



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Friday morning, May 8, 2020

Day 20

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Second Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Friday, May 8, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please remain standing.

Statement by the Speaker

VE Day 75th Anniversary

The Speaker: Today marks the 75th anniversary of VE Day, Victory in Europe Day. On May 8, 1945, Allied forces overcame Nazi aggression and liberated Europe, and the war in Europe came to an end after five and a half years of conflict. As we commemorate this important anniversary, let us all remember the immense sacrifice that our servicemen and -women made then and subsequently in the defence of Canada, our liberties, our democracy, and freedom for all.

Please be seated.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has a unanimous consent request to make.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I'd request unanimous consent of the Assembly that members 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 Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mental Health Awareness

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May 4 through 10 is Mental Health Week all across Canada. This year's theme is Getting Real about How You Feel. I encourage everyone across Alberta to reach out to friends and family they trust and confide what is going on with them and their families.

Mr. Speaker, 2020 has been an incredibly challenging year for a lot of Albertans. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption to our lives and routines. Between the danger to health posed by the coronavirus and the economic impacts being felt by Albertan families as a result of the world-wide economic slowdown, Albertans have had to deal with difficult and rapidly changing circumstances. Alberta's economy is also struggling due to the instability in the energy sector. We know that when our economy struggles, so does the mental health of Albertans, and now, on top of this, floods in northern Alberta have displaced thousands of Albertans and left lasting damage.

Albertans have always rallied around each other, especially when difficult circumstances have asked us to. While COVID-19 requires us to physically distance, technology offers us new ways to connect and interact with one another. Coming together as a community is

what will help us get through the challenges we face together and in good health.

I was glad to see our government committing to support the mental health of Albertans with the recent announcement of a further \$53 million to support mental wellness and addiction recovery. Whether to community organizations or further support for 24/7 confidential phone lines, which are particularly helpful to postsecondary students here in Alberta, our government is doing its part, and I know that we as Albertans will get through this together. For a full list of available resources, please visit www.alberta.ca/mentalhealth.

Thank you.

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

Albertans' Communication with MLAs

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last year my constituency office has received and responded to countless e-mails and phone calls with concerns regarding actions of this government. Now, that's not unusual, but what is unusual is how much of that correspondence I receive from constituents of UCP MLAs. Constituents from UCP ridings have been e-mailing or CCing my office about questions, concerns when they're unable to get a response from their MLA. This seems to be common among my NDP caucus colleagues. It is surprising and unfortunate to see how many Albertans are unable to have their representative respond to their concerns.

My office has received dozens of e-mails from teachers in Edmonton-South West regarding Bill 22 and forcing their pensions into AIMCo. We've also been receiving e-mails from all over rural Alberta about the cuts to health care and concerned parents contacting me angered that PUF funding is being cut or that their child's EA and teachers are being laid off. All of these Albertans are looking for answers. They are looking for their concerns to be heard. These constituents are attempting to contact their MLAs, only to be ignored.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that it may be hard for Conservatives to defend these types of cuts, but it is our duty and job as elected officials to listen to our constituents and actually respond. If they continue to ignore these tough questions, these constituents will continue to contact my office, they'll continue to contact my NDP colleagues, and then we will continue to listen to their concerns, we will continue to fight for them, and we will continue to ensure they have a voice in this Assembly.

Thank you.

Support for Vulnerable Albertans

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, this pandemic has been hard on our economy and the livelihood of many Albertans, but throughout our distress and troubles Albertans have shown that we can persevere through any storm we go through. Across the province community organizations and individuals have shown that we are all in this together by supporting one another. Many groups and individuals have shown their community spirit, and they have done this by making and donating masks, picking up and delivering groceries to those who are immune compromised or sick, and many other great acts of kindness. I want to take a moment to recognize and thank all of these people for doing their part to help out each other in this difficult time.

I would also like to remind organizations that we have our charitable donation matching program still running, matching donations to fundraising campaigns until May 31. We have this

program to help support organizations raising money to help fill the gaps created by the increased and changing demand for services due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also help keep many Albertans employed. Our program is asking Albertans who are able to donate whatever their finances allow to help those who rely on programs and services delivered by nonprofits and charities. Every donation will help these charities continue to feed, support, and care for Albertans in this unprecedented time. The fundraising campaigns will target those who are most vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the elderly, indigenous populations, people experiencing mental health issues, people with disabilities, those experiencing addiction issues, newcomers to Canada, and people experiencing homelessness.

Although we are seeing a light at the end of the tunnel with the relaunch soon happening, many Albertans are struggling through these difficult times. We want to support those who are trying to support the most vulnerable in our society. We are all facing the storm together, but with the help of individuals and organizations, we are all able to make it through.

Thank you.

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

COVID-19 and Agriculture

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture is one of Alberta's most important economic activities, but it's also more than dollars and cents. Alberta has a long, proud tradition of farming families, and for these families farming is more than a job; it's a way of life. Alberta's agricultural producers put food on the table for all of us.

Family farms built this province, but – I'm sorry to say it – farmers are struggling right now. Like all of us, farms and agricultural producers have been hit hard by the COVID pandemic. The fear and uncertainty caused by this government's mishandling of the outbreak at the Cargill and JBS meat-processing facilities have left farmers holding the bag. Beef prices, pork prices have taken a hit, forcing farmers to either hold onto stock or sell for less. Either way, that's money out of their pockets. To top it off, for many farmers this pandemic is coming on the heels of a terrible season and being stacked on top of a cold, dry spring. Times are tough. Alberta farmers work hard, and they support all of us through thick and through thin.

Finally, late yesterday the government listened to our calls for them to step up and participate in the federal AgriRecovery program, but it's not enough or fast enough. Farmers are solution-oriented people. They're not letting this minister's dithering get in the way of facing the challenges ahead. There are stories all over this province of farming families stepping up in this time of trouble to help their communities, to support their neighbours, and to find creative solutions to getting their products out locally.

I'm proud to stand with our Alberta farmers, and I'm asking all Albertans to do the same. While grocery shopping, check the labels. Buy Alberta products whenever possible, and encourage your friends, neighbours, and co-workers to do the same. Where your food comes from matters. Food security matters. Local food matters. Alberta food producers and processors and their families matter. Make the effort to show them how much you care, and buy Alberta products whenever possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

10:10 Irrigation Infrastructure and Economic Recovery

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Governments around the globe and at all levels have been challenged by the COVID-19

pandemic. The number one responsibility of this government continues to be the health and safety of Albertans. The measures required to combat this health crisis have come at a great cost to individuals, businesses, and our economy overall. Policy-makers have been justifiably focused on developing emergency support and to provide a financial bridge to survive these trying times.

The pandemic, coupled with the economic war being waged by Russia and Saudi Arabia against the world's competing energy producers, will ensure that Alberta's economic circumstance will be a generational challenge. With this challenge will come a generational opportunity for Alberta. The obligation of this government will be to target infrastructure projects that not only provide jobs and stimulus but also projects that substantially increase economic growth and opportunity for the province.

It would be hard to find a sector that checks all these boxes more emphatically than the irrigation agrifood sector. The industry contributes nearly \$4 billion to the provincial GDP. Over 20 per cent of Alberta's agrifood GDP is generated on less than 5 per cent of the province's cultivated land. Every cubic metre of water delivered for irrigation generates roughly \$3 for the province and \$2 in labour income. Every dollar invested by the government of Alberta in irrigation-related projects generates \$3 in added revenue to our province. Every million dollars in irrigation sales generates roughly 39 jobs.

This type of infrastructure spending is necessary but will come at a great cost. A very real fiscal reckoning will be waiting for the future leaders of our province in order to deal with this spending. It is crucial that we invest in ways that bring a return on our investment and that help to recover an economic future full of success and prosperity.

Thank you.

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

Farmers' Market Reopening

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I love this time of year. The grass starts to green, I awake to the sounds of birds chirping in the trees, and the outdoor farmers' market season returns. The province has deemed these markets an essential service, and I'm excited to get fresh produce as I wander the streets bumping into my friends and neighbours. Well, let's hope we don't bump into each other this year.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The market I frequent most is 124 Grand Market, and it's set to open in six days. I'm excited, but I'm also anxious. So, too, is the market. They've been trying to secure arrangements to help control the number of and flow of patrons. Neither the city nor the province is offering to help. They're trying to secure a larger area so that they can have two metres between their booths and the booths can be staggered. No word yet if that's going to be accommodated. While my constituents and I are keen to return to the market, we deserve to know that physical distancing and other public health requirements will be met.

The province needs to be on top of things. Many fear that they are not and that this government is rushing without a plan. Will the government provide limits on the number of the booths that the city can have on each city block so that they can operate safely, will the government provide fencing and barriers to ensure the safety of patrons, will there be guidelines and support regarding washrooms and handwashing stations, and will the government ensure that this is done before these markets open in just a few days?

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe we have another statement, from the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Faith Organizations

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is blessed with many wonderful faith organizations serving individuals and families through this pandemic. Our faith organizations are special. They are governed by love, not fear. Without the members of our faith organizations, many of our great community service organizations and charities would not exist. That is because these men and women, filled with the love of God, are not content with blessing their families alone but seek to bless all Albertans. Our faith organizations do not seek to shape human behaviour; faith can change human nature.

Mr. Speaker, many of the challenges arising from this pandemic are bigger than government. Relaunch strategies are better as governments trust responsible adults, providing them with an opportunity to apply principles of safety in good faith, offering those freedoms on an equal basis to all such persons, including our faith organizations.

Mr. Speaker, as Albertans seek to move through this pandemic, our great faith organizations will be wonderful partners in seeking better days for all Alberta individuals and families.

Thank you.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Economic Relaunch Strategy

Mr. Loewen: I am happy to speak on our government's relaunch strategy. This is great news because it means that Albertans have succeeded in containing the spread of the virus far below the scale of outbreak in many other places and well below the capacity of what our health care system can handle. Albertans should be proud of this.

Alberta's relaunch strategy was developed on the advice of public health officials. We are going to be carefully and gradually lifting the restrictions imposed on our economy and our lives. Safeguards will be in place to keep us protected, including increased testing capacity, comprehensive contact tracing, support for those who test positive, stronger border controls and airport screening, rules and guidance for use of masks, and strong protections for the most vulnerable.

The relaunch will be happening in stages. Immediately the resumption of nonessential surgeries will be allowed. Dental and noncritical health services can also resume immediately. Outdoor activities such as golf courses and parks will now be available. In the first phase many nonessential retail stores and services will be allowed to reopen. Some will have restrictions. Albertans will be able to go to hair salons and barber shops. Restaurants, bars, and patios may be open to 50 per cent capacity. Retail businesses can open again as well as museums and art galleries. Our government's full relaunch strategy will allow for the gradual reopening of businesses, services, and recreational opportunities under health guidelines. Albertans still need to follow social distancing and practise good hygiene.

We need to further enhance our nation-leading testing capabilities. Areas that do not allow for social distancing such as mass transit will require masks. Albertans need to be prepared for changes in infection rates as the relaunch begins. Other jurisdictions have seen increases in infection rates as restrictions have been lifted. Health officials will be monitoring this to ensure our systems

can handle those possible changes. Albertans also need to understand that if you are uncomfortable with getting a haircut or opening your small business or enjoying Alberta's parks, you do not have to. Feel free to stay at home. Just understand that others that choose to take part in the relaunch have the right to do so. We still need to be careful and responsible when serving and visiting the most vulnerable in our society like our seniors.

I am very happy that Alberta is opening up for business again. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has a statement.

Mental Health Week

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week Albertans and Canadians from coast to coast celebrate Mental Health Week. This has been a Canadian tradition since 1951, when it was established by the Canadian Mental Health Association. It's a week when communities, schools, and workplaces rally to celebrate, protect, and promote mental health.

Even before COVID-19 loneliness and social isolation were already concerns in our society. People with few or weak social connections are at an increased risk of anxiety, depression, and suicide. This year as the pandemic forces us to self-isolate, quarantine, and stay physically distant from each other, Mental Health Week serves as a particularly poignant reminder of the importance of social connection to maintaining our mental health.

Albertans are resilient, but many of them have lost work and are struggling to make ends meet, while our essential and front-line workers worry that they could be exposed to a deadly virus and bring it home to their families. Worse still, not all of us have survived the COVID-19 pandemic, and those that haven't leave behind grieving loved ones during a time when funeral attendances have been limited.

COVID-19 and all of the fallout may be the most significant risk to the mental health of Albertans that our province has ever faced. As we press forward, as we recover, Mental Health Week provides a reminder that it's okay not to be okay and that we can help each other, so call your friends, your family, your colleagues. Check in with them, talk, or just listen, but stay connected.

I wanted to say thank you to Albertans for their kindness and compassion that they have shown and continue to show for each other during this crisis. We will get through this difficult time together.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 20, to be put on the Order Paper in my name.

Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) recognize that the criminal use of firearms primarily involves unlicensed individuals often using illegally smuggled firearms;
- (b) express its opposition to the government of Canada's recent decision to amend regulations to the Criminal Code to prohibit the possession, transportation, and sale of certain types of legally acquired firearms by licensed, law-abiding citizens; and
- (c) urge the government of Alberta to take all necessary steps to assert provincial jurisdiction in connection with these

matters, including replacing the chief firearms officer having jurisdiction for Alberta, as designated by the federal Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, with the chief firearms officer for Alberta, designated by the government of Alberta in accordance with the Firearms Act.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have completed the daily Routine even prior to the determined question period time. Great job to everyone.

10:20 Oral Question Period

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

Support for Persons Affected by COVID-19

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. More than half a million Albertans have either lost their job or lost more than half their hours during the pandemic. Now, we all knew that the job numbers would be grim, but we can't forget that each one of those numbers is a family pushed into distress. Albertans who are not eligible for EI are surviving on the CERB, but that expires after four months. We will still be living with COVID-19 and with a badly damaged economy at that time, so to the Premier: will he commit to supporting Albertans after federal benefits expire?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. the Leader of the Opposition for the important question, and I join with her in expressing the greatest possible concern and solidarity for the hundreds of thousands of Alberta families whose livelihoods have been jeopardized, whose jobs have been lost, whose businesses have been shut, and who are wondering how they're going to pay the bills at the end of the month. That is why this government has provided some \$15 billion in fiscal action to support Alberta families, to provide financial security to both them and job creators, and we will continue to act in unprecedented ways, working together with the government of Canada.

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

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I actually take quite a bit of issue with that \$15 billion number, but we can discuss that at another time.

I was, however, concerned to hear the federal Conservative leader, Mr. Scheer, describe the CERB as, quote, a tranquilizer that incentivizes workers to sit idle. Now, these comments are an insult to the hard-working Albertans who would like nothing more than to get out of the house and back to work if only there was a job available to them. To the Premier: will he join me in condemning Mr. Scheer's remarks, and further, will he also join me in calling on the federal government to extend the CERB to keep Alberta families safe and secure?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I understand that this morning the Prime Minister indicated that the government of Canada intends to extend the wage subsidy program by at least one month and is considering further action with respect to the Canada emergency relief benefit. We will monitor the situation very closely. We do of course want to ensure that as the economy begins to relaunch, people are able to get back to work. We've already heard from some employers who are concerned that they're not getting the applications that they would hope they would at this time, so we're all going to have to work together to ensure that the relaunch is effective and that people get back to work.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, that sounds implicitly like he's doubling down on the comments of Mr. Scheer, and I would suggest that that is, again, deeply insulting.

We actually hope that and will call on the federal government to extend the CERB benefits, not just the wage subsidy. In the meantime many of the provincial programs to defer household costs, including rent and utilities and a ban on eviction, are scheduled to end before then. With 584,300 Albertans unemployed or underemployed, will the Premier commit to extend the life of all provincial programs to defer household costs, and better yet, will he provide real relief for families rather than just defer . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, as I say, the government of Alberta has already acted with some \$15 billion of measures to support families and employers, everything from deferring utility payments to deferring nonresidential property taxes to deferring WCB premiums to providing the emergency isolation payments to providing for relief in many, many other areas. We don't know exactly what the next months hold in store for us, and we'll have to assess what more we do as events unfold.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Support for Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we think about those half a million Albertans who are out of work right now, what we know is that we want them all to return to their jobs, but there are still significant risks for businesses that are reopening. We are hearing from the city of Calgary, the city of Edmonton, from restaurant owners, daycare owners, hairstylists, retailers, all of whom are desperate for guidance and consistency about how to reopen. Now, this isn't the job of one particular official. To quote the Premier: I am the Premier and ultimately responsible therefore for the government of Alberta's response. To the Premier: why was this work not done in advance? When can Albertans expect the same leadership other . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, I congratulate the hon. Leader of the Opposition for finally understanding one of the basic principles of Westminster parliamentary democracy. Mr. Speaker, there are enormous resources available online to provide guidance to businesses, that have been approved by the chief medical officer for health. In many cases that guidance is more specific and more detailed than the industry-specific guidelines available in other provinces. Early next week the Department of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism will be issuing more industry-specific guidelines where there have been requests for that information from specific industries.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you. Those requests have been in place for some time, and early next week is about a day before these places are expected to open, so that's kind of late.

Meanwhile Alberta's small and medium-sized businesses are the most critical in getting Albertans back to work. All the government has done so far is defer costs and add to their debt load. Alberta businesses are still desperately looking for utility relief, not deferral; insurance relief; and rent relief, and all this government

has offered them is more debt. Now, I'm sure some owners are questioning if they can even reopen at all, so when will this Premier offer real help to those businesses instead of just more debt?

Mr. Kenney: The premise of the Leader of the NDP's question is completely false, Mr. Speaker. Government has provided real cash relief to employers, including for example assuming fully half the costs of WCB premiums for this year. We have indicated that we will be partnering with the government of Canada on their commercial tenant rent relief program, with a commitment that I announced a week ago today of \$67 million in that respect, for I believe a \$340 million combined package, and the details will be released shortly.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows full well that that rent program disqualifies the vast majority of businesses that would be seeking it. Nonetheless, going forward, we also know that many businesses are going to need to make extensive investments in PPE, physical retrofits to their businesses, or they may need to operate on reduced capacity because of safety issues. These are business owners who want to reopen, they want to create jobs, they have workers who want to be back to work, but they can't do it because of the costs associated with staying safe. So will this government be providing specific relief to address those issues?

Mr. Kenney: With respect to the commercial tenants program, Mr. Speaker, the government of Canada has heard concerns about accessibility to that program and is in the process of making changes, in part with the advice of the Alberta government. With respect to the cost of equipment in businesses we will consider additional measures, but I would point out that 85 per cent of the businesses in Alberta have not been directly impacted by the public health orders, and they have all found ways to comply with the new public health orders at their own expense. From fast-food restaurants to grocery stores: they've adjusted to the new reality. That's what Albertans do.

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

Automobile Insurance Premiums

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With public health orders in place to stay home and socially distance, Albertans are driving their vehicles less. For many their car has been little more than a 3,000-pound paperweight parked in their driveway the past few months. This means insurance companies are paying out less in claims but still collecting hefty amounts in premiums from Albertans. To the Premier: have you spoken to insurance companies about reducing rates for Alberta motorists during this difficult time?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly acknowledge that auto insurance rates are high in this province. We inherited a broken system from the members opposite, quite frankly. That's why we've appointed an expert advisory committee that will be producing a report for this government. We're expecting that report in weeks.

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

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some estimates from major American insurance companies suggest vehicle use has dropped by 50 per cent, and they have recognized this by reducing their rates substantially. We should see a similar reduction here, and

I think that we can all agree that we must do all that we can to help Albertans make ends meet, especially given today's staggering job loss numbers. So with that in mind, Premier, we are proposing that your government impose a retroactive 25 per cent reduction on automobile insurance premiums for March, April, and May. Will you do that? I would be happy to help you directly with this.

10:30

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can say is that we've reached out to the Insurance Bureau of Canada, strongly encouraging them to offer as much relief as possible, recognizing that vehicle usage is down. I'm pleased to report that a number of the members of the IBC have in fact offered premium relief to their customers. That's strongly encouraged during this time. At the end of the day, we are also waiting for the report to ultimately fix the automobile insurance sector on behalf of all Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. [interjections] Order.

The hon. member has the call.

Mr. Carson: Well, Mr. Speaker, we need action now. All that Alberta motorists have seen are massive increases to their vehicle insurance since this Premier came into office. After being lobbied by his former campaign manager, the Premier removed the 5 per cent cap on auto insurance rates imposed by our government, and some premiums shot up by as much as 30 per cent. Thirty per cent. To the Premier: if you won't help motorists with a reduction, will you at least reinstate the 5 per cent rate cap today? People are looking to you for help.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I have to correct a complete falsehood. I've never spoken to my former campaign manager about auto insurance premiums. I would invite the member to retract that falsehood that he just uttered here.

Furthermore, it was the NDP that created this crisis by capping premiums at a time when payouts were going up enormously and insurance companies were leaving the market. They botched it, and we're going to have to solve this. I'm happy to report, Mr. Speaker, that I, at least, as a premium payer for my truck insurance, got a \$200 break on premiums, unasked for.

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

Health Minister

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, Donna Kennedy-Glans is a former Conservative cabinet minister and a current member of the Premier's hand-picked Fair Deal Panel. On April 26 she wrote: the Health minister "thinks it's about him, his wife, his interests outside of public life. He's wrong . . . The doctors have it exactly right." She concluded: "God help us all if [the minister] still believes he's on the right track."

Now, the Premier apparently has confidence in Ms Kennedy-Glans. Why won't he take her advice about the Member for Calgary-Acadia?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to serve alongside this Minister of Health, who has performed with remarkable strength and clarity during the most challenging time for any Health minister in Alberta history. The previous NDP government saw physician compensation move from 4 and a half billion dollars to 5 and a half billion dollars over their four years in office while average Albertans saw their incomes go down by 10 per cent. We're now

facing a \$20 billion deficit, so while we continue to maintain and in some cases increase physician compensation, we must manage it in the future.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, on April 28, prominent conservative columnist Licia Corbella wrote:

It's difficult to see how [that member] can continue in his role when no one he's supposed to lead trusts him enough to follow.

The best cure for the impossible relationship between [that member] and this province's doctors is for the health minister to resign or for him to be fired. There is no vaccine to fix this.

That is not a partisan attack. Ms Corbella has been one of the Premier's most loyal supporters throughout his career. If she no longer trusts the Member for Calgary–Acadia to do his job, why does this Premier?

Mr. Kenney: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's never easy to make and execute tough decisions. The NDP wouldn't know anything about that because their response to everything was just to write a blank cheque on Alberta's future. While Albertans saw their incomes crashing and a jobs crisis, while Albertans saw that we had lower than average life expectancy, higher than average infant mortality, and longer than average surgical wait times, the NDP's response was only and always to spend more for worse results. This minister has taken on the difficult task of ensuring that we get more bang for the taxpayers' buck in the health system, and that's one of the many reasons I support him. [interjection]

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, barely a day goes by without all of the doctors in a town that voted for the UCP writing a letter to blast that member's unworthiness. We just got one from Rimbey yesterday, from Taber a few days before that. It's widely known that even the government caucus themselves have been unhappy, especially after that member's disastrous, failed attempt to stop the crisis that he himself started. Literally anyone else on that side of the House could be doing a better job. Why doesn't the Premier give one of them a chance, or is this chaos, acrimony, and anxiety for rural communities exactly what he wanted?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I hear the NDP leader heckling as usual over there.

She told me once that she could give me advice on how to deal with the costs of the physicians. Now, I'll tell you how she did it: write them a billion-dollar cheque over four years. While Albertans' incomes were cratering, they increased that compensation, which was already the highest in the country.

Now, with respect to rural physicians, this minister listened to rural MLAs and provided an \$83 million package for about 800 physicians. That's \$100,000 per physician. If that's not an expression of good faith, I don't know what is. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

An Hon. Member: Quiet.

The Speaker: Hey, I don't need help from members of the government in keeping order in the House.

The hon. Member for Highwood has the call.

Capital Projects and Job Creation

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps no other jurisdiction faces a tougher road to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic than Alberta. Unemployment levels are higher than we've ever seen, and the Russia-OPEC oil price war has caused oil prices to hit negative values for the first time in our history. On top of that, some businesses remain closed, and for many people their only source of income is emergency supports being provided by the government. Can the Minister of Infrastructure tell the Assembly what help he is willing to offer to get Albertans back to work?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct to be concerned. While I believe in free-market capitalism and a limited role for government, we will do everything possible to get Albertans back to work. That's why we are getting projects like the Red Deer justice centre, the Bridgeland riverside continuing care centre, numerous schools, and other important infrastructure out to the market for bids. These are critical capital projects for those communities, and we cannot afford to miss the summer construction season while so many of our fellow Albertans remain unemployed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you to the minister for that answer, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the first stage of our economic recovery is expected to begin in just less than a week and given that many businesses are eager to reopen and Albertans are excited to get back to work and provide for their families, can the Minister of Infrastructure please explain the role that doubling the capital maintenance and renewal funding from \$937 million to \$1.9 billion will play in helping Albertans get back to work?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, capital maintenance and renewal are projects like fixing leaky windows, repairing cracked cement, replacing boilers, and filling potholes. We can begin work immediately and provide the short-term jobs we need when unemployment is at historic highs. This week we announced jobs in communities like Peace River, Lac La Biche, and Red Deer that will employ local workers. Our capital maintenance and renewal spending is an important tool not only for preserving the value of our schools, hospitals, and courts but also getting people to work right away.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you to the minister again. Given that the nation-building projects like the Hoover Dam and the interstate highway played a large role in getting Americans back to work during the Great Depression and given that investing in infrastructure projects like this can improve the quality of life for Albertans for years to come, can the Minister of Infrastructure inform this House of any specific projects that Albertans may see in the future?

Mr. Panda: The government is looking at major projects of all kinds, including irrigation, broadband, and energy infrastructure, that can create jobs now and create value for Albertans for generations to come. In recent weeks we have announced new schools, new roads, and, most importantly, new jobs. This government will consult with experts to listen to constituents and keep our promise to spend tax dollars wisely. Nothing is off the table when it comes to ensuring that Albertans can provide for their families. I hope and expect that the government of Canada will partner with us in rebuilding Alberta.

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

Bill 10

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. After weeks of criticism about the gross power grab within this government's Bill 10, the Premier conceded on Facebook that he will be bringing forward amendments that would include a sunset clause. The only thing he failed to mention during his broadcast backpedal was that the UCP voted down an amendment proposed by our NDP caucus to add the sunset clause to the bill. Is the Premier willing to admit now that through Bill 10 he attempted to snag more power for himself under the guise of COVID-19 and that he's now only backtracking because he got caught?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that question is ridiculous. The notion that the government came forward on the advice of the Justice department to clarify powers that have long existed in the Public Health Act because of some personal power grab – I mean, come on. We're dealing with serious issues. How about we start to get some serious questions for a change?

10:40

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that when our caucus proposed putting the sunset clause in this overreaching legislation, the Minister of Transportation rose and said that a sunset clause was redundant and unnecessary and called on his colleagues to vote down the amendment and given that it turned out the minister was only regurgitating the talking points and wasn't able to actually look at Bill 10 and see the colossal overreach, will the Minister of Transportation stand and admit that he failed to do his job by not actually reading the legislation before he directed his caucus to vote down our reasonable changes?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I do think that there are legitimate questions to be asked not just about Bill 10 but the entire Public Health Act because it is an extraordinary statute. I've been digging into it, and I understand that many of the powers embedded in it have existed from this Legislature since 1910. There's a lot of misinformation, and we'd ask the NDP not to feed into the hysteria. There are people who believe that Bill 10, for example, imposed a power to require people to be vaccinated or immunized when, in fact, that power has existed since 1910. Our government is going to be inviting a standing committee of the Legislature to review the entire Public Health Act, including recent amendments, to ensure that there are proper . . .

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that during the debate the Government House Leader deemed our amendments ridiculous and given that what Albertans found to actually be ridiculous was this government's massive power grab under the guise of this public health emergency and given that the Premier's best friend, an anti-LGBT policy maker, John Carpay, has gone so far as to file a lawsuit against this bogus bill, to the Government House Leader: you must be embarrassed. Will you now admit that the only thing ridiculous was your attempt to use a public health emergency – a public health emergency – to benefit your UCP government policies?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of talented Albertans without work right now whom the NDP could hire to do a much

better job of writing their questions. That is pathetic. Today they accused me of being lobbied by somebody who has never lobbied me, never raised an issue. Now they've invented my new best friend.

I believe that there are absolutely legitimate concerns and questions about the entire Public Health Act, to which Bill 10 made minor technical amendments. We will invite a standing committee of the Legislature to invite witnesses to do a deep dive into the entire statute to provide the Legislature with amendments to the bill and the act.

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

COVID-19 Related Health Care for Uninsured Persons

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some Albertans tell us that they're afraid to access medical care even when they are sick because of their immigration status. They don't have proper insurance to cover the cost of going to a doctor to determine if they have COVID-19, for example. Ontario, B.C., and Quebec have all said that every resident is entitled to public health care during this pandemic. Why won't Alberta do the same?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP is calling on us to do something we already did a month ago. We announced in early April that we would cover COVID-related care for anybody even if they're not eligible for public insurance coverage here in Alberta. We issued a formal bulletin to physicians on April 9. This is an exception to our decision to stop paying claims for care of noneligible individuals, in line with other provinces. We've confirmed with AHS that they will not pursue payment of COVID-related care from noninsured patients.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the bulletin sent out a month ago from the government regarding their policy for coverage of nonresidents only refers to, quote, COVID-19 diagnosis and/or treatment of COVID-19 and given that this means that the government policy only covers those who are actually diagnosed with COVID and given public health says that people should be getting tested if they have COVID-related symptoms, will the minister admit that his policy doesn't go far enough? People are concerned that they're going to get a bill if they test negative.

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, we took steps to align ourselves with other provinces. We're very proud to have done that for folks, whether they're from here or not, so that we could make sure that regardless of eligibility for our public health insurance coverage we would be covering anybody who is in this province for any COVID-related illnesses.

Ms Hoffman: Given that Albertans need to be part of stopping the spread of COVID regardless of their immigration status and given that in a recent telephone town hall the minister's only response to people who raised their concern around these extraordinary health care costs was that they should join the nongroup Blue Cross plan for pharmaceutical coverage, Minister, this isn't the question they're asking. They're afraid to go to the doctor because of their immigration status and that they're going to be handed a bill if they test negative. Will the minister finally agree to expand public health care, medicare, for all in the same way that Ontario, Quebec, and B.C. did? He said he's attempted to get there. He's not even halfway there. Will he take the final steps and align with these other provinces? Yes or no?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, again, the NDP are calling on us to do something we did a month ago. We have announced as early as April, to align ourselves with other jurisdictions, that we would cover COVID-related care for anyone, even if they are not eligible for public insurance coverage in this province. That's coverage through the Alberta health care insurance plan, which is a premium-free, copayment-free, deductible-free plan that covers all Albertans for the emergency care that they require in this province. Now we're extending it for anyone in this province for COVID-related care.

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

Personal Protective Equipment Availability

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Around the world and even inside Canada we are currently hearing about large-scale shortages of PPE, or personal protective equipment. I know that here in Alberta we began stockpiling equipment well ahead of most jurisdictions and as such were better off when the pandemic reached us. Previous to the pandemic Alberta used about 200,000 masks a week, but during the pandemic this has escalated to 600,000 masks per day. Keeping up with this requires a significant stockpile. To the Minister of Health: what is the status of Alberta Health's PPE stockpile?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS has always maintained a stockpile here in the province of ready-to-use PPE. They're leading the country, quite frankly, in procurement to meet the extraordinary needs during this pandemic. Generally their goal is to have a 90-day supply. That's based on their consumption. This includes gloves, masks, gowns, N95 respirators, goggles, face shields. But the pandemic response is unique in that AHS is now the sole supplier of PPE to many other groups, not just to their own staff.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that Alberta has already sourced much of its PPE that we anticipate needing over the next few months and given the need for PPE even for those who typically would not use it such as workers in industries such as meat-packing plants, such as the Cargill plant in Spruce Grove, and given the difficulty in sourcing PPE directly from suppliers, again to the Minister of Health: what is our government doing to ensure access to those outside of the medical field?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government is working very hard to get PPE to nonmedical workers, and that's through co-ordination between both AHS and the Provincial Operations Centre through and under my colleague the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. The POC, or Provincial Operations Centre, has fulfilled over 4,000 orders from pharmacies, first responders, funeral homes, social service organizations, and others, and they're continuing to work on getting PPE to non AHS groups and organizations on a priority basis.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of masks to prevent the disease, as demonstrated by Singapore, South

Korea, and Taiwan, and given that an important part of Alberta's relaunch strategy is ensuring access to masks in specified crowded spaces or mass transit and given that all steps should be taken to protect the health of Albertans, can the Minister of Health please explain what steps our government is taking to ensure that PPE is available to individuals seeking to protect their fellow Albertans?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Non AHS organizations and health care providers can request their PPE from the POC, the Provincial Operations Centre, through an e-mail address. It is pessecc-logistics@gov.ab.ca. I encourage any non AHS groups seeking PPE to write to that address. AHS has also scaled up their procurement so that they can provide PPE beyond AHS. That includes our physicians' offices, lodges, group homes, long-term care, specialty clinics. I know there are concerns from businesses and others in all provinces as we prepare for a relaunch, and we'll give them the best guidance.

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

COVID-19 and Agriculture

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our farmers and beef producers have been hit hard during the COVID-19 and economic crisis. While the Official Opposition has been working with our beef producers to call for real support for the industry, this government has been dithering. They're fed up. They're sick and tired of the province and Ottawa playing political tennis while their industry is under siege. Yesterday the minister of agriculture finally stepped up to the plate, but it was a swing and a miss.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Mr. Dach: Producers are saying that this minister just doesn't get how big the challenge is. So to the minister of agriculture: is this really the best you've got to offer?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 10:50.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it amusing that the members opposite, who, when they were in government, brought in Bill 6, the most hated piece of legislation in rural Alberta, actually stand up and pretend to represent Alberta farmers and ranchers. The Premier and our agriculture minister yesterday announced a number of key measures to support the agriculture sector in this province. We're continuing to monitor the challenges to agriculture and will be prepared to respond accordingly in the future.

10:50

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our minister of agriculture is the industry's voice at the Emergency Management Cabinet Committee and given that he was the minister in charge of the Cargill and JBS plant fiascos and given that producers have told us that they have suffered enormous reputational damage through absolutely no fault of their own because of this minister's incompetence, can the minister tell this House how he's going to repair the terrible damage he has done to this industry, or is he just going to sit on his hands and let another fiasco unfold?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, our agriculture minister has been doing an excellent job of working through these challenging times, reaching out to producers, to producer organizations, ensuring that our supply chain can continue to function safely as we work crossministry on challenges. That is why, again, the Premier and the agriculture minister have announced an initial response to the challenges facing Alberta producers such as the fed cattle set-aside program, the increased advance in AgriStability. We're prepared to continue to act.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They're saying that it's too little too late.

Now, given that we have a beef industry under siege and given that we have a minister who's asleep at the switch or being ignored at the cabinet table and given that we have hog producers who are digging pits because they don't see a better solution because this government can't get their act together, can the minister tell this House when he's going to step up to the plate, show some leadership, and take another swing? And given we know this minister's batting average is pretty terrible – he is the one who called the Cargill plant one hundred per cent safe before a major outbreak there – can he try and persuade his cabinet colleagues to do something, anything that might actually make a difference that satisfies our producers?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, again, we will not be lectured by the members opposite when it comes to agriculture and rural Alberta. We have an agriculture minister who's reaching out and communicating to producers every day. The Premier and the minister responded yesterday with initial relief measures, and I can confirm and assure Albertans and Alberta producers that we'll be monitoring the situation and be prepared to announce additional measures if they're required.

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

Environmental Monitoring of the Oil Sands

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Alberta Energy Regulator decided to suspend environmental monitoring requirements. This was done without the consultation of First Nations groups, specifically the people in Fort MacKay, who are surrounded on three sides by development. Would the minister please state the rationale behind not consulting or informing in advance the people of Fort MacKay of these serious environmental changes, and will he apologize for his neglect?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the NDP continue their practice of presenting unfactual statements in this House. Again, Alberta Environment and Parks and Alberta Energy have temporarily suspended a number of reporting requirements that affect the industry, not monitoring requirements. The industry must continue to report as directed in compliance and enforcement orders. They must also continue to report emergencies, including incidents, notifications, contraventions, and releases that may have the potential to impact the environment or public safety.

Mr. Feehan: Given, Mr. Speaker, that it's extremely discouraging to hear about the removal of environmental monitoring without any public process, consultation, or questioning in place and given that it's also discouraging that the Energy minister and environment minister can't even get their story straight about how long this

irresponsible situation will drag on for, would the minister please be clear on the length of these temporary exemptions and provide more clarity about when we can return to responsible environmental monitoring and reporting? The First Nations say that they have not been involved.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it doesn't matter how much the NDP rise in this place and continue to say something that is not happening is happening. That won't make it. Here's the problem. Facts don't care about their feelings. The fact is that we are continuing to monitor the environment. We're continuing to work with our industry to make sure that our world-class environmental standards remain in place. We are also at the same time helping to deal with their employee issues around COVID-19 as we do reporting requirements and collection of data across the province and providing the ability to be able to make sure they can do that safely in the days to come.

Mr. Feehan: Given that the need for robust monitoring in the oil sands cannot be understated and that for monitoring to be effective, it is crucial for data continuity to be in place and given indigenous leaders stating that this decision is akin to throwing out 12 years of monitoring work, would the minister please explain to the indigenous community who are presenting these questions if this serious consequence was reflected upon when they decided to remove the regulations and why they continue to take this dangerous path and refuse to talk to the First Nations so that they understand? If you have an explanation, give it to them. You're not doing it.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I actually have a standing phone call with Chief Grandjamb every several weeks and will continue that practice to continue that relationship and the important work that the Alberta government and Fort MacKay do together. The answer to this question is simple. That is not factual; that is not taking place. What the hon. member is referring to is not accurate. We continue in this province to monitor the environment. We continue to make sure that we have the best environmental standards in the entire world. Our industry is focused on that completely. Again, it does not matter how many times they state it; it does not make it true. Facts don't care about their feelings. These are the facts.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Transportation Capital Projects in Fort McMurray

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fort McMurray is still recovering from the fires, and like the rest of Alberta we're dealing with COVID-19 and low oil prices, with one more slap to the face: we're hit by another disaster, flooding. The people of Fort McMurray are resilient, but with all that's happening at the same time, it would be nice to know that other things that we so desperately need are being addressed. To the Minister of Transportation: is this government looking at our transport infrastructure, especially up north, where permafrost abuses our roads?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We care about all of Alberta, but we're especially sensitive to Fort McMurray with the challenges that they have had to put up with, as the hon. member has rightly pointed out. I would say to the hon. member that Budget 2020 already had significant investment. On top of that, we've

accelerated \$410 million in maintenance and renewal, which includes \$60 million for potholes. We're looking for shovel-ready projects to get done. We won't forget about Fort McMurray. They need and deserve our care right now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is given that highway 63 is vital to Fort McMurray. All of our logistical support comes through this vital road. It's also important north of Fort McMurray, where there are First Nations and my hydrocarbon industry, which also rely on this as their one and only road. The announcement on May 4 did not detail any work in these vital areas. To the same minister. My constituents are appreciative of the good start but want to know what the government is going to do to repair and maintain parts of highway 63.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say to the hon. member that you can tell your constituents that we have always had Fort McMurray in mind. While the announcement on May 4 did give specifics, what it does not include is the fact that there were always two pretty major paving projects on highway 63 that were already included in Budget 2020. They include 50 kilometres of repaving on highway 63 from 881 north of Fort McMurray and 32 kilometres of selected paving between highway 881 and highway 2 south. We'll get these projects done. Fort McMurray is always a concern of ours.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is given that despite these setbacks, my community will ultimately get back to normal, and once it's safe to do so, my constituents will have an urgent need to return to the quality of life they regularly enjoyed once before. It is so important that we ensure that recovery happens quickly, and we need this government's support for that. To the Minister of Transportation: when will the constituents see the benefits of all these projects?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say to the hon. member: as close to immediately as we can. We're working with our industry partners to have a good purchasing process that will actually be a little faster than we normally do, sped up by several weeks. In fact, with some of the projects that are coming out under the capital maintenance and renewal projects and some of the economic stimulus projects, we hope to have dust flying in June, not just in Fort McMurray but all over Alberta, because we know that right now is when the jobs are needed and when we have to do repairs.

Provincial Relaunch Strategy and Municipal Funding

Member Ceci: The closure of recreation facilities, fewer permit fees, and almost no revenue from public transportation: these are only some of the reasons municipalities, rural and urban alike, are seeing dire financial effects from COVID on their budgets. The future is uncertain, deficits are increasing, revenues are getting tight, and reserves are being drained. When municipalities are facing unprecedented crises, they need their partner in the provincial government to step up now more than ever. Will this minister commit to helping our municipalities, or is he ideologically committed to cutting deeper and downloading further?

11:00

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. This government has been working very closely with our municipal partners. In fact, on a weekly basis we hold a town hall to better understand how our government and our municipal partners can work together. I can assure the member that we will be there for all Albertans, including our municipalities.

Member Ceci: Given that Calgary faces a tenuous future as it's seen an economic crisis layered on top of this pandemic and given that the mayor of Calgary has been quite vocal that he's not been involved in discussions on the relaunch in his own city and given that it'll take more than cookie-cutter solutions from other orders of government, will this minister commit to establishing a round-table with municipal leaders and get their input on how the relaunch of our economy and building sustainability in municipalities will occur?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the hon. member that my office, including the Premier, is in constant communication with the city of Calgary and the mayor of Calgary and, indeed, all of our mayors and reeves across this particular province. As I said before, we hold a weekly town hall, where we get to discuss how we can both work together to address the outcome of this pandemic that we have never seen before.

Member Ceci: Given that the pandemic and economic crisis has regrettably forced municipalities to lay off workers and given that ensuring that these workers will have jobs to return to after the pandemic is lifted will only help improve our municipalities and Alberta's economic recovery, will the Minister of Municipal Affairs commit to providing municipalities with the resources needed to successfully rebridge every single municipal employee back into employment, or, despite what municipalities are telling him, is he only going to allow them to pass deficit-filled budgets? How is that your only solution, Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the hon. member that this government will do everything we can to get our people back to work, and that is why we've called out to all of our municipalities in this province to send us shovel-ready projects. We are working with them, and we are taking a look at all of those projects. In the weeks to come, we will announce how we are going to make sure that we get our people back to work.

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

Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, I'm sure all members in this House have been inundated with requests from local business owners looking for provincial support. I'm certainly hearing from hundreds of businesses with owners in my constituency. One of them is a florist, and he's unsure of his ability to reopen. They lost the majority of their stock over the last few months while they were closed. Their insurance will not cover losses due to the pandemic, and it will cost them thousands of dollars just to replenish their stock. Given the situation they currently find themselves in, will the Premier continue to say that he has done enough to help Alberta small businesses?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, our government has done a lot. We are constantly talking to businesses, and as things become

necessary, we'll do that, too. Businesses have already received delays and partial payment by the government for the workers' compensation fees, tax deferrals, and we are obviously working with the federal government on a number of supports. We've done a great deal, including \$67 million towards the commercial rental relief program. We will stay in touch, and we will take further action as it is required.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that businesses like the Indian Chef restaurant in Edmonton-South were hit hard by the pandemic as most of their revenue is through things like catering and corporate functions and given that they still decided that despite this they would help those who needed it most, offering free meals to anyone who needed it, no questions asked – when they reopen, they will need dividers, sanitization products, proper PPE. Will this government step up and help these businesses that have done so much to support their communities?

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'll ask the hon. member, because it's a good question to take yes for an answer. The fact is that our government has been very active in staying in touch with businesses. We've put lots of programs in place, many of which I enumerated with my first answer, and we'll stay in touch. I worked with the food business for 25 years before I was elected. I know how important the hospitality business is. They will be in our minds, and we'll be working with them all along the way to get them up as Alberta recovers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that businesses are saying that this is just not enough and given that the owners of restaurants like Buffet Royale have contacted me recently, concerned that without more support they will lose their business, and that they've been a staple in Edmonton for over 20 years and have over 120 employees and given that with four locations their monthly rent is over \$100,000 and even after the commercial rent assistance program they will still need to pay \$25,000 without any income and given that because of the nature of a buffet they aren't sure if they'll be able to reopen safely, will this government finally admit that they need to do more to support small businesses, or will they sit back and watch institutions close forever?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member points out a real problem that a lot of restaurants and hospitality members in our province and across Canada and around the world, really, are all suffering with. I've said that we have in place rent relief, some tax relief. We are looking for the financial institutions to be patient with repayment terms. We're doing a great deal. We'll stay in touch with these restaurants, and if the hon. member has specific things, I invite him to bring those suggestions forward.

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

Physician Assistants

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our military can be depended on during times of crisis, particularly with health care and with their field hospitals. One of the things that makes their medical delivery system so effective is the use of physician assistants in helping deal with serious injuries in situations where there are high patient-to-doctor ratios. Their model of having these assistants

perform some of the duties of a physician under the supervision of a doctor is something that we've been piloting here in Alberta for a number of years now. To the Minister of Health: can you please provide an update on the success of the physician assistant pilot program?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. In 2013 there was, through AHS, a two-year physician assistant demonstration project, and it integrated the PAs into several facilities. That project ended in 2015. It was a success, and AHS has continued to hire PAs into a number of roles. A new regulation proposed for PAs will build on that role, and it will allow them to do a number of additional things like working 24/7, writing orders, signing off on discharges, consults, and referrals to community agencies, and allow AHS to develop an alternative service delivery model.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that the pilot program was a success and Ontario, Manitoba, and New Brunswick are utilizing physician assistants, albeit in different capacities under their legislation and with regard to recognition, and that we're in the middle of a health crisis that demands as much efficiency and effectiveness as possible in the health care system, to the minister: will this amendment to the Health Act come into effect so that we can have physician assistants here to help with the COVID-19 pandemic?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Physician assistants are a proven new role. In fact, there are about 60 PAs that are enrolled under the CPSA, the College of Physicians & Surgeons, and a number employed with AHS. There's a process to approve the draft regulation for their profession to formally regulate them, and we're looking at options to move that process up to make more use of the PAs during the pandemic. We could move the regulation ahead more quickly or authorize restricted activities on a temporary basis, but I emphasize that the goal is to get them regulated.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our rural areas are among those in the most need of medical personnel, particularly at this time, and the government is dedicated to improving our health care system for Albertans going forward and that physician assistants can play a key part in helping us through this crisis, as we have agreed, will the Minister of Health facilitate the placement of physician assistants to locations where doctors are in short supply or overworked to maximize the physicians' time and to meet the challenges faced in rural Alberta's hospitals during this pandemic and going forward?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS currently has the capacity to deploy the PAs to areas in need. Businesses such as physician medical practices, nonhospital surgical facilities, the sleep medicine clinics, or diagnostic imaging clinics can opt to hire PAs and give them a salary. The PAs work under the supervision, then, of a physician, and this will be the case even when they are regulated. The supervising physician must be willing to take on these workers. We're working to get the PAs regulated, maximize

their contribution to the health system in the pandemic and going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North has a question.

Personal Protective Equipment Availability
(continued)

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Governments are working to secure sufficient supplies of personal protective equipment, or PPE. Our front-line workers depend on PPE to protect themselves. Because of our supply Alberta has been able to help other provinces. Since expanding testing, we have seen a significant increase in COVID-19 contractions. To the Minister of Health: do we still have enough PPE for Alberta, and if so, do we have the capacity to continue to help Canada's hardest hit provinces?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, there was a report that local supply here in Alberta was shared with other provinces and masks sourced recently from China were shared with other provinces. That report was misleading. AHS continues to lead the country in procuring PPE, and they continue to respond to the legitimate staff concerns about masks that are sourced from new suppliers, working with those employees and others throughout the system to hear those concerns on further and future procurement decisions.

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

11:10

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are certain safety standards that have to be met in order for protective equipment to be effective and further given that some groups like AUPE have publicly criticized the quality of protective equipment supplied by AHS to various sites, to the same minister: what do you say to those questioning the quality of our PPE?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS and our government are leading the country, as I said before, in procuring and supplying PPE. All PPE that's procured for health care use has to meet the accepted safety standards. Inevitably we're working with new suppliers, as everybody throughout the world is, as well as there's a shortage globally. It means that some products may not be well-suited to our needs. AHS has been open about acknowledging those concerns, responding to staff, and I have every confidence they'll ensure that all staff have access to safe equipment as needed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that an outbreak at Cargill meat-processing plant eventually caused the plant to temporarily close down and many Albertans are worried about food security in our province and further given that PPE requests outside of AHS are from places like pharmacies and independent medical clinics, to the same minister: should businesses like meat-processing plants be able to get PPE from our government?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A non AHS organization and health care providers can request their PPE from the Provincial Operations Centre, or POC, by e-mail. I mentioned

that e-mail address earlier this morning. I encourage any non AHS groups that are seeking PPE to write to that address. That offer is open to any organization. But I should be clear: supply is limited. Our government has set priorities. A large industrial employer needs to be responsible for their own business requirements, but certainly our government and AHS are providing all the advice and the assistance that we can.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. I believe the point of order has been withdrawn, but I'll ask the chief government whip if that's the case.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Government House Leader we withdraw the point of order.
Thank you.

The Speaker: As a result, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon, hon. members. I would like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 14
Utility Payment Deferral Program Act

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to Bill 14 in Committee of the Whole? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 14, Utility Payment Deferral Program Act. We want to say about this act that we do support the utility deferral that was announced by this government in March. It took them almost two months to figure out how to deliver this program, but even after two months I would say that this bill doesn't go far enough. This bill is just fulfilling a promise that they made on March 18, and I think things have changed since then. We have way more cases of COVID-19. We have seen job loss, and even today, with the number we are seeing in terms of job losses, there are almost half a million Albertans who have lost jobs. I think the government needs to think about whether what they announced on March 18 is still relevant. Is it still something that Albertans are looking for? Had they talked to their constituents, had they talked to businesses in their ridings, I think they would know that Albertans need more than just a three-month deferral on their utilities.

Things have changed since March 18, and it's more important than ever before that the government should consult with Albertans, consult with businesses, and actually provide real relief, that other provinces are also providing. The way they have set this up, it's a three-month deferral, and out of those three, I think it's possible that Albertans may have already paid their March and April utilities. Basically, this bill may be available to them for just this month of May and the month of June utilities.

The way the government is doing it, not only are Albertans not getting real relief, but they have made provisions within this legislation that utility companies will get interest-free loans from the government through the Balancing Pool. They will extend these deferrals to individuals and businesses, but at the end of the day they will be charging back to the consumers, to Albertans, and will even be making money on these deferrals.

Not just that, but if in the execution of this program there are some losses that are incurred by the utility companies, they have rate rider provisions right in the legislation. Those provisions mean that at the end of this repayment period, which starts on June 19, 2020, next month, and ends June 18, 2021, after 2021 they will have a rate rider period which starts on June 19, 2021, and ends June 18, 2022. During that period what these provisions give companies the ability to do is that they will be able to calculate their losses from these programs and socialize all those losses onto all Albertans, whether they're deferred or not, and collect those losses from the entire population. That's how they are setting this program up, not only that it's not providing any relief, but it's also making Albertans at large liable for the losses that companies may incur during the execution of this program.

11:20

Then there are other things. They have put in provisions such as Crown immunity. It doesn't matter how they execute this program. Nobody will have the ability to bring any lawsuit to seek any recourse from this government, because within the legislation they have put in provisions that will bar such actions.

With respect to accounting, they have put in provisions that they will not be required to do the proper accounting. Those things are very concerning, that the government wants to use public money to provide relief to the public, but they would not be willing to share their books with the public, who they're acting on behalf of, whose money they are using.

Then they have a provision, section 22, I believe, that exempts any agreements made under this piece of legislation from the requirements of section 42.1 of the Financial Administration Act. That section requires that when government enters into a contract and buys into some shares of a corporation and if the value of those contracts and shares is over \$500,000, the government is required to furnish those agreements and any amendments to those agreements before the Legislative Assembly at the end of the fiscal year within the time period specified in the legislation. They have put in a provision that will keep these contracts away from the public, and they will not be required or obliged to do so under section 42.1 of the Financial Administration Act.

One would think that they would have learned something from their past handling of these finances in a secret manner. It was not long ago that the Canadian Association of Journalists bestowed upon the government of Alberta the code of silence award for outstanding achievement in government secrecy. The reason they got that was that they came up with a \$120 million energy war room, and they put in similar provisions with respect to that war room: that their expenses won't be FOIPable, that they are not accountable, and that nobody would be able to see what they are doing with that \$120 million. For those reasons, they were given this award for outstanding achievement in government secrecy.

Again, instead of trying to fix that, instead of trying to make things better, instead of trying to avoid such embarrassment going forward, they are again putting similar provisions in their programs to avoid any disclosure, and that's exactly what they are doing with this program as well by making these contracts exempt from section 42.1 of the Financial Administration Act requirements.

In short, I think there are a number of things that we are concerned about. There are a number of concerns that we have heard from stakeholders, constituents, businesses across this province. We will propose certain amendments to make this bill better, to make this bill more current and relevant to what Albertans are going through now as opposed to when government announced

these deferrals. We will also make amendments, propose amendments to ensure transparency and to ensure that Albertans get to see how this government is spending their money. It is their right.

With that, I will be introducing the first amendment to this legislation. Do you want me to read it into the record?

The Chair: Just wait till I have a copy.

Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Sabir: Madam Chair, do you want me to read that into the record?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mr. Sabir: I move that Bill 14, Utility Payment Deferral Program Act, be amended as follows: (a) that section 22 is struck out; (b) that section 25(3) is struck out and the following substituted:

- (3) The Commission must, on or before December 31 of each year,
 - (a) provide an annual financial report relating to the Utility Payment Deferral Program to the Minister, and
 - (b) make that report publicly available.

What this amendment is trying to do is simply this. As government the revenues that you get, the finances that you have at your disposal: they belong to the people of Alberta. They are public funds. That's why it's called the public purse. That's why they are called public funds. When you spend them, Albertans have every right to know how their money is being spent. This provision, this amendment will make sure that Albertans are able to get that information that they need to assess for themselves how public dollars are being spent.

As I mentioned, it was just a couple of weeks ago that this government received an award, the code of silence award for outstanding achievement in government secrecy. What this amendment is doing is removing those provisions that will restrict public disclosure. It's removing section 22, asking that section 22 be struck out. Section 22 is where the government is making this legislation exempt from the Financial Administration Act. To all my colleagues in the House: this provision has nothing to do with the operation of this program. All it's doing is saying that government is not required to furnish any agreements that it enters pursuant to this piece of legislation before this Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

11:30

Especially to my colleagues on the government side, who always talk about fiscal responsibility and fiscal accountability and all those good things, I think that if they really mean those things, it's the time that they should stand up for fiscal responsibility. It's the time. It's their opportunity to stand up for accountability. If they vote down this amendment, they will be voting down accountability. They will be voting down fiscal transparency. They can read these provisions for themselves. All they're doing is giving government authority, giving government legal reasons not to disclose these agreements, not to disclose details of this program to Albertans. That's in section 22, which is about exempting this program from the Financial Administration Act.

The other section that we are proposing is – all we are asking, not right away, at the end of the year, is that the commission prepare a report and give it to the minister and publicly release it to see how public money was spent, who benefited from it so that basically we learn for the future how we can improve things going forward. Again, this is also about fiscal responsibility, fiscal transparency,

all those good things that my colleagues from the other side always talk about.

This is your opportunity to make this bill more transparent, this is your opportunity to be accountable to your constituents and to the public, this is your opportunity to make this program more transparent, and this is your opportunity to avoid receiving the cone of silence award for outstanding achievement in government secrecy and all those things. This is the amendment that will help you with all those things, and it will also give Albertans some assurance that government is transparent. This will give Albertans the ability to see how their money is being spent.

With that, I urge all of my colleagues in this House – I urge colleagues on this side and also colleagues on that side – to vote in favour of this amendment, vote against government secrecy, vote in favour of transparency, vote in favour of transparent accounting, and vote in favour of this Legislature receiving those arrangements made under this program and being able to represent their constituents. Let's vote in favour of transparency, and let's vote in favour of accountability. Let's strike out section 22, which restricts disclosure of these agreements, and let's ask the commission to provide full accountability of this program publicly so that the public can know how their money is being spent.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, I will take a little chair allowance here and say hello to my daughter, Molly, and my son, Brady, who are learning about the activities of the Chamber on a Friday mid-morning.

I'm wondering if there are any other speakers now that would like to speak to amendment A1. I see the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 14 and more specifically the amendment just made by my colleague. Just for clarity, to review, this first amendment looks at striking out section 25(3) in Bill 14, which restricts disclosure, and would be substituted by the following:

The Commission must, on or before December 31 of each year,

- (a) provide an annual financial report relating to the Utility Payment Deferral Program to the Minister, and
- (b) make that report publicly available.

I think item (b) in this particular amendment – obviously, the financial reporting is essential, but to make the information available to the public is essential. I think my colleague did a great job, obviously, reminding us of the government's recent award-winning behaviour of secrecy. So it stands to reason that this kind of amendment would be attractive to the government. If there is nothing to hide, then hide nothing and don't be afraid to put your information out there. If we're, Madam Chair, saying that we're concerned about in the future that some information may not be clearly available to Albertans so they can assess the success of this program, if we're introducing an amendment that would alter that, I think that's a good amendment.

Again, to reiterate what my colleague said, if the government members choose to vote against this particular amendment, I do think that sends a very real message to Albertans about their position on transparency. I think that we can all agree that Albertans deserve to know as much as humanly possible. I think we've all come to recognize how valuable good government is. Particularly during a crisis or when we're in a state of emergency like this global pandemic, like we are now, it is vital for government to be clear about what they're doing, to include people in what they're doing, and then to report back on what they're doing. All of those activities add to the trust that Albertans could feel going forward, and in a

time of incredible uncertainty like we are in right now, those things are incredibly valuable. Our amendment is quite simple in that it adds another component that perhaps government did not think about around transparency and disclosure.

Now, I'm going to give the government the benefit of the doubt to say that perhaps they did not realize that this particular piece of legislation didn't go far enough to allow Albertans to see precisely where their investments were going. I think my colleague brought it up, and it's important to remember that these funds are funds owned by the people of Alberta, so I think it makes sense to report back to them to say exactly what you're doing with those funds.

Any kind of lack of transparency – of course, you know this. We all know this in our lives. If you don't share information or if you're not transparent about the decisions that you're making, people are naturally going to assume things that aren't true, perhaps things that are malicious or things that cause them further worry. I think it's quite simple with this amendment to go forward, make a few changes so that you can guarantee that Albertans will understand exactly what you're doing with things related to this piece of legislation.

This is also my first time speaking to Bill 14, Madam Chair, so I just wanted to go back and underline pieces in this legislation, why I think transparency is so vital. There are a few things in the legislation that I think people are going to want to know a little bit more about. Just to be clear, we absolutely support the deferral, but we also know that the timeline the government has used in terms of supporting Albertans certainly doesn't go far enough. I wish that by June things would be different and this would not be necessary, but chances are, given the enormity of the reaction because of what's happened globally and here at home, that this will likely go on for quite some time, and it's important to recognize that.

11:40

The other piece that is concerning – and perhaps this amendment would reassure Albertans once they see the information as to why government chose to go the route that they did – was that other provinces are doing things a little differently. Now, government says that they know best; they're going to do this because this is the right way to go. Other provinces have said otherwise, so perhaps this amendment around introducing more transparency in public reporting would allow Albertans to feel more reassured that that is the case.

That being said, the concerns about this piece of legislation are actually quite basic in my mind in terms of the activity that is going to be undertaken, and that is about deferral. I'm sure, I'm positive that every single constituency office in this province has received an overwhelming number of phone calls or e-mails or messages of some kind just outlining and describing the absolute chaos that this pandemic has caused for people that have lost their jobs, people that are unable to work because they're at home with their children, people who don't have access to child care. There are so many things. Business owners that are on their knees: some of them just do not know how to make things work. They perhaps don't have a business that can adapt like others can. But a deferral doesn't cut it. All a deferral does is just put things off until later. Do you know what? Economic recovery for some of these folks and some of these business owners is going to take a whole lot longer than what this bill describes.

People are really struggling, and I can tell you that once the public health orders are lifted or changed or altered in some way, we are not going to bounce back just like that. People are not going to be able to bounce back just like that and catch up with all of the bills. We've got people that are struggling to pay rent, people that are struggling to pay mortgages, and that includes residential and

commercial. We've got people that are struggling to put food on the table, people that are really struggling, and a deferral doesn't cut it. It just doesn't cut it. If we have the ability to truly help people, not just companies that provide a service to people, why on earth wouldn't we do that instead of just pushing the problem a few months down the road? That's not good enough.

These resources belong to the people of Alberta, and right now the people of Alberta are hurting, and they need help. That includes businesspeople, residential set-ups in terms of utility usage, all of them. They need assistance. Deferral is not good enough.

I'm going to give you an example. This morning I had a chat with someone who's struggling, like everybody else, no different. Everybody is struggling. Everybody is struggling. They're worried about not being able to pay their rent, worried about food being put on the table, knowing that they're going to lose access to their phone because they can't afford the phone bill, and now waiting for some good news around utilities.

You know, there was an announcement. Your government spoke about this program, as my colleague mentioned, in the middle of March, so I think there was some anticipation around this: great; here's a program that will provide me some relief and perhaps get rid of one bill. Then we saw exactly what it was. It was a deferral, and that's not good enough. It's really not good enough. Economic recovery for businesses and for individual Albertans is going to take a heck of a lot longer than what the government seems to envision that will be.

I was truly hoping, Madam Chair, that the legislation the government was going to bring forward to deal with some of the hardships that Albertans are facing right now, that they would have learned from previous experiences about not going far enough or creating too many holes so that people fall through. I was quite hopeful that those lessons would be learned and this would be different, but clearly they are not. I think back to the emergency isolation benefit and all of the people that really needed that support at the time to get them to the time that the federal government stepped in, thankfully, to help them. I was really hoping that that experience would have taught something about what is needed right now, but clearly that didn't happen.

Again, I said this yesterday in this place as we were speaking about another piece of legislation. You know, when we sit here and listen to government, whether it's in question period or debate during the bill, it's always: "The premise of that question is false. That is incorrect. We've already done that. You're worried about that. You're fearmongering. You're wrong. We're right. You caused the problem." The point is that this is a very unique situation. People are hurting. Deferring bills right now, when they have zero income, is not good enough. It's not good enough.

What else isn't good enough is the lack of clarity and transparency. If you have truly nothing to hide, don't hide anything. Just agree to the amendment: "Yes. Absolutely. We know that Albertans want to know where their dollars are going. We commit to this. We will make this information available. Done deal. No problem." It's super easy. It is super easy. Show a bit of humility and say: well, maybe we didn't have all the answers, maybe we didn't consult all the correct people, and we're going to take a step back and do things a little bit differently. That is a good thing. That is our job here, to propose ideas that perhaps you didn't think about or to make this piece of legislation better.

This is a common-sense amendment. This is about transparency. Just like you hear about some scientists, you know, studying the impact of, say, sunlight on virus, right? It has the ability to reduce the potency of virus on some surfaces. Sunlight is a good thing. Transparency is sunlight. Let's shine a light. Let's figure out exactly where this money is going, who is benefiting, how many

Albertans are benefiting from this. Let's be clear. Let's be open. Let's share the information. If you truly have nothing to hide, don't hide anything, and join us in voting for this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair. With that, I'll pass it over to my colleague.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A1? I see the hon. associate minister of natural gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would first of all like to thank the hon. colleagues across the aisle for this very thoughtful amendment. Let me just be the first one to say that I would absolutely agree with the NDP if I thought they were right. I would be the first one to do that. Unfortunately, as thoughtful as this amendment is, it's only applicable if we were a state-owned economy. If we were a state-owned economy, this would be a wonderful amendment. Unfortunately for the NDP, we are not state owned. Not only are we not a state-owned economy, but we have a deregulated electricity environment. So the rules on the ground are a little bit different.

Please appreciate that the utility providers did not come to us; we went to them. We went to them with cap in hand, and we said: can you work with us to help out all Albertans? So they are in fact helping us to make this happen. It is unreasonable in an economy that is not state owned to then turn around and say: by the way, thanks for helping us; we're now going to ask you to put out your competitive, privileged information, and we're going to ask you to submit it to the Legislature and make it publicly available once a year. I mean, it's an unreasonable ask in a deregulated environment like we have. However, like I said, it's certainly thoughtful on their part.

I think what they're really concerned about is to make sure that this is a responsible program, that there's accountability. So I just want to point out that in part 3 of this legislation it deals with the Alberta Utilities Commission because that is the arm's-length organization that will be overseeing this, and it deals with inspections, audits, and reporting. In section 25 it says:

(1) A service provider must make available for inspection by the Commission all records and documents related to its participation in a Utility Payment Deferral Program.

Then it goes on to say:

(2) The Commission may review and audit the records of a service provider to ensure that submissions made by the service provider under this Act are correct.

Lastly, it says:

(3) The Commission must provide an annual financial report relating to the Utility Payment Deferral Program to the Minister on or before December 31 each year.

So there will be financial reporting submitted. It will be given to the minister because cabinet confidentiality will apply, and they won't be putting their competitive, privileged information at risk.

So as thoughtful as this amendment is, you know, and I do appreciate the attempt, I do ask all of the private members to vote against this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

11:50

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through this amendment we are not asking any utility company to make their competitive business information available to us. This amendment doesn't deal with utility companies' information. All it's saying is that "section 22 is struck out," and for the benefit of the House I will read out

what section 22 says. It says, “Section 42.1 of the Financial Administration Act does not apply to loans made under this Act.” What this provision is doing: government is making loans available to companies, and government is trying to hide that information. By striking this, we are not making utility companies open their books, open their secret business information in public. All this provision is doing is exempting government from disclosure of their loans, those agreements. I will read section 42.1 just so the minister knows that I have read this legislation and all other legislation that is referenced in this bill. Tabling share and loan agreements, section 42.1(1), of the Financial Administration Act reads.

If the Crown, pursuant to an Act passed on or after May 24, 1996, makes a loan or acquires shares of capital stock in a corporation, the head of the department that administers that enabling Act shall lay the loan agreement, the agreement under which the share is acquired and any material amendment to either agreement before the Legislative Assembly not later than 45 days after the end of the fiscal year in which the agreement or amendments, as the case may be, is made or, if the Legislative Assembly is not then sitting, not more than 15 days after the beginning of the next sitting.

Section (2) reads:

The requirement under subsection (1) to lay a loan agreement before the Legislative Assembly does not apply to a loan to an individual of less than \$500,000.

That’s the provision. The Financial Administration Act exists to ensure that when government is entrusted with public money, when government is made in charge of the public purse, there is transparency in how their money is spent. That’s what this provision does. When government uses public money as loans and provides loans to entities in our economy, that’s a use of public money, and the public has every right to know how that money was used.

Through this provision, through this section, government is saying: section 42.1 doesn’t apply to us. That’s wrong. The interpretation the hon. minister did of our amendment: that’s wrong, too. We are not asking for companies to provide their business information to us. We are asking our government to disclose to us in public how they’re spending our money, public money. That’s what the Financial Administration Act stipulates, and they are deliberately putting in this provision to avoid that transparency, to avoid accountability.

The second thing that this amendment is doing is striking out section 25(3) and essentially adding that the report that the commission will prepare and provide to the minister should be available publicly.

Again, we are not asking any utility company, utility provider, who is participating in this program to share their business secrets with the public. This amendment is not about that. This amendment applies to government as they are using public money, loaning public money, and all it’s doing is asking government to share that information with Albertans. It’s just asking government to be accountable for their use of public money. It’s asking government to provide details of how you’re using these funds.

I disagree with the interpretation put on this amendment by the hon. minister that it’s in any way, shape, or manner about utility companies and their business secrets. No. It’s just about government disclosing what they’re spending and how they’re spending public money. The commission will be preparing a report that they will present to the minister. All we are requesting is that that report at the end of the program be made available to the public as well.

Again, we hear all the time from the other side about transparency, about accountability, about how good they are with public money and what good stewards they are of the public purse. So let’s

do that. Let’s see that in practice. If you have nothing to hide, if you think the program you brought forward is in the best interests of the public and is the best use of public dollars, let us see the books, then. Share those arrangements so the public can see how their money is spent.

Also, this provision will help you to not get a code of silence and secrecy award next year. It’s also important from that standpoint.

Member Ceci: No guarantee.

Mr. Sabir: No guarantee, but at least it will be a good step in that direction. At least if something along these lines happens, a case can be made that: no; we removed these provisions, and we moved towards more transparency on how we spend public dollars. At least it will send a good message that after receiving the award, we have done things differently. Now we are more transparent. Now we are making sure that there are no provisions restricting disclosures and no similar provisions that we have used to set up the energy war room and those kinds of things.

This amendment will increase accountability. This amendment will make the program more transparent, and this amendment will give Albertans confidence in how their money is spent. Again, I’m asking all my colleagues on both sides of the House to stand with transparency, stand with public disclosure. It’s public money, and the public has every right to know how their money is spent. Government shouldn’t be giving themselves the power to exempt themselves from the Financial Administration Act. That’s wrong, and I think this provision is there to fix that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Chair. I’m pleased to rise to speak to the amendment to Bill 14, the Utility Payment Deferral Program Act. Before I speak to the bill, since this is my very first day in the House since the Assembly has reconvened, I bring my condolences to all the people, the families who have lost their loved ones in this COVID-19 pandemic and all those people that are, you know, suffering financial hardship due to this, that have lost their jobs and are working hard to make their ends meet. My sympathies are with all those people.

12:00

The reason I said that I’m pleased to speak to the amendment – the one thing that I can, you know, say for sure probably, or I can echo it: it seems like the House unanimously understands that the people of Alberta, the Albertans, are facing unprecedented times and challenges during this COVID-19 pandemic. People are struggling to make their ends meet. People are having a tough time keeping up with their normal life. So I’m glad that the government also sees this in this way and took some steps to deal with this issue.

What we are doing with this amendment is being a very positive opposition. By doing some constructive work, we are trying to complement the work that this bill is trying to take into hand, to achieve the goal that we see. Without going through these steps, it might not be possible to achieve.

I think that it was this morning or late last night when I was looking to the news. The reports were coming out of nearly half a million people out of jobs due to the situation. Many of the small businesses cannot operate due to the situation. So people are struggling to keep up with their regular expenses. Either they’re trying to keep up with their normal life or the businesses just, you know, to keep their doors open. They are struggling to find the means. A number of businesses are closed, so it’s very hard for

them. Due to the situation either there is not really income or their income sources or income have been reduced big time.

I'm glad that the government has come up with something. Even titling this bill says that they understand that even those small things are an incredible part of their normal life, to keep the things going, to pay these utility bills. The people are finding it hard.

When we are looking at the bill, we have a number of concerns, but we are trying to address one of those with this amendment that – I believe this is the very first amendment to the bill since this bill has been moved in the House and discussed. This amendment is focusing on one of the very important components of the bill. I'm sure the government should have been concerned with this because it wasn't long ago when we saw this in the news. It made it to the media, and I'm sure the government probably didn't take big pride for the government receiving the code of silence award. That was the very reason I said that, when we're discussing this amendment, when my colleague from Calgary-McCall moved this amendment to the bill, we are trying to complement this. I will say that I'm giving the benefit of the doubt to the government for having the lack of provisions in this bill. I will not blame, that the government purposely has done this.

This is a time, I would say, an opportunity for the government House members to pay attention to the lack of components in this bill. It is very important that we all, the members of this Legislature, members of this House – Albertans have put their trust in us, and the utmost accountability of this House is to uphold the people of Alberta, Albertans who have voted for us, on behalf of them so we can raise their voices. Also, we cannot only act on behalf of them but also to provide the information of how we came to the conclusion on behalf of them and how this is going to impact and what, you know, components and oversights the provisions have, if they have questions with regard to how this very information or the action was conducted in the House.

As I said, the media has spoken out very loudly on this, and the people are concerned. Let's not make another mistake. Let's not give another chance. This is the third time this amendment has been discussed. Two of my colleagues already spoke at length elaborating the work this amendment is proposing. This is a time that I urge all the government House members to look into this information and to support the amendment. We have a chance this time to say that we will not let it happen, what the media came to conclude in awarding the government of Alberta the award for the code of silence.

12:10

This is very, incredibly important to the people. We are accountable to the people. Also, whatever we do here – Albertans are the ones responsible for the consequences of what we do. The government of Alberta has a provision in this bill that they will authorize the companies or they will provide provisions for the companies that they can go apply for a loan, an interest-free loan, but this bill does not provide enough information for the people of Alberta and maybe the members of the opposition or the media outlets. Again, the media was very concerned. They will not be able to find out the exact consequences that Albertans are going to be responsible for.

So considering this, this is a very important aspect of this. I understand that there are two major key players that the government really sees, the companies who are providing the service and the people. They go 9 to 5, work two jobs, and in this time, you know, are struggling to find a job, struggling to make enough income. The people have already too many consequences. The government is going to move forward with, I think, the first phase of relaunching the economy. A number of people will end up doing a lot of

different stuff, but their income still might not be enough to come up with those kinds of payments. There's so much uncertainty. What is going to happen to those businesses? What's going to happen to those everyday Albertans? How are they going to deal with the funding from the federal government?

On top of this, the government has a number of, you know, I will say, holes in this bill. It's a very nice bill. I would say that it's very nicely worded, but there are a number of holes, a number of problems that we still need to go through to make this bill achieve the goal that it is meant to achieve.

The government is allowing people to defer payments only for three months, and that's retroactive from March to June, just barely one more month. We are not even sure if we will be out of this situation by next month. You know, when government says that they're giving them relief, this is not real relief. Deferring payments for three months is not really a relief, and more of this is really adding to their debt. This is not really even helping Albertans. This is not really helping the government of Alberta. We know that the people who are going through these challenges due to the financial constraint and a number of things – we are seeing the news. We are hearing the information on the rise of domestic violence, the rise of mental health issues, and we do not take the appropriate approach in this House. The government will also be dealing with a number of other issues because of this.

When we are discussing this bill and properly taking things into consideration, looking into all the aspects that are important for this bill, when we are offering any kind of financial support – I will not consider this bill a financial support because this bill adds more debt onto everyday Albertans. The government seems like it understands only one philosophy when it comes to large corporations. As I said, there are two key players to this bill, and the government understands very well. The government is worried about the companies' revenue. The government is, you know, working on provisions where the companies can access the funds. The government is worried about how the companies need the money interest free.

The government is not worried about how everyday Albertans can afford to come up with added debt, to pay their added debt when there are no guarantees when this economy is going to return to normal, when those half a million people will be able to find those, you know, good-paying jobs, come back to their normal lives. The government still left the provision in this so that people have to pay these bills back, not only having to pay these bills back but that there will also be interest on them.

The companies can simply access the interest-free loan. Companies can simply download their debt load to Albertans, the people of Alberta, the everyday Albertans who work day and night, who work hard, who work two jobs to keep up with their bare-minimum daily life so that sometime they can afford to buy a bus pass. A number of people will not even afford to keep a regular car, will not even afford to keep up with the rising cost of auto insurance, will not even afford to keep up with the gas prices.

As I said, this is a good bill. It's a very good step moving forward. But, at the same time, we need to think that, sincerely, this is a time when we can sit together, that this is a time when we can discuss together, that this is a time when we can discuss the lack of work, the consultation the government might not have been able to achieve due to a number of things. Let's give them the benefit of the doubt. My colleagues: as a constructive opposition, that's what we're trying to bring in.

In looking at this amendment, this is how I interpret this, and I believe the government members of the House would also look at this very positively, sympathetically, so that in this House we can do our due diligence and duty that we are holding to Albertans.

With those remarks, I'm just going to conclude and hand it to my colleagues. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1 on Bill 14?

Seeing none, I shall call the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We are now back on the main bill, Bill 14. Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's unfortunate that that amendment was defeated. It would have ensured transparency. It would have given information to the public to see the details of this program, but it is what it is.

I have another amendment to move.

12:20

The Chair: All right. Just wait till I have a copy.

Hon. members, this amendment is three pages. This will be known as amendment A2.

Mr. Sabir: Do you want me to read it into the record or just summarize it?

The Chair: I think that if you gave a really good summary of this amendment, that would probably please the members of this Assembly.

Mr. Sabir: Good. Then what I will do is that I will provide a really good summary of what it's doing.

This amendment is actually changing some of the dates that are put in the definition section and some other provisions. It's trying to bring this bill up to date. The government announced its program back in March, March 18, I believe. During my bill briefing I think it was made clear that the government was bringing this legislation forward to fulfill its promise, which is good for a change, but since then two months have passed. There are a lot of things that have changed.

[Ms Issik in the chair]

Around March 17 I think we had hardly even a hundred cases, if I am not mistaken. Since then we have seen a huge spread of COVID-19, since then there have been job losses, since then businesses have been shut down, and since then this pandemic has added to the hardships that Albertans are facing.

This morning job numbers were out, and almost 361,000 jobs were reported as lost in Alberta. There are another 223,000 Albertans who are working fewer hours because of this pandemic. Altogether it's more than half a million Albertans who have lost jobs. With that, they are less able to pay for the costs of their daily living, and utilities are one of the essential ones, that you cannot avoid. Whether you have a job or not, you will have to pay rent, mortgage, utilities, those things. These are fixed costs.

Things are significantly different now than they were on March 18, when the government promised this three-month deferral. Some of those Albertans have already paid for a couple of months of those utilities, so they may not even be able to benefit from this legislation. What this amendment will do is that this amendment will change the date of the deferral period from June 18, 2020, to March 18, 2021, so that Albertans will have a longer period of time to defer their utilities.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

Not only that, but we have added a provision there as well: let's defer it to "March 18, 2021, or as otherwise prescribed in the regulations." The legislation, the way it's drafted right now, doesn't give the minister or cabinet the ability to change the deferral period, so this provision will add a power for this government, a power for the minister that if they want to choose a different date for the deferral period, they will be able to do that by prescribing a different date in regulation.

The first provision is doing two things. One, it's proposing a longer deferral date, because we know that the deferral date proposed by the government, June 18, will not be enough. I can say this with absolute certainty: all across this province, among those who are struggling, those who have lost jobs, those who have been impacted by this pandemic, this government will not be able to find one Albertan, just one Albertan, or one business owner who would agree with them that the June 18 date is good enough for deferring their utilities. I challenge all my colleagues to find one Albertan who is impacted by COVID-19 and who has lost a job and who agrees with you that this three-month deferral is enough for them. Not a single Albertan will agree with you on this. Not one.

Ms Hoffman: Other than the members in this House, maybe.

Mr. Sabir: Other than the members who may be asked to agree, but no Albertan will agree that a deferral of three months for utilities is enough and that that is what's needed.

That will change that deferral date to a longer date. We are also adding a provision that if the minister wants to prescribe a different date through regulation, they will have that flexibility to do that under this provision.

Then we are changing the rate rider provision. We would have preferred that this provision not be there in the legislation, but we are changing the date for that as well. Again, we are suggesting that it be drafted in a way that this provision can also be adjusted through regulation or, as we are suggesting, a different provision, the same as with the other provision, clause (e), the repayment period. Again, we are suggesting a different date, a date that will correspond with today's realities, with what Albertans need today. Again, there is a provision there that if they want to prescribe a different date, they can do so through regulation.

12:30

In summary, clause (a) of the amendment is suggesting a different set of dates for the deferral period, for the rate rider period, and for the repayment period along with an ability for the government and minister to change those dates through regulation. That will give Albertans some certainty, and that will give this government some flexibility to adjust this program based on the changing needs of Albertans.

With section (b) we are changing section 6(2) of the legislation, which is about the repayment of deferred payments. It's striking out "June 18, 2021" and substituting it with "the day the repayment period ends." We already changed the repayment period in the definition section, so this section is not needed. This date is not needed here anymore. The date that will be read in this section will be the one that will be amended in section (a) in the definition section, so that will make the deferral dates the same as what we suggested and proposed in section (a).

In section (c) it's amending section 11 of this legislation, and that deals with rate rider provisions. Again, we're not changing this provision. Rather, we are just adjusting the dates because we have changed the dates for the rate rider provision deferral period in section (a), so section 11 needs to be amended to match those dates

that are defined. It's not changing anything other than the dates that we described in section (a).

In section (d) section 16(2) is amended. Again, it's only changing the dates to the different dates that we are suggesting in the definition.

The same is the case with section (e), which will adjust the new dates in these provisions.

We are also amending through this amendment section 29 by adding certain provisions to that section. Section 29 is the regulation-making authority, and we are proposing to give the government powers to make regulations

(a.1) prescribing

- (i) the end date of the period referred to in section 1(b), no earlier than March 18, 2021,
- (ii) the start and end date of the period referred to in section 1(d), with the start date of the period no earlier than the day after the end of the repayment period and the end date of the period no earlier than March 18, 2023, and
- (iii) the start and end dates of the period referred to in section 1(e), with the start date of the period no earlier than the day after the end of the deferral period and the end date of the period no earlier than March 18, 2022.

There's section (g) in this amendment as well, which is also making changes to section 33 by striking out "June 18, 2023" and substituting "March 18, 2024, unless it is continued for a further period by an order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council."

In short, these amendments have taken into account the circumstances that have changed since government first announced this program. We have talked to our constituents, we have talked to businesses, and we have talked to consumer groups. Many concerned Albertans have reached out to many of my colleagues, and I'm pretty sure that private members on the other side are receiving those e-mails as well because some of them get CCed to you. My hope is that the minister and private members on the other side will take into account these changing circumstances, the realities that Albertans are facing today, and they will take into account the job numbers that came out just today and see how important it is to give some relief to Albertans who are struggling to make ends meet. In no way, shape, or manner will this three-month deferral be enough for those Albertans.

The way these changes are drafted, they are proposing longer periods of deferral of utilities, but they're also giving government the ability to change those dates, to prescribe different dates through regulation, so you don't have to come back to the House to figure this out. It takes a long time, and for this government it took almost two months from their announcement to figure out how to actually give Albertans this relief.

With that, I think I would suggest and urge all my colleagues in this House that these are very reasonable amendments. These are amendments that will help all Albertans in your constituencies as well who are struggling to pay their utilities, who are struggling to pay their rent. It would have been preferable that they get some direct relief, but that's not on the table. Now, at this point, all they can get from this government is a deferral for three months, so this amendment will extend that deferral period beyond those three months and help . . .

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2 on Bill 14? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. If your children, Molly and Brady, are still watching, your mother is doing a great job in the chair.

It's my pleasure to get up and speak to the common-sense amendment that's been brought forward by my colleague from Calgary-McCall to extend the deferral date for customers of utilities in this province that are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. I just want to reinforce that the jobs numbers that came out today are startling. Over half a million Albertans have either been out of work, lost their jobs, or had their hours severely reduced. There is no clear path back to recovering the economy. We certainly have heard about the phasing 1, 2, and 3. It's our fervent desire on both sides that timelines work out and we don't see a reignition, a flare-up of the COVID issues.

12:40

But I want to also thank my colleague for bringing this rather substantive amendment forward that looks at a number of parts of this Bill 14 and does what is in the best interests of Albertans, both businesses and individuals, who, for no fault of their own, are impacted by something that has totally derailed them and their ability to make a living, to live their lives as usual. But we must change, and we must listen to the science and the evidence with regard to how we flatten the curve and how we get back on our feet.

The deferral period being extended to the extent that has been identified, June 2021, makes great sense to me. I'll express that by going through the bill and reflecting on a crossjurisdictional comparison with a few other best-in-class provinces that are doing better and more than the province of Alberta is in this regard.

We, of course, know that many, many, many Albertans, both businesses and individuals and families alike, will end up at the end of this COVID period with a great deal of debt, and they'll be saddled and burdened and anxious. The government of Alberta can help those same individuals, those same businesses, small and medium-sized businesses, weather their anxieties and get back on their feet.

The crossjurisdictional review that I've been able to do and my colleagues are aware of through our wonderful policy researchers speaks to three provinces. I'll speak to those three provinces with regard to what they're doing, and right now they are doing better than Alberta. We've never as a province seen ourselves as mediocre. We've always seen ourselves as – and, indeed, we hear from the Premier on a daily basis almost that Alberta has contributed so much to the economy of this country and the abilities of our sister provinces to address the needs of their own citizens.

The issue that I want to take issue with was brought up by the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity, where he talked about state-owned economies. The first economy, the first province that I want to speak to is B.C., and B.C. has more generosity for their citizens. I'll share what that means, what that is with regard to the programs that they're putting in place. They have state-owned B.C. Hydro, and they also have – B.C. Hydro for sure, and one that is not theirs is FortisBC. But I want to speak to what B.C. is doing for their citizens.

They call this their customer crisis fund, and that will help residential customers. Not unlike Bill 14, it talks about residential customers and small and medium-sized customers as well. But the customer crisis fund is for residential. It's for those people who have lost their jobs or are unable to work as a result of COVID. They're going to receive a credit to help cover the costs of their electricity bills. The credit will be for three times their average monthly bill over the past year at their homes and does not – and does not – have to be repaid. The average residential customer's bill is \$159 per month, so the average credit provided to B.C. residential customers who have been impacted, lost their jobs, or are unable to work is about \$500 a month. We have a deferral program.

The second thing I want to bring up around B.C. and B.C. Hydro power relief is with regard to small businesses that have been forced to close due to COVID. They will have their power bills forgiven for three months. B.C. Hydro is waiving bills for these customers from April to June 2020. So that's not a deferral; that's forgiven. As we know, there are tens of thousands, probably even more than that, of small businesses and medium-sized businesses in this province that are negatively impacted and who would dearly love to see their power bills forgiven, and for three months in B.C. they will be. The other thing that they've done in B.C. as well is that they've halted all service disconnections.

Fortis, to go on to them, has a certain number of customers, obviously, in B.C. Their residential customers can sign up for the customer relief recovery fund and automatically have their bills deferred for a longer period of time than Alberta is offering. There will be a repayment schedule for those individuals, and it will be interest free, or additional fees will not be charged to them. Those, again, sound like more generous terms than what Alberta is offering in Bill 14. That's one neighbour, to our west.

The other neighbour, to our east, Saskatchewan, has a Crown corporation interest deferral program. Sorry. I want to get to their program with regard to individuals. It will be a six-month grace period for residential customers. That means that no interest, no late penalties, no disconnections will be applied for six months, that grace period, and then people will have an additional 12 months to catch up on their bills. Again, that sounds like a better program, if you're in Saskatchewan, than ours. It's really important, of course, that they have stopped disconnections of residential power services for nonpayment. And they are not going to use load restrictors on anybody's residential property. So those are better.

The last one I want to bring up is New Brunswick. They are deferring electricity bill payments for residential, seasonal, and small businesses up to 90 days without interest or late fees. Then they're extending payment plans for those individuals.

That, again, sounds like, from a crossjurisdictional perspective, B.C., Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, the governments in those provinces are looking at addressing the needs of both their individuals who are affected by COVID and businesses, small and medium, to the tune of greater support than the government of Alberta is offering. I just wanted to bring up that crossjurisdictional because I know that ministers look at those sheets. When they get bills brought before them, they'll often say, you know: "What are other provinces doing? How are we fitting in? Who is really helping out the most? What province is struggling?" We always try and get to the top in terms of abilities to help our citizens and small and medium-sized businesses. The amendment put forward really speaks to that and says that three months is not nearly enough for Albertans.

12:50

We know that last week the Calgary Chamber of commerce weighed in on this and talked about what they think getting back to the new normal will look like and how long that will take, and they did not say three months. They talked about a year and a half, a year and a half before we find some sort of equilibrium where people feel confident about their personal health and safety, where businesses can count on cash flows, where they can count on a business plan that will work out when they design it instead of being thrown totally for a loop and looking to government and other sources as ways of getting back on their feet.

We put forward this amendment because we want to ensure that there's more flexibility and an ability to be nimble that cabinet has when dealing with a recovery that will not be the same across this province. In some parts of this province they're not experiencing

the significant COVID infections that we're seeing in other parts of the province. Regrettably, my own community of Calgary is a hot spot in this province, so relief there might look very different than relief in, for instance, Grande Prairie.

I talked about those three provinces. I neglected to talk about Manitoba. Manitoba also is deferring for six months.

The government of Alberta and many of my colleagues here who have spoken have all pointed out how Alberta is on the front line of the economic impact in this country. We're being hit harder than other places because of the significant challenges to the world price of oil and what that does to our revenues, what that does to our ability to see workers in the field, companies pumping, digging, and business being as usual. It's not as usual. So Alberta has felt the effects of this pandemic certainly more than other places in the country, it could be argued, but we're seeing other parts of the country – namely, B.C., Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Manitoba – come up with better plans, come up with greater support. We have never seen ourselves as a province that does less than any other province. Why do we want to start doing that now?

We, of course, want to extend protections in this amendment for longer periods of time so that people can't be disconnected, so that, as I said, there's a longer deferral period and the cabinet has the ability to be more nimble. My colleague from Calgary-McCall made some excellent arguments on why that was necessary and why the people of Alberta, both on the business side and on the individual family and individual side, would probably look favourably on the ability of their provincial government's cabinet to have the ability to be reflexive and address issues without having to come back into the House and do them here.

I know that I will support the deferral of utility payments. I wish there was more here. I don't think it goes nearly far enough, but it's necessary even with what we have before us. We are bringing forward amendments to try and improve this, and I certainly hope that members on the other side see the wisdom in some of these amendments and support Albertans, support small and medium-sized businesses with greater government investment.

Support that only goes to June 18 is challenging. It's challenging for those who are going to be out of work for a significant period longer than that. It's challenging for small and medium-sized businesses that won't get their usual business plan up and operating. It will take a long time, as was identified by the Calgary Chamber of commerce.

So as we look at what's before us in Bill 14 today, we know that it's going to need a redo, it's going to need an extension, and this government is, regrettably, kind of becoming known for having to redo their bills that they bring before us because other people point out that there are shortfalls in those bills. We want to of course support good legislation, and the many families struggling during the next year are going to have extra burdens on their back. Not every family. You know, half a million jobs, either fewer hours or out of work entirely: that's not all of our workforce, which is 2 million plus at this time, but it is a significant number of people who are going to be looking for government programs, both federal and provincial, to stay afloat.

Thankfully, we have a province that has the best balance sheet of all provinces. We have a province that has a can-do attitude. We have a province that has suffered immeasurable setbacks over the years, but we've come back. The flooding in Calgary was the biggest natural disaster that city has ever seen. It was the biggest natural disaster, in 2016, in our whole country, in the history of our country, billions and billions and billions of dollars. But it's back, and once COVID runs its course, it will be transforming and supporting both oil and gas, new business entity start-ups, and will be significant in terms of its economic power in this country. But

for the time we're in today, it is struggling, and it needs the support of the provincial government, more than just the bare minimum that is here in this bill.

That's why these amendments – and there are several – are all designed to make this province and the people who are experiencing the difficulties today better and know that we have their interests at heart so that they can focus on their health, so that they can focus on what it's going to mean for them to transform their lives, to get employment, to find a new way to deliver the business that they used to do. Many Albertans are doing that. You know, they have curbside pickup, or what they used to expect you to come and get, they bring to you now. This is going to change the way business takes place in this province, not only in this province but in this country.

So allowing consumers or citizens and businesses to defer their electricity bills and their gas bills . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, Molly and Brady are thrilled that you mentioned them in the opening of your speech. We thank you very much.

I see the hon. associate minister of natural gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is always a pleasure to stand in this House and speak to such thoughtful amendments, so I appreciate that opportunity. I have some comments that I want to share. At the end of the day, the Crown has one significant tool that we have to support Albertans, and that tool is our balance sheet. That is the biggest tool that we have to support Albertans, and we have to leverage that balance sheet in order to do so.

1:00

Now, the problem that we have is that the previous administration squandered much of that opportunity to do that. Now, it's not a secret. We begged them – five years ago we begged them – not to squander that balance sheet. Kevin O'Leary wrote a letter to the Premier at the time and begged her: don't do anything; like, for the love of God, do nothing. Unfortunately, that's not the direction they took. Here's what they did. Now, we all know this, Madam Chair, that we were the only energy-producing region in North America that never began to see recovery. That was because they put one tax over another tax over another tax. Here's what they did: while all these other energy-producing regions were putting themselves on a path to recovery, we were putting ourselves on a path, a trajectory towards \$100 billion in debt. At a time when other regions were recovering, they gave us five credit downgrades. That is their gift to our grandchildren, five credit downgrades. Here, at the end of the day, our balance sheet has been squandered.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo brought up a good point. He said that we have the best balance sheet in the country. Madam Chair, he is correct to a degree. The problem is that he doesn't finish his statement. He only gives you part of the story. I call that revisionist history; call it what you want. The problem is that our balance sheet is on a trajectory to make us one of the worst balance sheets in the country. That then puts us in a position where we have to make tough decisions, and that's what we're doing. We have made absolutely tough decisions. We have decided that we will so far spend \$15 billion supporting Albertans – \$15 billion – and you heard the Premier today say that there is more to come. But the treasury is not in a position to write a blank cheque, and we have to absolutely make difficult and tough decisions.

We have collaborated with industry and, by the way, we have spoken to industry. Just as we have a balance sheet, industry has a balance sheet. Industry has the same tools that we do to support Albertans, and that's their balance sheet. The problem is that the

industry's balance sheet has also been squandered. Now, Madam Chair, do you know why industry's balance sheet has been squandered? Do you ever stay up late at night wondering why the electricity industry is in such turmoil? Well, it's because of four years of NDP mismanagement. They left the electricity industry in almost as bad a condition as the natural gas producers, not quite as bad but close. All the electricity producers have is their balance sheet, and unfortunately, as I mentioned, it's been squandered.

Because of this, we are not in a position to provide unlimited relief forever as the NDP would have us do. Madam Chair, we are making thoughtful decisions, we are making deliberate decisions, we are committed to supporting Albertans, as the \$15 billion clearly shows.

However, we have also made the decision that these are the time frames that we are going to go by, that are going to best support Albertans. Now, there are some other considerations. I mean, you know, instead of a year, could we add two months? Well, here's the problem, Madam Chair. The problem is that we then have to go back to the drawing board, but we have retailers right now that have bills that are due. They need the money that is associated with this legislation so they can provide the very support to Albertans that they claim to support. But we need to support the utility retailers so that they can support Albertans, and this is how we do that. We have collaborated with industry, we have collaborated with Albertans, and this is the solution that we have put in place with these time frames.

Now, while I appreciate the thoughtful – thoughtful – amendment, my recommendation to the private members is that we turn down this amendment. It does not meet the needs of the industry, it does not meet the needs of Albertans, and unfortunately it would slow down the whole process of getting funds to the very companies that are providing that support. So, Madam Chair, I humbly request that we decline this amendment.

The Chair: Are there any other speakers wishing to speak to amendment A2? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. This amendment was about extending the deferral period from three months to a longer duration of time, and it has absolutely nothing to do with what we just heard. We are talking about a credit downgrade. They already have two; they're on track to get more. They're talking about debt-to-GDP ratio. We left it in the best shape; they're on track to get it past Ontario or something. There are so many other things that were not related to this amendment.

We do know and I think I heard from the minister during the brief that they promised this in March, and they said that they're doing this bill to fulfill that promise. As I said previously, it's good that they're fulfilling their promise for a change. But since then things have changed; things are different. We lost so many jobs under their watch before and now because of COVID-19. There are almost half a million Albertans who are struggling to make ends meet. They're not all in our constituencies; they live in your ridings as well. After the March announcement, had they talked to businesses, had they talked to their constituents and Albertans, they would know that this bill doesn't go far enough. And when I talked about consultation, when I asked a question about consultation, they said: no; it's what we are doing to fulfill our promise, and we are relying on department estimates and their expertise. They admitted that they didn't talk to any Albertan. They didn't consult on this bill.

Even their own reopening plans show that they won't be back any time soon. The Calgary Chamber of commerce is saying that it may take Albertans up to 12 to 18 months before they could get back on their feet. Albertans are looking for relief from this government.

This government cannot forever sit and wait for Ottawa to act. Here we have a minister who's saying that we are helping utility companies so they can help Albertans. You can provide direct support to Albertans as well. Many other governments are doing that.

This amendment is extending that deferral period and giving government the ability to prescribe a different period within regulation. It's giving Albertans some certainty, and it's giving government some flexibility. It's a very reasonable amendment. As I said before, if government and the government side MLAs were to go into their ridings and talk to Albertans, talk to businesses, not one person will agree with them that a three-month deferral is what Albertans are looking for. Not one person or business will agree with them that this three-month deferral is enough. It ends just in four to five weeks, on June 18. What will happen after June 18? All of a sudden they will have three months of utilities piled up, and if they have availed this program, they will end up paying those deferrals with interest. That's why we are suggesting that government MLAs, everybody should consider this amendment. This will help Albertans all across this province.

Thank you.

1:10

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I shall call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:11 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Ceci	Irwin	Sabir
Deol	Renaud	Sweet

Against the motion:

Allard	Jones	Rowswell
Amery	Long	Schweitzer
Ellis	Nally	Smith
Getson	Neudorf	Stephan
Glasgo	Nixon, Jeremy	Toor
Guthrie	Orr	Turton
Horner	Reid	Walker
Issik	Rosin	Yaseen

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 24
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to Bill 14? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen to speak.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. I rise to speak to this bill. We know that the pandemic has impacted Albertans all across this province. People are concerned about their lives and livelihoods. Many of them have lost their jobs. As I indicated earlier, there are half a million Albertans who are impacted by this pandemic in terms of jobs, and they are looking for relief. They are looking for something substantial, more than a deferral, but in the absence of any action from this government, having a deferral, I think, may help some Albertans for the three months that this deferral is valid for. That's the only help Albertans are getting from this government.

1:30

There was some benefit, the social isolation benefit, a transition benefit that was available up until the federal program kicked in. Even though there were people waiting to receive that benefit, they cut that benefit off. Almost 33,000 Albertans were in queue to get that social isolation benefit when the government shut their website down, shut that program down. That was the only benefit that was offered to Albertans, and now there is this three-month deferral.

As I mentioned earlier, since then things have changed. There are way more Albertans who are impacted with COVID-19, in particular in Calgary because of the outbreaks and government inaction respecting those outbreaks. We have a huge number of Albertans who are impacted in Calgary. That impacts Albertans' ability to be out at their jobs. That impacts their ability to open their businesses until we know that things are better in the community, things are more under control. In these difficult times Albertans are looking for leadership from this government. They are looking for relief from this government, and the only thing they came up with was a three-month deferral.

The way this legislation is set up – and I will read those provisions into the record as well – is that government is giving loans to utility companies, which may be interest-free, but utility companies will be able to charge interest or may be able to charge interest on these deferred utility payments. So it's very concerning that instead of providing Albertans any relief, now Albertans are getting charged, may get charged for interest on those deferred payments. That might help the bottom line of the companies, but it's not helping Albertans, which should be the priority for all of us. It is the priority on this side of the House. I can say that for sure.

We have talked to many Albertans, and they are concerned about their rent, mortgages, utilities, and daily living expenses. They don't have steady income coming in like before, and they don't have any other support from this government, any other financial support. As I indicated, the only financial support the government announced was a transitional one that they cut off as soon as federal supports kicked in. Albertans are left waiting by this government for Ottawa to act, whether it comes to CERB financial assistance, whether it comes to the child benefit, whether it comes to rent supports, this government is just sitting, idling, and waiting for the federal government to act. They are not providing any relief.

Now they're providing these three-month deferrals, and they are leaving open the possibility that companies may benefit from these loans, but Albertans may end up paying interest on these deferred payments. For those who are on fixed-income, those who are on AISH, those who are on income support, those who have lost jobs, those who have shut down their businesses, these interest costs can add up pretty quickly. So it's deeply concerning that government is allowing companies out there, at least the possibility for the companies to charge interest on these deferrals from consumers. So we will be proposing an amendment to give some relief to Albertans, some certainty to Albertans that if they have deferred their utilities for three months, they won't be charged interest on that.

With that, I would like to move an amendment, which I have the requisite number of copies. I will take my seat until it's . . .

The Deputy Chair: Yeah. Thank you, hon. member. Just give me a minute, and I'll take a look at it and just see how long it is to see whether or not we should read it into the record or just let the members review it themselves.

Hon. member, if you would please just read it into the record, that would be appreciated. For the record, for discussion purposes and debate, this amendment will be referred to as A3.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Sabir to move that Bill 14, Utility Payment Deferral Program Act, be amended as follows: Section 7 is amended by striking out subsection (2) and substituting the following:

(2) A deferral account approved by the Commission under subsection (1) must use the weighted average cost of capital to determine the carrying costs that may be collected in respect of the deferred payments, excluding the cost of interest;

Section 11 is amended by adding the following immediately after subsection (6):

(7) The Commission may not approve a rate rider under subsection (2) that includes the cost of interest;

Section 17 is amended by striking out subsection (4) and substituting the following:

(4) A deferral account approved by the Commission under this section must use the weighted average cost of capital to determine the carrying costs that may be collected in respect of the deferral payments, excluding the cost of interest.

Section 21 is amended in subsection (2) by adding “, subject to subsection (5),” immediately after “transmission providers and gas distributors, and”, and by adding the following immediately after subsection (4):

(5) The Commission may not initiate a proceeding to establish a rate rider under subsection (2) that includes the cost of interest.

1:40

The purpose of this provision is to make sure that it's clear in the legislation that under no circumstances Albertans, their businesses, the consumers will be asked to pay interest on their deferred utility costs. In so doing, I think we are still leaving for the commission the ability to add weighted average cost of the capital to determine the carrying cost. So they can get the weighted average capital cost, but what this amendment is doing is restricting service providers' and utility companies' ability to charge interest on deferred payments. It's only fair because they are getting loans which may be interest-free, so they shouldn't be allowed to charge interest on that to consumers. If we will do that, then I don't see how we are providing any relief to Albertans. By having this amendment in place, we want to make sure that Albertans are not charged interest on their deferred payments.

I urge all my colleagues in this House to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Chair's Ruling

Referring to a Member by Name

The Deputy Chair: On amendment A3, just prior to calling anyone – I would never be presumptive as to what the House will do for the rest of this afternoon. However, I would just remind the House that where there is a name for whom is putting forth the amendment, when you are reading the amendment into the record, to just use the constituency of the hon. member.

With that, I believe the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen to speak.

Debate Continued

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this particular amendment. I have to admit – is it A3?

Member Irwin: A3 now. Yeah.

Ms Renaud: A3.

This amendment to Bill 14, Utility Payment Deferral Program Act – and just to be clear for the tens of people watching at home,

this is the third amendment that we are trying to propose to government to make this particular piece of legislation a little bit better for Albertans as they try to navigate this new world here in Alberta. The first one was around transparency, the second one was around extending the timing of the support, and now this one is actually about ensuring that the utility companies or the providers of this product or service do not charge interest on their customers during this time. As my colleague did mention, they have access to quite a bit of support, as outlined in this piece of legislation. But I think it's important for Albertans to know that these amendments that we're bringing forward are truly focused on them, to do whatever we can to create some transparency and to deepen the support that this piece of legislation claims to provide.

I think that if you think back on the last couple of weeks, it's just been a cascade of announcements either from the federal government, provincial government about different types of support, but there is a theme in the cascading announcements about support that are being made. Particularly, I want to focus on the federal supports. I think that in each province the provincial governments have been trying to introduce programs or a piece of legislation or alterations to existing supports that would sort of mesh or augment federal supports, but sadly we've not really seen that happen in this province.

I just want to note that the different announcements that we've heard from the federal government – and don't get me wrong, I'm not a huge fan of all of them. I certainly think that there are some areas that they missed. I'm really hoping that things will get better over the next few months. It's been a steady sort of criticism from this government to say that, you know, this isn't enough. This doesn't go far enough to protect Albertans or to invest in Albertans. I agree with some of that. But I think it's really important that they turn that magnifying glass onto themselves. Instead of standing up and raging about a previous Finance minister or credit downgrades – and trust me, we will be having these conversations into the coming years. Instead of being a little bit ragey about what happened in the past, focus on the matter at hand. The matter at hand is that we are trying to create supports for Albertans that are struggling because of no fault of their own. They are struggling in ways that are hard to even express in this place. Of course, giving them some breathing room, alleviating some of the financial stress through some work around utility bills – unfortunately, deferrals don't go far enough.

But I think it's really important to focus on the matter at hand. What is it that we can do to make this legislation better, to support Albertans better, to go farther, and, like my colleague said, to be the best, not to be the last or kind of good or, you know, less better than our neighbouring provinces? Let's be the best. That's why these amendments keep coming forward, and they will keep coming forward because this legislation doesn't go far enough.

Now, government seems to, you know, just based on reactions and comments we hear afterwards, think they have all the answers for everything. They seem to think that anything we propose doesn't make a whole lot of sense. I don't know why when we're telling them that this can be better. This can support people.

I think for an average person watching, if we were to explain to them what we're trying to do in terms of passing on costs to them – we're allowing the person who's selling the product to pass on additional costs. But don't worry. You'll be fine because we're deferring your bill for a little bit. That's not good enough. We can do better than that. We have to do better than that. Just like we demand our federal government to do better than that – you all do that on a regular basis – I am saying in this place, Mr. Chair, that I believe we can do better than this. Instead of just deferring, instead of, you know, creating loopholes or mechanisms for retail providers

to pass on additional costs to customers – that’s not going far enough. That’s not understanding the enormity of the struggles Albertans are facing right now.

On that note, I will sit down and pass it on to my colleagues.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any others wishing to join debate on A3? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to my colleagues for their insightful comments to date. You know, as I did yesterday as well, I just want to give a shout-out and sort of a statement of solidarity with all of our front-line workers and essential workers who right now are again on the front lines doing so much for us every single day. Thank you.

I spoke about Bill 14 yesterday, and I expressed a number of my concerns. We raised a number of questions as well regarding this bill, and we noted as well that we would be introducing a number of amendments. I expressed my concern that, as we’ve seen historically to date, this government has refused to accept a number of our amendments. To echo the comments of my colleagues, I would advise the members opposite to really consider this amendment in particular – all of our amendments, I would say, but this one in particular – because we’re talking about direct support to consumers, direct support to constituents.

1:50

Now, it is very concerning to me. I talked about affordability a lot in previous days. You know, it’s very concerning when I hear from my constituents all the time – my staff and I get countless e-mails, phone calls, social media messages from folks who are struggling to make ends meet. They’re dealing with rising insurance costs. They’re trying to pay their rent or their mortgages. They are seeing in many cases increased utility bills. We’ve noted, of course, that Bill 14 does not go far enough.

We are very aware that we sit in this Legislature without the majority. All we can do is put forth reasonable amendments, and, as my colleague from St. Albert just noted, this is one where your constituents would, I think, be quite grateful to you if you were to support it. The bottom line is that Albertans should be our priority. Our constituents should be our priority, not utility corporations. I do fear that without this amendment, without addressing interest, our constituents will be paying even more. I don’t want to say that it’s irresponsible, but it’s incorrect to say that this would be, you know, a small amount of money. If you were someone who was struggling every month to make ends meet, every small amount, interest charges, those add up. Those add up.

We saw the same example when we were talking earlier last year, I believe, on AISH and the deindexing of AISH that came about because of this government. I think it was Bill 20 or Bill 21. Of course, some of the folks opposite talked about how, you know, it’s minor. The Premier himself noted that it wouldn’t be onerous. I asked him: “You try to live on \$1,600 a month. You come talk to my many constituents who are on AISH and who are struggling daily to make ends meet. You tell them to their face that this isn’t onerous.”

Again, it’s really important that we think long and hard on this amendment, something simple we can do to support affordability for all Albertans. This government has said and I know the associate minister has said, too, that he’s willing to consider amendments. I would like to hear from him and perhaps other members. If they’re not willing to support this amendment, why not? Are you hearing from your constituents that they want to pay more? Are you hearing

from them that they’re having no problems making ends meet? If so, share that with us in the House.

Again, I’m not going to speak too much longer. As we’re in this House, as we’re, you know, just reminded every day of the privilege that we have being able to represent our constituents, let’s remember why we’re here. It’s for them.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe the member who caught my eye in this case was the Member for Edmonton-Meadows. Go ahead.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for noticing that. Once again I’ll be very brief. I’m pleased to rise to speak to amendment A3 to Bill 14, Utility Payment Deferral Program Act. The two key components I just wanted to stress – and I’m going to be brief – that the key contributors to this bill are the consumers who pay the bills and the companies who provide service.

What this bill offers to Albertans, everyday Albertans who are facing financial hardship due to the pandemic or the slow economy – either they have lost jobs, at the end of the day they cannot, you know, keep up with their payments to one of the essential services. The small-business entrepreneurs, sole proprietors, the people who do not even regularly draw salaries: there’s not right now the time for them to, you know, operate the business full-fledged, and they’re struggling with their essential costs so they can afford to pay their routine expenses to keep their doors open. All this bill offers to all those people, small businesses and everyday Albertans, is additional debt. Even though this offers three-month payment deferrals, in the end, the way it has been articulated in the bill, it’s additional debt. They have to pay it back, and they will end up paying with additional interest on it.

At the same time this bill offers to the large corporations, the companies, the service providers, interest-free loans, and they can come after those consumers and charge interest on the payments they were not able to pay or, you know, they can download their costs, the debt of the carrying costs, to all Albertans.

What this amendment does, basically, is strike a balance into the bill, and that is the main reason, you know, I am supporting it and rise to actually speak in support of this amendment. That is the reason I ask all House members to. It’s very important to strike the balance, to support this amendment.

With this, I conclude my comments, and I’ll just hand it to my colleague. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any – I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Also, very briefly, I thank my colleague from Calgary-McCall for bringing forward such helpful and thoughtful amendments to strike a better balance for consumers, for citizens of this province, whether they be individuals and their families in their homes or if they be in small and medium-sized businesses, which are no doubt struggling at this time as a result of so many having to stay home, stay safe, or being impacted from COVID directly and recovering.

Mr. Chair, the interest being charged to Albertans doesn’t have to be so. There are other jurisdictions, notably B.C., Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick, who do not do that. FortisBC, which is a private company: repayment schedules are free of interest in that province for FortisBC customers. Saskatchewan power, Saskatchewan energy, Saskatchewan telephone: they all have interest waiver programs for their citizens and businesses, no late penalties, no disconnections for six months. New Brunswick power has 90 days without interest or

late fees. Clearly, those entities and governments are doing more in this regard than our province is doing, the government of Alberta is doing.

The Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity said that he wished he could have done more as a minister coming forward with a bill, but the firepower was squandered. Mr. Chair, I want to remind you that over the course of the government's fiscal plan, \$4.7 billion is going to be given as a corporate handout to successful and other businesses in this province. That sounds like the very case of squandering. I think, if people are watching, that the NDP caucus is endeavouring to try and make it more affordable for those who have lost their jobs or who have lost hours in their jobs as a result of the COVID pandemic. The government of Alberta is pushing back on that. They're pushing back on the affordability we're trying to bring to this bill for Albertans.

Mr. Chair, I appreciate all the effort of my colleague from Calgary-McCall in leading that charge, and I want him to know that he'll continue to get my support on smart actions that support Albertans like this. I recognize that we've never been through this before as a province. We're struggling to find our way to support, and I just think more can be done by the government of the day.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other – I see the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity has risen to speak on this matter.

2:00

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's always a pleasure to rise again on another amendment. As I said before, we're always happy to look at the amendments, and we appreciate the thought that goes into them. In fact, I'll give a shout-out to the House leader across the aisle for reaching across the aisle. We've went back and forth a few times on the amendment. You know, I appreciate the opportunity to work with someone like that.

In the end, there are some reasons why we are unable to accept this amendment, and I'm going to go over those now. One of the speakers today really wanted us to focus on the matters at hand. I guess my response to that is that we are focusing on the matters at hand, but when you ask why we have limitations, then we need to answer that. One of the answers to why we have limitations is – and I can't believe we had this conversation, but we actually had a back and forth about how many credit downgrades we went through under the NDP. I think I said five credit downgrades, where the worst Finance minister in Alberta's history was saying, "No, no, it was just two," and I'm like – seriously, you can't make this stuff up. If I have a can of gas and I say that I'm going to throw in five matches or just two, is it going to matter? No. The damage has been done. Every credit downgrade makes the cost of money that much more expensive.

Because of that and everything else that happened over four years, we have absolutely squandered the balance sheet, so there are limitations. Now, we have still committed to providing \$15 billion in supports, and that's no small amount. The Premier today said that we are prepared to do even more. You know, Mr. Chair, we are making difficult decisions. We are supporting Albertans, but yes, we have to make tough decisions, and some of those decisions come with some limitations.

There were some references, you know, by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo about other jurisdictions. We talked about Manitoba Hydro, B.C. Hydro. Those are Crown corporations. You can't compare a Crown corporation to a private electrical utility in Alberta. It's apples and oranges, Mr. Chair.

But, really, my favourite comment that he made was that he actually referenced corporate handouts. I've got to ask: this corporate handout business, does it actually say that in Lenin's guide to socialism? Because it's almost like it's on everyone's lips, and I have to tell you: there are no corporate handouts. If anything, this is an industry that is doing us a favour. They didn't come to us. They did not come to us and say, "How can we help?" Mr. Chair, we went to them, and we said: "Can you partner with us? Can you work with us? Can you collaborate with us so that we can support Albertans?" They said: "Yes." They said: "Absolutely." They have shareholder responsibility.

But there's something else, and this is why we can't accept this amendment. That's because – and I've mentioned this before – just as we've had our balance sheet squandered, the private utilities have had their balance sheets squandered. Now, there was a time when the electricity industry in Alberta was one of the jewels in the crown that is the Alberta advantage, but after four years of socialism, Mr. Chair, that is gone.

An Hon. Member: Destroyed it.

Mr. Nally: Destroyed it. Absolutely.

So we went to the retailers, and we asked them if they could help us. The retailers came back and said, "Yes, we will partner with you," but their lenders had some conditions. Their lenders said: "You have to recover the average weighted cost of capital. You have to recover that because if you don't cover that, you further risk your balance sheet and you risk your ability to borrow." Well, Mr. Chair, these are private businesses. They are willing to help us but not to the point of the detriment of their shareholder, so we accepted that they should be allowed to accept the average weighted cost of capital because there is a cost of money. Here's the good news. It's a negligible amount. There is no business that could survive on just this business model, so if the members across the aisle think that the utility companies are going to be just laughing all the way to the bank and skipping on the way there, they're wrong. This is a negligible amount of money, okay? There is no business model in what they're doing.

They are doing this to help Albertans because we went to them – and, quite frankly, I'll tell you what I said. You can quote me. I said: "Alberta has been good to you. Now how can you be good to Alberta?" This is how they could work with us. And they did, Mr. Chair. They partnered with us, and they've come up with a solution, but we need to accept that one of the conditions was that they are allowed to recover the weighted average cost of capital. Otherwise there was no deal. It was a showstopper for them.

I am proud to say that this is a program that meets the needs of Albertans. It's going to allow them to defer their utilities, and it's also going to allow them to pay this back over the course of 12 months to make it more manageable. As I said, Mr. Chair, this is one of many tools in the tool box. This is one of many tools in the tool box that we are coming to Albertans with in terms of supports. I have mentioned this before. The total cost of the support package is \$15 billion, and we're not done yet. We said that we're going to support Albertans, and this is what that looks like.

My ask of all the members in this House is that we turn this amendment down for those reasons. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen to speak on this amendment A3.

Ms Sweet: Yes. Amendment A3. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the associate minister for standing up. As he indicated, we

have been going back and forth on this amendment over the last two days because I have some concerns.

I think the most concerning thing for me is that I think I might be more fiscally conservative in this discussion than the minister is at this point when it comes to talking about the average weight of capital and the responsibility of governments and the responsibility of capitalism and the economy and what drives the free market. The fact that the minister just stood up and talked about the viability of these electricity companies if they support the deferral payments without interest and the fact that this may impact the electricity companies: my question to the associate minister would be, of course, if we're looking at the free market and we're talking about the fact that there is some viability with some of these companies, why is it that the government feels that they have to bail these guys out right now because they may go under? Is that capitalism? Is that how the free market works, or would we be asking to see if there's a possibility of somebody else coming in and looking at potentially other companies who may want to purchase those stocks or purchase those abilities and be able to run this? Why is it that we have to look at the average weight of capital for these industries who, without government assistance, could not be viable because they don't have the balance sheet to be able to do it?

Of course, he'll blame us and he'll say that it was because of the four-year NDP government. That would be like saying that we're at fault for the natural gas prices that bottomed out before we became government. The reality of it is that this government, although the associate minister likes to stand and talk about downgrades and credit downgrades, has already had two in the first year that they've been around. They're going to say: oh, that's because of the NDP. That's not the case.

Let's talk about the fact that the associate minister also said that the reference by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo was talking about using examples of other jurisdictions and provinces and how they're Crown corporations and how the reason that they have viability and the reason that they're able to do this is because they're Crown corporations. The reality of it is that you don't like the Crown corporations because they're Crown corporations – i.e., being funded by the government; i.e., being supported by the government – but the reality of it is that you're adopting the model to subsidize private industry right now using zero-interest loans from the coffer of the treasuries. Zero-interest loans. You're allowing these corporations to then charge interest to Albertans to pay off their average weight of capital, and then on top of that you're allowing them to gain interest on the money sitting in their bank accounts.

A zero-interest loan from the government: here, government treasury, we're going to be fiscally responsible. It's our responsibility to do that, but we're going to give you this money with zero interest, we're going to allow you to charge interest on the little guys, the average Albertan on their power bills, and then you're also going to allow them to gain interest off the zero-interest loan that you are providing them, so they get interest in two ways, off Albertans and off Albertan taxpayer dollars. That is not fiscal conservatism. It's not. That is the reality of it.

Mr. Schmidt: It's corporate socialism.

2:10

Ms Sweet: It is corporate socialism. Some would say that it is corporate welfare bums. I've heard that used before.

Really, what that is is that if you think about it – my question would also be that about a year ago this government also put in a \$4.7 billion tax giveaway to corporations. How many of these businesses and corporations that are now getting an interest-free

loan from this very government also got that \$4.7 billion corporate tax credit? The whole intention of that \$4.7 billion tax credit that you were giving corporations was to help them balance their balance sheets, was to address their average weight of capital. If they got a corporate tax giveaway so that they didn't have to pay their corporate taxes to the treasury and now you're giving them more money with a zero per cent loan, where they then get to charge interest to the taxpayer again, really, you've been paying their bills for a year is what I think is happening right now. The fact that you expect Albertans . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I would just remind the House to direct their comments through the chair.

If the hon. member would continue.

Ms Sweet: I can do that. Sure.

Mr. Chair, I think the problem here is that, basically, what we're saying is that the government – and I think I've referenced the government more than once, not necessarily the associate minister, so I'm talking to the whole House at this point – historically over the last year has given away billions of dollars in tax giveaways to corporations. They are now giving zero-interest loans to corporations, who now are using taxpayer dollars out of the treasury to pay for deferrals. They are also, on top of that, charging Albertans interest if they access a deferral program, which actually then doesn't really give them the freedom of the deferral, and then on top of that they also get to gain interest off the zero-interest loan that sits in their bank account. They're making money off the treasury.

I have talked to the associate minister through our discussions, Mr. Chair, about what happens with this interest that these businesses and corporations make off the zero-interest loan that they receive from the treasury. My question: what do they do with the interest? Why do they get to make interest off a zero-interest loan from the treasury, and where does that interest go? Does it go back to the treasury at the end of this deferral if they haven't used it or if they have gained equity off a zero-interest loan from the treasury? Those are taxpayer dollars that you are allowing corporations to gain interest on, that they may not have to pay back to the treasury and also not have to pay their corporate taxes. Fiscal conservatism does not exist in this legislation whatsoever.

The accountability to Albertans when it comes to their taxpayer dollars does not exist in this legislation. In fact, the deferral that you are discussing, when you look at how much the taxpayer will actually pay over a period of time, is probably going to cost them more because you're giving it to the corporations. What are our taxpayers, with their taxpayer dollars, getting back with this deferral? Yes, they're getting a break for a couple of months, not having to pay the bill, but they're going to pay interest on that bill, which means it's going to cost them more.

You're taking taxpayer dollars. You're not charging any interest for these corporations back to the treasury, so they're not making any interest off these loans that you're giving to these corporations. The taxpayer is not benefiting from this piece of legislation. You are making them pay, the government is making them pay, for a deferral program. You say that you are helping when really you're just spending more money. This isn't going to help if they can't pay back the interest or it costs them more in the long run.

So my question is twofold. One, where does the interest go if they make it? If these corporations make the interest, does the treasury get it back? Do they get that money back? Fiscally that is the responsible thing to happen. They get to keep it in their bank accounts to help their average weight of capital until they don't need it because the deferral program is finished and that interest

payment that they have accumulated, the interest that they have made off that money, comes back to the treasury. That would be the whole intent. If not, you're allowing corporations to make money off the public dollar. That is a problem. So how does it come back? Where does it go? How does the taxpayer overall benefit from the province giving this money and allowing corporations to gain interest from it? I mean, that is the fundamental problem.

The other piece, of course, again is the fact that Albertans could potentially and will be actually paying interest on top of the request for the deferral. So if their bill is a \$300 bill, they're going to have to pay interest on that \$300 back to the corporations. It's their tax dollars that you're giving away to these corporations to help pay for this program, and you're making them pay interest on top of it? It's their money. It's the treasury. The treasury is the public dollar. Why are Albertans having to pay interest on the treasury?

I don't care if the businesses say that, well, they need it for their average weight of capital. Why is that the government's responsibility to deal with? I mean, I would love to hear the answer to that. How is that capitalism? How is that free market? How is it that the public dollar has to pay for this and then pay interest on the money that you are using that is already belonging to the Albertans? I'm sorry. Mr. Chair, through you, I mean that is the fundamental question. I would love to see the associate minister stand up. I would like to have an answer to where the interest goes and how it goes back to the Albertans that is being loaned with zero interest.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity has risen to speak.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. I always appreciate the history lesson. It's not lost on me and not lost on all of us. I appreciate it. Again, more references from Lenin's guide to socialism. Those go-to phrases of corporate socialism and corporate handouts: you know those are go-to phrases, and you know we just love to hear that, so we thank you. We thank you for that and give you a shout-out. They're consistent, for sure.

One of the questions that was asked was: where is the fiscal conservatism in this legislation? The hon. member is implying that there is no fiscal conservatism in the act. Well, Mr. Chair, do you know what is in the act? Compassionate conservatism. I'll tell you why. These are uncharted times. There is no playbook. This a one-in-a-hundred-year black swan event. So, yes, we've demonstrated some compassionate conservatism, but this is what we've always said that we've stood for. We're fiscally conservative when it's appropriate, but we will always stand up for Albertans, absolutely. [interjections] Do you hear that sound? That's the sound the socialists make right before they light their hair on fire. When we hear that sound, we know we're doing a good job, okay?

Now, Mr. Chair, there were some references to handouts and bailouts. I've got to tell you I wasn't going to do this. I was going to go high road, okay? I was going to go high road. I wasn't going to mention it because we've sat here for two days and we've listened to the members across the aisle talk about everything, almost everything. There was one thing that they consistently did not bring up. Do you know what that was? Do you know the one thing that the NDP does not want to talk about? The Balancing Pool. The Balancing Pool.

Now, Mr. Chair, the Balancing Pool is intended to be an arm's-length nongovernmental agency. The best way to describe it is: nose in, fingers out. Well, it wasn't exactly nose in, fingers out with the NDP when they were in government. They dove in headfirst,

and they brought with them their ideological agenda. Now, I won't use the words that industry uses to describe their behaviour in the Balancing Pool because it wouldn't be very honourable. It would not be parliamentary. It would not be honourable. I will use the word "shenanigans." I think that's the best word that I can describe, "shenanigans," from the NDP with regard to the Balancing Pool. They behaved in a manner that the Balancing Pool was never intended to behave.

The end result of all of that, one of the end results, was that we saw these power purchase agreements that were cancelled. The part that they will wear forever: 44 years from now they will be talking about the power purchase agreements because it wasn't that they cancelled them, Mr. Chair; it was because they forgot to read the fine print and they cost Albertans \$2 billion. A \$2 billion boondoggle because they didn't read the fine print. Things got so bad that the burn rate for the Balancing Pool was \$30 million a month.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Nally: Thirty million. Absolutely. The whole industry was in turmoil, and guess what? Guess how the NDP responded? They bailed out the industry, Mr. Chair. They bailed out. They made every effort to hide their shenanigans. Well, I guess it would be a corporate bailout. Yeah; it was a corporate bailout. It wasn't the one that Lenin was referring to. It wasn't the corporate bailout that Lenin was referring to, but it was a corporate bailout nonetheless. So it's ironic that when it comes to hiding their own shenanigans, you know, that type of conservatism for the NDP is appropriate, but when it comes to supporting Albertans, they don't appear to take the same position.

2:20

Well, we have been consistent for the last two days, and we have said that we have a fiduciary responsibility and that we have a moral responsibility. We take that seriously, Mr. Chair. We campaigned on a platform of standing up for Albertans. Well, this is what standing up for Albertans looks like.

Now, there was a good question about the weighted average cost of capital. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning wants to know about the weighted average cost of capital. I mean, this is money that will be accrued in the deferral account, okay? This is not retailers getting rich off Albertans. There is no business model for this. They will not get rich off this. This is simply so that they don't jeopardize their balance sheet. It's one thing to ask a corporate citizen to help you, but it is another, Mr. Chair, to ask them to jeopardize their balance sheet, and we are not going to ask them to jeopardize their balance sheet and to put their whole company at risk. That is something that the NDP might do. Do you know what? That is something that we will not do.

Mr. Chair, the weighted average cost of capital met the needs of their lenders without jeopardizing their ability to borrow. At the end of the day, when everything is said and done, this will allow this government to defer utility payments for Albertans and give them the liquidity that they require to get through this very extremely difficult time, this one-in-a-hundred year black swan event.

Again, I thank the hon. member for the amendment. I ask everyone to respectfully turn down this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. associate minister.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate you recognizing me this afternoon here for my first opportunity to speak on Bill 14, of which amendment A3 is currently a part of for that discussion. As you can imagine, I've been intently listening to the

minister of gas talk about standing up for Albertans. Clearly, some of the folks that I've talked to so far about Bill 14, which is why we are bringing forth these amendments to this bill – you're clearly not standing up for the residents of Edmonton-Decore. I can tell you that right now.

You know, I've caught some of the debate here this afternoon, including A3, and heard some very interesting buzzwords. We've heard buzzwords like "difficult and tough decisions." I've heard "thoughtful and prudent decisions," Mr. Chair, and tying that all together with the needs of Albertans and how we're going to be using the tools in the tool box. Well, the Albertans that I represent here today on this would wish the government would use any of those tools. So far they seem to be left in the tool box and are not getting used.

So far when I ask them about if their needs are being met potentially with this bill, they're saying: "Well, it's going to be really hard for me to pay for something that I haven't made any money to pay for. It doesn't matter whether it's now or later. I still haven't made it." Now they're starting to talk about, "Well, do I take that money from, you know, maybe that second- or third-hand car payment that I'm paying in order to pay for this interest that would be charged through this?" hence why we've brought forward amendment A3, to reconsider that position. You know, they have to think about: "Well, maybe I'm going to have to take that from my rental payment where I live so that I can pay that interest. Maybe I'll just take it from my groceries."

You know, I find it very, very interesting when we talk about the needs of Albertans because some of those needs were hardly being met here when they were working two or maybe even three jobs just to barely pay the bills when we were not in a pandemic, when we were not in an economic crisis right now. Part of those large numbers that we've heard about this afternoon, you know, 360,000 Albertans: some of my residents are part of that. I can tell you right now that their needs do not include interest on something they can't pay for right now. That's why amendment A3 is very, very critical to some of those people I represent in Edmonton-Decore, something I think they clearly haven't been talked to about ahead of time. They've said: "Where's the relief? I couldn't get it because I couldn't get online to get that relief payment," or "I didn't qualify."

All that bragging we heard earlier on about how much has been spent and how many people we've helped: there are a lot of people in Edmonton-Decore that didn't get that. They're wondering why. Thankfully, at least, the federal government managed to cover them a little bit.

The needs of Albertans are that they need the province to step up, start using some of those tools in the tool box. Amendment A3 will remove the interest because they can't afford to pay it, and when they get back to work and they're making their full salaries at their two or three jobs that they're already working, they still won't be able to afford to pay that interest. Maybe if you would have talked to some of these low-income people, you would have found that out. But that's okay. That's what I'm here for. That's why I'm here today; I'm letting you know what their needs are.

Some buzzwords that we just heard from the associate minister, "needs of Albertans": so why don't you start making some difficult and tough decisions using the tools in the tool box to help the needs of those Albertans, like the ones in Edmonton-Decore, Mr. Chair? They aren't going to make the money to pay for that interest at any point in time in the future. All we're doing is kicking the can down the road. Heck, you probably might as well have just let them pay the late fees; it probably would have been cheaper.

As you can imagine, Mr. Chair, I'm very much in favour of amendment A3, which will take a piece of legislation and help

Albertans that find themselves in a bad place and will hopefully make it a little less bad. I have certainly heard from Albertans. You know, maybe I'll go out on a limb here a little bit. I'm going to bet that some of my colleagues here haven't had somebody call them up at their office, send an e-mail, bump into them somewhere, and say: please, can you charge me interest on my utility payments that I can't pay? I would love to see one conversation anywhere in Alberta where somebody said that, whether it be an individual or a business: please, charge me interest on a utility payment that I can't pay.

It kind of sounds a little bit like when students got charged higher interest on their student loans. I couldn't find a single student that wanted that. I tried. I tried really hard. I said: "No, no. You know what? Government is telling me this is what's in their best interest. This is what's in their need." I don't know. Maybe, you know, I just didn't look in the right places. Maybe that's the only thing I can think of. Maybe that's the case here. Maybe there are some Albertans out there that need to pay interest on the utility payments that they can't pay right now anyway and won't be able to pay for in the future.

2:30

Here's your chance to use some of the tools in the tool box. Here's your chance to help some of those low-income Albertans that won't be able to do this. Then you'll be able to stand up and say that you're working to meet the needs of Albertans by making the tough and difficult decisions through a thoughtful and prudent process. Hopefully, we might see some members jump up and be in favour of this, and I hope we get a chance to move this forward and meet the needs of Albertans, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate on A3? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank my hon. colleague for bringing forward this amendment. It's certainly been enlightening to hear the arguments that we've made in trying to amend this legislation, and it's certainly also been equally enlightening to hear the Member for Morinville-St. Albert's responses to some of the arguments that we're making. It's quite clear to me whose interests we're working in and whose interests the members opposite are working in. From the debate that has been conducted in this Chamber on this bill so far, it's quite clear to me that we are working to protect the interests of everyday Albertans and that the members opposite are working overtime to protect the interests of their corporate overlords. You know, it's interesting.

Of course, yesterday a few of us celebrated our five-year anniversary here of being elected to this Chamber. There were a couple of things that have happened in the last five years, that I think would be relevant to remind members of who weren't here, that members of the legacy parties that preceded the UCP voted in favour of. The first was cracking down on payday lenders. Alberta was the Wild West of the payday lending industry in the entire country of Canada. It was subjecting hundreds of thousands of Albertans to the prison of debt, that they couldn't escape, all the time. Even members opposite agreed that what was going on with the payday lending situation here in Alberta was immoral and unjust, and they voted in favour of our legislation . . .

Ms Glasgo: Hear, hear.

Mr. Schmidt: . . . to change that situation. I hear the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat cheering for that legislation. I'll remind that member that her predecessor, of course, was the only member of

the Wildrose caucus to stand up and actually argue against bringing in regulations to . . .

Ms Glasgo: I'm very much not him.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

Mr. Schmidt: I know. I'm trying my best, Madam Chair, to give the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat a compliment, and she won't even take that.

Ms Glasgo: Sorry. It's a little unusual.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah.

So it is interesting. It is interesting to me, Madam Chair, that now we have, a few years later, the same members effectively turning utility companies into payday lenders. I don't understand why three or four years ago it was immoral and unjust for payday lending companies to subject people who were accessing payday loans to the unacceptable interest rates that those lenders offer to the people who borrow those loans, yet now they want to make utility companies lenders to people who can't afford and will likely never be able to afford to pay back the utility bills that are piling up while everybody is unemployed during the pandemic.

You know, the Member for Morinville-St. Albert remarked in his remarks that he's been consistent for the last two days. Well, I guess consistency beyond two days is much more than we can expect from members of the UCP, because if they had been consistent with their past stances on lending to everyday Albertans, they wouldn't be entertaining this kind of legislation in the first place. If it was true then that Albertans couldn't afford to pay back the loans, it's certainly true now, when we find out that more than half a million Albertans have had their jobs affected by the pandemic. We don't know when this economic pain will end for those Albertans, and we certainly want to offer them help, yet all the government is offering is a payday loan dressed up as corporate charity from Nancy Southern and the good people at ATCO, according to them.

The other piece of interesting history that I think is relevant is the fact that under our watch we eliminated the unsavoury business practices of companies like Direct Energy that engaged in the door-to-door sales of long-term energy contracts. In fact, that move to ban door-to-door sales of long-term energy contracts by companies like Direct Energy was so well received that people would cross the street to thank me for doing that, which is an unusual situation to be in for any politician. It was, by far, one of the most popular decisions that any government in Alberta has ever made.

The reason is that companies like Direct Energy have repeatedly engaged in unsavoury business practices, trying to dupe their customers out of money. By bringing door-to-door energy sales under control, we severely limited the ability of Direct Energy to hoodwink and swindle honest, everyday, hard-working Albertans out of their money by unknowingly signing on to long-term energy contracts. That doesn't mean that Direct Energy just picked up stakes and blew out of town. They're still my natural gas provider, as I'm sure they are the natural gas providers for thousands and thousands of Albertans in the province.

Now the government is saying, "We're going to trust Direct Energy to manage these loans that they're giving to their customers," which is absolutely outrageous, Madam Chair. There's nothing in the history of a company like Direct Energy that indicates that they are worthy of the trust of the public and should be given the ability to administer these loans to their customers. Perhaps the associate minister or members opposite will say: well, we have a robust regulatory system in place to prevent those kinds of abuses from happening. Unfortunately, that is also not true. The

ability of a company like Direct Energy, which operates not just in Alberta but all across North America, to do end runs and pull the wool over the eyes of even our hard-working regulators should not be underestimated.

Unless the associate minister is also going to commit to beefing up our regulatory system to make sure that these kinds of loans aren't abused when they're being administered by companies like Direct Energy, who have a history of working overtime to swindle Albertans out of their hard-earned money, then the people of Alberta should reject this kind of offer, if you will, to defer their loan payments. We should not be asked to trust companies like Direct Energy to deal with its customers fairly or honestly.

So those are two pieces of Legislature history that I think should be brought to bear when members in this Chamber consider how they're going to vote on this amendment. It's certainly inconsistent with the past practice of cracking down on unsavoury lenders in this province. If the members opposite desire to be consistent – I don't necessarily think that they will be, but if they do, it would certainly make sense to me that they would vote in favour of this amendment because that's consistent with the votes that they've taken in this Chamber over the last five years.

2:40

I want to also go back to this issue of who the members opposite are working for. We have of course heard today that, as I said earlier, at least 500,000 Albertans have lost their jobs or had their jobs affected by the pandemic. Lots of people are in financial straits, financial difficulties, and there has been next to no help from the provincial government whatsoever for most people who are struggling to make ends meet. We had a failed rollout of an emergency cash benefit that didn't reach most people for whom it was ostensibly intended. We know that frequently the Premier and his government officials have asked Ottawa for help because they've made it clear that they don't intend to step up and help Albertans on their own. Even when the holes in the programs that Ottawa rolls out to support the people of Alberta are pointed out, this government is not interested at all in trying to fill the gaps, trying to help those whom the federal programs leave behind.

We've seen the failure of the province to step up in terms of providing cash transfers to everyday Albertans when many other provinces have done so. We've seen the failure of the province to protect renters. We had a piddly little eviction ban that lasted for a month, we see no actual cash supplements for renters, like they have in British Columbia, being made, and now all Albertans who are renting are in danger of eviction if they cannot pay their bills. So there's no help for renters, and now we see that there's really no help coming for people who can't pay their utility bills, because all we're getting is the offer of debt and the opportunity to pay the interest on that debt.

The associate minister has often stood up and said: oh, well, we can't affect the balance sheets of companies like ATCO. So we're shifting that impact to the balance sheets of everyday Albertans. Let's compare the balance sheets, Madam Chair. The average Albertan, prior to the pandemic hitting this province, didn't even have enough money in the bank to cover an emergency expense of more than \$400. Put on top of that now the economic distress that those Albertans find themselves in. How are they ever going to be able to pay back the thousands of dollars that they're likely to rack up in deferred utility payments?

Meanwhile a tour through ATCO's balance sheet shows that they made \$1.5 billion in 2019, and they have more than a billion dollars in cash assets alone. They have a billion dollars in the bank that's not doing anything, that they're not spending on anything. It's just sitting there.

An Hon. Member: So you want to take it?

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah, I do. I do want to take that money, and I want to give it to the people of Alberta so that they don't end up in a hole that they can't get out of.

Why is it that when things are tough, we've got to think about people who have a billion dollars in the bank before we think about those who don't even have \$400 to cover an emergency expense? Explain to me how that is fair. Why is it that when the bill comes due, the members opposite look first to those who can least afford to pay to cough up the cash, and the ones that are sitting on huge piles of money – we're talking Scrooge McDuck levels of money. I just imagine Nancy Southern in her private vault diving into piles of dollar bills.

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Point of Order Referring to a Nonmember

Mr. McIver: It's Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). There's a section there. It's well established that we don't typically like to pick on people here that aren't here to defend themselves. I would just ask that you insist that the hon. member not talk down one of the finest people that I know and a great Albertan and somebody that's done a great deal for Albertans. But even if this person had not done those things, this person is a person and can't defend herself here.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I believe the Deputy Government House Leader referred to 23(h), (i), and (j).

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

I would suggest that the member who was speaking had done none of those things.

The Chair: If anyone is interested in reading the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* rules and procedures, pages 97 and 98, it will speak to a matter in which members shall take great caution with remarks towards a person outside of the Assembly that is not here to defend themselves.

Hon. member, I'll ask you to proceed with caution with the remainder of your remarks.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. My point is that the members opposite are asking Albertans who have zero money to cover ATCO's bills for the next three or four months or however long. I mean, we have now a bill before us that defers utility payments for a certain period of time. Certainly, we don't expect the pandemic to be over and we certainly don't expect Albertans to be going back to work at the levels required by the time that this deferral period expires. It doesn't make sense to me. It is not fair to ask Albertans to pay the bill when ATCO and companies like it are definitely in a much better financial position. Moreover, it is therefore incredibly unfair to ask them to pay interest to those companies for not being able to pay their bills.

I and my colleagues here in the Official Opposition are bringing forward this amendment because we think that at least, at the very

least, the smallest step that we can take to improve this bill to make sure that Albertans at least have a glimmer of hope of paying back the utility payments that are piling up right now is to eliminate the ability of these companies to charge them interest. It is certainly the right thing to do, and it is certainly in the best interests of Albertans who are really struggling, the Albertans who are struggling to make ends meet right now. We have to be clear.

When we emerge from this pandemic and we start to relaunch our economy, we need to be clear about who the economy will be working for. Do we want it to continue to work for the profitable corporations that the members opposite continue to give billions of dollars to, or do we want it to work for every Albertan? Do we want everybody to have the opportunity to relaunch themselves after this pandemic?

2:50

I can tell you that it's going to be much harder for Albertans to get back on their feet if they're struggling to get out of a giant debt hole. At least the members opposite could limit the amount of debt that Albertans will find themselves in as a result of this legislation and eliminate the ability of utility companies to charge interest to their customers.

Madam Chair, for all of these reasons, I urge all of the members in this Chamber to vote in favour of this amendment and to stand up for Albertans, who desperately need the help right now.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3 on Bill 14?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A3.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:51 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Dang	Loyola	Sabir
Gray	Nielsen	Schmidt

Against the motion:

Amery	Milliken	Rutherford
Getson	Nally	Singh
Glasgo	Neudorf	Smith
Gotfried	Orr	Stephan
Guthrie	Rehn	Turton
Horner	Rosin	Yaseen
McIver	Rowswell	

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 20
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[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: We are now back on the main bill, Bill 14, in Committee of the Whole. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall standing.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. The way this bill has been set up is that from the government, through the Balancing Pool, utility companies will receive loans that they can keep, charge interest on, and then when they get to collect from Albertans the deferred utilities, they can add weighted average capital costs and add interest on that. Not just that, but there are still provisions, rate rider provisions, that will allow utility companies to charge all

Albertans for any loss they incur during this program. The rate rider provisions define the periods and then establishes them through sections 11 and 21 and gives the government regulation-making authority in section 29.

I would like to move an amendment to get rid of these rate rider provisions and, I think, restrict their ability to charge Albertans for their losses. I think it's the government's job to establish this program and execute this program with care and not make Albertans liable to pay for the companies' losses. They are already down, and as the government usually puts it, they shouldn't be kicked in the face when they are already down. They cannot afford to pay their utility bills. They cannot afford to pay for the losses that companies may incur.

I have an amendment that I would like to move.

The Chair: I think you set a record today for the number of amendments moved by one single member.

Mr. Sabir: That's the fourth.

I can read the amendment into the record.

The Chair: Hon. member, it is known as amendment A4. Please read it into the record.

Mr. Sabir: I move that Bill 14, Utility Payment Deferral Program Act, be amended as follows: (a) section 1 is amended by striking out clause (d), (b) section 11 is struck out, (c) section 21 is struck out, and (d) section 29(1) is amended by striking out clause (c).

Just to describe this amendment, section (a) is striking out clause (d). Clause (d) defines the rate rider period. Section 11 defines the rate rider program for electric utility companies. Section 21 similarly describes the rate rider for gas utility companies. Section 29(1)(c) gives the government the ability to make regulations with respect to the rate rider provision.

As I said, what this rate rider, in the simplest terms, is: companies who are getting loans from the government will provide deferrals, and they will have one year to collect deferred payment, and if they incur any loss, the government is not taking any responsibility. Rather, they are putting Albertans on the hook for those losses, and again those losses will be socialized on all Albertans. This is wrong. Albertans are struggling. They cannot afford to pay bills, much less the interest costs and other people's losses. So this should be struck out to make this bill a little bit better.

Thank you.

3:00

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I would like to say, for those that have been around here for a little while, that there was a period of time when the Ethics Commissioner and I disagreed on whether I should talk about electricity in this House, but I'm here to report, at the Ethics Commissioner's request, that the Ethics Commissioner and I now both agree that I can talk about electricity in this House. She asked me to say that, and I'm sure the opposition will check. I'm comfortable with what I just said. Now that I've got that out of the way, I can talk about this.

You know what, Madam Chair? The opposition: it's pretty rich for them to talk about cost to the consumers on electricity, especially a member of the former cabinet that put in essentially billions of dollars' worth of losses that had to be paid back by the taxpayers with free closing of coal plants, with all kinds of policies, basically botched this file beyond belief. Alberta taxpayers and ratepayers have had to pay for many, many millions and billions of dollars based on the incredibly poorly-thought-out, reckless, and,

frankly, destructive policies of the previous NDP government, so we won't be taking any lessons from those people about looking after the ratepayers and the taxpayers, and we won't be supporting this amendment.

The Chair: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's always a pleasure to rise in this place and speak to an amendment from my hon. colleague here. I think, frankly, it's a good amendment, so it's disappointing to hear that the Minister of Transportation here doesn't think it's valuable that we protect consumers from increased rate riders and, basically, piling on to utility bills of consumers and small businesses right when they might be getting back on their feet, right? We're talking about an amendment that actually is trying to ensure that when the recovery starts, when people start to be able to pay off their deferred payments, when people start to be able to actually go and run their businesses and pay their bills again, when all these things are happening and the economy is starting to get moving again, we're not going to hit them while it's happening, right? We're not going to try and kick the puppy when it's just starting to run, right?

Madam Chair, I think it's important that when we look at this amendment and we look at this bill and we look at the types of initiatives that we're trying to propose, the types of amendments we're trying to propose, what we're trying to say is that we need to give consumers and we need to give the ratepayers a break right now, right? We need to make sure that they can actually make it through this pandemic, that they can make it through this economic crisis as well as this health crisis, and then when they're recovering, they need to be able to continue that growth so that they're able to maintain their homes or businesses, right? It's just that simple. It's just as simple as saying that we need to have the backs of Albertans. We need to make sure Albertans are able to have stability, and we need to make sure that Albertans know what their costs will be as they move forward through this economy, right? So that's what's so important.

When we look at this bill and we look at how the rate rider is trying to be introduced, we know that there are going to be costs, right? We know that the energy companies are going to have costs. We had talked about why earlier in a different amendment, Madam Chair, and it was already spoken to. We had talked about why it was important that we looked at where the costs were laid and who was paying for it. We know that this cost shouldn't be covered by consumers and businesses. We know it shouldn't be covered by businesses right when they are trying to recover, right when we're talking about that as many as over half of the businesses in Alberta may be closed right now. Small businesses in Alberta may be closed right now. I think, actually, every small business in my riding, Madam Chair, is closed right now. I spoke today in question period about how I've been receiving correspondence not just from those in my riding but from across the entire province, right? We're talking about businesses that really actually do need support right now.

We know the government isn't giving enough support. I've been hearing that in my office through e-mail, through phone, through Zoom meetings, whatever it is, Madam Chair. We know that there isn't enough support, so why would we support the bill as it's written if we don't accept this amendment? Maybe when those half of the businesses across the whole province that are closed right now, maybe when they're just starting to reopen again, maybe when they just start bringing people back to work, maybe when they just can finally say, "Well, let's start serving again; let's start having customers again; let's start making revenue again," why would we

suddenly hit them with an extra cost, right? That's what the government is proposing here. That's what the government wants to do. They want to charge businesses more. They want businesses to hurt more during the economic recovery. That is actually what is being proposed when they don't accept this amendment, right? I think that's something that is actually really hard to comprehend. It's really hard to comprehend because we're back here on a Friday, which is very unusual, to debate emergency legislation.

These are things that we need to implement to support Albertans and to support Albertan businesses. That is at least the stated intent of why we are in this Legislature right now, right? That's why this Legislature didn't break for lunch today, Madam Chair, to support businesses and support Alberta families. So why is it that every single government member who is sitting here right now is going to vote to kick those businesses while they're down and trying to recover? Why is it that every single member right here, right now is trying to kick those families when they may just be able to pay off those deferred payments, pay off those interest charges that the government wants to download on them, pay off those extra bills? This amendment, Madam Chair, would ensure that that extra rate rider wouldn't kick them when they're down. It wouldn't hinder the growth and regrowth of our economy. It wouldn't hinder the reopening strategy that the government is trying to implement, right?

We're talking about: how do we manage this economy through a crisis? How do we manage it, and how do we make sure Albertans have the best possible chance of recovering and bringing our economy back full steam, right? That's what we're talking about. We're talking about: how do we make sure that once we're through the immediate health impacts, once we're through the immediate global economic impacts, once we're through all these immediate issues, how do we make sure that, long term, businesses and families are sustainable, businesses and families will be able to pay those bills and pay back the deferred payments, they'll be able to start looking at how they can make revenues again, how they can start making profits again, how they may be able to pay off their credit cards, and things like that, Madam Chair? That's what we're talking about.

This amendment would ensure that we don't suddenly say: "Well, great. We're past the immediate health crisis, we're past your deferred payments, and we're past all this debt you built up because of the COVID pandemic. But you know what? We think energy companies should charge you a bit more. We think you should give energy companies a bit more money. We think you should pay a bit more on your electricity right now because your business is finally able to hire people again. Your business is finally able to start making sales again. Your home, your household, your family is finally back to work. You have finally gone back to work, and you're making money again. Well, you know what? Now is a great time to hit you with some extra bills while you're still paying off that credit card debt. Now is a great time to charge you more."

That's what the government is saying when they reject this amendment, Madam Chair. What they're saying is that every single family should pay more and get less. That is the type of thing we're talking about. Those are values that we're talking about when we talk about these amendments, right? We're not talking about whether we think that the economic crisis is going to hurt people. The economic crisis absolutely will have a negative impact on the economy and on families. That's the reality. We all accept that. The government accepts that. That's why they're introducing this legislation. If they don't accept it, I don't know why we're here.

We agree that there are going to be negative impacts on the economy, on households, and on small businesses. We agree that all of these things are happening. So why, at a time when we need

to be supporting them the most, which is going to be when the economy is starting to recover, which is going to be when these families are starting to get back to work, which is going to be when these businesses are starting to be able to serve customers again and seeing local activity in economies, whether that's people going to stores again or being able to go to work, go to their offices again, whatever it is, Madam Chair, why, when we're about to start to see that happen again, would we suddenly decide to kick the economy again? Why would we decide to say: "Well, consumers, you should pay more. Small businesses, you should pay more. You know what? Big multibillion dollar energy companies, you need some more cash in your pocket right now. Cash flow for these multibillion-dollar energy companies right now: really important. Cash flow for small businesses, cash flow for families: not important."

That's what the government is saying when they reject this amendment, right? They're saying that the cash flow needs of these multibillion-dollar corporations is more essential, is more important, is more emergent, as we are here debating emergency legislation, than that of those families and those small businesses, of the households that have just paid off their credit card debt or are trying to pay off their credit card debt, of the businesses who are just paying off their lines of credit, of the businesses who are doing things like paying off the deferred utility bills. What the government is saying is that those businesses, those families, those small-business owners, those households are less important than the multibillion-dollar energy companies that are friends and donors of this UCP government. That's the reality, Madam Chair. That's what is going on here today. That is why they're rejecting this amendment, and it's because they do not want to support these families. If they disagree with that, they're free to stand up and state that in this House here.

3:10

I mean, I think it's just the opinion that, certainly, utility customers just need a break, right? They need a break. They need to be able to grow back the economy, grow back with the economy, and ensure that our economic situation does not worsen because when we're talking about recoveries, recoveries are something that can be fickle. It can be very difficult to manage an economy through a crisis, and we know that as we see the economy start to recover, the last thing we want to do is mess around with it. The last thing we'd want to do is stifle the recovery.

What the government is actually suggesting by introducing this rate rider and not accepting our amendment is to actually say: "Well, in the middle of the recovery we don't really care what the businesses are thinking. We don't really care that they're going to have cash flow issues if they have to pay more on their utilities. We don't really care that consumers are going to go out and spend money and these businesses are going to have some extra fees on their utility, the extra rate rider." Madam Chair, that's basically what the government is saying. They're saying that they are willing to put at risk the economic recovery.

They are willing to put the economic recovery in jeopardy so that multibillion-dollar energy companies can make a little bit extra money – right? – can have a little bit better balance sheets, can have a little bit better cash flow, can have a little bit more security on this multibillion-dollar company that the government is already bailing out. The government is already giving a corporate handout. They gave a \$4.7 billion corporate handout a few months ago, and now they're giving another corporate handout in the form of a no-interest loan, and then we're going to see them give another corporate handout here and say, "Well, this multibillion-dollar energy company, their cash flow, their balance sheet: much more important than that of small businesses, much more important than that of

families.” That’s what the government is suggesting. That’s what the government is trying to tell Albertans. They’re trying to tell Albertans that they don’t matter as much, that they don’t matter as much as these multibillion-dollar energy companies.

That’s why this amendment is so important. It wouldn’t fix all the issues in this bill, Madam Chair. There is no suggestion that this amendment will suddenly make Bill 14 an amazing bill. That’s simply not true. But what it would do is that it would help protect consumers – it would help protect consumers – and small businesses during that recovery period, during when they are just getting back to work, just when Albertans are just able to start paying those bills back, start paying off deferred payments and maybe, in the cases of small businesses, when they’re trying to see revenues again, right? When businesses are finally able to see revenues and look at long-term hiring and long-term growth forecasts, when businesses are just going to be getting back in that position, this government is actually suggesting that we should kick them and charge them more, right? That’s what this government is actually suggesting and actually going to be implementing – not suggesting. They’re actually going to be doing in this bill. That is actually the stated intent in this bill.

It’s actually quite shocking to see government members who profess their love for businesses and profess their love for capitalism and profess their love for all of these things, Madam Chair, and then, suddenly, when it comes down to it, they’re willing to give corporate welfare, socialism for companies. They want to do all of these brilliant things for multibillion-dollar companies with great balance sheets and cash flows and then say to the small businesses and families that it doesn’t matter, that they can pay a little bit more, that they can pay a little bit extra. It’s actually astounding, right? Like, it’s actually shocking when you think about it. It’s shocking.

When you think about how utility customers, whether it’s a renter of a commercial space or a renter of a residential space or a homeowner, whatever it is, or even a business owner who owns their own property as well, it’s actually shocking that in every single situation, no matter where you are on the spectrum of owning or operating a business or owning and operating or renting a home, no matter who you are in Alberta, you will end up paying more unless you happen to be a multibillion-dollar energy company, right? That’s what’s most shocking about this bill. It’s most shocking that this government thinks that is the number one priority of the day, that that is the number one priority that we have to be here for on a Friday afternoon and skipping lunch debating an emergency resolution, so that we can kick businesses while they’re down. That’s what’s the most shocking thing.

Madam Chair, it’s amazing that the government can’t see the value in an amendment saying that well, yes, we have these costs that, well, they’re introducing because of their corporate bailouts, and then we have these extra costs that are going to be happening – it’s absolutely true. But it’s amazing that the government can’t even realize for a second, that they can’t even understand how now is not the time to be kicking businesses while they’re down.

If we’re looking at actually trying to manage the economic crisis, if we’re looking at trying to manage the health crisis, if we’re looking at trying to manage any of these crises that are ongoing right now, Madam Chair, to do that, you try to make sure that people are supported. Whether they own a business or whether they are a family, whatever it is, you try to make sure that these people are supported, right? That fundamentally is why we’re here. We’re fundamentally here to try and support people. People that live here in the province of Alberta, whether they own a business or not, whether they own a home or not, whether they rent a home, whatever it is: we’re here to support people.

This amendment would enable us to better support those people, right? It would allow us to look at families and look at every single Albertan and say: “Hey. Look, we don’t think that when you’re recovering, we don’t think that when things are just starting to look okay for you again, you should pay more. That’s what we want to tell Albertans at the end of the day. We want to tell Albertans at the end of the day that we stood up for them, that we fought for them, that we made sure that they had the best possible chance to return to normalcy after this crisis, right? That’s what we want to be able to tell Albertans.

It turns out, Madam Chair, that instead of that, the government has actually said: “Well, you know, let’s just keep kicking them. Like, they’ve already taken a lot. The global economic crisis, the global health crisis have all happened, but you know what? They should pay a little bit more. They should pay a little bit more because that would really help the balance sheet, that would really help the books of this multibillion-dollar energy company.” It’s astounding. It would be laughable if it wasn’t in black and white in legislation that we’re being asked to vote on here today. That is what is most shocking, that this government actually has introduced in this legislation a plan to charge Albertans more during an economic recovery.

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Madam Chair.

Point of Order Repetition

Mr. McIver: Under 23(c), persists in needless repetition. The hon. member is excited, and I appreciate that, but he’s trying to stretch a two-minute debate into 20 minutes by repeating the two minutes a whole bunch of times. I would just ask that you maybe ask the member to come up with some new words or phrases along the way.

The Chair: Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Regarding 23(c) I would just like to stress that this is an amendment that has just been introduced. This is the second speaker other than the person who moved the amendment. I do not think that we are currently in any form of needless debate at this point. The member is making his arguments and has not even used up, I believe, the full 10 minutes or 15 minutes yet. I would suggest that it is not a point of order and that the member should be allowed to continue his response to amendment A4.

The Chair: Hon. members, it’s getting late on this Friday afternoon, on which it’s unusual to sit in the first place, and we are here to do the business that our constituents expect us to do, and that is to debate the matter at hand, which is amendment A4. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South is one of the most creative members, I find, in this Assembly, and I am certain that he will find that creativity for the remaining five minutes and 42 seconds.

Please proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Chair. I really appreciate your comments and, I suppose, your compliments as well in this case.

I think, certainly, it is clear that the government does not want to hear about what their bill actually does. It’s clear the government doesn’t want to hear about how this amendment would help families. It’s clear the government doesn’t want to hear about why it will cost consumers more. That’s something that is becoming evident no matter what piece of legislation we debate, right? The

government doesn't want to hear discourse. The government doesn't want to hear debate. Instead, they would rather ram through legislation under the cover of darkness in many cases, Madam Chair, and see that they were able to run away quickly so that nobody would notice they had hurt consumers. That's becoming very evident.

I think that perhaps we can see that this amendment would clearly allow the economic recovery to be more stable, right? It would clearly allow the economic recovery to have a longer term outlook. When we talk about economic recoveries and we talk about how crises are managed – and, Madam Chair, I'll be the first to admit that there was a big economic crisis when we were in government as well, when the NDP caucus was in government, the NDP government, of course, five years ago now. At that time about \$10 billion had disappeared from the provincial treasury. I believe at this time that it is in quite excess of the amount that had disappeared from the treasury under our government.

But this government, when they see that, when they see the same type of crisis, when they see the same type of economic issues start to come up – of course, it's a different situation now. It's under different circumstances. There also happens to be a global health pandemic. When we see this, when we see that instead of making the decision to try and ensure that consumers are protected, which is one of the things that our government did – for example, making sure we had a rate cap, right? – instead of making sure that consumers will not pay more, instead of making sure that consumers, whether they own or rent or whatever it is, have stability, what this government would like to do is say, "Well, these multibillion-dollar energy companies need a bit more money; we should kick the families, but we should put some cash into the pockets of multibillion-dollar companies," you can see the difference between how economic crises are managed, right?

3:20

We're talking about the rate rider here. We're talking about whether this is an appropriate tool to manage the economic crisis. And it's become pretty clear that this is about choices. It's about: who do we choose to support? It's about: how do we choose to support Albertans? It's become pretty clear the government has chosen not to support Albertans and instead has chosen to support multibillion-dollar profitable companies, and that's a decision the government is allowed to make. The government absolutely has the right to make that decision. They have the prerogative. They are a majority here, Madam Chair. They absolutely have the right to say: well, Alberta families, you can pay a bit more; Alberta businesses, you can pay a bit more; but these multibillion-dollar, multinational oil companies, energy companies need a bit more money, right? That's absolutely the prerogative of the government.

But it shows the difference in approach, right? It shows the difference in opinion. It shows the difference in perspective that the governments took, our former government and this current government, because governance is about choices. I mean, Madam Chair, with the global health emergency, with the global health pandemic and the global economic crisis, pretty clearly, there is no necessarily best way to manage every single thing, right? There's no best way to make sure everything will be okay in the end. Nobody can predict that. If they have that crystal ball, please let me know. I'd like to buy some lottery tickets this weekend. It's pretty clear that nobody has that crystal ball. But what we can do is that we can make choices and decisions about who we want to support and how we want to support them.

It's become very clear, by the rejection by the Transportation minister of this amendment, that the choices that are being made, the decisions that are being made, whether it's at the cabinet table

or the caucus table – whoever is making these decisions, if the cabinet or caucus table are making those decisions at all, is making choices that will not actually benefit consumers, that will not actually benefit families, that will not actually benefit small businesses. That's what's becoming pretty clear.

I think, Madam Chair, that we can see that Albertans are going to have a choice, and they're going to be able to look at the choices that were made, and that's what's going to come back and really solidify this because when we look across the entire country or across the entire world, we see governments making choices, right? No government has made perfect choices in every situation. Those are simply the facts. Nobody makes perfect decisions every single time. That's simply a truth. What we can see is that across the world and across the country, governments are trying to make decisions that better families in their areas, better their constituents, better the lives of their constituents, and better the chances of a successful economic recovery. What we're seeing instead here is a government that is kicking families while they're down, kicking businesses while they're down, and trying to stifle that recovery.

Madam Chair, I really encourage every single one of my colleagues to vote in favour of this, whether they're in the government or opposition side. I think it's very important that we have a bill that is best able to support families and businesses.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4 on Bill 14? I see the hon. associate minister of natural gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's always an honour to stand up and speak to yet another amendment. I always appreciate the thoughtful amendments that they put forward. Their attempts to contribute to democracy are always welcome, so thank you for that.

Some comments that I have. I have to say that right now, with what I just heard, I'm glad that the visitor galleries are closed. I'm glad that Legislative Assembly TV only has 10 viewers. The reason is because I'm glad that the utilities don't have to watch themselves be vilified by this administration. My department reached out in good faith and asked them to help, and how does this caucus across the aisle respond? By vilifying them for helping out Albertans.

Now, Madam Chair, with regard to Edmonton-South I can appreciate that his biggest professional accomplishment outside of the Legislature was graduating from high school, so I get that he lacks some business experience . . .

The Chair: I will give you an opportunity to draw back that comment and apologize to the hon. member.

Mr. Nally: I apologize and withdraw.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nally: . . . clearly doesn't appreciate economics 101, and perhaps the individual would be a little bit more respectful to the companies that are helping us get through this mess and would stop vilifying the very companies that have essentially helped us to backstop this program. So if we can get past vilifying the utilities, Madam Chair. The rhetoric has been incredible, and it's very disappointing.

Again, you know, when I read Lenin's guidebook to socialism, what it didn't say was that when you're talking, you're never listening. I think that there are some members that are not listening enough, and they would have heard why we're putting this legislation forward, why we're turning the amendments down, because if we wanted to make this deal with the utilities, this is what

it looked like. Unfortunately, they're choosing not to listen, Madam Chair.

Now, with regard to the rate rider I can't believe we're even talking about this because the NDP owns the corner on rate riders. The NDP used a rate rider to disguise their electrical fiasco when they were in government. So the very idea that they would be criticizing the use of a rate rider now is, in fact, laughable. Madam Chair, the fact is that there is a very real likelihood of bad debt. It's going to have to be dealt with, and a rate rider is going to allow us to deal with this bad debt.

But let's stop awfulizing for a second – okay? – and look at what this bill accomplishes instead of looking at what it doesn't accomplish. What this accomplishes, Madam Chair, is that this allows us to provide financial relief to Albertans that are harmed financially by COVID-19. That's what this does. Now, I'll be the first to admit that if this was good news, we wouldn't be here. If this was good news, COVID-19 would not be impacting Albertans, but it is, so we have to make some difficult decisions. It's imperative that we provide Albertans with financial relief in the form of a utility deferral. We have the utility companies that are going to help us backstop this, and we appreciate their efforts because they're not the bad guys in this. Any suggestion that they are is absolutely irresponsible and unacceptable.

For that reason, Madam Chair, I humbly ask everyone to please turn down this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Seeing none, I will ask the question.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 14. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think we are here trying to do our best to represent our constituents and do something that they need. I can tell you that in my riding – and we have been hearing from many Albertans across the province that they are looking for financial supports, and deferring their utilities to be paid with interest is not financial relief that Albertans are looking for.

We will still try to do what we can to make this bill a bit better, to improve this bill, and here is another amendment that is very reasonable, that is very thoughtful. I think they will like this one once I distribute it.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A5. Please proceed.

3:30

Mr. Sabir: The Member for Calgary-McCall to move that Bill 14, Utility Payment Deferral Program Act be amended as follows: (a) section 8(4) is amended by striking out “interest-free”, (b) section 18(4) is amended by striking out “an interest-free loan” and substituting “a loan.”

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

As I said, it's an important amendment, and so far what we have heard from the minister when he gets up is talk about socialism, Lenin, and all those things, which have absolutely nothing to do with this bill but may help him with his boss or whatever, but it's not helping Albertans in any way, shape, or manner. We have also heard lectures about businesses' balance sheets. We heard lectures about how capitalism and all those things work. But in this entire province – I would say continent – I haven't heard of interest-free

loans that businesses are able to avail other than from this government. So I think that it's reasonable that when we are doing this transaction, we should watch for Alberta's bottom line, too, because it's public money. When the public is loaning that money to somebody, I think they have the right to earn some interest on it because wherever in financial markets you borrow money, you pay interest. It's only fair that these companies, when they are borrowing from the public, also pay interest. They are able to charge interest on the deferred payment, so they should also be paying Albertans interest when they borrow from Albertans.

With that, I urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this amendment and make sure that Alberta money, taxpayer money, is not just doled out without any conditions or terms.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to speak to amendment A5? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen to speak.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's always an honour to get up and speak in the House. We've been here quite some time now debating this in Committee of the Whole, and we've heard a number of statements made in the House. What I specifically wanted to address was the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity getting up to say that this is an example of compassionate conservatism. While I agree that it's conservative, I wouldn't necessarily call it compassionate. At the end of the day what is happening here within this bill, although we've tried to reverse it to some extent by introducing a number of amendments – and I will get to this amendment – is to actually help more Albertans with the amount of money that's inside their own pockets, right? I mean, that would be compassionate at a time when we're living an unprecedented pandemic like we are right now.

I can't tell you the number of people that have reached out to my constituency office. I'm sure that all of the members here could attest because I'm sure that people, constituents all across this province are reaching out to their MLAs and letting them know how the COVID pandemic is actually impacting their lives and the economic stability of their own households. Is that fair to say? Yeah. I'm pretty sure that everyone is hearing about this.

Now, tack onto that the economic crisis that we're in because of the fact that because of COVID-19 small businesses have been forced to close, and they can't meet their financial responsibilities because there's absolutely no revenue coming in. They've had to lay off workers. Those workers are the ones that we are trying to protect right now in this House by introducing these amendments and making sure that those people who have lost their jobs, the ones that truly are going to have to defer making their utility payments, are the people that we're trying to protect.

Now, by asking those people to pay more – and let me stress this. This is a deferral. This is saying: I know you can't pay this right now, but I'm asking you to pay it a little bit later on. You know, that's fine, but then with some of the amendments, the fact of the rate rider – we've already voted on that. Unfortunately, we weren't able to change the government's mind on that one. Now these utility companies are going to be getting these interest-free loans from the government, which are taxpayer dollars. Those are taxpayer dollars.

Here we have Albertans that have paid their taxes. Now we're administering it. Well, the government is administering it, this cabinet along with the Premier. They're administering it, and now they're saying: “Okay. We're going to give this money to the utility company interest free, but, Albertans, you're still going to have to pay at the end. Once June 18 comes around, you're going to have to make sure to make those payments. There's no forgiving for you; you're going to have to pay that.” But here this government is

willing to stand up and say: utility company, we're going to give you this money, and you won't have to pay any interest at all when paying us back, not even for the benefit of Albertans.

I ask myself: how is this scenario, when you look at it holistically, within the context of the global pandemic that we're living and the fact that that global pandemic is having an absolute – it's an incredible economic crisis that we're living in. How is this bill, in the context of what's happening right now, compassionate? It's not, Associate Minister. That's my argument to you. I know that you reached out and asked – Mr. Chair, through you to the associate minister: how is this compassionate within the context in which we're living?

I was going to get on to this. I appreciate, Mr. Chair, that the associate minister reached out to the utility companies, tried to find a solution. The solution that he's found is lacking, I would say. I believe that it would be possible for the government to work with the utility companies to reach something of a little bit more benefit for the Albertans that are going to have to defer these payments, that are in a scenario where they're going to have to defer these payments but, again I stress, are still going to have to pay it. Tack the possibility of the rate rider on top of that, then they're going to be paying a little bit more while at the same time this government is allowing the utility company to borrow interest free.

It's not fair. Every time I have the opportunity – and, you know, I did one of these today. This is why it's fresh off the top of my head. I did a Google Hangout with a school. Every time I have the opportunity to speak to students, grade 6 students specifically, at schools within my riding, I ask them: what do you think is one of the most important aspects legislators need to make sure happens when we are coming up with a law? You know, these students are so intelligent. Every time – every time – I ask the question, the students just naturally gravitate to one answer, and that is: make sure it's fair for everybody. Make sure that the law is fair for everybody. My argument through you, Mr. Chair, to the hon. members on the other side is that this is not fair. It's not fair that Albertans are going to have to pay. Yes, they can defer. Yes, that's great. But at the end of the day this same government is giving the opportunity for the utility companies to borrow interest free.

3:40

I seriously think that this needs to be re-evaluated, and I would encourage every member of this House to please think about what is being presented in this bill. The amendment that we're putting forward is just simply trying to reach a reasonable balance. If you're going to lend public money to this utility company, which, as has already been stated by so many members on this side of the House, is sitting on billions of dollars – it's not as if they're wanting. We are talking about Albertans who are in a predicament because of this global pandemic. Perhaps they have been laid off or perhaps they're business owners that haven't been able to make any money, any revenue, because their businesses were forced to close. We're asking you for some balance. We're asking you for a reasonable measure that would make this fair for everybody within this province, not just those who are sitting on billions of dollars.

I understand that you need to go to the utility company and ask them for help or push them just a little bit further to actually help the average Albertan a little more than what you're doing so far. This is all we're asking. That's compassion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity has risen to speak to amendment A5.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Once again, I appreciate the thoughtful amendment. I appreciate the intent that the amendment is putting forward. One of the things that the opposition is not considering is that electrical retailers are required to pay a prudential. A prudential is a deposit, an interest-free deposit, that they have to put down that essentially will offer some protection to the electrical system if in fact they go bankrupt. By the way, it's not a small amount. It's a fairly significant cost, and it's one that they are required to outlay. This is just one more example of what the opposition doesn't appreciate. The electricity industry requires liquidity so they can pay that prudential.

The other thing to consider, Mr. Chair, is that if the Balancing Pool charges interest to the retailer, well, we just raise the cost of the entire program. The whole purpose is to make this affordable for the consumer. If we start putting on interest charges from the Balancing Pool, the whole program gets more expensive.

You know, I appreciate the amendment. I appreciate the intent of the amendment. Unfortunately, it would make this uneconomic, and it would make it unworkable. So I humbly request that all the private members turn down this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. associate minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak on A5?

If not, I'm prepared to ask the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A5 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:44 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Dang	Loyola	Sabir
Gray	Nielsen	Schmidt

Against the motion:

Getson	McIver	Rutherford
Glasgo	Nally	Singh
Gotfried	Neudorf	Smith
Guthrie	Orr	Stephan
Horner	Rehn	Turton
Hunter	Rosin	Yaseen
Lovely	Rowswell	

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 20
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[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Moving back to Bill 14 proper, are there any members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, we are here, so we should try to do everything we can to improve this legislation. I have another amendment that I want to move.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. If you could just read it into the record and then please continue with your comments. This will be referred to as amendment A6.

Mr. Sabir: I move that Bill 14, Utility Payment Deferral Program Act, be amended by striking out 29(1)(i). That's the regulation-making authority which reads: "providing for any matter that the Minister considers is not provided for or is insufficiently provided

for in this Act.” This regulation is very concerning. It would give the minister the ability to consider which are things that are not provided in it or insufficiently provided in it, and there is nothing specific about what it deals with.

3:50

Essentially, this program was announced two months ago. Now they are bringing this forward, and they are still not confident that they have thought through everything that they needed to implement their program. This provision is just there to cover for their staggering incompetence. That’s what this provision is doing, and it’s my considered opinion that it is probably not legal and cannot be relied on to make any substantial changes. I think that if the minister is so worried about this bill that government is giving themselves this power to provide for anything that they haven’t considered, I would suggest that they can take this piece of legislation back and prepare, work on it a little bit more, and bring it back whenever it’s ready.

I don’t think that in a free and democratic society government through legislation will create such broad powers for themselves to provide for anything and everything, whatever they feel at some point in the future, provide for those powers in the Legislature. That’s wrong. I think that needs to be amended, and I’m urging all my colleagues in the House to vote for this amendment and vote against these kinds of powers reserved for government without any accountability whatsoever.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A6? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to quickly add some comments around this amendment that has been proposed by the Member for Calgary-McCall around amending their regulations in section 29(1)(i).

You know, I can’t help but think back to the 29th Legislature, Mr. Chair. I remember the members of the government who served during that time as well as members of the government caucus that also served during that time. Whenever they perceived any kind of extra powers that were being given to ministers back at that time, quite honestly, since we’ve already heard the comment here this afternoon, they lit their hair on fire and thought it was absolutely outrageous that any of the ministers should be able to make those kinds of decisions.

Fast-forward here and now to the 30th Legislature, and we see the exact same behaviour that those members who sit in the government and in the government caucus are presenting in this legislation around Bill 14, which is why A6 has been proposed. If you’re going to criticize these types of perceived behaviours, then you can’t then go and duplicate them after the fact. That kind of makes you a little bit of a hypocrite.

Amendment A6, of course, would provide for that to be eliminated. Certainly, if there were concerns from the government side that, you know, that could mess things up, then I think, like my colleague from Calgary-McCall said, perhaps take the legislation back, look more at that and whether that is really what is needed. Because we have seen already legislation that has been recently brought forward into the House where an outside organization has presented a legal challenge for its overreach, here’s the Official Opposition trying to prevent a possible pitfall here because I’m concerned that perhaps this maybe starts to cross over into an area that could see some kind of a legal challenge. I know we have seen a bit of, I guess, an attitude from the government that, well, we’ll

just take everything to court if somebody goes against us or doesn’t believe that we should be doing what we’re trying to do. We’re trying to help here. We’re trying to prevent a potential pitfall. You know, I’m happy to entertain this later on if we have to. We can certainly expedite it a little bit, maybe, if that was the case, if there are worries about the rewrite there.

I do find it very, very concerning that yet again we are starting to see a little bit of overreach here. We wouldn’t want your good friend Mr. Carpay to file yet another lawsuit, although, you know, if you’re trying to create some jobs and it’s lawyer jobs, well, that would certainly be one way to do it, to allow yourselves to get legally challenged and fight with taxpayers’ money.

It’s unfortunate up to this point, you know. Five up, five down. Perhaps maybe we’ll see some foresight amongst members in the Chamber here to support this amendment. Let’s not waste taxpayers’ money on legal challenges. If we have to hit the pause button, we can certainly hit that and then come back and re-examine where we’re at.

I would suggest members support A6 and, you know, try to make this legislation potentially with fewer pitfalls than what it currently holds after defeating the previous five amendments, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity has risen to speak.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Chair, thank you again, and through you to the hon. members across the aisle thank you for the thoughtful amendment. Always appreciated, even in this volume.

I want to point out the urgency of us getting this money to the retailers so that they can provide the relief to Albertans. We looked at doing a regulation and using regulation to be able to do this, but it unfortunately was not allowed in the legislation for us to be able to do that, which is why we ended up here. This particular piece here is standard boilerplate in legislation that allows the minister to issue ministerial orders to the regulation.

One of the things that was commented on across the aisle was that this program isn’t long enough, and that was a big concern. One of the things that I said is that we will monitor the situation, and we will make accommodations as required. Well, it is this very section that will allow us to be able to make that ministerial order to provide additional supports.

I appreciate the intent of the piece, but, you know, for the benefit of the private members, I respectfully request that we turn down this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen to speak on A6.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to respond very quickly to something that the Member for Morinville-St. Albert said in his remarks on this amendment. He stated that this is standard boilerplate, and I can assure him and all members of this House that this clause is anything but standard.

Such a clause in the regulation-making section – I mean, every legislation that comes before this House has a regulation-making section in it, but I don’t recall in the five years that I’ve been here where we’ve had a part of the regulation-making powers allowing the minister to provide for any matter that the minister considers is not provided for or is insufficiently provided for in this act to be done by regulation. This is extreme overreach. This gives the minister extreme levels of power that are unwarranted and unjustified and unprecedented in this Legislature. The problem, though, Mr. Chair, is that the government has already recognized

that they've gone too far in giving themselves extreme powers to deal with issues facing the province of Alberta during this pandemic.

4:00

It was only a month ago that we were debating Bill 10. We told the government at that time that that bill was going too far. Even the Premier himself has admitted that that is in fact true now. He promised, a promise that has as of yet gone unfulfilled, that he would reconvene the Legislature to deal with some of the issues surrounding Bill 10, and I look forward to discussing those kinds of legislative changes as soon as we can. The government admitted that it made a mistake in Bill 10 and then is coming forward to make the same mistake again.

I appreciate the Member for Morinville-St. Albert saying that this is a matter of urgency. It is indeed a matter of urgency. There are hundreds of thousands of Albertans who are waiting for any kind of financial help from this government, so we would humbly suggest that there is nothing that would impact the ability of the government to deliver on this program if this clause were removed from the legislation.

In the interest of limiting government power, which we've heard members of the United Conservative caucus talk about frequently – they are nothing if not concerned about limits on government power – we would suggest that this is an extreme overreach on the part of the government, and we would suggest that this clause be removed so that the government doesn't make the same mistake that it made with Bill 10, but we still preserve the intent of the government to deliver on this program.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to speak to amendment A6? Seeing none, I'm prepared to ask the question.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Going back to the bill proper, Bill 14, Utility Payment Deferral Program Act, are there any members looking to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to move another amendment. I'll wait until it's distributed.

The Deputy Chair: If you could please read it into the record and then please continue with your comments. Just for the record as well this will be amendment A7.

Mr. Sabir: The Member for Calgary-McCall to move that Bill 14, Utility Payment Deferral Program Act, be amended by striking out section 28. Section 28 is the immunity to the Crown provision that gives immunity to the government that there can be no action resulting from this program. A couple of things I will say about it. In a free, democratic society and a free, democratic country, where we respect the rule of law, we don't exempt government from the application of law lightly. Unless there is a good reason to do so, we don't do that, and there seems to be no good reason for the government to grant itself blanket immunity.

During the bill briefing I asked that question of the minister, and the only answer I got was: so nobody can sue the government. I do understand that's what this provision means, but it would help if anybody from the front bench would help us understand the policy rationale of why we are throwing in this blanket immunity for the Crown coming out of this program. Otherwise, I think it's concerning to see such kind of language in this legislation. Instead of relying on these tools, legal means to exempt themselves from

lawsuits, I would suggest that they get better at governing, get better at drafting these programs, executing these programs and not rely on these blanket immunities.

I urge all members of this House to vote in favour of accountability and vote in favour of transparency and vote in favour of a government that follows the law, whatever laws they put in place, and that they don't consider themselves above those laws.

Thank you. I will sit down, and one of my colleagues may want to make some comments.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Looking for other members to speak to amendment A7. The individual who caught my eye is the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is always a pleasure to stand here in this House and, you know, address the quality of the amendments and the volume of the amendments and the thoughtfulness, and certainly it's appreciated. With respect to this particular amendment, referring to the immunity for the Crown, one thing that we have to keep in mind is that in utility legislation this is standard boilerplate, and the reason it's standard boilerplate in utility legislation is because we have the only deregulated utility market in Canada. When this was initially put together, it was put together with some great caution. They were very methodical, and they wanted to make sure that the Crown was protected at all times.

Now, Mr. Chair, I have brought up the one thing that the NDP do not want to talk about, and that is the Balancing Pool. Short of beating a dead horse, you know, the NDP's behaviour to the Balancing Pool would make an Enron accountant blush, okay? That's how bad it was. The way that they cancelled the PPAs – the cancelling of the PPAs without even looking for fine print was nothing short of negligent on behalf of the previous administration. The cost of that negligence: \$2 billion. So if members across the aisle want to know why we're putting this immunity for the Crown in here, that's why we're putting it in because, heaven forbid, should they win again in 44 years, we don't want them to make the same mistakes twice.

I humbly request that everyone turn down this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen on A7.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That was quite the response from the minister, considering that the question posed by my hon. colleague here from Calgary-McCall was basically: what's the justification for granting yourself immunity from lawsuits? That's the premise of the question, right? The minister did not address that issue at all. The minister did not make clear for this Assembly, did not make clear for Albertans why this government thinks it is above the law. That's a thing that we've seen again and again in this government. It's not the first time we've seen this government think it's above the law. We saw them fire the commissioner that was investigating them for fraud, bribery, and corruption. We saw that happen just a few months ago here in this Assembly.

4:10

Again and again we can see that the government does not want to be held accountable. We can see that when we talk about this amendment, when we talk about Crown immunity, when we talk about not having the ability to sue the government, basically, not having the ability to have the government held accountable in a court of law, right? Accountability: that's basically why the opposition and this Legislature exist, to hold this government accountable. This government feels like they should be legislating

away as much of that accountability as possible. They want to change the rules so that they don't have to be held to them.

That's basically what the government is doing with this clause, and that's why we're asking for it to be struck, right? The simple question that the minister had to answer or could answer was: why? Why is the government in this particular case above the law? Why is the government immune from the courts? Why is the government not supposed to have to face the same scrutiny as everybody else? That's the simple, basic question. It turns out that this minister has no answers and instead is only able to basically slander other members here and talk about previous decisions that have nothing to do with this bill. That's basically all this minister can even do. This minister can't even address the amendment at hand, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, it's shocking because if this minister doesn't understand that every single thing that goes into the bills, that every single thing that we're trying to introduce and vote on today is important, that the accountability included in our judicial system is important, that the independence of our judicial system and its ability to review legislation and review things like constitutionality around this legislation is important, then this minister is lacking some of the fundamental knowledge base that it takes to be a parliamentarian, right? That's what this minister has just shown us. This minister has shown us that he lacks the knowledge to do his job. He doesn't understand that this amendment actually changes the nature of the court's oversight of this legislation.

The minister is either unable to answer that question, which the Member for Calgary-McCall posed and I'm posing now as well, of why this amendment is unnecessary – why is the immunity of the Crown above the rules? Why does this minister not have to follow the rules? That is the core question. Instead, this minister decides to talk about other things, right? This minister is either unable to answer the question because he does not understand or he does not know. Both of those should be terrifying for Albertans. I know it's terrifying for this opposition, Mr. Chair. I know that this opposition is deeply concerned that this minister does not know how to do his own job, that this minister does not actually understand the bill that he is putting forward and does not understand why this amendment is making fundamental changes to the type of oversight that he would be subject to.

Mr. Chair, I think that when we look at the amendment and we look at the very simple wording of the clause that is being struck out, section 28 here – I know that there are many lawyers in this Assembly. I myself am not one of them, but many of the lawyers will understand the importance of judicial oversight. They'll understand the importance of why legislation should be subject to the judiciary and why this Assembly, as one of the branches of government, the Legislative Assembly – the judiciary is another branch of government – has these balances of power. If this minister does not understand that, if this minister does not actually realize how the judiciary works . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I appreciate your comments. I feel they may have something to do with comments that were previously made in the House that were also apologized for, so I'm just going to ask the hon. member to veer away from comments that I think are getting toward insulting language and continue to discuss amendment A7, should you want to continue.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would suggest, in fact, that I am referring to the comments from my colleague from Calgary-McCall here, and the question that is basically posed is: why is this government above the law? Why is this government allowed to give themselves immunity through legislation? Why is this government allowed to say that accountability is not important, right? That's

basically the question. That's the question that every single UCP caucus member, whether they are a backbencher, whether they are a minister, whether they are the Premier – it doesn't matter who they are. The question that they should be able to answer is: why should this clause, section 28, be allowed to stand? Why shouldn't it be struck out, and why should this government be immune from lawsuits? Why should this government not have to be overseen by the judiciary?

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

That is the fundamental question in this amendment. That's the question my colleague from Calgary-McCall posed, and that's why this amendment was introduced. That's the question that many members of the opposition have been asking over and over again. That's the question that this minister has not been able to answer. That's the question this minister is not willing to answer. This minister instead decides to talk about issues that are irrelevant to this bill entirely, Madam Chair, I believe, at this point. Indeed, it becomes clear that this minister does not have a good reason to actually grant this immunity, grant the Crown this extrajudicial immunity, right? That becomes exceedingly clear.

When we can see that to be the case, when we can see it to be the case that the minister is not able to provide sufficient answers, which is the point of this Assembly, which is the point of why we are actually in this place, to provide that oversight to the government – when we talk about bringing forward amendments like this, when we talk about bringing forward this particular amendment, it's to ensure that the government is able to justify every single clause in every single piece of legislation, right? That's why we have this entire process, Madam Chair, Committee of the Whole here. We are all here actually debating the individual clauses of the bill and trying to introduce amendments so we can talk about the reasoning and rationale. It appears indeed that the government has no rationale or is unable to provide a rationale, and I think that every single member of this Assembly should be extremely concerned.

I'd encourage everyone to vote for this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A7? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair. The only thing that I'd like to complement the statements made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South is the fact that Albertans elected each and every one of us to come into this House, come up with legislation that at the end of the day we're all responsible for. That's what you were elected to do here. You were elected to be responsible for the decisions that you are making within this House. For that reason, there just doesn't seem to be any good reason why clause 28 is inside of this bill. It just doesn't make any sense.

The fact is that the government is responsible for every piece of legislation that is presented within this House. They're responsible to the Alberta public. That's what our democracy is all about. As has already been stated by the Member for Edmonton-South, we have checks and balances so that the judiciary can balance us in this House and the decisions that we make. So it doesn't make any sense why the associate minister would actually have this clause within this piece of legislation. As was stated by the Member for Calgary-McCall, I would highly suggest that this cabinet and the minister be more responsible in actually crafting good legislation rather than being worried about being taken to court and therefore trying to skip out on a fundamental principle of our democracy. Take responsibility.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A7? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise to join in the debate on Bill 14, the Utility Payment Deferral Program Act, and specifically amendment A7, which specifically in the bill removes a section of the bill. The opposition has, through the earlier speakers, put forward this amendment because this section: there does not appear to be a good reason to have that in. As well, when the associate minister responded on this particular amendment, A7, there's a real concern that we didn't hear appropriate reasoning for why this kind of language would be included in Bill 14.

It's truly my opinion that the government should be focusing on crafting very good legislation, and clauses and sections, as the one we are debating, that give the government complete immunity, immunity for the Crown, raise concerns for me, Madam Chair. This section specifically says:

No action may be brought against the Crown claiming compensation for any real or perceived loss or damage resulting from the coming into force or the implementation of this Act or amendments to this Act or any regulations made or purported to be made under this Act.

I would ask that the government provide more reasoning for why this section is or why they would not support this amendment to remove this section.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A7 on Bill 14?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A7 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:20 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Dang	Loyola	Sabir
Gray	Nielsen	Schmidt

Against the motion:

Amery	Lovely	Rowswell
Ellis	McIver	Rutherford
Getson	Nally	Singh
Glasgo	Neudorf	Smith
Gotfried	Orr	Stephan
Guthrie	Rehn	Turton
Horner	Rosin	Yaseen
Hunter		

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 22
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[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Chair: We are back on Bill 14. Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I shall call the question on Bill 14.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 14 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? The bill is so carried.

Mr. McIver: I move that we rise and report Bill 14, please.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 14. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 14 Utility Payment Deferral Program Act

The Deputy Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Transportation rising.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to seek and request unanimous consent of the House for one-minute bells for the duration of today's sitting.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. associate minister of natural gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to move third reading and present these comments. It's been a long couple of days, and I know it's getting late, so I will keep them brief. These were unusual times. You know, part of it was the Russia-Saudi Arabia trade war – that did not help the fiscal situation for Albertans – and then you lay overtop of that COVID-19, the biggest health crisis that we've seen in a generation or more. You combine those two events together, and you do have a one-in-a-hundred-year black swan event.

Now, we stepped up to the plate, and we said early on that we will support Albertans. So far we have delivered on \$15 billion worth of support, both in the form of direct support as well as liquidity. Now, some of those things came in the form of the emergency support payments. I mean, we came out hard and strong on that one because we wanted Albertans to know that we were going to take care of them in this time. Some of the other ones were, you know, the student loan payments that we deferred; we also talked to Alberta treasury branches and the credit unions, and we worked with them to show some flexibility to some of their customers because these were such difficult times; the rent subsidies as well. The utility deferral program is simply one more tool at our disposal to help Albertans. That's what it's about.

Now, this situation was evolving very quickly on the ground, but we announced on March 18 that we were going to develop this program to defer utility payments for any Albertan that was experiencing financial difficulty as a result of COVID-19. We also said that there will be no utility cut-offs whatsoever during this time. This was important to us because it goes down to what I have

said earlier about a moral obligation to support and take care of Albertans during this difficult time. That's essentially what this bill does. This bill allows us to defer utility payments for 90 days.

Now, you can appreciate: the messaging we got out early because we wanted Albertans to not stress over what was a very stressful event, so we consulted after we made that announcement. We began the consultations, and we worked with the utility providers because, I mean, we went cap in hand. You know, I've mentioned before that our balance sheet has been compromised already, so we went cap in hand to these utilities, and we asked them to partner with us, to work with us. Remember, these are not Crown corporations. These are private utilities that are required to provide shareholder value to their shareholders, so they were under no obligation to work with us, but they did because they're good corporate citizens. That's what this bill reflects. This bill reflects a group of good corporate citizens who, under no obligation to help, said: we will.

4:30

There were some parameters we had to put in place because we did not want to compromise these companies' ability to borrow money, and we did not want them to experience any credit downgrades, so we had to put some things in there to address that. But, at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, we came up with a program that we believe is going to support Albertans. I know that it's working because I have spoken first-hand to Albertans, and let me tell you that those Albertans who have lost their jobs, who have been compromised financially from COVID-19, absolutely appreciate this program. Make no mistake; I dare say that each and every one of us in this room knows someone who has benefited from this program and is taking advantage of this program.

Madam Speaker, make no doubt about it: this is a good program, and it is a program that is appreciated by Albertans because it delivers on standing up and supporting Albertans during this very difficult time. I humbly request that we come together and that we support this bill for all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to speak in third reading to Bill 14 and to talk about: because people use the program does not mean it's good. If someone is dying of thirst, you could hand them pretty much anything liquid and they will drink it. That doesn't mean that it is the quenching water that they need.

Other provinces have chosen to use grants, direct relief to consumers, and this government should have done the same. When they announced on March 18 that there would be relief for consumers and as other provinces were coming out with programs that did not give consumers more debt in the future but, rather, granted relief now, the opposition hoped that that would be the solution that this government would choose to do.

This bill does not go far enough when it comes to helping Alberta families and businesses. Just because families and businesses will use the program does not give this government the right to pat themselves on the back and congratulate themselves for a job well done when it could have been done better, when a number of amendments were proposed by the Official Opposition that were rejected by this government, and when people who are drowning will grab for anything, any support, any help that they can get. They are not getting enough support through this program by this government. This government is not even meeting the benchmark that other provinces are setting. Instead, they are giving Albertans

the ability to carry more debt and to defer the payment of that debt down the road rather than grants or direct relief to consumers.

Families struggling during the next year are going to be facing the burden of paying back the three months of utilities. To be fair, Madam Speaker, I also am concerned that the supports only go until June 18. Other provinces, again, have extended longer programs, more supports.

For these reasons, I will not be supporting Bill 14. I think this government needs to be doing everything it can to be supporting businesses and people. I don't think this bill goes far enough, and I am pleased to be able to have the opportunity to stand and say that.

As a final comment, I will also say on the record that I am concerned about the lack of transparency. Many of my colleagues through the debate on this bill have raised those issues, so I will not belabour those points at this time, but I am certainly disappointed and had hoped that the utility payment deferral announced on March 18 would meet expectations of Albertans set by this government. This bill does not.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to add some final thoughts around Bill 14, Utility Payment Deferral Program Act, on behalf of not only the residents of Edmonton-Decore but also the businesses that call Edmonton-Decore home. I've always said that I'm very proud of the fact that it's nicknamed the shopping district. It holds a lot of small and medium-sized businesses and a lot of homeowners and renters of all different levels.

When I look at Bill 14, again, I have to comment. I've heard some interesting buzzwords throughout this debate, everything from "difficult and tough decisions," "thoughtful and prudent decisions," "the needs of Albertans," to "tools in the tool box," none of which are going to help Albertans or their businesses. This bill, Bill 14, is set up to help a very, very small handful, and it's set up to negatively impact everyone else that is not in that small handful of this bill.

When we talk about how we don't want Albertans to stress, well, Minister, they are going to stress because in 90 days these bills are going to come due for those that do access the deferral. Like my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods said, when you're desperate, you will grasp at anything, and they will be trying to figure out how to not only pay those but the interest that is incurred on them, so there will be additional stress on top of that.

The last comment I intend to make on this, Madam Speaker, is about: it's a good program. Well, it's a good program for that small few, but when you need to put in a clause granting yourself immunity, if it was that good, you would not be worried about that at all.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will speak briefly to the bill, to which we tried all afternoon to make improvements. We said from the very beginning that we agree in principle with the idea of deferring utilities, but there is more that needs to be done. The first thing was that this program ends on June 18, and we knew that that's not enough. We tried to amend that but with no success. Similarly, the way this program is set up, the public is paying their own money to utility companies interest-free, which they keep to charge interest on, and then on deferred utilities the companies are allowed to charge interest to the public.

So, at the end of the day, the public is on the hook for this program. They will end up paying more for deferred utilities. Not only that, but there are rate rider provisions that if the companies incur any loss throughout this program, since the government has washed its hands through Crown immunity provisions, companies will be able to collect those losses by socializing it on all Albertans.

As much as we tried to work with the government to make this bill better, I think significant concerns remain, and through this bill Albertans are not getting any relief. It's their money that's being used, and at the end of the day they will be paying companies much more in interest instead of getting any relief. That's why I will ask all my colleagues to vote down this piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. All I want to say is that I'm happy to support this bill. I hope the other side is right on one thing, that very few people need it. I fear that a lot of people will need it. I've heard members on the other side make comparisons many times about someone making a choice between paying the utility bill or buying groceries. I guess that in this case they'll be able to buy groceries because they won't have to worry about their utility bill, hopefully, till they're on their feet. They'll have an extra year. Again, I hope they're right in that not many people need to use this program, but if they do, it will be there for them. It's not the only help that's available, but it's a piece that our government has decided to put forward to help, and I'll be happy to support it when the time comes.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other speakers wishing to speak to the bill in third reading?

Would the hon. associate minister of natural gas like to close debate?

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It has been a long couple of days for all of us. We've had some thoughtful debate. We've had an incredible volume of amendments. You know, I'm rising to have some final comments on the utility payment deferral bill. We introduced the utility payment deferral program on March 18, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, and since then our government has invested more than \$15 billion in support and deferrals to help Albertans and businesses through these unprecedented times.

4:40

Now, over the course of this debate the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud complained that it was the "bare minimum of supports." That's how it was described. Well, Madam Speaker, I don't know how \$15 billion can be described as the bare minimum of supports. If the NDP thinks that \$15 billion is the bare minimum, then that explains the trajectory towards \$100 billion of debt that they put us on. Let me say that \$15 billion is a significant amount of money, and it is a significant amount of supports for Albertans.

You know, when you look at it, we did, you know, the emergency support funding, the WCB deferrals, the rent subsidy, the education portion of property taxes. We delivered, like I said, \$15 billion worth of supports, including this utility deferral. That's, I think, the piece that got missed today. This isn't the only support that we are providing Albertans. The supports that we're providing go from deferrals to grants, so, Madam Speaker, it is a plethora of supports that we are offering to Albertans.

An important note on the March 18 date, if I may, Madam Speaker, because I hear that a few of my hon. colleagues across the aisle may be a tad confused. Albertans have had the ability to defer their natural gas and electricity payments since March 18. They've

only needed to phone their utility provider and ask for it. If a consumer fails to make a payment during the program period and the service provider is unable to contact them, they will be automatically enrolled in the program.

This piece of legislation does not initiate the launch of a deferral program. It simply allows utility providers to ask for loans to recover the cash flow that's been reduced since the March 18 date. Actually, I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud who indicated that she had already paid her electricity bill for March and was concerned that she did not qualify for the program. You know, I mean, you can't make this stuff up. Madam Speaker, through you to the hon. member, this program is not intended for the NDP caucus. Okay? This program was designed for Albertans in financial need from COVID-19. So the very idea that a member of their caucus was concerned that they didn't qualify for the program: I've got to tell you that I don't lose a lot of sleep over that, because it was not designed for that member. This program was designed for Albertans suffering from the COVID-19 crisis. This was not a benefit or a perk to be taken advantage of.

To the hon. member, Madam Speaker, through you to her: please don't apply for this program if you don't need it. The program is targeted to Albertans who have been financially affected by COVID-19. We are relying on and have total faith in the honesty of Albertans during this time. Like I said, I would hope to hear that the hon. member wasn't actually looking to defer her utility payments, but that is certainly what the hon. member indicated.

Now, as mentioned, the passage of this bill will support the effective delivery of the deferral program so that it can effectively assist Albertans who are experiencing financial hardship as a result of COVID-19.

I've appreciated the debate that has occurred so far in this House as well as the thoughtful amendments put forward by the Member for Calgary-McCall. As we know, this program allows impacted Albertans to defer their utility payments until June 18 and ensures that service providers can continue to handle the upfront costs associated with delivering these essential services.

I'd like to speak briefly to a point that my hon. colleagues have raised a number of times during these proceedings, and quite simply that was that this program is not long enough. Well, it's ironic, Madam Speaker, but the very honourable people that say that this program does not go on long enough are the very honourable people that put forward an amendment that would stop us from extending the program. You know, you can't have it both ways. You either want the program extended or you don't want the program extended. Like I said, we said clearly in the very beginning that we will stand up for Albertans. We will continue to monitor the situation on the ground. If extensions need to be made, we will absolutely look at them, but we need the opposition to not handcuff us as we try to help Albertans.

Our government alongside the chief medical officer of health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, is continuously monitoring the health and economic implications of COVID-19 as well as the standing of the virus within our province. Our priority as a government is ensuring that Albertans are able to focus on what matters most right now, their personal well-being and that of their families.

Madam Speaker, if on June 18 it is determined that the utility payment deferral program needs to be extended to financially support Albertans, we will absolutely have the ability to do that because of this legislation. We recognize that during times of crisis it is critical for government supports to be flexible and responsive to the immediate needs of its citizens.

The members across the aisle said that they wanted grants, that they wanted direct cash infusions to Albertans. My response to that, Madam Speaker, is: that's exactly what we did. We did that with

the emergency support payments that we provided. That was a direct cash injection. We budgeted \$50 million for it, and we took the program to \$108 million because that's what was required. When the members across the aisle want cash injections, we did that, but we don't think that there's a one-size-fits-all. [interjections] You know, there they go again. The socialists are lighting their hair on fire while we are discussing this important legislation that is going to support Albertans during this very difficult time.

Madam Speaker, we did the grants; we did the cash injections; we did the deferrals. We took a very methodical look at all the tools that we had at our disposal, and we came up with a plethora of solutions that would address the financial hardships that Albertans are experiencing.

This legislation ensures proper supports and systems are in place for both electricity and natural gas retailers and establishes authority for the Alberta Utilities Commission, or the AUC, to provide proper oversight of the program. If passed, this bill will allow Albertans to get the financial support they need right now and will provide our utility retailers with the backing they need to fulfill the program's objectives and continue to provide Albertans with safe and reliable electricity. Madam Speaker, that's important.

I already talked about prudentials, which is something that these retailers have to pay. They have to pay that down as an insurance payment, so they require cash to operate their businesses. They get that cash from the payments. So when the payments are deferred, Madam Speaker, then we put these retailers in a precarious situation. I can say that there's at least one retailer that has missed a payment because of the length of time it has taken us to pass this legislation. It is imperative that we pass this legislation this evening, before we go home for the evening, so that we can provide the support to the retailers who are helping us backstop this support. We know that reliable electricity is crucial, particularly during uncertain times such as these. It's imperative that we support the electricity and the gas utility providers that are providing the support.

Now, a number of my colleagues across the aisle here have mused that our utility providers, the providers who agreed nearly two months ago to put their bottom lines aside and help Alberta ratepayers, are the only ones who benefit from this bill. Madam Speaker, I'd like to make something clear. Our government went to privately owned utility retailers in the midst of a global pandemic and economic meltdown and we asked them to commit to keeping the lights on for Albertans without assurances that they would continue to see the much-needed revenue they rely on to operate effectively. Albertans should be proud to know that their utility providers agreed to this request without hesitation. Why did they do it? Because they're good corporate citizens. They don't deserve to be vilified in this House for standing up for Albertans. In fact, most of these retailers, when we went to them, applauded it. They said: absolutely. They embraced what we were doing.

Now, I'm certain that my colleagues across the aisle would agree that when we asked our province's utility providers to support Alberta during COVID-19, we as a government then had the responsibility to support them financially if it's needed. Madam Speaker, if we go to the retailers cap in hand and ask them to work with us to help Albertans and then we leave them high and dry, what happens the next time that we need them to come and work with us for Albertans?

4:50

Bill 14 was introduced in order to support providers who may be experiencing liquidity issues that could arise following their implementation of the utility payment deferral program. Retailer

loans provided through Bill 14 will be paid back over a 12-month period after the program ends as customers pay down their deferred balances. Now, you know, we've had some very passionate conversations and very passionate debate, and we've heard on numerous occasions how outraged the NDP are over the rate riders. Well, you know, my response, Madam Speaker, is: well, what about the bad debt? That is something that the industry has to deal with. Remember that these are not Crown corporations; these are private utilities who are under a fiduciary responsibility to provide shareholder value. For them to not consider things like the bad debt would be irresponsibility on their part.

The weighted average cost of capital was another concern that they brought up. You know, I've said this, Madam Speaker, over and over again: this was a requirement of their lenders. Their lenders were honest. They said: yes, you can do this, but you better have the weighted average cost of capital addressed so that it doesn't jeopardize your balance sheet, so it doesn't jeopardize your ability to borrow money. Now, I would just like to reiterate the point that we went to these independent utility retailers and we asked them, cap in hand, to support Albertans.

I note that some of the remarks made here in this House over the past two days have questioned why Alberta doesn't follow the suit of provinces like B.C. and simply waive electricity fees altogether for three months. Well, Madam Speaker, to use an age-old phrase: that's a little like comparing apples to oranges. British Columbia's electricity provider, B.C. Hydro, is a government-owned Crown corporation. It's really quite simple for the B.C. government to waive those fees; they own the utility. In Alberta our electricity retailers operate entirely independent from the Crown. Waiving fees is simply not within our jurisdiction. It's wishful thinking on the part of the NDP.

I know my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Manning was seeking detail on our consultations on Bill 14. I'm happy to share with this House that our consultation is ongoing. My office has been consulting with electricity providers and both small and large consumers since March 18. In fact, these stakeholders were critical in the development of the legislation from the beginning.

Another point I'd be happy to raise is around calls for increased transparency through the Financial Administration Act. Now, the intent of the Financial Administration Act, Madam Speaker, is that if the government provides loans to business, there will be transparency and they will be provided to the House. Now, this scenario is different. The retailers did not come to us and say: will you lend us money? We went to them and said: will you help us? Well, it is just not appropriate for us to go to these companies, these private organizations, ask them to support Albertans, and say: by the way, we're going to be making public your financial documents. It simply wasn't appropriate, and it comes down to doing what is right. Now, I'm sure that members across the aisle understand that as our province's utility providers operate in a competitive market, it would have been unfair for those companies to be required to do that.

Now, with regard to my colleagues' concerns about Crown immunity, I'm happy to report that the wording included in this bill is typical boilerplate that is common for this type of legislation. It simply protects the Crown from unnecessary liability. Madam Speaker, you know, as has been mentioned, there are many lawyers in this House, some of them on this side of the floor, and due diligence is something that we take seriously. That's what this represents.

You know, Madam Speaker, it's been a long haul. I know that some of my colleagues want to start their drive home to be with their families, so let me just say that I encourage all members and I humbly request all members: pass this important legislation; Albertans want you to.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a third time]

Mr. McIver: Madam Speaker, I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 10A(a)(i) the Assembly now stands adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Government Motion 10, agreed to on March 17, 2020, and the notice provided by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, the Assembly now stands adjourned.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:55 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 2nd Session (2020)

Activity to Friday, May 8, 2020

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Critical Infrastructure Defence Act (Kenney)

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 25, 2020 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 12-18 (*Feb. 26, 2020 morn.*), 96-98 (*Mar. 2, 2020 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 2 — Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020 (Hunter)

First Reading — 30 (*Feb. 26, 2020 aft., passed*)

Bill 3 — Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Amendment Act, 2020 (Glubish)

First Reading — 30 (*Feb. 26, 2020 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 431-46 (*Apr. 7, 2020 morn.*), 458-65 (*Apr. 7, 2020 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 465-76 (*Apr. 7, 2020 aft.*), 477-507 (*Apr. 7, 2020 eve.*), 572-83 (*Apr. 8, 2020 eve.*), 659-66 (*May 6, 2020 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 703-09 (*May 7, 2020 morn., passed*)

Bill 4 — Fiscal Planning and Transparency (Fixed Budget Period) Amendment Act, 2020 (Toews)

First Reading — 62 (*Feb. 27, 2020 aft., passed*)

Bill 5 — Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2020 (Toews)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 3, 2020 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 224-32 (*Mar. 17, 2020 aft., passed on division*), 222-23 (*Mar. 17, 2020 aft.*)

Committee of the Whole — 232-33 (*Mar. 17, 2020 aft.*), 234-41 (*Mar. 17, 2020 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 241 (*Mar. 17, 2020 aft.*), 242-48 (*Mar. 17, 2020 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 20, 2020 Outside of House Sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2020 c3]

Bill 6 — Appropriation Act, 2020 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 215 (*Mar. 17, 2020 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 216-22 (*Mar. 17, 2020 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 222 (*Mar. 17, 2020 aft., deemed passed on division*)

Third Reading — 222 (*Mar. 17, 2020 aft., deemed passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 20, 2020 Outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 20, 2020; SA 2020 c1]

Bill 8* — Protecting Survivors of Human Trafficking Act (Schweitzer)

First Reading — 431 (*Apr. 7, 2020 morn., passed*)

Second Reading — 509-21 (*Apr. 8, 2020 morn.*), 551-58 (*Apr. 8, 2020 aft.*), 559-72 (*Apr. 8, 2020 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 593-618 (*Apr. 8, 2020 eve.*), 671-73 (*May 6, 2020 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 709-12 (*May 7, 2020 morn., passed*)

Bill 9 — Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2020 (Madu)

First Reading — 276 (Mar. 20, 2020 morn., passed)

Second Reading — 277-80 (Mar. 20, 2020 morn., passed)

Committee of the Whole — 280-82 (Mar. 20, 2020 morn., passed)

Third Reading — 282-83 (Mar. 20, 2020 morn., passed)

Royal Assent — (Mar. 20, 2020 Outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 20, 2020; SA 2020 c2]

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

First Reading — 296-97 (Mar. 31, 2020 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 307-20 (Apr. 1, 2020 morn.), 337-44 (Apr. 1, 2020 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole — 354-57 (Apr. 1, 2020 aft.), 407-09 (Apr. 2, 2020 morn.), 426-28 (Apr. 2, 2020 aft., passed)

Third Reading — 428-29 (Apr. 2, 2020 aft., passed on division)

Royal Assent — (Apr. 2, 2020 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 2, 2020; certain sections took effect on earlier dates; SA 2020 c5]

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

First Reading — 297 (Mar. 31, 2020 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 298-301 (Mar. 31, 2020 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole — 301-03 (Mar. 31, 2020 aft., passed)

Third Reading — 303-05 (Mar. 31, 2020 aft., passed)

Royal Assent — (Apr. 2, 2020 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2020 c6]

Bill 12 — Liabilities Management Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (Savage)

First Reading — 297 (Mar. 31, 2020 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 320-25 (Apr. 1, 2020 morn.), 344-49 (Apr. 1, 2020 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole — 350-54 (Apr. 1, 2020 aft.), 401-05 (Apr. 2, 2020 morn., passed)

Third Reading — 406 (Apr. 2, 2020 morn., passed)

Royal Assent — (Apr. 2, 2020 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2020 c4]

Bill 13 — Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2) (Madu)

First Reading — 431 (Apr. 7, 2020 morn., passed)

Second Reading — 521-26 (Apr. 8, 2020 morn.), 537-51 (Apr. 8, 2020 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole — 583-93 (Apr. 8, 2020 eve.), 619-35 (Apr. 9, 2020 morn.), 648-57 (Apr. 9, 2020 aft.), 673-74 (May 6, 2020 morn.), 688-99 (May 6, 2020 aft., passed)

Third Reading — 699-701 (May 6, 2020 aft., passed)

Bill 14 — Utility Payment Deferral Program Act (Nally)

First Reading — 687 (May 6, 2020 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 724-45 (May 7, 2020 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole — 758-86 (May 8, 2020 morn., passed)

Third Reading — 786-90 (May 8, 2020 morn., passed)

Bill 201 — Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act (Gotfried)

First Reading — 62 (Feb. 27, 2020 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 136 (Mar. 5, 2020 aft., reported to Assembly)

Bill 202 — Conflicts of Interest (Protecting the Rule of Law) Amendment Act, 2020 (Ganley)

First Reading — 136 (Mar. 5, 2020 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills)

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