



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 31, 2020

Day 12

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 31, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, I encourage all of you to use your very best singing voices as there are fewer of us than normal. It will be my pleasure for us to be led in the singing of our national anthem by the Minister of Children's Services, and I would invite you all to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

Statement by the Speaker

Legislative Assembly Response to COVID-19

The Speaker: Please be seated. Thank you, hon. members.

Before we commence our proceedings today, I'd like to note that the Assembly will be operating with reduced staff in certain areas of the Assembly during the pandemic. I'll be asking for some of your patience with any delays or deviations from the normal practice that may occur.

I would like to take this opportunity and say a very special thank you to those who are continuing to help serve our province and our Legislature as well as those who are helping Albertans on the front lines and, in particular today, those here in the building who are helping with the additional cleaning and ensuring as much as possible the safety of our Assembly. The Legislative Assembly Office has taken some additional steps that include additional hand sanitation stations, allowing for social distancing, and of course the chief medical officer allowing provisions for the Assembly to continue to sit.

In particular, as you'll see in the Chamber here today, members of the Legislative Assembly security service will be serving as our pages, but without a full complement of pages in the Chamber, we will no longer be accommodating the routine exchange of notes between members. Having said that, if you do have a requirement to communicate with the Speaker or the table, they still will be able to accommodate that.

Copies of bills and amendments will be provided only to members in attendance in the Chamber. Additional copies will be made available in the members' lounges and the lounge immediately behind the Speaker's dais. I'd like to thank all members in advance for their co-operation.

With that said, I understand it's possible that there is some agreement amongst the House. I would encourage social distancing here inside the Chamber, and that will require unanimous consent for any member to sit in any seat in the Chamber and speak from any spot in the Chamber as well as vote from any spot in the Chamber. So I wondered if there might be a member who would request unanimous consent for such a motion.

I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request unanimous consent of the Assembly that members may be able to sit, speak, and vote from any chair within the Assembly for today's sitting.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a statement to make.

Education-sector Layoffs

Ms Hoffman: Two weeks ago the Minister of Education promised that schools will be fully funded. She promised that despite the pandemic, quote, school authorities will receive their full allotment of funding for the 2019-2020 school year. Two days later she even stood in this House and praised education workers for stepping up as this time required. The same day she claimed that the safety and well-being of staff and students were "paramount" to her and her government. Then, without any warning, on a Saturday afternoon the minister announced via a press release and three tweets that at least 20,000 of the very same educational assistants, substitute teachers, bus drivers, and support staff she praised in the Legislature and whose safety and well-being she vowed were paramount would be laid off with zero warning. School boards were given next to no notice of the biggest single mass layoff in Alberta's history.

While students, parents, and staff scrambled to cope with the impact that her broken promise would have and sought answers to their very serious questions, the Minister of Education hid. She hid from the media seeking to ask why she had so cruelly and callously laid off at least 20,000 people on a Saturday afternoon. She hid from the Albertans hurt and confused by her decision who want to understand why she was so quick to go back on her word. She hid from the parents, teachers, and support staff who've been reaching out to me and my colleagues with fears, concerns, and questions.

I know the work that these staff do on a daily basis and the impact they have on the lives of their students and their families. It is reprehensible for this minister and government to lay off these people and then refuse to answer the many serious questions or even address the impacts that those cuts and layoffs will cause. The minister's job is to fight for students and the staff who serve them. If she is unable or unwilling to do her job, she needs to step aside and let someone new actually stand up and put children first.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

COVID-19 Community Response

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no doubt about it. These are challenging times, but in these challenges the willingness of people to support one another truly shines through. In the midst of empty supermarket shelves, class cancellations, public facility closures, and a constant news cycle, it can be hard to find positive stories from the COVID-19 outbreak. On Friday Dr. Deena Hinshaw

asked Albertans on Twitter to share acts of kindness that they have seen and experienced in their own communities using the hashtag #albertacares.

The responses that flooded in were nothing short of inspirational. I'd like to share some of these encouraging stories, examples of Albertans coming together while maintaining a physical distance to support their neighbours and loved ones in this period of uncertainty and isolation. Communities province-wide have been co-ordinating in their own ways to spread happiness to their neighbours. Many families are using the good weather to spend time out on their driveways and decorate the sidewalks with colourful encouraging messages for passersby. Others are putting up signs and art in their windows to cheer on the workers at the front lines of the fight against COVID-19. There are also stories of neighbours and friends dropping off care packages for people in self-isolation, seniors, and those with compromised immune systems. These small gestures are doing wonders to ease stress in this difficult situation.

Closed restaurants and bars are donating their perishable inventory to soup kitchens and homeless shelters, ensuring that food will get to those who need it the most. Countless distilleries are manufacturing alcohol-based cleaners for their communities, meeting a critical demand for these products. In my constituency of Grande Prairie the Grande Prairie Boys' Choir found a way to virtually come together and record a beautiful song of blessing over our city, which has been shared repeatedly on Facebook.

Mr. Speaker, I've always known that Albertans are generous people, and I'd like to thank them for their kindness as we encounter some of our province's most challenging days.

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

1:40 COVID-19 Community Response

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to take the time to thank everyone working hard to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

To all those health care workers on the front lines fighting this disease now more than ever: we can't thank you enough, and we commend your dedication to our health.

To businesses: thank you for going above and beyond to support all Albertans and complying with the requirements set by our government in these challenging times.

To the truckers who are keeping food and supplies on the shelves: thank you for keeping us full and safe.

To all the Albertans in isolation: thank you for taking these steps to protect our communities. I know that it is not easy being at home for two weeks, but the actions you are taking now will reduce the risk to others and save lives in the weeks and months to come.

To those checking in and helping those who are most vulnerable: thank you. Without your thoughtfulness and community spirit some people may not have had the chance to be prepared for the weeks to come.

I think of the amazing birthday party parade that took place in Fort McMurray this weekend to celebrate the ninth birthday of Jax. More than 40 vehicles passed by his home, honking their horns, some with balloons and signs, many playing music, and some even singing *Happy Birthday* as he watched with his family from a safe distance. I hear that there have been parades just like this one happening all across our great province, showing that we are able to stay together while still being far apart.

We as Albertans need to keep working hard to stop the spread of this virus. We also need to be checking in on our friends, family, and the vulnerable while respecting social distancing, washing our hands, and practising good hygiene in general. Albertans are tough

and resilient. Every time we were presented with hard times, we have gotten through it, and this will be no exception. In these extraordinary times please act with extraordinary kindness.

Health Minister

Mr. Shepherd: The Member for Calgary-Acadia must be removed from his appointment as Minister of Health. We don't come to this call lightly. To remove a Minister of Health in the midst of a pandemic is a serious matter, but his conduct has shown Albertans that he clearly lacks the judgment and the temperament to lead Alberta's health care system during its most brutal test in our province's history. He tore up Alberta's contract with doctors despite clear warnings of the chaos it would cause. Now clinics are closing, doctors are leaving, and patients are stranded without care. The letters from doctors and patients are pouring in from dozens to hundreds and now thousands. I know that many of the members opposite read them, but it seems the Member for Calgary-Acadia does not.

Then the coronavirus arrived. It took 12 days after the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Alberta before this member showed any willingness to slow his attack on doctors. In the most crucial early hours of fighting the spread of the coronavirus, Alberta doctors had to spend almost two weeks fighting their own government, yet many of that member's attacks continue today.

Yesterday more than 850 doctors signed a letter begging him to at least set his attacks aside until the danger of this pandemic has passed. And in the midst of all of this the member arrived unannounced at a doctor's home at night, Dr. Zaidi, a front-line health care professional, who did not threaten this member or his wife, yet the member yelled at that doctor in his driveway, in front of his wife and children and neighbours. If a private-sector executive had displayed such incompetent, irresponsible, and dangerous behaviour, he would have been sacked the next day.

Mr. Speaker, the coronavirus has killed eight Albertans and sickened hundreds more. We need a Health minister who can inspire the greatest-ever level of performance from doctors and nurses through the hardest time ever in their careers. We need a Health minister who is not distracted by his wife's business or his own uncontrollable temper tantrums. I sincerely hope that someone on that side of the House is capable of taking up that challenge because Albertans can see that, without a doubt, the Member for Calgary-Acadia is not up to the task.

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

Economic Recovery

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province, this country, and the world are experiencing an unprecedented global emergency. The outpouring of support from individuals, groups, and businesses in our local communities to help those in need speaks to the courage and resolve of Albertans and Canadians alike. We will get through this trying time together with grit, determination, and the resiliency of our citizens. We will emerge stronger, and when we do, people will require a plan for municipal, provincial, and federal governments acting in harmony and with purpose to stimulate the economy and generate opportunity. Rebuilding will be difficult if we delay or allow ideology to stifle economic recovery. Differences need to be put behind us to get Canadians back to work, building the infrastructure this country needs to lead us out of the crisis.

The energy sector is our country's number one exporter and is a primary contributor to Canada's prosperity. Mr. Speaker, it is time we built those pipelines. If we want to lead the world in economic

recovery and showcase the heart of Canada's sustainable and ethical resource industries, then it is time to take off the shackles placed on Alberta's economy and release the entrepreneurial spirit that lives in Alberta. Let's move TMX, line 3, and Keystone XL into high gear to create thousands of jobs. If we want recovery, we cannot chase away investment with taxes and regulatory hurdles burdening commercial growth.

Mr. Speaker, this is a unique time in world history. We have an opportunity to show the world Canada's mettle, and we have an obligation to our citizens to do everything possible to protect and serve their well-being. Albertans will be ready to support Canada, so let's move forward, unified in our resurgence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

COVID-19 Response

Ms Renaud: To every Albertan choosing to listen to medical professionals and scientists by staying home to save lives: thank you.

To every student in Alberta who is missing school and friends and sports and graduations, staying home to save lives: thank you.

To every parent who works every day to create a safe learning environment for their children while managing their own stress and anxiety: thank you.

To doctors, nurses, first responders, and support staff who put their personal safety on the line to keep us safe and alive in the face of a global health emergency while knowing their own government does not have their backs: I am eternally grateful and commit to fighting for you in this place.

To every Albertan who sets their anxiety and fear aside to show up for work so we can access essential services: I thank you for your courage, and I applaud you for the hard work that you've always done, only we didn't notice how vital it was.

To the social service front-line support workers and organizations: I thank you for your lifetime of service to those of us who are poor, homeless, isolated, sick, and afraid.

To every Albertan who is in a financial position to help others by donating much-needed resources to front-line supports like food banks: thank you.

I want every Albertan who has taken the time to write, call, message, post to know that I and my colleagues hear you and will do everything we can to amplify your voice and request for assistance. Once we emerge from this, we will begin the process of rebuilding and examining our priorities and our responses to these extraordinary challenges we are facing now. All of us in this Chamber will be held to account by the people of Alberta.

Support for Persons Affected by COVID-19

Mr. Loewen: During this period of rapid change and isolation I want all Albertans to know that they are not alone. No one should have to choose between doing the right thing by self-isolating and having to work to make necessary income. We know it's impossible to make everyone perfectly whole for their losses related to COVID-19, but our goal is to alleviate many hardships facing Albertans and make sure we are in a position to make a strong recovery once the crisis level drops.

The effects of COVID-19 on not only the Alberta economy but the world economy will be enormous. Each time we reduce Albertans' ability to work and move around freely, there is a cost to the economy that is felt by families. These decisions are not taken lightly. That's why we are continually coming up with programs and plans to help Albertans through these tough times.

As a society we must work together to not only fight the spread of COVID-19 but also tackle the economic effects.

Our government has announced immediate actions that will provide much-needed financial support to Albertans. Albertans who meet the Alberta Health Services requirement for self-isolation will be able to apply for emergency isolation support. This funding will provide those forced to self-isolate without other income to receive \$573 weekly for two weeks, with funding reaching bank accounts in days.

In addition, student loan payments will have a six-month interest-free moratorium for all those repaying them. This will ensure that Albertans with student loans do not have to worry about financial stability in these uncertain times.

We are deferring utility costs on natural gas and electricity for Albertans, farms, and local businesses for 90 days. This means that no residence, small business, or farm will be cut off from their electricity or heat in the next three months. This is critical for people in central Peace who are already isolated from many services. To cut utilities would be unbearable to businesses, homes, and families.

We are also suspending corporate income tax collections until August 31, allowing businesses to have additional dollars available to help continue operations.

Our focus is on making sure Albertans have cash in their pockets, businesses can maintain basic operations, and households can pay or defer their bills. Alberta has a long history of overcoming adversity, and as we face this health crisis, unlike anything seen in over a century, it is our duty as legislators to ensure that no one is left behind.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Allow me to begin by offering our condolences on behalf of the Official Opposition to the families of all Albertans we've lost to COVID-19.

Education-sector Layoffs

Ms Notley: Twenty thousand educational assistants: the biggest single day of layoffs in the history of Alberta, and this government did it by news release, by tweet on a Saturday afternoon. This Premier and his minister didn't even have the courage to stand up and be accountable. To the Premier: why is your minister breaking promises to vulnerable children, who are anxious, stuck at home, and just trying to keep up?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, this decision was not made lightly. No decision regarding valuable workers is. This is just as true in the public sector as it is in the private sector. Governments of all levels, including the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, are making difficult decisions. The unfortunate reality is that in-person classes, not occurring during COVID-19, and at-home learning options do not use the same levels of staffing and resources that they did. I want to stress that this is a temporary measure only.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government couldn't actually be more out of touch with what's actually happening. Adjusting to online learning is a monumental task for a child with disabilities. That's why we had and have EAs developing specialized home programs for these kids. They're working every day to provide routine and support and to ensure that these kids don't fall behind. Meanwhile, the Finance minister and apparently the Education minister go on to say that they're just not a big enough priority. Parents know they're wrong, and they

feel betrayed. Premier, will you do the right thing and reverse this short-sighted and cruel decision?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, my daughter is an educational assistant. I understand how hard they work day in, day out. This is not an easy decision to make. We are in unprecedented times, and both governments and businesses are making difficult decisions to cope with COVID-19. This pandemic has changed how our education system functions, and like the private sector we are still adapting to this new reality. I value the role everyone plays in our education system. This is a temporary measure that will be reversed when classes resume.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, today they found \$1.6 billion, but they couldn't find \$120 million for 20,000 people helping disabled kids across this province. You know, this government keeping a promise is an exception to the rule, but when we look closer at who suffers from their broken promises, it always seems to be children and, in particular, special-needs children. They've already slashed PUF, they've already cut GRIT, and now they're firing 20,000 EAs. To the Premier. At a time like this these young people need more support, not less. Will you please reverse these horrible, cruel cuts?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, as a former trustee and board chair I want to stress that this decision was not easily made. Both the public and private sectors are having to make tough decisions as they manage this pandemic. With our transition to at-home learning, the resources and staffing required by our schools have temporarily changed. This is a temporary measure. I want to assure everyone who is affected that once classes resume, regular funding will be restored.

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

Health Minister

Ms Notley: She didn't answer a single question. You know, it is actually hard to believe, Mr. Speaker, because the Education minister is only the second-biggest failure on this front bench.

Never in my many years in this House have I heard of behaviour like that which we saw from the Minister of Health, a Minister of Health, who is supposed to be overseeing a pandemic, threatening a doctor. Can the Premier please explain to this House why it's acceptable for anybody on that front bench to go to a person's private residence, a person over whom he has ministerial authority, walk up their driveway, scream at them, threaten them with the power of his office, and intimidate their family in front of the whole neighbourhood?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has already addressed this issue, as has the hon. Minister of Health. But this is the problem. COVID-19 is a significantly serious issue inside this province right now, but the NDP can't help themselves. They have to continue to play partisan politics. It is outrageous how the Minister of Health's wife was treated in the last few weeks. Every member of this House should condemn that type of behaviour, and going forward, all members of this House should be united, working to be able to help the Minister of Health and his officials be able to overcome the COVID-19 crisis. Park the politics. Let's get this job done.

Ms Notley: When politics becomes intimidation, it's a much more serious thing, Mr. Speaker. Doctors make house calls, not ministers. This doctor is an epidemiologist on the front lines of fighting

COVID-19. In no way, shape, or form did he threaten the minister's wife. Rather, he commented on the questionable judgment of the minister, as is his right in a free and democratic society. Now his family is scared for their safety. Why will this minister not resign? Or, better yet, why will the Premier not do the right thing and ask him to leave?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, an unprecedented health crisis happening in this province, and that's the second main question from the Leader of the Official Opposition? Shame on her. We have a serious issue in this province with COVID-19 and a serious economic issue that is developing that will have implications for decades to come on Albertans. This House needs to be united. We need to work very hard. I'm proud of the work that the hon. Health minister is doing and his department as they combat COVID-19. This side of the House is going to continue to stand with him and his officials, and we're going to get this job done on behalf of Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is right about one thing. We are in the middle of a historic pandemic, and there is no room for error. The people working for Alberta Health do need strong leadership, focused leadership, steady leadership, but the Member for Calgary-Acadia's actions have demonstrated that he provides neither. Albertans deserve a Premier who will stand up to protect them, who will put Albertans first, not his own cabinet ministers. So why won't the Premier replace the Member for Calgary-Acadia with someone who actually has the backs of Albertans and front-line responders?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, Albertans do have a Premier that has their back. He's working day and night with his officials, with his cabinet, and with the Official Opposition to combat COVID-19 and to also put the province on the footing such that we can be able to overcome the serious economic concerns that we have coming our way. Contrast that to how the Leader of the Official Opposition is acting inside this Chamber today. It's quite shocking. Let me be clear. We have the utmost faith in the hon. Health minister and his officials. We stand behind him one hundred per cent. We're going to overcome this pandemic all across Alberta despite the opposition, it appears.

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

Physician Funding Framework

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we need a leader who is focused on the health and safety of Albertans. Instead, the Member for Calgary-Acadia is focused on his own personal vendettas. It's not about this one doctor; this has been building for months. Eight hundred doctors wrote a letter pleading with this Premier to stop calling them overpaid, start respecting their profession, and pause the big changes to their clinics. We are in the middle of a pandemic. Why is this Premier letting the Member for Calgary-Acadia continue his fight with doctors in the middle of a public health crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government will provide whatever resources are needed to protect Albertans in the middle of this pandemic. Spending on physicians has not been cut. In fact, we fully expect it to be significantly increased this year. We were planning to maintain spending at \$5.4 billion, the highest level ever. Now with unlimited virtual visits paid at the same rates as office visits, we expect to spend significantly more. That's what

physicians asked for, to support them and their patients. We agreed, regardless of budget.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve honesty. Based on the announcements made yesterday, we are hearing that some doctors will lose up to 30 per cent in their pay. “We are essential responders that cannot be replaced . . . Doctors cannot afford any distractions during this time where we are counted on to perform to the best of our capabilities.” The letter says that more than 400 community clinics across Alberta are laying off staff or considering closure. Why is this Premier letting the Member for Calgary-Acadia force changes that mean fewer doctors to help us respond to COVID-19?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

2:00

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that physicians are facing unprecedented demands due to this pandemic, and we’re taking action to support them. We’ve added unlimited virtual visits and cancelled or suspended the two largest changes that were planned before the pandemic. Apart from the pandemic we’re making some smaller, common-sense changes to align our payments with other provinces. We’re in discussion with the AMA on a continual basis, both formally and informally. I spent almost three hours on Friday with the president of the Alberta Medical Association, Dr. Molnar. We continue to meet with them, continue to get their feedback on how we can make sure we can all work together in the best interest of patients.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that phone conversation with the Member for Calgary-Acadia has now resulted in the doctors going to courts and letters being signed suggesting that they’re losing significant amounts of income: “Now is not the time to restructure the system . . . COVID-19 is spreading like a wildfire in this province. We are a strong and trusted team who require necessary resources to help us put out this fire.” They are begging the Member for Calgary-Acadia to stop negotiating the price of water and let them focus on putting the fire out. Premier, why are you choosing the Member for Calgary-Acadia over the thousands of doctors who are protecting the people?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we are going to spend significantly more on our physicians, and we’re going to make sure, even after the pandemic, that physicians in this province, with a new funding framework, are going to be among the highest paid physicians in the country. We’re going to continue to listen to the AMA, the Alberta Medical Association, and work with them, give them a forum so they can always have an opportunity to be able to work with my office or the ministry, to give their feedback and work with us. Either through the advisory committee that we’ve established for them to be able to go to or even on an informal basis, they continue to get their feedback and understand how we can work with them in the best interests of patients.

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

Income Support for Persons Affected by COVID-19

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are hurting right now due to the double shock our province is facing from COVID-19 and the drop in the price of oil. This government promised Albertans that they would provide bridge support until federal programs kicked in, and they promised that no Albertan

would fall through the cracks. This simply isn’t true. The provincial program only applies to very narrow criteria of those who have been directed to self-isolate or are caring for someone who must self-isolate. What is this government doing to fulfill their promise and support those who do not qualify for emergency isolation support?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Applications are being processed, and money is being quickly distributed. As of Friday we had successfully processed 17,000 applications, and then as of earlier today we’d processed more than 43,000 applications. That’s a 152 per cent increase in just a few days. The purpose of this program was to bridge the short period until federal funding was made available. Now, the government of Canada announced that the Canada emergency response benefit will be available shortly, and that will be retroactive to March 15. We’re getting money into the hands of Albertans to . . .

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thousands have lost their jobs over the past few weeks, including over 20,000 that the government announced they were laying off this weekend. Through no fault of their own, these people are out of work, desperately need support from their government. The website to apply for isolation benefit has been down over and over and over, and there have been at times 30,000 people waiting online to access the isolation benefit. What is the government doing to rectify this issue, and will these people get the support they need and deserve? They certainly deserve better than this.

Mr. Copping: We appreciate that there have been challenges getting onto the website. As the hon. member knows, this program was announced two weeks ago. Last week we stood up the website. But we have already processed, as indicated, 43,000 Albertans to help get money into their hands, to help stop the spread of COVID-19. This was designed as a temporary measure so that Albertans didn’t have to make a choice about: go to work, or stay home and help stop the spread. Now, again, federal supports will be available shortly, and we encourage Albertans to apply for the Canada emergency response benefit, which will be retroactive to March 15.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be very clear, this government promised a bridge to the federal programs. Albertans who lost their jobs because of economic slowdown, parents not working because they’re taking care of kids, people who’ve lost hours but are still technically employed: all of these people qualify under the federal emergency response benefit. This government said that their support would bridge to that support. They promised that no one would fall through the cracks. Will the government keep their promise to Albertans, update their program criteria to match the federal program, and be that bridge?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has put in numerous measures to support Albertans. This program, the emergency isolation support benefit, was focused on individuals who were required to self-isolate under the directions of the chief medical officer. We wanted to ensure that they didn’t have to make the choice to go to work or stay home, and we wanted them to stay home to help prevent the spread. We’ve put money into their hands

to be able to stop that. Other measures we've put in place – rental protections, utility bill deferral, student loan payment deferral – help that, and the federal program, which applies across the country, is consistent and will be in place soon and retroactive to March 15.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question.

Kindergarten to Grade 12 Class Cancellation

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thousands of Alberta students are currently at home after classes were cancelled. This includes students across my riding, from Crowsnest Pass to High River. The uncertainty of the COVID-19 outbreak is causing stress for everyone, including our children. As our daily lives are forced to change, creating some consistency and routine is essential to supporting students at this time. To the Minister of Education: what guidelines have been given to school boards to continue teaching students while in-person classes have been cancelled?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Ensuring our students continue to receive teacher-directed learning is a priority for our government. School authorities will offer all K to 12 students at-home learning opportunities either through online means or other accommodations such as the provision of course packages and telephone check-ins. Content covered will vary depending on the grade level of the student, but every student will receive final grades.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that many high school students were expecting to graduate this year and given that cancellation of classes has created stress for these students and that their grades are required for postsecondary studies and given that the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak has required that provincial diploma exams be cancelled for this year, to the same minister: what guidelines are in place to permit eligible students to graduate from high school this spring?

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, my department has worked with postsecondary institutions to ensure that the cancellation of provincial diploma exams will not prohibit admission to postsecondary studies. High school students will continue to receive teacher-directed learning in specified and core courses required to graduate from high school. Any student on track to receive 100 or more credits will still be eligible to graduate this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many parents and guardians are currently staying at home in light of the COVID-19 outbreak and given that students will now continue to have some school work for the remainder of the school year and given that many families have been looking for additional information on how to support their children's learning while they're at home, again to the Minister of Education: what other resources are available to parents and guardians to assist their students in continuing their learning from home?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. We understand that parents may want to supplement student learning by providing their children with additional resources. LearnAlberta.ca offers more than 4,000 digital resources that are aligned with Alberta's curriculum. Parents and students can find more resources online at alberta.ca/covid19 under the Info for Schools section.

Education-sector Layoffs

(continued)

Ms Hoffman: On Saturday the Minister of Education decided to announce more than 20,000 layoffs via tweet. Kids who rely on their educational assistants for stability and grounding were heartbroken to learn that their dedicated support workers weren't going to be able to help them through their learning during this pandemic. Will the Minister of Education tell Alberta families why she said that she would fund education at the rate it was in the budget on March 15 and then broke her word on March 28, leaving so many kids in her wake?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, these are unprecedented times, and the decision that we made was not taken lightly. We value the workers, all of our workers. Governments at all levels, including Edmonton city and Calgary city, are having to make these difficult decisions. It's unfortunate that in-person classes had to be cancelled, but we know that once they resume, we will be calling all our workers back.

2:10

Ms Hoffman: Given that hundreds of parents have reached out to me in extreme distress, Minister, given that one mother said that she couldn't bear to tell her son the news because over the last two weeks he's been so isolated and so devastated, given that she promised her son that his EA would call him every single day – that was the plan; that was a plan based on the minister's word – and given that the minister has forced this mom in turn to lie to her son, how can she possibly stand in this place and say that she's putting kids first?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure parents that program unit funding, PUF, will continue to flow to school authorities, that teachers and other staff, including speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, mental health workers, physiotherapists, and PUF EAs, will continue to provide specialized supports and services for our students. These are unprecedented times, and our government is still actively working to manage the COVID-19 crisis. As soon as it's safe to do so, in-school classes will ...

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: He's in grade 5. Nothing the minister said applies to that kid, and she made that mom lie to her son. This is unconscionable, Mr. Speaker. Given that the school nutrition program – the only good-news story that minister shared in this House was about a bus driver delivering food hampers to families experiencing food insecurity. Given that the minister took to Twitter to fire that school bus driver and all school bus drivers across the province this weekend and given that the minister has caused so much harm to staff, students, and so many more, will she or will she not commit to an emergency debate this afternoon on her cold and heartless decision and, if not, at least tell us why not?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the nutrition of our students is of the highest importance. School authorities have the flexibility to either continue administering their own nutrition programs or to provide funding to local not-for-profits, ensuring that kids do not go hungry. No decision regarding valuable workers is taken lightly. These temporary – and I stress “temporary” – measures will aid in our fight against COVID-19, and we thank everyone for their efforts to help stop the spread in these unprecedented times.

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

COVID-19 and Seniors' Housing

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, yesterday was a difficult day. I, too, want to pay my condolences to the five Albertans who lost their lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that seniors' housing administrators are doing everything they can by taking necessary steps to protect vulnerable seniors in facilities such as long-term care and seniors' lodges. But we've heard that some facilities only have skeleton staff and are needing to recruit and train new people. To the Minister of Health: will you commit to 20 per cent surge funding for six months to seniors' housing providers to prevent and combat the spread of COVID-19?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS as well as our colleges are working hard to make sure we have the workforce capacity throughout the system, including in continuing care, to make sure that we are fast-tracking, for example, any nursing students who might be able to help us on the front lines and as well providing a register so that anybody who might have recently retired can be able to come back in an expedited way. Through AHS we can know where to deploy some of those resources in an expedited way to make sure that patients are going to get the treatment that they need.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that the number of COVID-19 cases at seniors' housing facilities continues to grow, like at McKenzie Towne in Calgary, where 36 residents and five staff members have tested positive for COVID-19 – and we just found out that another resident died yesterday – and given that families are saying that they're feeling helpless and that in another case the relatives said that they didn't know their mother was in isolation until they saw on FaceTime a worker walk into the room behind her in full protective gear, to the minister: what specific protocols are in place to ensure that family members are notified when seniors are self-isolating, and how do we ensure that the additional support that families provide is able to continue?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The communication is through AHS as well as some of the guides that we've been publishing for those who operate in the continuing care space to be able to help the patients and their families understand what is happening, everything from the essential visitor recommendation, an order from Dr. Deena Hinshaw, the chief medical officer of health, as well for loved ones, when they come and visit, to understand, not just when they do come and visit but, as the member said, so they're aware of, when they're not visiting their loved one, what's happening with the loved one.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that there's a very real fear among elderly residents of seniors' homes about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and given that one of the biggest concerns identified by families and seniors' groups is staffing and personal protective equipment for workers, again to the minister: how are we ensuring that the administrators and public health officials have the tools and flexibility they need to deploy staff when and where they are needed, and why won't you just commit whatever dollars are necessary to keep Albertans safe and their families informed?

Mr. Shandro: Well, I have said many times, Mr. Speaker – I'm happy to say it again – that budget will not be a consideration for us when we respond to this pandemic. We are going to make sure that AHS and our health system have the resources that they need. It is not going to be a matter of dollar amount for us. We're going to make sure that our front lines have those resources that they need. We do believe that through AHS's procurement processes we have an enormous amount of PPEs to make sure that our front-line workers and as well those throughout the health system are going to have the PPEs that they need.

Keystone XL Pipeline Project

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, as a farmer I understand how a reliable transportation network is critical for the long-term success of our agricultural industry. Our oil and gas producers also require a transportation network they can be confident will be there when they need it. This morning our UCP government announced a deal to begin construction with TC Energy's Keystone XL pipeline. To the Minister of Energy: what is the projected outcome of this pipeline for our economy both in job growth and in potential revenue to be gained?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. The KXL project was first filed in 2009, and it has been bogged down in the regulatory process and uncertainty for over a decade. What today's historic announcement will enable is that it will enable the pipeline to start construction. We expect that that will create over 7,000 direct and indirect jobs here in Alberta. It will also provide up to \$30 billion in royalty revenues for this province. This is a much-needed project at a never more important time in our history.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that this pipeline will come a long way in ensuring that Alberta oil can be shipped out to international markets and given that our province has a history of responsible and ethical development of our energy resources, to the same minister: how important has securing this pipeline been in our mission to become the foremost producer of clean and ethical oil around the globe?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you for the question, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada and Alberta have the third-largest reserves of oil in the entire world, and this oil is from a democratic, responsible country. Let me remind you that here in Alberta we produce the best oil in the world. We price carbon, we protect civil liberties, and we

actually regulate our industry higher than anywhere else on the planet.

Mr. Speaker, the demand for oil in the world will grow as we get out of this COVID crisis. It will grow, and Canada and Alberta need to be positioned to supply it. That's what we're doing with the KXL pipeline.

Mr. van Dijken: Given that the crucial construction of the Keystone XL pipeline is scheduled to start immediately to help give our economy a much-needed boost and given that we are currently in the middle of a global pandemic due to COVID-19, to the Minister of Health: what steps are being taken to ensure that our valuable oil and gas workers remain protected from the virus while working to complete this very important project?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health has the call.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, all work sites, including these camps, are expected to follow the public health measures that have been ordered by the chief medical officer of health. AHS, public health, is working closely with companies operating work camps, particularly in the north. Just like members of the general public, camps are urged to limit the number of workers in a given area at any given time, practise social distancing, ensure workers are practising good hand hygiene. We all have a role to play in the fight against COVID-19. Employers need to ensure the health and safety of their workers in order to prevent and limit the spread.

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

2:20 Physician Funding Framework
(continued)

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow this UCP government will launch another attack against Alberta doctors even as the coronavirus pandemic enters a deadly new phase. It's incomprehensible and dangerous. Many doctors say that their income will be cut by a third or more starting tomorrow. I know that many members opposite understand that the timing of these billing code changes is, frankly, insane, so will the Member for Calgary-Acadia please stop his war with doctors until after this pandemic has passed?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, our government is going to make sure that we're providing the resources that are needed to protect Albertans throughout this pandemic, and that means that spending on physicians is not being cut. In fact, we expect the amount that we spend on physicians to be significantly higher this year. We're planning to maintain spending on physicians. We were, before this pandemic, at \$5.4 billion. That was the highest level ever. Now, with unlimited virtual visits, which we provided for physicians to provide care to their patients, we expect to spend significantly more. That's what physicians asked for to support them and their patients, and we agreed.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that those virtual visit codes he's so fond of talking about have yet to be activated and are not accessible to doctors – and that's part of the reason that 850 doctors yesterday signed a letter pleading with this member to just wait – and given that these Albertans are saving lives right now under the most demanding and dangerous conditions we have ever seen in

this province, why does this member continue to show Alberta doctors such contempt, hostility, and condescension while they are sacrificing so much for all of us?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, that's not true at all. Those codes have been activated. The med bulletin was very specific and provided the instruction to the physicians that they needed to make sure that they were going to be able to report their hours at a certain date. I believe it begins tomorrow, when they can start to be able to provide and bill for that time that they could have done. But it was activated immediately. We developed those new codes through our conversations with the Alberta Medical Association. We also very quickly, at the request of physicians at the very beginning of the COVID crisis, implemented the H1N1 code and activated that code for \$20 as well.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, given that this member has disgraced his office by berating a doctor in his own driveway at night in front of his wife and children and neighbours and given that this member continues to ignore all professional advice about dropping his irresponsible attack on all doctors during a deadly pandemic, there's only one question for this member. I know the leader asked it, and I will ask it again on behalf of thousands of doctors: given that he has demonstrated terrible judgment and refused to acknowledge the chaos he's created in our health care system, will this member simply resign?

Mr. Jason Nixon: What an absolutely ridiculous question. This continues to show that the opposition can only play politics. I want to assure Albertans, through you, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta's government is dedicated to working every day to help Albertans overcome the COVID-19 crisis and the economic crisis that we're in right now, and we won't play these ridiculous games. Through you to the Official Opposition: they should do the same. Shame on them. Stop playing these games, and get down to work for the people of Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Keystone XL Pipeline Provincial Equity

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that our oil industry needs takeaway capacity. This morning we found out that the government will financially back the Keystone XL project and that they are providing 7.5 billion public dollars to back this project. But the details are unclear, and Albertans deserve to know how their money is being spent. By the way, that's 94 per cent of the total project cost on the Alberta side. The question I have is: what oversight will the government have over this money, and will Albertans have a seat at the table?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. The government of Alberta will be taking an equity interest in the pipeline with preferred equity shares. This project was going to be mothballed without the government of Alberta stepping in. There's never a time that's more important than now to show the world and to show Canadians and to show Albertans that big projects can actually be built and go forward. This is an important project for all of Alberta. It's needed, and we will be ensuring that it's built.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this is a large investment of public money and given that Albertans deserve to know if their money is being spent wisely and given that the government has claimed that they will be paid back the \$1.5 billion they are putting into this project, to the minister: how much will Albertans get back from this deal, did you conduct an economic analysis of the deal, and will you make it public today?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. This project will be able to start construction tomorrow. This is a project that was going to be mothballed without government backstopping and stepping in. We'll be taking a preferred equity position in the project. It will create 7,000 jobs here in Alberta at a time when Albertans have never needed jobs more. It will create \$30 billion in royalty revenues for the province. It'll allow a pipeline of 833,000 barrels a day to be built into markets, into the Gulf coast and the U.S.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government didn't include \$1.5 billion for Keystone XL in the fantasy budget that they rammed through the House earlier this month but were able to find it to address the concerns of investors and that this government couldn't find \$128 million to keep more than 20,000 staff employed to support our kids and families, to the minister: do oil and gas investors simply have more sway with your government, with your office than the hundreds of thousands of parents whose kids are trying to learn at home?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last days and weeks we've seen a number – quite frankly, tens of thousands – of Albertans lose their employment due to the changes and disruptions of COVID-19. We've heard the Education minister. Again, due to changes in the way services are delivered, there was a segment of public servants that simply didn't have additional work to do at this point in time, so it's incumbent upon government to allocate those resources to the greatest need and to move those to our health care system to fight COVID-19.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge has a question to ask.

COVID-19 Information and Protective Measures

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day we are seeing the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 in our province. As COVID-19 containment measures continue, many people in my riding are concerned about what steps they should be taking. We have heard many stories of high call volumes to Health Link 811 or even 911 by those in fear of having contracted COVID-19. To the Minister of Health: what tools are available to Albertans if they think they are sick with this virus?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for advocating for both his constituents and all Albertans. For all general questions about symptoms and testing, the starting point is the AHS online assessment tool. It's one of the best of its

kind. Just google "Alberta COVID-19 self-assessment." As a reminder, if you have general symptoms like a cold or flu, stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as you can. If you've come back from outside of Canada since March 8, you must stay home for 14 days.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his response. Given that Albertans are being urged to stay home as much as possible and find nonphysical ways to communicate with each other and given that many people who need to consult with a doctor are concerned about getting this virus at these locations and given that Alberta's health system is very likely to experience an increasing demand as a result of the ongoing pandemic, can the Minister of Health please update this House on new tools available to help connect patients with doctors?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The pandemic places an unprecedented amount of demands on our physicians in this province. Their main concern has been the need to make virtual visits – that is, by phone or by video – available to all patients and to pay the physicians at the same rate that we pay them for an office visit. We announced exactly that on March 23. We'll pay for unlimited video or phone consults at the same rate as an office visit. That's \$38. We made this change to help physicians minimize the risk to themselves and to their patients and to keep their practices economically viable as much as possible.

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

2:30

Mr. Toor: Thank you again to the minister for his answer. Given that everyone in our medical system needs to be prepared for the challenge of this pandemic and given that pharmacists are on the front lines of providing health information to Albertans who do not feel well and given that maintaining our province's drug supply chain is critical in this uncertain time, to the same minister: what changes are being made to support the drug distribution chain for our province and to increase the role of pharmacists in the fight against COVID-19?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 19 we announced new measures to support pharmacists and to protect Albertans against potential disruptions in our global supply chain for prescription drugs. We created a new billing code to allow pharmacists to be paid for screening patients and providing information about COVID-19. Their role may be expanded as needed. We also recommended that pharmacies have the discretion to provide a maximum of 30 days' supply of prescription drugs. We're urging Albertans and health care professionals to use judgment to maintain the supply of drugs for everyone who needs them in a situation where supply may be constrained at any time.

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

Income Support for Parents Affected by COVID-19

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The coronavirus pandemic is creating severe financial distress for so many Albertans. That distress is felt sharply by low-income families raising young

children. Many wage-earning parents are stuck at home either due to self-isolation, business closure, or caring for children who can't attend school. The federal government has increased the Canada child benefit by \$300. A simple question for the Minister of Children's Services: will she match this and increase the Alberta child benefit by \$300, and if not, why not?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past couple of weeks our government has announced a number of measures both to help Albertans as well as small businesses. Certainly, we've been hearing from a lot of parents, including vulnerable families, about some of the supports that they're looking for. We've had great conversations with our community partners who are offering important supports to vulnerable kids and families, and more announcements of the like will be coming, again, in the days and weeks to come.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are more than 700,000 Alberta schoolchildren at home today and given that many working parents are now unable to go to work because they have no choice but to stay home and care for their children and given that these parents are isolated by this emergency and need support, to the Minister of Finance: why have you failed to make these parents who are unable to work eligible for emergency isolation support payments?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, over the last number of days I've been reaching out to many of our community-based partners and the organizations who help support vulnerable kids and families across this province, and I can tell you that they are continuing to do exceptional work. One partner said that they've seen more innovation in our sector in the last seven days than they've seen in the last 30 years. There are positive things coming out of this, different ways of doing our work, and I have great faith in our community partners for the exceptional services they're providing to vulnerable Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These vulnerable Albertans actually need financial support.

Given that the other side of this problem is essential service workers in Alberta, many of whom are parents who are nurses in hospitals, lab technicians processing COVID-19 tests, municipal workers making sure we have the services we need to survive this pandemic, and given that these essential workers are now being asked to pay full price for child care when they have no choice but to work and are working on behalf of all Albertans right now, to the minister: will you do the right thing, like what is being done in Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia, and cover the cost of child care for these essential workers during this pandemic?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows when I briefed her last week on the measures that we were taking to support families across the province, the moves being made to expand the definition for essential service workers – recognizing that access to child care is a barrier for some of these parents to go and do the very important front-line work that we do, we will continue to support child care across the province. We continue to work with AHS, the Ministry of Health as well as my colleagues in Municipal Affairs and with municipalities across the

province to identify when and how many spaces we need to continue to open across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has a question.

Emergency Isolation Support Eligibility

Ms Renaud: Thanks. During times of emergency and crisis it is always the most vulnerable, Albertans struggling to make ends meet, who are in the greatest danger. I was shocked to learn that the UCP government is telling Albertans who receive AISH or income support that they are not eligible for emergency isolation support assistance. To the Minister of Community and Social Services. This is a new level of neglect. Will you reverse this decision immediately? If not, please explain to these Albertans why not.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to supporting our province's most vulnerable people, and that includes Albertans who receive AISH and income support. We are obviously maintaining people's monthly social assistance rates. The emergency isolation support program is designed specifically to help people who have temporarily lost income due to needing to self-isolate or care for a dependant. This program is for people who do not have any other source of income at this time.

Ms Renaud: Given that many Albertans on AISH or income support also work to supplement their poverty-level income, contrary to the comment over here that was about double-dipping, and given that these Albertans will not be able to go to work if they have to self-isolate or if their employer has been forced to close their doors – they have nowhere else to turn – again to the minister: why have you singled out the most vulnerable Albertans and denied them emergency assistance?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, again, this program is for those who don't have any other source of income. AISH recipients and income support recipients do have core benefits that they do receive, and for the AISH program those core benefits include financial and health benefits in addition to supplementary benefits. So we are taking care of them, and we will continue to take care of them.

Ms Renaud: Given that this UCP government has already left tens of thousands of low-income and disabled Albertans behind as a result of neglect and poorly-thought-out decisions and given that the cost of groceries, rent, electricity, insurance continues to rise, making life more expensive for vulnerable populations at the absolute worst time, will the minister commit right here and now to re-evaluate this decision to exclude AISH and income support recipients from this emergency benefit? If you won't, give them a clear answer why.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, again, the emergency isolation program is designed for those individuals who have no other source of income. AISH and income support recipients do receive a core benefit. In addition to that, they have access to a plethora of supplementary benefits. We are taking care of vulnerable Albertans and will continue to take care of vulnerable Albertans. That is a very clear, clear answer.

COVID-19 and Renter Protection from Eviction

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, last week the government announced some supports to help renters during this pandemic. I've heard relief and thanks from many people who hoped for measures like this, but I've also heard some concerns from landlords in my constituency,

landlords whose single rental property pays their mortgage or provides them with some income in retirement. They're worried that they're not protected through these measures. To the Minister of Service Alberta: are there any assurances that you can provide to landlords who are nervous about what these protections mean for them over the months to come?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, well, I think what might be helpful to do first is just to do a brief overview of what we actually did announce on Friday, and that was four measures to protect renters during the COVID-19 crisis. First of all, let me be clear: there will be no evictions in the month of April for nonpayment of rent. Second of all, we have created an environment that will incent all tenants and landlords to work together on meaningful payment plans for the duration of the crisis. So long as tenants work with their landlords on this, they will be protected from eviction for the duration of the crisis. Furthermore, there will be no late fees from April 1 to January 30 and no increase in rent during the state of public health emergency.

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some eviction processes may have already been in motion and given that uncertainty for landlords and tenants is causing unnecessary anxiety and given that clarity around what a suspension of evictions actually means could help ease that anxiety, to the Minister of Service Alberta: which eviction proceedings are suspended in the actions announced on Friday?

Mr. Glubish: Let me be perfectly clear. The only evictions that will no longer be enforceable are those in April for nonpayment of rent. Any evictions that would be necessary to deal with safety issues or activities of a criminal nature or to deal with damage to a property or violence towards a landlord or a fellow tenant: those can still continue as normal. Thereafter, after April 30 and going forward, so long as tenants work with their landlords, they will be protected from eviction. But let me be perfectly clear: tenants still have an obligation to pay their rent. There is no such thing as a rent holiday or a rent strike. They must work with their landlord, and landlords must work with them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government announced four different measures to help keep renters and the larger community safe during this time of self-isolation and physical distancing and given that one of those measures requires tenants and landlords to work together to create a payment plan for rent, to the Minister of Service Alberta: what requirements for renters and landlords need to be met before entering into a payment plan?

2:40

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that there are no requirements other than that they go ahead and do enter into a payment plan. So long as a tenant works in good faith with their landlord on a meaningful payment plan and adheres to that payment plan, they will be protected from eviction for the duration of the public health crisis. This is a very strong protection, but let me be clear: they have to work with their landlord. If they don't and if their landlord had made a meaningful effort to enter into a plan with them and the tenant does not comply, then they will be subject to the normal eviction proceedings available under the existing laws.

We think that this is a fair and balanced approach to ensure that tenants and landlords work together to solve this problem.

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

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon members, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Physical and Social Distancing

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I come from a small town, and my constituency is made up of small towns. We see, during the crisis, food donations going up. We see church volunteers delivering food to those who are self-isolating. We see oil and gas companies offering for free to shovel the walks and driveways of front-line workers. This is what we get in small-town Alberta. We stand up for our own. We make sure that we don't leave anyone behind. No one should be left at risk. It's said that Alberta is the biggest small town out there, and that's why we have to care for our communities and our province, and the way we do that as best we can right now is by staying at home where and when we can.

It doesn't matter if you're young and healthy, it doesn't matter if you want to spend time with friends, and it doesn't matter what the weather is going to be like this weekend. It's incumbent upon all of us to make sure that if we're going to take this fight to the disease, we follow the advice of the public health officers that we have. This is how we can care for our neighbours, this is how we can care for the elderly, and this is how we can care for our grandparents and our family and everyone in our biggest small town out there, the province of Alberta.

Ignoring physical distancing and social distancing measures puts everyone at risk, whether you know it or not. Alberta has precious little time to prepare itself for the peak of the pandemic. By staying at home, practising good hygiene, and maintaining social and physical distancing from others, we can help prevent this disease. This is not a vacation right now. It's a situation many Albertans take seriously, especially those who are most vulnerable. For them, it is life and death, Madam Speaker. So let's all do our part: protect our communities, protect our province, and stay at home where and when you can.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

COVID-19 and Nonprofit Organizations

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to bring to the House's attention the efforts of civil society during this unprecedented health crisis. Over the last several weeks we have seen charities, the faith community, volunteers, neighbours, and families rise up and show resolve in the face of tremendous adversity as our communities and governments attempt to navigate uncharted waters.

The Lethbridge Senior Citizens Organization has worked closely with the city and provincial efforts. Their Fritz Sick gymnasium has been transformed into a shelter space so that the homeless have a roof over their head but also maintain the distance and procedures so necessary to halt the spread of COVID-19. Their volunteer efforts for seniors have been similarly tireless. Whether it's Meals

on Wheels or homemaking services for our seniors, the LSCO and its people have been there for those who need it.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Calgary Seniors' Resource Society has also stood tall during this crisis. It has been hard for them to balance the health regulations limiting COVID-19 with the sheer need within their community, but I'm proud to say that their staff and volunteers have followed health directives to keep themselves and their clientele safe, and they have delivered in spades.

Similarly, I want to thank the staff and volunteers at Hope Mission and the Mustard Seed as well as their partners in Central Baptist church and First Alliance church for rapid and effective mobilization during this pandemic. When red tape threatened to send the vulnerable out into the cold, you searched and found spaces so that you did not have to turn anyone away. You reached out to the community, and the tide of goodwill and donations of critical equipment like masks and blankets is an inspiration to all of us.

We need stories of hope and faith, even if it starts as small as a mustard seed, for with it we can move mountains. I'm immensely proud of the efforts of Albertans. Once again, during tough times, during a crisis Albertans have shown their valour, compassion, and resiliency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

Mr. Jason Nixon: First, Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Standing Order 7(8) the daily Routine may continue beyond 3 o'clock.

I also rise today to give oral notice of two government motions to be put on the Order Paper in my name, the first being Government Motion 17.

Be it resolved that despite any standing order and immediately upon the passage of this motion the Assembly is to debate the urgent public matter of the COVID-19 pandemic in the following manner:

- (a) the Premier may make the first statement not exceeding 45 minutes;
- (b) immediately following the Premier's statement the Leader of the Official Opposition may make a statement not exceeding 30 minutes;
- (c) immediately following the Leader of the Official Opposition's statement and for a period not exceeding 30 minutes
 - (i) the Leader of the Official Opposition may ask questions on matters relevant to the Premier's statement, and
 - (ii) the Premier may respond to those questions;
- (d) any other members of the Executive Council may make a statement not exceeding 10 minutes;
- (e) immediately following each statement made by a member of the Executive Council and for a period not exceeding 15 minutes
 - (i) members who are not a member of the Executive Council may ask questions on matters relevant to the statement, and
 - (ii) the member of the Executive Council who made the statement may respond to those questions;
- (f) a member who asks a question or a member of the Executive Council who responds in accordance with clause (c) or (e) is limited to a period of five minutes at one time to ask that question or make a response;

(g) immediately after all statements and related periods for questions and responses have concluded, the debate is considered to have been concluded by the Assembly without decision.

Government Motion 18, which I also give oral notice of, is as follows, Mr. Speaker.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) acknowledge that the oil and gas industry will continue to play an important role in global energy demand for the foreseeable future and that world oil prices will not remain depressed in perpetuity;
- (b) urge the government to plan for the future and continue to play an important role in ensuring Alberta's oil and gas industry can meet global energy demand;
- (c) recognize that increased export options for Alberta energy result in better prices, which benefit workers, employers, and all Albertans by providing critical financial support for public services, and
- (d) express its support for the government's plan to provide an investment, through a \$1.5 billion equity stake and \$6 billion loan guarantee, in the Keystone XL pipeline project.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a notice of motion.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I will move a motion pursuant to Standing Order 42 that I'd be happy to read out now. Or is it later that I read it out?

The Speaker: Just the contents of the motion.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. It's not a short one. I'll pass it to you folks for tabling and distribution.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly support educational assistants and other school staff, who bring value to all aspects of learning, by urging the government to immediately reverse its decision to reduce funding for K to 12 education because this decision offends the principles and values of the Education Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms by

- (a) being inconsistent with the statutory powers and responsibilities of school boards as provided under the Education Act, specifically sections 11(3) and (4) and sections 33(1)(d) and (e),
- (b) reversing the Ministry of Education's commitment, as publicly announced by the Minister of Education on March 15, 2020, to maintain then existing levels of educational funding to ensure that school boards could, during the COVID-19 pandemic, continue to deliver educational learning through effective distance education, and
- (c) severely and disproportionately impacting students with special needs and disabilities given their need for and the resulting lack of specialized supports and services to ensure that these students continue to have equal access to ongoing educational learning.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Bill 10 Public Health (Emergency Powers) Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce Bill 10, the Public Health (Emergency Powers) Amendment Act, 2020.

Bill 10 would make changes to the Public Health Act and strengthen our ability to protect the health and safety of Albertans. While most Albertans are doing their part to prevent the spread, those who choose to put their families, their neighbours, and other Albertans at risk must face consequences. These amendments will increase fines for violating public health orders. They will modernize the ability to serve people with legal documents through e-mail and fax and supplement the existing enforcement authorities given to executive officers in the legislation, community peace officers as well as police officers. These are aggressive measures, and they're not to be taken lightly. The health and safety of Albertans are and will always be a top priority.

Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise and request leave to introduce Bill 10, the Public Health (Emergency Powers) Amendment Act, 2020. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Bill 11 Tenancies Statutes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce Bill 11, the Tenancies Statutes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Act, 2020.

This bill is an important step to protect Alberta renters in light of the COVID-19 health crisis. On Friday last week we announced a number of protections for Alberta renters. Those protections were enacted through ministerial orders and included measures to prohibit rent increases and to prohibit the collection of any late payment fees during the state of public health emergency. This bill will make changes to the Residential Tenancies Act and the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act to ensure that rent increases and late fees cannot be retroactively enforced or implemented after the state of public health emergency ends.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll just beg your patience. The LASS team will be distributing all three bills in just a couple of moments, but at this time we're going to go to the hon. Minister of Energy.

Bill 12 Liabilities Management Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 12, the Liabilities Management Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.

This act will help strengthen the ability of the regulator and the Orphan Well Association, the OWA, to more effectively manage orphan wells and the associated infrastructure, infrastructure such as pipelines, while protecting landowners and ensuring environmental and public safety. This legislation is about setting the stage for job creation while ensuring a responsible, sustainable oil and gas industry for generations to come.

Expanding the role of the OWA is one part of a new suite of policies, to be announced in the near future, that will touch every single stage in the life cycle of a well, from exploration to postclosure, while ensuring that industry is able to meet their obligations. This legislation will increase the authority of the OWA and accelerate the cleanup of oil and gas properties that do not have an owner to be

accountable for the cleanup. Mr. Speaker, taking these actions will help enhance Alberta's reputation as a responsible energy producer by ensuring that environmental obligations are met, providing certainty for industry, and generating much-needed jobs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there tablings today?

Seeing none, I believe that I have a tabling today. It's a letter from the Ethics Commissioner dated March 20, 2020, regarding her decision to not undertake an investigation into complaints received by her office.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Schweitzer, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, pursuant to the Statutes Repeal Act a report, undated, entitled Statutes Repeal Act 2020 List.

On behalf of hon. Mrs. Sawhney, Minister of Community and Social Services, responses to questions raised by Ms Renaud, hon. Member for St. Albert, on March 3, 2020, Ministry of Community and Social Services 2020-21 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at motions. We had a request for a Standing Order 42. Prior to moving to the debate, I will just remind members that for a motion in case of urgent and pressing necessity previously explained by the mover, by unanimous consent of the Assembly, without notice being given under Standing Order 39, the member may provide the notice and a brief description as to why the urgency of the notice is required, not the debate of the content of the motion, as that would be granted should unanimous consent be granted, but the urgency of why it should be heard.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Motions under Standing Order 42

Education-sector Layoffs

Ms Hoffman:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly support educational assistants and other school staff, who bring value to all aspects of learning, by urging the government to immediately reverse its decision to reduce funding for K to 12 education because this decision offends the principles and values of the Education Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms by

(a) being inconsistent with the statutory powers and responsibilities of school boards as provided under the Education Act, specifically sections 11(3) and (4) and sections 33(1)(d) and (e),

(b) reversing the Ministry of Education's commitment, as publicly announced by the Minister of Education on March 15, 2020, to maintain then existing levels of educational funding to ensure that school boards could, during the COVID-19 pandemic, continue to deliver educational learning through effective distance education, and

(c) severely and disproportionately impacting students with special needs and disabilities given their need for and the resulting lack of specialized supports and services to ensure that these

students continue to have equal access to ongoing educational learning.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will let everyone read the SO 42, the motion that has been circulated or is in the process of being circulated, rather than reading it a second time, but I will take this opportunity to discuss urgency because I think that this clearly is the first opportunity we've had in this place to speak to this issue. It was Saturday afternoon that the press release and three tweets were initiated, so this is definitely the first sitting day since that happened.

I also have to say that in terms of urgency, we know that boards and independent schools and others are all in the process right now of initiating layoffs as directed by the minister on Saturday. This is our opportunity as an Assembly to send a very clear message to the government and in turn to all of these employers who are in the process of initiating the largest single-day layoff in the history of our province – 20,000 individuals is estimated by economists to be about 1 per cent of our workforce – and certainly I think it would be incumbent on us as members of the Assembly and representatives of those 20,000 workers as well as the families, probably double or triple that, who have been impacted by this decision, because we know that often those workers support more than one family, to make a decision in an expeditious fashion to do so here. I would say that it is certainly a pressing, urgent matter.

The last thing on urgency. It was in this House on March 17 that we passed a budget. There were two sitting days since then, and this is the only sitting day since then that this change to the budget has been made, so it certainly is a matter that would normally would be discussed before this Assembly and, for the reasons I outlined, is certainly a pressing matter. We also passed the Education Act in this place within the last year, and this relates directly to that and is in contravention of that. Again, the urgency is the first opportunity since the House has sat since notice was given through the Internet on the weekend, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Mr. Eggen: Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. Can I just get clarification, please?

The Speaker: I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West is asking for some clarification. I'm not sure, but given the unique circumstances of the Assembly today, I'm more than happy to hear from him.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. That's fine. I just wanted to remind ourselves that the denial of unanimous consent precludes any vote on a motion 42, then, right?

The Speaker: Certainly, I can understand the confusion of "What is an emergency debate?" where there would be the possibility for a vote, but in order for that to happen, it would have had to have been presented under Standing Order 30, which would have required notice to my office prior to 11, which was not received. In this case the hon. member was using a Standing Order 42, which is a request for unanimous consent of the House, and that was obviously not granted, so there is no requirement for a vote or otherwise as any one single member could have chosen not to provide consent, as was the case today.

We are at Ordres du jour.

3:00

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: It looks like the hon. Government House Leader has a question.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Correct, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 77(1) in order to proceed to second reading of Bill 11, Tenancies Statutes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Act, 2020.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as a way of clarification for the House, the hon. Government House Leader has requested unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 77(1). Standing Order 77(1) prevents the multiple readings of a piece of legislation or stage of bill in one day. I believe there may be unanimous consent to proceed immediately to the second reading of Bill 11.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 11

Tenancies Statutes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Act, 2020

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will proceed immediately to the hon. the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 11.

We are in unprecedented times with this health crisis, and that is having a profound financial impact on Albertans. As part of this fight to prevent further spread of COVID-19, we are being directed to self-isolate and to practise social or physical distancing. These directions are necessary to maintain the health of Albertans, but they are also affecting Albertans' finances as they navigate reduced work schedules or are not able to work at all. That is why we have implemented several protections for renters, including suspending late-payment fees and rental increases, prohibiting evictions in April for nonpayment of rent, and requiring landlords to enter into reasonable payment plans with tenants. These protections are in place to keep people safe, enable them to stay in their homes, and to allow them to get back up on their feet after this emergency ends.

However, two of these protections, prohibiting rent increases and prohibiting late fees, are currently in place through a ministerial order under the Public Health Act in direct response to this public health emergency. By its nature, the order will lapse once the state of public health emergency passes. We trust that both landlords and tenants will operate in good faith, but we recognize that, unfortunately, there may be some bad actors. For tenants, a bad actor would be one who does not pay rent and who makes no effort to work with their landlord on establishing a meaningful payment plan. For landlords, a bad actor would be one who tries to retroactively enforce or collect late-payment fees for nonpayment or late payment of rent or tries to recoup a rental fee increase that would have applied had our renter protections not been in place. This bill will codify and strengthen the prohibition on late-payment fees and rent increases currently authorized in a ministerial order under the Public Health Act to ensure renters are not retroactively asked to pay these fees or rent increases once the state of public health emergency ends.

For these reasons, I am pleased to bring this bill forward and move that it be read a second time. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak to second reading of Bill 11? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for bringing forward Bill 11, Tenancies Statutes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Act, 2020. Certainly, we are very glad that rent will not be increased for tenants and that there will be no late fees on rent during this public health emergency and economic emergency as well. I'm glad that the minister finally made a decision around the banning of evictions. We saw that this became self-apparent from what follows with people having difficulty with their rents and paying and so forth and the trend that we saw across the country and, indeed, in other nations around the world, too.

We as the Official Opposition along with many concerned Albertans have been calling for these changes, and we're glad that the UCP listened. The Premier said that he expects landlords and tenants to come up with agreements during this pandemic. I certainly do hope so as well, but I also hope that the UCP has a plan to ensure that Albertans are financially supported through this pandemic and do not lose their place of residence.

Albertans, I know, do not feel financially secure when they cannot access isolation supports, for example. Eligibility for isolation supports are very narrow in scope. We see many people being left behind. I can certainly attest to that from the many constituents that have come to my office in the last couple of weeks. It's good to see that the government has taken steps to ensure that Albertans will have a roof over their heads, but we also need to see certainty on how they will keep food in their fridge and, indeed, pay their bills as well. I think many of us saw the news story today that many Albertans are within a couple of hundred dollars of being destitute here in this province, and this is accelerating very quickly.

One of the first, most important places for us to make an investment in is to protect people's places of residence. Once people have a place and an address and a roof over their heads, then we can start to supply the necessary other elements to their lives. But if you lose that place of residence or if it's in jeopardy somehow, Mr. Speaker, then that just adds exponentially to the anxiety that's associated with the economic downturn, with the public health emergency, and we just simply don't need to do that at this time.

We know that we will learn many lessons, I think, from this economic emergency and this medical emergency, but one of them, I think, is fairly self-evident, and that is that we need to ensure that the right for every individual in this province to have a place to live is both self-evident and the foundation of reconstruction here after we see the end of this medical and economic emergency. It's not negotiable to know or to expect that any Albertan is without a place to live, and this is a precondition for not just economic stability but as a health issue and, as I say, a foundation to building a more equitable and a better place for all here in the province of Alberta.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this, and thanks to the minister for moving on this as well. Certainly, one issue that I was mulling over over the last couple of days, when we saw that this was coming forward, was to try to make sure we build provisions for people living in mobile-home parks as well. We know that there might be something that was coming for that relief and assistance for people living in mobile-home parks, but I think that is something that we might have seen through Bill 3 if I'm not mistaken. Again, let's not lose sight of other reforms that need to be happening within

both home ownership and rental, whatever form that home might take in this province.

Thanks for an opportunity to say a couple of words on this, and I hope we can move this bill expeditiously. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak to second reading of Bill 11? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 11, Tenancies Statutes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Act, 2020. I'd like to first of all express my appreciation to the government for bringing forward the ban on evictions, which is something that is related. It's not specifically within this bill, but it is absolutely related. As we know, in this extremely challenging time for Albertans the idea of losing your home during a time such as this has created incredible anxiety for many, many Albertans, and I know we were all hearing – I'm sure members on all sides of the House were hearing that concern. I was very proud of my caucus colleagues, who have repeatedly stood up and asked for the government to take precisely this action, which was to ban evictions during this incredibly stressful time.

3:10

I regret slightly that it took as long as it did for the government to take that action, but I appreciate the fact that it ultimately did. We know that many other provinces have taken similar measures because, as my colleague from Edmonton-North West so eloquently stated, during this time of crisis the idea of being evicted from your home could not possibly be more stressful, particularly knowing how difficult it is to find other places to live when people are being told to stay home and to self-isolate if they are showing symptoms or have travelled. We know that it's very important that people have a space to do that and to take care of themselves. That's not just for their own safety, but it's for all of our safety. Making sure that every Albertan has the dignity of a home to do their part as an Albertan to prevent the spread of this epidemic is critical.

We obviously know that there are so many Albertans who have lost a lot of income and maybe even their job in the last few weeks with the economic downturn but as well with the pandemic hitting, so to add to that, the anxiety of losing their home was probably insurmountable for so many people. I know myself that I had many letters and e-mails from constituents, from people who are particularly concerned, so I'm glad that the ban on evictions was made by the government. I'm also happy to see this bill come forward, which will prevent rent increases during this critical time as well as ensure that there are no late fees charged to tenants during that period of time. It is very important for Albertans to have as much security and certainty as they can in this very difficult time. At least for the time being they will have some degree of certainty if they are a renter.

I do know there are a number of other measures that are still necessary for this government to take in order to ensure that all Albertans have the financial security they require during this stressful time. My colleagues have pointed out a number of concerns with respect to the emergency isolation supports that have been provided by the provincial government as a bridge to the federal program. We know that there are many Albertans who continue to either not have access to those benefits or those supports because they are not eligible or they've had difficulty getting access due to the technological challenges of getting an application in.

I do have a few comments. While I am in support of this bill and the provisions, I have a bit of a procedural comment. I don't know if the minister will have an opportunity to speak to this. You know,

he did note that ministerial orders were passed last Friday, I believe, pursuant to the current Public Health Act, which allows for ministers to take those sorts of actions. He mentioned that this bill is intended to solidify or strengthen those ministerial orders. This is really me putting on my legal procedural hat. I'm not really sure if it was necessary to do it in legislation. I appreciate it provides additional certainty, but ministerial orders do have the effect of law. That is a procedural question.

You know, I'm not opposed to legislation doing that, but we do need to be very careful when we're coming back to this Legislature at this time, when the recommendation coming from the chief medical officer of health is for Albertans to stay home. It's not just about the members of this Assembly who are here today. Obviously, when we come back to this Legislature, it should be for very emergent issues because there are a number of staff who come along every time this House is sitting: people who run *Hansard* and run the cameras, our sheriffs and our security, and, of course, staff members. It is simply a procedural question because I do believe the ministerial orders have the same effect. I'm not sure if the minister can provide clarification as to what is added by doing this through legislation, but I am happy to see that happen.

There are still some things, I think, with respect to rentals that we need to . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. Having said that, I'm finding it a little bit difficult to focus on the comments. If members would like to take private conversations in socially distant, responsible ways to the lounges, I would prefer that so I can focus on the very engaging comments that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is delivering.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not very often that people complain about not being able to hear me. Usually that is not a problem I have, but I appreciate that.

As I said, I had some procedural comments. There are some additional supports, I know, for renters and for landlords that I still think Albertans are concerned about. In particular, I understand that in British Columbia, for example, the government has provided supplemental income to landlords. Of course, we know that this is a bit of a chain reaction, right? If renters can't pay their rent because they don't have income, landlords may still have mortgages to pay. Of course, they usually do. You know, landlords then are going to need some support as well. Some, of course, are corporations. Some are individual landlords, and I know that there will be concerns about how they make their payments as a result of no rent. Of course, with every step this is a complicated issue, absolutely. As we look at supports for renters and for Albertans in general, we need to look at all the chain of events that come about, so we have to look at mortgage deferrals. Those are important things. I know that announcements have been made by the federal government, but also I wonder if the provincial government, the Alberta government, would consider supports for landlords as well because they have bills to pay as well.

Lastly, I have to raise an issue that is related because I'm hearing a lot about it in my constituency, and that is concerns of small-business owners, who also have to pay rent, of course, as we know. I know, for example, that my constituency office is located in a big strip mall in my constituency, and while I'm lucky that my ability to pay my commercial rent as an MLA is not affected by income of business, there are a number of small businesses in my area – paint stores, restaurants, art-framing shops – and they are deeply concerned about, whether their business has been closed or whether business has

slowed significantly, their ability to pay their rent. I've had many conversations with my constituents who are small-business owners about that issue.

Similarly, I've heard from a number of nonprofits who share a lot of concerns. Nonprofits are often lease payers, whether it be child care centres or whether it be other nonprofits. I know the YMCA of Edmonton recently put out an excellent paper where they were putting forward a position to the federal government about making sure that supports for small businesses extend to nonprofits, particularly around things such as lease payments. We have a lot of nonprofits and small businesses who have fixed costs, and we want to see them – we all want to see them – come out on the other side of this able to open their doors again, back to the way they were before, and operate fully. I'm wondering. Again, it's not specifically related to this bill, but we are talking about lease payments. Individual renters are incredibly important, and so, too, do we need to give some thought to what support we can provide to our small-business owners and nonprofits to make sure that they're still viable and functioning when this pandemic ends.

I want to again express my thanks. I do believe that we will be in support of this. I do want to also actually quickly, before I close my comments, mention that the Member for Edmonton-North West commented on the fact that we do currently have a bill before the Legislature, Bill 3, which would have made changes to the mobile tenancies act – I'm not saying that right – that would have extended the residential tenancy dispute resolution service to mobile-home renters, and I think that's a very important measure.

I realize that because of how this has happened, it's not possible, I believe, procedurally for those provisions to be part of this, but it does mean that because of the timing of the way the legislation is coming forward, even when these provisions are made or these changes are made under Bill 11, at this point mobile-home renters will not have access to the residential tenancy dispute resolution service because Bill 3 has not yet passed. I just raise that as something that we would like to see come forward together if possible because all renters, regardless of where they rent, should have access to that service. That service is still going to be, based on the comments from the minister, hearing matters during this public health emergency. There is a bit of a procedural gap here right now, and any opportunity to address that would be welcomed.

I thank again the government and the minister for bringing this forward. I know that I myself will have no concerns supporting this bill. I just still have those questions about procedure and other supports that might be available and about the consideration of additional direct supports for Albertans so that we can all weather this pandemic together and come out stronger on the other side.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Minister of Service Alberta has risen.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening intently to the Member for Edmonton-North West and also the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who had some good questions for clarification. I just want to take this opportunity to provide that greater clarity. I thank them for, you know, tentatively pledging some potential support for this, subject to the rest of the process, of course, as we all should follow that.

First of all, to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud about why procedurally this is necessary as a bill when we did the ministerial orders on Friday, the reason is not to make it effective today, but it's to make sure that when the public health emergency is lifted, there is no legal mechanism by which landlords would be able to retroactively enforce the payments that we had prohibited through

ministerial order. Once the public health emergency lifts, that ministerial order is no longer in effect, so that's why we wanted – actually, quite frankly, that's what Bill 11 is all about, simply to make sure that once the public health emergency is lifted, the protections against rent increases and the protections against late fees cannot be imposed retroactively. That's why we do have to do this now despite being in a time of emergency. I agree that we want to focus on emergency-related business, and that's why. I hope that that's helpful for clarification.

3:20

The second point I would like to clarify is just with respect to the mobile-home aspect to this. It's true that, yes, I did bring forward Bill 3, which was essentially an attempt to amend legislation to ensure that residents of mobile-home communities would have access to the residential tenancy dispute resolution service. I know we got through first reading of that before this crisis, but we have more work to do, hopefully, to get that thing passed. I hope that we may even have unanimous agreement in the House on this because I think it is a very important step forward to protect the residents of mobile-home communities and to give them access to the same resolution services that all other Albertans have under the Residential Tenancies Act. That is something that I look forward to, continuing the good work on that with all members of this House when time permits.

But for now let me just make it clear so that everyone here is aware. Mobile-home residents who are renters will have all of the protections that we announced on Friday: the protections from eviction, the protections from late-payment fees, the protection against rent increases for the duration of the public health crisis, and the requirement to work with landlords and for landlords to work with them on a meaningful payment plan for the duration of the public health crisis. So all renters in Alberta are being protected in the same way by the measures that we have taken. In fact, Bill 11 is making amendments to both the Residential Tenancies Act and the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act in order to ensure that the late fees and the rent increases cannot be enforced or collected retroactively at the end of the public health emergency.

Those were two things that I heard, you know, loud and clear as being sort of just reasonable questions that I felt I could quickly provide some clarity on. I hope that that was helpful. Of course, we'll have more opportunity to discuss this bill in later stages.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) still remains available. Is there anyone else wishing to speak to it?

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to second reading of Bill 11?

Seeing none, I am prepared to offer the Minister of Service Alberta the opportunity to close debate should he wish to do so.

Seeing that he has chosen not to, I call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 11 Tenancies Statutes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Act, 2020

The Chair: Are there any speakers wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate you allowing me the chance to rise here in Committee of the Whole on Bill 11, the Tenancies Statutes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Act, 2020. I just want to thank the minister, of course, for bringing this forward. We know that there have been a lot of people that have been very, very concerned around their rent coming up here on April 1. You know, certainly, we and many Albertans – that may be a little bit of an understatement in terms of how many people have been calling for this. But, granted, even though we were the last province to bring this forward, at least we've got it. As they say, better late to the party than never.

You know, I think I want to echo the comments from the Member for Edmonton-North West when talking about financial security for people around their homes. We know that as soon as that starts to break down, that's where we start to see people that potentially start to make, you know, poorer decisions around how to move forward, and sometimes we will see people inadvertently making a situation worse.

I know that earlier the Premier had commented that he did expect landlords and tenants to come to some agreements during this pandemic, and I'm almost certain that just about every single landlord will actually do that within the province. But just, you know, given my background and some of the things that I've dealt with in the labour world, I always find that there's always that one instance where we might not necessarily have that.

I think that, from that, what I'd like to do is just jump into some questions that, hopefully, the minister will have the opportunity to maybe talk about a little bit. When I do see those instances where a tenant might be in a situation where a landlord is pressing them on this issue and maybe it does get out of control, we know that the tenant does have the ability to access the courts. But given the current situation with our court system not being able to hear nonurgent cases, I'm wondering: could this be determined as a nonurgent case, or would we be looking at maybe temporarily elevating that so that those will be allowed to be heard sooner rather than later? I'm just wondering around maybe priority level, how that might address things.

I'm also wondering if maybe the minister had considered things around rent supplements. I know that certainly in Edmonton-Decore I have a lot of rental properties that tend to be for very, very low-income Albertans, some of whom may have lost their jobs, including, just recently in some of the announcements that we've seen, within our school support staff, who may find themselves struggling to make their rent. I'm wondering if there have been any considerations around those kinds of things.

Kind of going back a little bit, when I was talking about financial security, I'm just wondering if there's been any consideration for tenants that do find themselves in straits. Once this is all done and we've reached the finish line and potentially landlords are saying, "I'm expecting my rent due" but tenants don't have the money to be able to catch up because they have not been able to work, I'm wondering: have there been any conversations around that?

One of the other things that I know the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud had brought up earlier was around businesses within her riding. With Edmonton-Decore being nicknamed the shopping district, I have a substantial number of small-business owners. Also, with three malls within Edmonton-Decore who have been asking, you know, what there is potentially available out there for them as well,

there are certainly some tensions and some anxiety around what they're going to be able to do to be able to keep their facilities. I think that once a business has to close and move out and once we are on the other side trying to get back up and restarted, it could present some challenges there, which then, of course, roll down to the employees, that they might have had to lay off in the meantime, coming back to be able to work. Are those employees even going to still be there?

So just some of the questions that I have around this. I'm hoping the minister might have the opportunity to look at some of these things and, you know, allow us to be able to provide some answers, not only to our residents.

I should do, of course, my due diligence, just like we've heard. Although Edmonton-Decore doesn't have any mobile homes within that riding, I have heard comments from them, so I'd be remiss if I didn't bring those forward just so that you know there are concerns on the mobile-home owner side, which I know you've just recently addressed here a little bit. Hopefully, maybe there are some other actions that we could take that could temporarily fold them in if they do find themselves having to go within some kind of civil actions or whatever, if they're able to jump up in priority based on what's happening within the courts. Of course, we certainly don't want to compromise things at the same time.

With that, hopefully, the minister might have a chance to be able to address some things that I've asked about today. Thanks.

3:30

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Decore for those questions. I'll do my best to provide some further clarity on those. First of all, let me just make it very clear. The residential tenancy dispute resolution service is still active and will continue to be active during this health crisis, you know, for a few of the reasons that I've mentioned, one of which being that we still need to be able to deal with tenants who should be evicted for reasons other than nonpayment of rent. I think there's broad agreement on that. I heard a story from one landlord about how one of their renters had used bear spray on their neighbour. I mean, these are the kinds of people you still need to be able to get rid of, public health crisis or not, and that's why the RTDRS will continue to be able to hear those cases, adjudicate them accordingly, and issue orders as required, and those will still be enforceable.

You know, when we're talking about good actors and bad actors, there are good actors and bad actors on both the tenant side of the equation and the landlord side. That's why I think that the protections we announced on Friday in connection, then, with this Bill 11, which ensures that those protections will continue and not be undermined after the public health emergency is lifted, strikes the right balance to ensure that tenants have the protection and the certainty they need on what it will take in order to stay in their home, be able to care for their families through this crisis, but also to ensure that landlords are not unduly subsidizing bad actors who are just trying to abuse the system and live for free regardless of the crisis.

Again, I will just clarify that mobile-home residents will have all of the same protections under what we've announced on Friday and what this bill would cover as the residents in traditional dwellings, whether they be condos or apartments or homes. If they're a renter there and they have these protections, renters in mobile-home communities will have those same protections.

Certainly, it is my intent and desire to pass Bill 3 as soon as possible, which would then give mobile-home community residents access to the RTDRS for all concerns, not just for questions about

payment of rent. Of course, that's why I brought this forward some time ago, before the crisis began. Certainly, as soon as is practically possible, I would love to work with all of my colleagues in this House to try and get that across the finish line. It would be a strong signal that we all could show of our support for and understanding of the challenges that mobile-home community residents face.

You know, in terms of what happens at the end of the crisis, I mean, that's, again, why Bill 11 is so important. This is how we make sure that late fees cannot be collected after the crisis for the time where they were prevented during the crisis, and the same thing for rent increases. In terms of small business: look, I'm the Minister of Service Alberta. I'm responsible for the Residential Tenancies Act. I'm responsible for the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act. That's why I announced what I announced on Friday to protect Alberta renters and also to provide certainty to Alberta landlords of residential properties. I'm focused on the tools that I have to address the problems that I see that affect my portfolio and area of responsibility. That's what this is all about. I, too, have heard some of the concerns about small businesses and their difficulties paying their commercial leases. We're aware of that. That's not a part of what I'm working on, and I don't want to preclude what other folks on my team may be looking at.

You know, in terms of what was raised by the member opposite from Edmonton-Decore, I think just what I'd like to sum up is that what we announced on Friday and what we are talking about in Bill 11 to ensure that that is enforceable after the public health emergency is lifted is a comprehensive, thoughtful, balanced suite of protections that will deal with the most urgent need of keeping Albertans who do not yet have access to supports like the federal EI program later in April in their homes and to make sure they have certainty and that they can focus on, number one, getting the supports they're eligible for from all levels of government, figuring out what the next few weeks are going to look like, and then working with their landlords thereafter to figure out a meaningful payment plan so that there can be at least some cash flowing to the landlords so that the landlords can then negotiate with their lenders to make sure that they're not foreclosed on.

At the end of the day, if the lenders foreclose on the landlords – and that's not in our jurisdiction as a provincial government – then the landlord's hand is forced, and the tenant is still out of luck. We need to find something that's balanced, that covers all angles. It covers tenant, landlord, lender, and government. These are the things that we've done as a government to try and help ensure that we maintain some level of stability and certainty through this crisis.

I thank the Member for Edmonton-Decore for his questions. I hope this was some helpful clarification.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm happy to take this moment to add one other angle for consideration this afternoon. While I don't believe it's addressed in this bill, I'd be happy to be informed otherwise by the minister, and if it isn't, I hope that it's something that can be done through MO or OIC. I know that's been the case in Ontario and Quebec. I think some of these jurisdictions, looking at what the federal chief medical officer of health has directed this week, particularly for Ontario and Quebec and Alberta, are in crucial times for making sure that we flatten the curve and that we follow all of the recommendations.

The one area I want to highlight that they, I think, have taken some swift action on that has increased safety for residents is around residents who may have lapsed work permits. So they aren't technically citizens or PRs, and they have lapsed work permits, and there are, of course, challenging times right now to get all those things

filed as well, so their rights to have housing during this very difficult time because there are many of them who are afraid to speak out publicly for fear that it will result in their removal from Canada right now. Obviously, if they end up homeless, that would be problematic for those individuals but also for public health at large. I was speaking with some folks from Catholic Social Services and from Migrante yesterday, and these were some of the issues that they were saying are of a concern for them. I appreciate the steps that have been taken through the MO and relevant OICs in those other jurisdictions, and they asked that we do the same here to ensure that those folks with lapsed work permits have the opportunity to also be housed during this pandemic.

They also asked some questions that, again, might tangentially relate to the minister in some way, but I appreciate that he's at the cabinet table and can raise these issues around it. We usually have a huge influx of migrant workers during agricultural season. Of course, we're in the midst of calving right now, and we're heading into seeding and then harvest, so can work be done for these workers who are here right now who are waiting for permit approvals to maybe step in and do some of that work that migrants would typically do that we won't have access to this season?

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, shall I call the question?

[The clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: I move that the committee rise and report Bill 11.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 11.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried.

Mrs. Savage: I rise to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 77(1) in order to proceed to third reading of Bill 11, Tenancies Statutes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Act, 2020.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 11 Tenancies Statutes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Act, 2020

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

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise a final time to move third reading of Bill 11, the Tenancies Statutes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Act, 2020.

3:40

As I've said before, this bill will serve to guarantee two of the renter protections we announced and implemented last week through a ministerial order under the Public Health Act. The impact of this bill will be both immediate and lasting to tenants who are facing difficulties paying their rent on time each month during this crisis.

The measures announced on Friday and reinforced in this legislation will remove the burden of late payment fees and potential rent increases during this difficult time and will provide peace of mind to tenants as they will not be on the hook to retroactively pay for these costs. It's important that we are clear, though, to both landlords and tenants. We have not introduced a rent holiday. Tenants must still pay their rent. However, if a tenant is unable to pay on time and in full, they are to work with their landlords to develop a meaningful and reasonable payment plan and those good-faith efforts need to be acknowledged by landlords. Part of that acknowledgement is ensuring that good-faith efforts to pay rent are not penalized, which is why the prohibition of late fees is so important. The prohibition on increasing rent during the state of public health emergency further acknowledges the financial reality that many Albertans find themselves in.

I'm proud that we've brought forward a comprehensive and balanced package that will help many Albertans during an exceptionally challenging time. We have been saying this for many days, Madam Speaker, and I'll say it again now: landlords and tenants will need to work together. The protections we announced on Friday last week create an incentive for landlords and tenants to do just that, and this bill will ensure that these protections we've discussed are enforced.

For these reasons, Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to recommend that Bill 11 be read a third time. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 11. I am appreciative that the government has brought this forward. This was, of course, one of the first things that we as a caucus began to call for when it became evident that under the requirements, the recommendations of the chief medical officer of health, there was going to be a serious economic impact for a large number of Albertans. Certainly, we saw that a number of jurisdictions did move forward with this very quickly to put this in place and provide that reassurance to individuals.

I can say that over the last few weeks, you know, representing Edmonton-City Centre, probably one of the highest percentages of renters within the city of Edmonton with all of the different apartments and condo buildings and other structures that we have here and, indeed, within that a fairly wide mix – we, of course, have some of the highest end condominiums in the city, but we have some areas of my constituency within the downtown here where people are on very low income and, in fact, many of them on fixed income. Of course we also have a large number of people that are self-employed, folks that are working in the gig economy, working as contractors, so there is a large amount of economic disruption for my constituents as a result of the reasonable precautions that we're

taking to combat and contain COVID-19. That was something that I was hearing about from a number of my constituents. They were asking what steps the provincial government was going to take to help protect them as they were in an economically precarious position, so I do appreciate that the government has moved forward with this now so that we have this reassurance.

Having had the chance to sit down and look through the bill, I'm encouraged. This looks like this covers pretty much the provisions that we needed to have in place. I appreciate what the minister was saying in terms of wanting to provide certainty for landlords as well as tenants. Certainly, I did not only hear from tenants; I did hear from landlords. Indeed, Madam Speaker, I have been a landlord. I had a problem tenant, so I certainly appreciate the challenges that there are at the best of times in dealing with some of those circumstances. Certainly, I think it's reasonable that we did not want to put landlords in a bad position either.

Indeed, one of the things I did hear from some constituents and continued to hear even today at my office: people were concerned because there was some conversation initially, before the legislation was introduced, about provisions that, you know, if landlords could demonstrate they had made a reasonable attempt to negotiate and weren't able to do so, they might be allowed. I don't see that provision in the legislation. I'm not saying, necessarily, it would be a problem, as long as there was a clear definition of what that was and what "reasonable" was considered to be. But not seeing that in the legislation, it doesn't present an issue.

Again, I'm very happy to see this because, as I noted, a number of my constituents have also reached out with concerns that they don't qualify for the current provincial bridge funding to address the isolation benefits, individuals that are working in the gig economy or are self-employed or other situations and are facing some challenges there. So this at least helps provide them with some certainty that even if they are unable to get any provincial support and have to wait for the federal program when that comes into place, they at least may have some breathing room on the side of their rent. I do thank the government for doing that, for making sure that you're including the mobile homes. I appreciate that the government has been moving forward on legislation in that regard as well. I look forward to supporting this bill.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dang: Edmonton-South.

The Deputy Speaker: You're in a different seat. Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It appears your memory of my name is tied to my seat, but that's good.

It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 11, the Tenancies Statutes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Act, 2020. I want to say that I've heard from a lot of people in my riding and actually across the whole province because people are reaching out every single way they can to anybody they can, really – I'm sure almost every member of this House has heard those concerns around things like rent increases, late fees, or even evictions during this public health emergency – so I want to thank the minister for bringing this forward. I think it's very important that we can move forward with this legislation and have these changes. I'm glad the minister listened and that these changes are moving forward and that we'll be able to protect these vulnerable people at this very difficult time.

I want to speak a little bit about how I believe there does need to be more financial supports for these people, and I think there does need to be some immediate support for tenants so that these impacts will not ripple down – right? – so they won't just continue and

prolong these types of things. Just as I've been hearing from tenants, I've also been hearing from landlords who are worried that they may not be in a situation that's feasible for them for an extended period of time. I'm hoping that there's financial support that the provincial government and this minister will look at to ensure that those people are able to then pay their rents and perhaps back rents that are owed and support our landlords and families and small businesses here as well. I think those are all really important things.

I think it's great that we're making sure every Albertan has a roof over their head, that every Albertan that has a roof over their head right now will continue to have that roof over their head. I think that is something that is very important. I think it's good to hear that the mobile homes are included in this change. I think all these things are good. I just think that we need to keep doing as much as we can, and I think that there is more that we can do. So I'm looking forward to seeing more that this minister may bring forward in the future or other initiatives that they may bring forward without needing to bring the House in, but those are types of initiatives that I think would help many people.

Madam Speaker, if you'll indulge me, I know this bill does not address commercial tenancies and commercial landlords and those types of issues, but I believe that at some point we will need to start talking about that as well. I think that that's going to become a problem, and I'm hearing a lot from those people as well, from small-business owners in particular but also some commercial landlords, that this is starting to become a problem for them as well, especially as we enact stricter and stricter physical distancing procedures and different things in public health. I think it's very important that we have these conversations, that we keep raising these issues, and that we keep looking at different ways we can protect every single family and every single small business. Of course, you know that small businesses are owned by families – right? – so those are the same groups of people. We need to look at how we are protecting these groups, and I want to make sure that we keep that in mind and in focus every single day that we're debating these issues.

Thank you very much for this bill. That's all I've got. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, would the hon. minister like to close debate?

Mr. Glubish: Sure. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a quick comment again. First of all, I want to just thank all members on both sides of the House for their co-operation and speedy discussion of multiple stages of this very important bill to ensure that the announcements we made on Friday about protections for renters and certainty for landlords in this trying time are guaranteed and enforceable, both for the duration of the public health crisis and also thereafter.

Just a quick comment in response to the Member for Edmonton-City Centre's question about the definition of reasonable as it related to the reasonable and meaningful payment plans between tenants and landlords. The reason that is not in this bill is because this bill is only addressing the late fees and the rent increase protections. It is not dealing with the protection from eviction for the month of April for nonpayment of rent, and it is not dealing with the payment plans, which so long as they are negotiated and in – that is dealt with through the ministerial orders and only needs to happen for the duration of the public health crisis. It doesn't need that protection at the expiry of the crisis, so that's why that is not included in this bill.

3:50

So to sum up, Madam Speaker, I believe that the four protections we announced on Friday, being the protection against any evictions

being made in April for nonpayment of rent, the ongoing protection for the duration of the public health crisis so long as tenants work with their landlords on a meaningful and reasonable payment plan that there would be no evictions for nonpayment or partial payment of rent – but, you know, that also does mean that landlords, if they have a bad actor tenant who is choosing not to pay rent, still have the tools of the RTDRS, the residential tenancy dispute resolution service, to deal with a normal eviction process; that will still be there to deal with bad actors – and then the prohibition against late fees, and the restriction against any rent increases. Those are the four things that we introduced on Friday. This bill makes sure that none of those would be undone at the conclusion of the public health crisis. So they will not be allowed to be imposed retroactively. This is a balanced, thoughtful, reasonable suite of protections that has thought through not just the impacts on tenants but also on landlords and, I believe, will ensure that we have the ability to all work together, between tenants and landlords, lenders and government, to ensure that we don't end up with a housing and a rental crisis as a result of COVID-19.

So I thank everyone for their co-operation on this. I hope that I have been able to help elaborate a little bit on the context, and I'm hoping that we can pass this here today. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Oh, do I have to move to close?

The Deputy Speaker: Sure. Yeah.

Mr. Glubish: I move to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Neudorf moved, seconded by Ms Goodridge, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Motion carried]

Government Motions

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

9. Mr. Kenney moved:

Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: It is my privilege to rise to move Government Motion 9 on behalf of the hon. Premier.

The Deputy Speaker: Are any members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, would the hon. Minister of Energy like to close debate?

Mrs. Savage: Yes, I would like to close debate.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to advise the Assembly that there shall be no evening sitting this evening and therefore move that the Assembly adjourn until 9 a.m. tomorrow, Wednesday, April 1.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:54 p.m.]

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