functioning energy sector as we move through this crisis.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the war room has not posted anything on its website since March 11 and given that the Premier expressed serious concerns about the prospect of layoffs in the industry that could emerge from this crisis and given that Albertans, including the Energy minister, I hope, would agree that supports for energy workers facing layoffs and their families during these difficult times would be a better use of the \$82,000 per day that this war room is spending, can the Energy minister explain why she prioritized war room funding over providing supports for the workers in the energy industry?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, while the members opposite are focusing on using a health crisis to fund raise, we are focused on finding solutions to help the energy sector and all Albertans move forward in spite of this crisis. They are taking shots, using a partisan effort to create fear and chaos. We are working on solutions to help keep our energy sector viable.

Services for Persons Affected by COVID-19

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 is an unprecedented global pandemic that we find ourselves navigating on a day-to-day basis. Our government is taking action to help slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect public health. The Alberta chief medical officer is advising: if you are not feeling well, stay home and self-isolate. An increasing number of people live alone, and many feel they have insufficient family and personal supports to get them through. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: what social

supports are available to those that feel isolated or are struggling with their mental health as a result of COVID-19?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I understand that this is an extremely stressful time and people may not know where to turn. To all Albertans I want to say: you are not alone; we care about you, and we're here to help you. Yesterday we announced \$60 million in COVID-19 social services funding. Of this, we're dedicating \$30 million to organizations that are providing supports to those who are isolated. These projects include home support for seniors such as picking up groceries or medicine prescriptions, supports for mental health counselling via phone, and ramping up information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that parents in my riding of Sherwood Park and throughout this province are adapting to the increased measures announced in order to flatten the curve and reduce the spread of COVID-19, with all licensed child care facilities, out-of-school care programs, and preschools closed, to the Minister of Children's Services: what advice and supports do you have for parents as they navigate having discussions with their children around what is happening and working to establish a new daily routine?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the chief medical officer of health said a few days ago, we should absolutely be talking to our kids about this, answering their questions as best we can, and giving them simple steps to follow. With my own kids that's meant good handwashing and explaining in a calm and reassuring way how we can limit the spread of germs. I also know that many parents are looking for other child care options right now, including private child care providers. While these providers can stay open for up to six children, I encourage parents to be cautious and make informed decisions. We will continue to support parents as well as the child care sector through this unprecedented . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that COVID-19 has now been declared a public health emergency and given that our government is taking the pandemic extremely seriously and is working to act quickly to not only address the direct impacts of the virus but also the indirect impacts by supporting vulnerable Albertans, can the Minister of Community and Social Services please explain what measures the government is taking to support charitable and nonprofit social service organizations in addressing the COVID-19 public health crisis?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, civil society organizations play such a vital role in supporting and caring for our communities, and we need to rely on each other now more than ever. We've just had a second meeting with the Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society to help mobilize these efforts. We are in ongoing contact with social service providers on public health issues to address these ongoing needs, and we're also anticipating emerging needs.

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

Postsecondary Institution Layoffs

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP projected 698 jobs lost at postsecondary institutions with their last two budgets,

but just in the last few weeks, for example, we had SAIT with 230, NAIT with 240, and the University of Alberta projecting 1,000. That's just with three institutions. That's more than 1,470 positions being lost, double what the UCP was predicting. Based on the budget that this government passed last night, I'm sure that they actually made a calculation of how many jobs are actually going to be lost in our postsecondary institutions. I think the minister owes us an explanation.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Job losses are never easy. I've been in touch, of course, with senior administration at the affected institutions, and I know that they're taking appropriate steps to help ensure that there's appropriate transition for those individuals that are affected. Of course, we're going through very challenging and unprecedented times, which is why it's critical that we maintain strong and open lines of communication with our postsecondary institutions so that we can work together to provide our students with the academic programming they need.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that this government's so-called blueprint for jobs talks about training and retraining programs to help unemployed and underemployed Albertans obtain the skills that they need – now more than ever we need this training – and given that these plans hope to increase skilled trades training at secondary and postsecondary levels, how does this government think that cutting positions at postsecondary institutions like NAIT and SAIT will actually help us now? I would ask him if he could please put a freeze on postsecondary layoffs immediately.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct, and as he knows, strengthening apprenticeship learning in the province is a top priority for the Ministry of Advanced Education and for the government of Alberta as a whole. Just the other day I had the opportunity to connect with our task force on apprenticeship learning. We are committed to strengthening the apprenticeship system within the province of Alberta, not just, of course, in its current state, but we're also being proactive in terms of thinking of the future of the apprenticeship system and looking at new and emerging industries to ensure we're building a stronger connection between education and jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Finance minister: of course, all of our postsecondary institutions are closed, and young people, often having part-time work and so forth, are in danger of losing jobs or are already losing jobs as we speak. We saw today that the federal government is looking for provisions for relief for student loans at the federal level. I would ask if the Finance minister could consider putting a pause on the payments required for Alberta student loans immediately.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we recognize that Alberta postsecondary students are going to be challenged in the upcoming days in terms of finding work, even in terms of those that are working part-time now that may be laid off. I would say through you to the member opposite: stay tuned for the announcement this afternoon.

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

School Class Closures and Student Mental Health Supports

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are hundreds of thousands of Alberta students at home today. They're isolated from their friends and their teachers, and they are experiencing incredibly high levels of stress during this pandemic. Every day this week I've asked the Minister of Education to produce a new plan or any new measures or new programs, anything to support the new mental health pressures on Alberta students. Will the minister today please tell us a single new thing that the government is doing to address the new student mental health pressures caused by this pandemic?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, our government takes the mental health of all Albertans, including our students, very seriously. We are the first government to have an Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and have an unprecedented spending commitment of \$140 million. School authorities are still receiving their full funding for the upcoming school year and are looking at adapting their existing mental health services to continue to meet the needs of their students. I have full confidence in them. Any student who is struggling is encouraged to contact the Kids Help Phone at 1.800.668.6868.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, it's disappointing that after three days we're still getting talking points from two weeks ago. Given that students with complex needs are also isolated at home, away from their friends, teachers, and educational assistants, and given that many students will not be able to continue with their education without specialized supports, I'm asking the minister again. This is the third day I've asked this and the second day in a row I've given you my questions in advance. Where is the minister's plan to support students with complex needs during this pandemic?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, as a former rehabilitative practitioner and as the sister of my late brother Lou, who was born with Down syndrome, supporting students with complex needs is my top priority. School authorities across Alberta are working hard to adapt their supports to accommodate their students in a new and unprecedented reality. All funding for specialized supports continues to flow, and I have full confidence that our education system will rise to the occasion and meet the needs of their students. I know that every member in this House shares that same confidence.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Given that parents and students are reaching out to me saying that they need confidence in this minister and that they don't feel it right now, that she isn't acknowledging the realities of this week's pressures, Mr. Speaker, I find that very disheartening.

Given that the government has rammed through a budget last night that will cut as many as 1,400 teachers from Alberta classrooms and given that teachers are also dealing with a ton of stress right now keeping themselves and their families safe while supporting students who are trying to learn from home – Minister, I've sent you this in advance so you can give these teachers and these family members a real answer – will you please commit here and now to freeze all teacher layoffs and provide mental health support for all staff?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, first off, we're proud and we are depending one hundred per cent on our Minister of

Education, who is working tirelessly. She's already answered the question.

That hon. member, the acting leader of the NDP, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, sent out a fundraising letter just the other day about the virus, and then said, and I quote, "if you can chip in \$5 or more, I can promise to put your contribution to work." A political fundraiser on a virus at a historical time in our province when they need the government to stand with them: shame on that member; shame on the opposition. It is completely and utterly unacceptable. She should stand up and apologize. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. All members will come to order.

The hon. member for . . . [interjections] Order. [A cellphone rang.] That's an untimely phone call, isn't it?

The hon. Member for Calgary-North has the call.

COVID-19 Information and Public Awareness

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The COVID-19 pandemic is unfolding quickly, and there are multiple . . .

The Speaker: Order. The hon. members will come to order. If they'd like to have a private conversation, they're welcome to use the lounges because the hon. Member for Calgary-North has the call.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The COVID-19 pandemic is unfolding quickly, and there are multiple updates coming throughout the day from the provincial and federal governments. However, many of our most vulnerable groups do not have stable or continuous access to services like cable or Internet. To the minister of culture: what is the government doing in terms of outreach to groups that do not use traditional forms of media?

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My office is sending translations directly to cultural organizations. Also, I'd like to thank the MLAs and ministers for their co-ordinated effort with ethnic media. It's been very meaningful. It's been a true privilege working with the faith leaders and community leaders who are doing direct outreach with their communities. I'd like to give a special shout-out to the Islamic group MAC, Muslim Association of Canada, that is doing a blood drive right now. As Dr. Hinshaw has said, it is safe to donate blood, and they're doing that grassroots work right now. Thank you very much to them.

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that many newcomers consume media in their native language and given that daily updates are only available in English and further given that many newcomers are not familiar with our emergency management processes, to the Minister of Health: what is the government doing to provide updates to newcomers that have limited English capabilities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS is actively translating public health information into Alberta's most common languages to keep Albertans informed. Dr. Deena Hinshaw, the chief medical officer of health, is also being assisted in her press conferences now with translation in ASL. This includes messaging for AHS and signage in their health care facilities, signage in airports, frequently

asked questions providing COVID-19 guidance for Albertans. These languages are Spanish, Arabic, traditional Chinese, Punjabi, Tigrinya, simplified Chinese, French, and Vietnamese.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:30

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this virus came to Canada due to foreign travel, given that there are real fears and high anxiety regarding COVID-19 in Alberta and further given that Alberta is a diverse and culturally rich province, to the Minister of Health: how can we ensure people are protecting themselves but do not discriminate against particular groups of people?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government stands for an open society and against discrimination in any form. Our values will be tested in the weeks to come, and we will pass that test. We're in this together. That's our message to Albertans. That's not just rhetoric. It's the key to an effective response to this pandemic. The reality is that we cannot treat our way out of this pandemic. We all need to act now to reduce our risk and to slow the spread of the virus so that the hospitals can keep up with the peak of serious cases when they come.

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

Child Care Centre Closures

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most Alberta families are struggling to adapt to a new reality. Schools and daycares have been closed since Monday, for good reason, and it is impossible to predict when they will be open again. For many parents working from home is not an option. These parents may be required to stay home with their children even if they are not sick or self-isolating. This morning the federal government announced it would be increasing support through the Canada child benefit. The Official Opposition is calling on this government to likewise increase the Alberta child benefit to support Alberta families. Can the Minister of Children's Services commit to doing this, and if not, what specific supports will she be providing to parents who cannot work due to child care obligations?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past number of days we have been speaking with parents and child care centre operators across the province as we recognize that this is a very uncertain and unprecedented situation. As a number of my colleagues have mentioned, there will be more to come on the Alberta government's path forward and what we have to offer the citizens of Alberta, from businesses to families. Stay tuned for 4 o'clock today.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that child care providers across Alberta are still struggling to find out what the pandemic will mean for their centres, their families, and their staff and given that on Monday the minister said that she would provide additional direction through calls with child care operators and told operators that she would have regular calls with them in the future, can the minister update this House on what substantive information she provided to operators on Monday about closures due to the

pandemic, and will the minister commit to sharing the information that she's discussing with operators through regular updates to this House?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to provide an update to this House on that front right now. I did speak with more than 900 child care centre operators on Monday by phone to answer some of their questions. As you can appreciate, we make decisions based on the advice of Dr. Deena Hinshaw, the chief medical officer of health, and we recognize that this is a very uncertain time both for child care centre operators, front-line child care workers as well as parents across the province. We are scheduling another one of those calls to update centres as promised.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. I think that this House would be interested in hearing a little bit more about those updates as they happen. Given that some operators are unable to pay staff or keep up with operating costs like rent and utilities as they will no longer be collecting child care fees for the time being and given that operators will be likely forced to lay off staff while they remain closed and given that parents should not be charged for child care services they aren't receiving but that also cannot even be offered at this time, how will the minister ensure that parents and child care operators will get through this uncertain time with our strong, necessary, and critical child care system intact at the end?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is exactly what we committed to child care centre operators on Monday when I spoke with them. Again, this is an unprecedented situation, and it changes by the day based on the advice that we receive from the chief medical officer of health. I do understand that this is an exceptional circumstance, again, both for child care centres as well as parents. Many centres are choosing to waive fees, have refunded parents. I have encouraged them to, in fact, not charge parents for services that they are not receiving, and I have committed to working with child care centres to see them through this so that they are there to provide services to parents.

COVID-19 and Agriculture

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy has been hit hard by a number of issues ranging from coronavirus to lower oil prices, and no one has been exempt or immune from these challenging times, including our farm and ranch communities. Our farmers and ranchers feed Alberta and the world, and they require our support to get through these difficult times. Will the minister of agriculture inform this house what new supports he and his government will be making available for our agricultural producers during this crisis?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member opposite for that very important question. The AFSC program continues to support farmers. There's over \$700 million that's still expected to be paid out to farmers after the very difficult season. There are almost a million acres still under snow as we speak. We are reviewing additional relief, whether it be through interest-only payments, payment deferrals, or reamortization of loans with farmers that have loans with AFSC as well as farmers

that have insurance with AFSC. We're looking at extending the insurance deadlines for farmers.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farmers are anxiously awaiting these new facilities because they are in challenging times indeed. Now, given that Alberta's agricultural products are world-class and make up a significant portion of Alberta's trade but given that we are seeing the closures of borders as a measure to prevent the spread of coronavirus and given the impact that these necessary measures could have on our agricultural producers, how is the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry keeping farmers informed of developments, and will he be taking further actions should border closures impact the bottom lines of Alberta producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We all saw today that the border between Canada and the U.S. is closed. That is \$1.7 billion worth of trade that is still being able to continue, which is a great sign for our agriculture sector here in Alberta and across Canada. The fact that we have not lost market access to the United States or any countries around the world is a good thing, obviously. I would encourage farmers as well as all Albertans to pay attention to Dr. Hinshaw, our Alberta chief medical officer of health, to make sure that they are getting daily updates because this is a very dynamic situation that does change at a very frequent rate.

Mr. Dach: Timely mention of Dr. Hinshaw, Mr. Speaker.

Given that Alberta has internationally renowned livestock, including world-class beef, pork, and poultry industries, and given that many of these animals require round-the-clock care and assistance and given the concerns of the possibility of the need for self-isolation and other such measures, what is the advice for farmers and their workers on their farms in self-isolation, and how is the government planning to help them tend to their farms and maintain a labour supply?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I would encourage farmers to listen to Alberta's health specialists and to put their own health and safety first. Unfortunately, most models indicate that this pandemic will last all calving season and actually peak during spring seeding, and we want to make sure that – it was very important last night, actually, that we passed the budget so that the funds from this government will be able to go to farmers and to all Albertans combatting this pandemic.

Consumer Goods and Services Availability

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, over the past few days we've seen and heard stories of Albertans stocking up on groceries and other essential items. Most people are stocking up to ensure their family is prepared in case they need to self-isolate for 14 days. Some are stocking up to donate and help others, but we've also heard reports that others are attempting to unfairly profit from shortages. To the Minister of Service Alberta: can you please inform this House of any measures this government is taking with regard to this issue?

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

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for the question. Like all members here, I'm disappointed to hear stories of people taking advantage of COVID-19 to

personally profit. We're asking Albertans not to take advantage of this situation and of people's concerns over COVID-19 but instead to work together to ensure that Alberta and Albertans come out of this stronger together. While the Consumer Protection Act doesn't cover private sales like this, common sense and decency should, and we urge all Albertans to act with consideration and caution and to find ways to help support one another in this time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for that answer. Given that some Albertans have experienced ridiculous price markups across the province and given that in the wake of the COVID-19 health crisis people are already strained for money, to the same minister: what protections are in place for Albertans, and what can Albertans do when they identify unreasonable prices on necessities?

2:40

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Consumer Protection Act prevents suppliers from making excessive price increases with no reasonable explanation, so if Albertans have specific examples of stores or businesses that they believe have unnecessarily raised their prices for products and services in Alberta simply because of COVID-19, then they should report it through our Report a Rip-off phone line or our website. They can do that at 1.877.427.4088 or at alberta.ca. This is not a new regulation because of COVID-19. It has been the law in Alberta for many years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and once again thank you to the minister. Given that it appears as though it's only a small minority taking advantage of the current pandemic and given that the people of Alberta are strong, generous, and resilient and given that we have already seen and heard amazing acts of charity and kindness, can the minister please provide examples of unique solutions that might deliver additional aid for our seniors and our most vulnerable here in the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank and commend all Albertans who are stepping out to help one another in this challenging time. Some Albertans are stepping up on Facebook, like the Airdrie helping neighbours or the Strathcona County COVID-19 Support pages, where people are writing in with requests for or offers to supply assistance. I've seen a poster for Crescent Heights community in Calgary that encourages helping each other out, and retailers like Sobeys Belmont in Edmonton are opening their doors early to provide a less busy and less stressful shopping experience for seniors, mobility impaired, and vulnerable populations. I want to commend all Albertans who are making a difference.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have one tabling this afternoon, the requisite six copies of a memorandum from the hon. Government House Leader regarding the extension of sitting times. It states:

Please accept this memo as notice required pursuant to Government Motion 10, agreed to on March 17, 2020, that the public interest requires the Assembly to sit beyond the normal adjournment hour on Thursday, March 19, 2020.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Minister LaGrange, Minister of Education, pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, the Education Annual Report Update 2018-19.

The Speaker: I see the hon. Government House Leader rising. We're not at Orders of the Day yet.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Oh, sorry. I was excited.

The Speaker: I also am excited because, hon. members, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: The hon. Government of Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to just do two simple things and then move for consent of the Assembly. The first is this. Pursuant to Standing Order 3(1.2) I wish to advise the Assembly that there shall be no morning sitting tomorrow, Thursday, March 19, 2020. Pursuant to Government Motion 11 I wish to advise the Assembly that there shall be no evening sitting tonight.

With that said, I rise to ask for unanimous consent of the Assembly to temporarily recess the Assembly until 4 o'clock this afternoon.

[Unanimous consent granted]

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:44 p.m. to 4 p.m.]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

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

[Adjourned debate March 5: Mr. Jason Nixon]

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is enduring its most serious and disruptive public health emergency in over a century. COVID-19 is a global pandemic crisis. As I rise, more than 200,000 people around the world have been infected with this disease, and more than 8,000 have lost their lives. In Alberta some 15,000 people have been tested. As of now, more than 119 cases of novel coronavirus infection have been confirmed, an addition of 22 cases since yesterday. Fortunately, we have not suffered loss of life to this disease, and while we hope for the best, the velocity and nature of this pandemic mean that Albertans will not be immune. We will experience fatalities.

That is why we are taking increasingly stringent measures to slow the spread of this virus. It is why we declared a public health emergency yesterday, to ensure that our health care system has the tools to cope with the peak of the viral curve, which we expect about four weeks from now. It is why this Legislature authorized an additional appropriation of \$500 billion in the budget last night to ensure funding for Alberta Health Services as our world-class medical professionals fight this disease. Let there be no doubt, we will spare no expense – no expense – in fighting COVID-19, and we will win that fight. We will do everything within our power to

limit the spread of this disease and to maximize the capacity of our health system to cope with the top of the curve of infections.

I can assure Albertans that our medical professionals believe that with the measures taken to date and efforts to maximize the capacity of our health system, we will be able to care for those who are infected and to get through this with as little in terms of fatalities as possible, Mr. Speaker. Other jurisdictions around the world have seen their health systems overwhelmed, and we are doing everything in Alberta to prevent that from occurring here.

Mr. Speaker, that is why we have taken increasingly stringent social distancing measures such as the decision to suspend classes, to close recreation facilities and bars, casinos, gyms, children's play areas, to limit service at restaurants, and to ban organized events of over 50 people. This includes weddings, funerals, and religious gatherings. It is also why we have invoked a public health emergency, to ensure that we have the powers that we need to ensure the protection of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, none of these are easy decisions to make. Behind a decision to close every business lies lost jobs and lost dreams. I understand, I am sure we all understand the profound anxiety of everyone who has been affected. They're wondering how they'll pay the bills. Small-business owners wonder whether they'll ever be able to reopen. At the same time, tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of Albertans have done the right thing and stayed at home in self-isolation because they feel unwell or they've recently travelled abroad. From elementary school kids, whose routines have just been upended, to the self-employed, who have no safety net, to entrepreneurs who fear losing their life's savings, to seniors who feel particularly vulnerable or isolated, there is fear and anxiety.

Mr. Speaker, we need all of those Albertans who feel such fear and anxiety to know that they are not alone. In facing this unprecedented challenge, we have each other, we have strong institutions, we have a culture of caring and of resilience, we have a world-class health care system, one of the best funded on Earth, and together we will get through this.

Mr. Speaker, for those who may be feeling depressed, I encourage them to reach out to friends or family, to social service organizations. Mental health support is available, and one way of accessing it is by calling the Alberta Health Services' mental health support line at 1.877.303.2642.

Mr. Speaker, at the height of the Blitz, when the Luftwaffe was bombing the cities of England in 1940, when it looked like all was going to be lost in the great struggle for civilization, the British government prepared signs, that it had distributed and displayed on every street corner and lamp post, that said: Keep Calm and Carry On. While people are right to feel great anxiety, we encourage Albertans to have confidence in the strength of our institutions and in one another, to keep calm and to carry on.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, this public health crisis has been matched by economic challenges of, I believe, an increasingly unprecedented nature. We know that the coronavirus has caused a collapse in global demand and the onset of a world-wide recession. It is hard for us right now to grasp the potential depth of that recession. I do not offer these views to discourage people. I think it is our collective responsibility as leaders to offer a sense of solidarity, confidence, and hope, but it must be predicated on realism. Today major financial institutions are projecting that the American economy is likely to experience a contraction of as much as 14 per cent in the second quarter of this year and 30 per cent in Europe. Canada will not be immune.

Indeed, Alberta is likely to be at least as badly affected because of, obviously, the important presence of the energy industry in our economy, which is now being hit by an unprecedented decline in

energy prices after five years of economic fragility. At the end of trading today, the benchmark energy price for Alberta, WTI, was trading at \$21, and western Canadian select oil was trading at \$9. I just received a projection from a major financial institution that the average price for Brent oil in the second quarter of this year may be as low as \$5.

We have never experienced anything like this in the history of our energy industry. When layered on top of a massive global contraction in demand and layered on top of five years of economic and social fragility, Mr. Speaker, we are facing a period of profound adversity. That is why this government will join other governments across Canada in doing everything within our power to protect people: first of all, to protect the health of people; secondly, to protect the financial security of people; and, thirdly, to protect our broader economy.

But, Mr. Speaker, we must begin to prepare ourselves for a time of adversity unlike any we have seen since the 1930s in this province. Happily, we enter this time of adversity as a much wealthier society. We enter this time of adversity with the youngest and best educated population in Canada. We enter this time of adversity with a province that leads the world in so many ways, and we enter this time of adversity with a determination to get through it together and to emerge stronger than ever.

Today the government of Canada announced a number of measures, which we appreciated, I believe totalling some \$27 billion, a fiscal action, much of it concentrated on income support through a significant expansion of the employment insurance system. This morning I spoke to Deputy Prime Minister Freeland and on behalf of Albertans thanked the government of Canada for those measures, on which we have worked with them. Albertans should understand, Mr. Speaker, that we have been significant net contributors to the employment insurance system for decades, and it is only right that we should be able to see some of our decades-long net contributions come back to help us at this time of need.

4:10

However, the government of Alberta must act in its own right, so today I will enumerate some of the initial measures, extraordinary financial and economic measures, that we will take to try to protect people from the effects of this disturbing and pending downturn.

First of all, as I mentioned last night, Mr. Speaker, this Assembly authorized a \$57 billion budget for the upcoming fiscal year, that gives us certainty that we will be able to deliver the critical public services that Albertans will need now more than ever, in addition to a \$500 million supplementary appropriation for the health care system, which we anticipate would be the beginning and not the end of additional resources to combat COVID-19.

Secondly, yesterday we announced \$60 million for municipalities and charitable and nonprofit organizations providing social services to support seniors and other vulnerable people who are affected by COVID-19. I can assure the House that my colleague the hon. the Minister of Community and Social Services in particular is working with our homeless shelters to ensure that they have the resources to protect vulnerable people from the potential spread of the disease.

The further actions that we announced today take assistance one step further for Albertans. Effective immediately, we will take a number of measures to help Albertans struggling financially. We will provide as a bridging mechanism \$50 million to Albertans who are currently self-isolating or will be self-isolating in the next two weeks because they meet the chief medical officer's published criteria before the federal payments for emergency support begin to flow later in April. This will be distributed in one payment, and Albertans will be able to apply online at alberta.ca next week. We

expect that funds will be deposited in bank accounts by the end of next week. The point here is to provide for the availability of cash as quickly as possible so that individuals are not forced to choose between doing the right thing for public health – staying at home in self-isolation if they feel ill or have recently come back from abroad – and working. Those Albertans need to understand that a payment of \$572 will be available to them through this emergency financial support.

The government will defer utility charges for residential, farm, and small commercial customers for the next 90 days and will ensure that no Albertans will be cut off from these services. I repeat: Albertans will have full protection from having to pay utility bills over the next three months. This will cover electricity and natural gas regardless of the service provider, and I have spoken to mayors to encourage them to match these measures with respect to water charges.

Like the federal government, Alberta will also implement a six-month interest-free moratorium on student loan payments for all individuals who are in the process of repaying these loans.

Similar to actions by Canada's six largest banks, we have worked with ATB Financial to ensure a relief program for customers affected by COVID-19. Personal banking customers can apply for a deferral on their ATB loans, their lines of credit, and their mortgages for up to six months. Small-business customers, in addition to payment deferrals on loans and lines of credit, will be provided access to additional working capital. For other businesses and agricultural customers ATB will work with customers on a one-to-one basis, and further solutions are being considered at this time.

Alberta credit union members will also have access to a variety of programs and solutions tailored to their specific situations. Both individuals and businesses are encouraged proactively to contact their credit union directly to work out a plan for their personal situation.

I want to thank, Mr. Speaker, the major national schedule 1 charter banks for having taken similar steps, announced just hours ago, to provide mortgage and personal loan relief as well as relief to small businesses in terms of their repayment schedules to reflect these extraordinary circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, on top of the immediate needs in our health system, this pandemic has also changed our day-to-day lives and our spending habits. We are also working diligently to put the right plans in place to ensure people will have access to jobs to come back to when this situation passes. Many businesses are concerned whether they will be able to reopen their doors after this public health crisis, so effective today we are suspending the collection of corporate income taxes and instalment payments until August 31, 2020, to match a measure announced by the government of Canada today. This will give Alberta businesses access to about 1 and a half billion dollars in funds to help them cope with this difficult situation. This is in addition to the decision of the government of Canada today, made in co-operation with the government of Alberta, to also defer the filing deadline for personal income taxes to help individuals seeking to cope to pay their bills now.

These measures will maximize the cash available to Alberta families and employers so that they can pay their employees, address other debts, and maintain operations. I'm grateful to all employers who are placing the safety of their people above profit. I encourage them, where they can, to provide paid leave to those who have had to take time for self-isolation. I also encourage them, wherever possible, to provide some support to individuals they've had to lay off in the interim period. The more employers who are able to maintain operations and continue to pay their staff, the greater the chance we have of keeping Albertans working and negating some of the damage of COVID-19 on our economy. In

these exceptional circumstances making sure businesses have the ability to stay in business is another way we are working to provide certainty to Albertans that we as a province can recover from this crisis.

Mr. Speaker, these measures are just the beginning. Our action plan will continue to roll out as the situation continues to change, and it is changing hour by hour. I can assure the House that the government will be announcing additional measures tomorrow, additional measures on Friday, and additional measures next week. I want to thank our public servants, some of whom have literally been working around the clock to help us design these programs and others that we will be announcing in the days to come.

But, Mr. Speaker, let me close in saying this. The challenges before us are enormous. They will require great resolve, yes, fast action but also patience. The period of economic adversity through which we will go is likely to last, at the very least, several months. At this point a government faced by some of these developments would likely launch an immediate countercyclical stimulus package. This government is preparing a very robust package to stimulate the Alberta economy, but to be blunt, the challenge that we face as Albertans' elected representatives is that much of our economy is moving into hibernation right now. There are very limited policy levers to stimulate an immediate increase in demand when, in fact, there's enormous momentum in the opposite direction.

So Alberta's government will in the immediate term focus on the immediate imperative of doing everything we can to keep cash in people's bank accounts to maintain the ability of households to pay their bills, to defer their bills wherever possible, and the ability of businesses to maintain at least basic operations. We are working closely with the Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Canada to maximize the use of the recently enhanced credit facilities, which includes \$10 billion of expanded federal backstop for distressed companies.

4:20

This morning I and the hon. the Minister of Energy spoke with the board of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, and in the last two days I and the ministers of Finance and Economic Development, Trade and Tourism have spoken with the leaders of most of the major industry and employer groups across the province to seek their input on what measures we can take to ensure a path forward in the challenging months ahead. We are prepared to do what it takes to offer a lifeline of hope for families and businesses who are and will be feeling extreme financial distress in the weeks and months to come. For example, we are reviewing every charge and fee assessed by the government of Alberta to see if that would constitute an impairment to the operation of businesses, employers in the months to come. We welcome suggestions from all corners, including the Official Opposition, on other areas through which we could provide concrete relief.

Mr. Speaker, tonight I will be joining our newly formed Economic Recovery Council, chaired by Dr. Jack Mintz, with representatives of a broad range of sectors of the Alberta economy, including the union movement and the social sector, to help us to begin to focus on the mid- to long-term recovery. Because, by necessity, the government is focused on managing multiple crises on an hour-by-hour and day-to-day basis, we need some of our brightest minds as Albertans, who are removed from daily crisis management, to think seriously and imaginatively about how best that we can recover after we get through the worst of the challenging months ahead.

We will act with the greatest possible speed, bluntly, to get money in people's pockets, to relieve them from the enormous

stress of bills and mortgage and utility payments, of taxes and other charges. We are developing what will likely be the most robust countercyclical stimulus package in the fiscal history of this province. We will work closely with other governments, both municipal and federal. We will depend increasingly on the great compassionate power of civil society, of our charitable, not-for-profit, and faith-based organizations, that will do so much, that already are doing so much to care for those who are in need right now.

Mr. Speaker, let me close, as I've often said, by reminding Albertans that the history of this province is often one of struggling and emerging, of overcoming adversity. Now more than ever we need to relearn those memories, to redevelop a sense of social solidarity across regional, demographic, political, and other lines. It is a time for us, to the greatest extent possible, to come together for one another. People need to know that the government of Alberta will stand behind them at this difficult time. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to be slightly less organized in responding to this as, in fact, I am responding to this. I want to begin by offering as well the appreciation of members of the Official Opposition, certainly, to the Premier for his comments and some of the announcements he's made today – and I will certainly touch on a few of those as we go through these – also to the federal government for the many forms of support that they announced today. I know that they are complex, and it takes some time to put those things together. So that is also helpful.

Finally, I'd like to join the Premier once again in offering our great thanks to members of the public service for their work on behalf of Albertans. We talked a lot, of course, about, you know, first responders and front-line folks with respect to health care and emergency response. Of course, it is worth also acknowledging those public servants who have been working on the public policy side of things to provide support to the Executive Council in terms of how they respond now and in the weeks and months to come because that, too, of course, is a very, very significant job.

Let me say as we start that, again, we'd like to offer our best wishes and our statement of concerns to all the folks in Alberta who have been diagnosed thus far with the virus as well as those who are awaiting test results and who are concerned about the health and safety of their family members. We know that this is a very, very challenging time for this province and, quite frankly, for this whole country. We know that there are many, many initiatives that the government needs to put into place.

Let me say that there were a number of things that the Premier identified that we were glad to hear about. Certainly, I mean, we aren't talking right now about the budget that was passed yesterday. As you know and when I spoke last night, we had a number of concerns about the blueprint that is embedded in that budget. I will say that it was good to hear the Premier say that they will do everything that is necessary to maximize the capacity of our health care system. I suspect that that, obviously, will mean that we will go well above and beyond the health care spending that was agreed to yesterday in the budget, because, certainly, we know that Albertans need to have all elements of our health care system there for them when they need it.

I'm also pleased to hear of several of the initiatives that the Premier has offered up. At the same time, we are still wondering – we have a few additional questions, I note. I'm very pleased to see the conversation about income support for Albertans between the time that they isolated or had to remove themselves from work and

the time that the federal government support kicks in. I noted there was a description of \$50 million. I noticed there was a description of I think it was \$532. I wasn't sure if that was per week or in total, so that is just a question that I offer. I'm not expecting anybody to get up and answer it, but just as I was listening, I know myself that that was a question that popped into my head. If I misheard, it would certainly be helpful at some point for someone on the Executive Council side to clarify for Albertans on that.

Also, I was very pleased to hear the Premier talk about providing full protection for Albertans in the matter of utilities, utility payments, utility services. As you know, that is something that we have been raising for some time. I might have missed it, and if so, my apologies for that. But, of course, as you know, one of the other things that we were very much wanting to see was some short-term statutory protection for Albertans from eviction, particularly in their rental arrangements. We are talking about deferrals for homeowners in terms of mortgage payments, which is excellent, but, you know, we have that group of people that also pay rent. Some of them will be at risk of eviction, and there is the capacity for the government to make that something that needs to not happen, both on a residential basis as well as on a commercial basis for those small businesses. Let me just say that if that is something that public officials say needs to be secured through legislation rather than regulation, we would be more than prepared to agree to accelerated efforts to get that particular piece of work in place. So that was good to hear.

4:30

I also see that there is talk of supporting small businesses and encouraging all businesses to pay their employees and to keep them on as much as they can. We saw the federal government offer a 10 per cent payroll relief program. One thing that we would urge this government to consider as they are looking at the further announcements that they'll be making tomorrow and the day after and in the days to come is a similar matching kind of proposal to support those businesses if they are able to make those decisions to support their employees and continue their receipt of income. We would certainly offer that as well.

There is no question that this is a phased process. As the Premier rightly says, you know, there is focus on ensuring that our health care system is properly resourced. I'm not convinced that we yet have the budgetary allocation that is necessary to ensure that that is the case, but we are going to take the Premier at his word that if officials are coming and saying that they need more, they are getting more, notwithstanding what we are seeing in the budget. I see the Premier nodding. That is good to know, and we look forward at some point to after the fact getting more information about that. That is certainly good to hear because we know that the pressure is very great there.

I understand, of course, as we have already discussed, that the second thing is to basically provide for immediate financial stability for Albertans, so the only piece that again we would urge the government to consider as they look at rolling out additional initiatives would be the matter of potentially topping up the financial support that we have seen the federal government roll out. I think we know that in many parts of this province \$1,800 a month is not going to be enough to sustain families over any kind of extended period of time even with mortgage deferral. It's a stretch, so I hope there will be some consideration in some cases at looking at needs-based options for a top-up. Nonetheless, we understand that that is the next piece that has to happen.

The final piece, as the Premier rightly said, is the issue of economic stimulation. We get that it's a difficult problem because the way, certainly, we would approach the issue of economic

stimulation is to put money into the hands of consumers and then encourage them to go out and do what they do best, which is stimulate the local economy, which they obviously can't do right now because we're telling them to stay home and stop stimulating the local economy. The standard strategies that are used with respect to economic stimulation are, at best, on hold, and we get that. It is a bit of a struggle, so as we try to grapple with how we sort of backstop these businesses until people get back to doing what they do, which is buying and selling widgets, you know, we have a struggle there. Going forward, certainly, we would be very interested in having the opportunity to contribute to what that forward-looking plan will be.

As I said last night and I will say again and as the Premier rightly said, I think that when we talk about Brent at \$5, I mean, that is jaw-dropping. We've said this on every side of the House for the last 40 years, that we must diversify our economy. If we didn't say it before and if we didn't mean it before, we must mean it now. When we talk about the economic stimulus package and the economic recovery package that people are going to be working on over the next two to six to 12 to 48 to a hundred months, we must very much focus on the issue of the capital of economic diversification. I hope that we will look to our postsecondary system as being one key place where we will be able to partner and really partner in a very robust way. It's obviously not the only place, but it is one place, so we're going to need to very much be focused on stimulus that allows us to do that.

You know, as has been rightly pointed out, the reality is that Alberta does come to this with some strengths, that not every economy and not every jurisdiction can reach to, can talk about. We do have the youngest population in the country, which is a privilege for anybody in public policy who's trying to think about how we can create the kind of activity that will pull us through this. It's also the best educated population. We need to keep it that way. We need to make sure that those folks want to stay here, and we need to make sure that that is how we would describe all those folks that live here. Whether we would describe them that way now, we should be able to describe them that way in the future.

We also, relatively speaking, have a good deal of wealth in this province, both amongst our citizens as well as fiscally in this province. Yes, we are going up against some very, very, very big challenges, but relative to other jurisdictions we have more to work with than many.

I believe and agree that we can get through this, but what we need to do is to be very open to hearing how these challenges are impacting Albertans economically, socially, individually. We need to be listening to concerns, unintended consequences, unintended challenges that we can't even imagine yet. We need to be very open to those. We need to focus on keeping Albertans safe right now. We need to focus on ensuring that those Albertans who continue to show up to work every day, whether in our health care system, whether in a room down the hall from Executive Council putting together policy proposals, whether in the remand centre, whether at child protection, whether in our school system and keeping in touch with students who have lost their social contacts and are in crisis –

there are so many different places that we can see the consequences. We need to make sure that those people are protected and that we are rethinking how they approach what they do, because right now, anyway, people are very fearful and anxious.

They're not fearful and anxious even about a lot of the things that we're talking about today. They're literally just fearful and anxious about their health and the health of their family members, the health of their children, the health of their parents. Many families are simply focused on getting their family collected together so that they're all in the same place and can weather it together. I don't know about other folks in this Legislature, but my family has gone through the process of pulling our kids back from school, trying to pull our in-laws back from other parts of the country. Albertans are experiencing that, I think, across this province.

That's where people are at, and we need to be there to respond to the concerns that they have because they will be great. When we raise those concerns, it's about ensuring that they are heard. It is not about other things; it's just about ensuring that they are heard. We will continue to do that.

I think there are a lot of very good steps that we've seen introduced today. We have a few questions. We have some ideas for some additional ones. I hope that those ideas will continue to be considered as the government moves forward. You know, this was going to be a debate about the budget. I don't think, really, that we should spend a lot of time on that because I think most people understand our view on the relevance of that document to the issues that we are facing today. There will probably be other times to discuss that should it become a critical barrier to the experience that Albertans are having at any level.

We just hope that we are able to continue to respond to Albertans and be there for them. Again, we encourage all Albertans to have each other's backs, to support each other, both online as well as from a socially distanced place. I do believe that a lot of the concern and anxiety that people are experiencing right now will be fine, and a few months from now we'll all be feeling more secure and on the way to mapping a path through this unprecedented struggle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move to adjourn debate.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn the Assembly till tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:42 p.m.]

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