



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, June 10, 2020

Day 29

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Infrastructure and Capital Projects

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the work Alberta Infrastructure is doing to help the province move forward with its economic recovery resulting from challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. While infrastructure may not be the spiciest topic, it will be increasingly important as we respond to the challenging economic circumstances.

My ministry works to ensure that the public infrastructure Albertans require, from health facilities to schools to government buildings, is designed, constructed, and maintained in a cost-effective, efficient, and timely manner. Alberta Infrastructure is responsible for delivering a large number of the projects in the government's capital plan, which commits \$24.2 billion over four years to build infrastructure and create jobs, and through the pandemic, I'm pleased to report, construction activity has continued around the province. It's a testament to the culture of safe workplaces and the talent and the dedication of Alberta's men and women in the skilled trades. While some projects may still face delays because of the workplace and supply chain disruptions, impacts have been limited.

I want to provide the House with a summary of projects that are currently under way. There are 26 health facility projects in the province; 12 of the 26 are in the construction phase, and of those 12, seven are expected to be completed this year. The biggest of these projects, the Calgary cancer centre, averages about 917 workers on site per day. In addition to these health facilities, 74 school projects are in progress; 14 of those 74 are expected to be completed and open for students by the end of this year.

We're also accelerating projects to counteract the recession. We have streamlined the procurement process so we can get contracts in place faster, shovels in the ground sooner, and Albertans back to work. This included taking a hard look at the five school projects that have been evaluated for P3 delivery. We changed our approach for these schools to a design/build method so we could start construction earlier and get Albertans working. We averaged 13 bids per project, and I look forward to awarding them and commencing construction soon.

We also took quick action to get started on capital maintenance and renewal projects on government-owned facilities. These CMR projects mean that communities throughout the province will see vital infrastructure repaired and thousands of Albertans employed, largely through small, skilled-trade businesses.

Our government doubled the CMR funding in 2021, from \$937 million to \$1.9 billion. This additional billion-dollar funding will help to stimulate job growth and support Alberta's economy with shovel-ready projects like fixing leaky roofs, replacing boilers, and caulking windows.

I also continue to push the federal government to move quickly on approving the 70 or so ICIP projects we submitted a few months ago. I want the communities and organizations who submitted these projects to see work start this summer. These projects ensure local jobs directly in the communities where they're most needed. The Canada Infrastructure Bank also presents opportunities to finance major projects, including water, transportation, rapid transit, rural broadband, and, most importantly, energy infrastructure.

Working with partner ministries, industry, school boards, Alberta Health Services, engineers, contractors, and architects, we are committed to delivering major capital projects that support Albertans, jobs, and the province's economy. Members of this House were recently sent a letter by my office asking them to submit five priority infrastructure projects from their respective constituencies. These will provide guidance to my cabinet colleagues and myself as we begin the capital planning process.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be the minister of construction as our government looks to provide economic stability during difficult times. Critical infrastructure is vital for our economic recovery, and this government will not let Albertans down.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the minister for his statement. I certainly understand that right now, during the COVID pandemic, it is more important than ever that we invest in our infrastructure because this province has a serious infrastructure deficit, and we certainly believe that building Alberta and building projects here in Alberta is essential to keeping people at work right now.

That's why our government, when we were in power, built or modernized over 244 schools. I'm concerned because the minister gets up here today and speaks and pats himself on the back and talks about all this great work he's doing, Mr. Speaker, but those projects will need nurses. They will need teachers. They will need doctors. They will need people working inside of them. What this government has failed to do is that they have failed to plan in any meaningful way to actually staff those buildings, to actually have projects that will be able to serve Albertans.

We know that this government is causing a great deal of damage, and they're fighting with our doctors in the middle of a global pandemic. They're pushing forward with projects like P3s. I know the minister spoke to how he cancelled many of those P3s and moved ahead instead with design/build because, of course, they were more efficient and they were able to get dollars out the door quicker. It's clear that even this government, in the middle of a pandemic, can realize that those P3s aren't working. They need to cancel them across the board.

Mr. Speaker, we understand how important this infrastructure is. We understand how important building our province is and providing these services to Albertans is. What we don't understand is why this government would go out and not actually staff, not actually provide those services, not actually do the work that's required beyond making announcements. That's what we are here to do. That's what the Infrastructure minister should be fighting for, to make sure that we have actual projects that provide services, not empty buildings providing nothing of service.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much to the minister. I hope that he will be able to make that point to his colleagues in cabinet. I hope all members of this House will join us in fighting to make sure that we have the best services for Albertans.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North has a statement to make.

Philippine Heritage Month

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize Philippine Heritage Month. Just two short years ago June was adopted as Philippine Heritage Month in recognition of Canadians of Filipino descent and the contributions they have made to our country. Filipinos are among the fastest growing communities in Canada, and many have chosen Alberta as their home. They have made significant social, economic, political, and cultural contributions to our society.

However, Mr. Speaker, the past few months have not been easy for everyone in Alberta, including the Filipino community, though the spirit of bayanihan never left them. This Filipino concept literally means being in the bayan, which refers to the spirit of communal unity, hard work, and co-operation to achieve a particular goal. This spirit was demonstrated by Filipino volunteers across the province that used creative ways like music and fundraising drives to collect donations for those affected by COVID-19.

Now more than ever it is important to celebrate the accomplishments, contributions, and incredible spirit of Filipinos in our province. During Philippine Heritage Month every Albertan can celebrate and share in their beautiful and colourful culture. Just last week I attended the Filipino flag raising at the Edmonton Federal Building, and over the weekend I was lucky enough to participate in a virtual Philippine Heritage Month event hosted by Fiesta Filipino. If you are around Calgary on Saturday, be sure to check out the fiesta caravan at Marlborough Mall to celebrate their independence day.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I ask all hon. members of this House to join me in wishing Filipinos across Alberta a very happy Filipino Independence Day. Thank you.

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

1:40 Government Policies and Indigenous Relations

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent events in the news and ongoing protests have raised awareness of the racism against both black and indigenous communities in this province and indeed this country. These experiences are not a thing of the past and, sadly, continue to disproportionately impact members of these communities. Indeed, this government's actions during the pandemic continue to negatively impact Alberta Métis, First Nations, and indigenous communities. Here are a few examples.

First, Bill 1 disproportionately targets Alberta's Métis, First Nations, and indigenous communities. It risks criminalizing their Charter-protected right to protest. Instead of starting difficult conversations with those who disagree with them by encouraging dialogue and peaceful resolution, this government believes that undemocratic, draconian measures, which sideline Charter-protected rights, are the way forward.

Second, the suspension of the environmental monitoring by oil and gas companies impacts the AER's ability to identify and mitigate impacts to their traditional territories. The Athabasca

Chipewyan, Fort McKay, and Mikisew Cree First Nations say that the decision was made unilaterally, without the government fulfilling their consultation obligation to consult with First Nations communities. The heavy-handed decision suspends the monitoring of soil and groundwater fumes and leaks of potent greenhouse gasses such as methane.

Third, the rise in domestic violence that our province is facing disproportionately affects indigenous women. At best, this government has provided the bare minimum in support to these communities.

Mr. Speaker, the work that we all do on reconciliation today will define our province and indeed our country for generations to come. The time to act is now, and the government can start by learning how to acknowledge the land that we all stand upon.

Thank you.

Farmer's Day

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has some of the best farmers in North America. They provide meat, dairy, poultry, and grain products to Canadians and to the world every day. All the food on your dinner table is thanks to a farmer, and it is important to remember that our agricultural industry is of vital importance to our economy as well. Agriculture is Alberta's largest renewable industry and second-largest overall. Last year, agriculture was responsible for \$6.15 billion of Alberta's total GDP.

Farmer's Day, this Friday, is an important opportunity for everyone to support a farmer. The roots of Farmer's Day can be traced back to 1914, and it was solidified as an official holiday in 1951 by Premier Ernest Manning. Every second Friday in June students would have a day off to celebrate a successful seeding and take a day of recreation before the busy haying season. Farmer's Day was amended in 1975 to be optional for schools, meaning most students no longer got the day off, so the United Farmers of Alberta, the UFA, revived Farmer's Day in 2010 and celebrate at their farm and ranch supply stores and petroleum agencies with barbecues, picnics, games, and music. UFA is a co-operative association that knows all about supporting our farmers and our ranchers. They have had our farmers' backs for over a century and continue to advocate for them to this day.

This important day still holds on to its original intention of honouring our agricultural community and all the hard work that they do. This year UFA will not host events due to COVID-19 but will, however, still be having a calendar contest, where kids 17 and under can illustrate how they would thank a farmer. In recognition of Farmer's Day, the Legislature, High Level Bridge, Calgary Tower, and Lethbridge city hall will be lit up in orange and gold to show support for our farmers.

This year Farmer's Day is Friday, June 12, so mark your calendars, and don't forget to thank a farmer.

Speaker's Ruling

Use of Electronic Devices in the Chamber

The Speaker: Hon. members, it was almost like I heard a cellphone infraction there during the member's statement given by the hon. the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. I'm sure whoever it was will be more than happy to make a contribution to a charity of their choice for not following the very basic rules that the Assembly provides. Presumably it was the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo; I'm not a hundred per cent sure.

The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Public Service Pension Fund Administration

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year, in November, the Minister of Finance described AIMCo's returns as "spectacular." Two days ago the minister downgraded his assessment to describe those returns as "excellent." Yesterday both the Premier and the minister changed their tune. The Premier said that anyone who's concerned about returns at AIMCo is, and I quote, economically illiterate. Mr. Speaker, is this a joke, or is this government just so profoundly clueless about AIMCo and investments that they really don't get it?

AIMCo returns impact every Albertan every day. AIMCo manages the government's short-term cash. AIMCo manages the heritage savings trust fund. Simply put, there is a direct link between AIMCo's performance, the province's bottom line, and the money available to pay teachers in classrooms. As the Institutional Investor notes AIMCo's latest blunder, "Wall Street banks happily paid . . . [AIMCo] for crash insurance – and cashed in." This leading Wall Street publication quoted experts calling AIMCo "amateurish."

So it's not surprising that Albertans and public-sector pension holders are up in arms about Bill 22. They're screaming from the rooftops for this minister to take their hands off their pensions, and they simply don't believe a word the Minister of Finance says. He claims that AIMCo returns are spectacular, but they haven't met LAPP's benchmarks in 44 straight quarters. That's a hundred per cent failure. Teachers are up in arms because the minister is moving their pensions to a manager with a track record of delivering poorer returns relative to what they already have. And for teachers, if they don't get the returns they're used to, it's going to mean higher contribution rates, lower take-home pay. To make it worse, it's going to mean higher taxes on Albertans as government matches contributions.

Mr. Speaker, this minister has sold Albertans a fairy tale, but it's actually a nightmare. Bill 22 is a disaster. Tens of thousands of Albertans are demanding he reverse Bill 22 and admit his mistake. If you agree, head to yourpensionisyours.ca and tell this UCP government that they need to be listening to your voice.

Blood Donor Week

Mr. Loewen: Albertans are incredibly giving people. I'm sure we can all agree on that. Part of what makes me so proud to be an Albertan is my fellow Albertans' willingness to give their time, money, and resources to help support the most vulnerable. It is deeply ingrained in our culture and who we are. One of the simplest ways to volunteer or make a difference is donating blood.

This week marks the 12th annual National Blood Donor Week here in Canada. It is an occasion for us to highlight the importance of blood donations to our health care system and encourage Canadians to take some time to donate. That's why I've organized several caucus blood donor events, where many of the members of our caucus, cabinet, and staff donated blood to help support the cause. And I'm sure they would agree that the process is safe, effective, and necessary.

Blood and plasma are literal lifesavers, and the need for donors is high. For example, a single victim of a motor vehicle collision can require up to 50 units of blood. That means that up to 50 different donors are needed to save one person's life. We all know someone who has received blood or plasma to help them through medical emergencies or procedures.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges for our national system of blood donations. Many of those who donate regularly are seniors who have had to cancel their donation appointments for their own health. Also, mobile clinics could no

longer operate. But after a call to action put out by the Canadian Blood Services, Albertans, in particular, stepped in to donate. It is yet another way that the people across our province are taking action to support one another during the COVID-19 pandemic. The process is simple. Go to blood.ca, book an appointment, show up for the prescreening process, get hooked up, and relax. Of course, you get some good snacks and beverages when you're done, too.

I've often heard the phrase that volunteers are the lifeblood of our communities. Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to donating blood, this message can be taken literally. I encourage all Albertans to visit blood.ca and look into how they can easily help to save a life.

Thank you.

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

Education-sector Layoffs

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I saw the news yesterday, I wish I could say that I was surprised: another day, another announcement of layoffs in public education, another day that the children of this province suffer at the hands of this government, that is more concerned with talking points than actually providing for Albertans.

Yesterday Edmonton public schools announced that 611 staff – that's 30 per cent of what this government called a temporary layoff – would lose their jobs. Out of those, 429 are educational assistants, 429 EAs who have had to watch this government, this Premier, and this minister accuse anyone and everyone who questioned those spring layoffs as spreading fear and smear because those layoffs were only temporary, 429 EAs here in Edmonton alone. How many students that have lost their supports does that represent? It could be thousands, Mr. Speaker. How big does that number have to get before this government and this minister will actually pay attention? How long will Albertans have to suffer through this rhetoric?

1:50

Just hours before this devastating announcement the Premier, in response to a letter about lost educational assistants negatively impacting the quality of life of an Albertan with special needs, said "not to listen to the disinformation" because Albertans, particularly those with special needs, have it better than anywhere else in the country. Shortly thereafter, the Minister of Education tried to deflect questions about PUF and tried to deny the negative impacts of those changes, yet once again we see that due to the minister's changes to PUF, the number of eligible students in Edmonton public will decrease in 2020-2021 by 42 per cent.

I am sure today that all members of the Assembly will hear, in response to questions on this topic, deflection again, and I'm sure that the same will happen tomorrow. But, Mr. Speaker, I'm equally sure that the EAs, students, families, and staff affected by this debacle that is the Education budget will be watching. I wonder who the Premier and minister will try to blame today.

Oral Question Period

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

Support for Persons and Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier announced plans to accelerate the launch of phase 2. The problem is that he's again making small businesses reopen with no additional support. According to the CFIB, only half reopened in phase 1, 24

per cent are not sure they will survive, and a further 15 per cent expect to go bankrupt. The Premier announced a grant and some form of eviction protection but no details, no date, nothing. Premier, you've waited 57 days. When will this money be available? When will evictions be banned? Businesses can't afford to wait for you any longer.

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the Premier and I did announce a grant for businesses that were forced to close or severely curtail their operations due to public health orders. It's going to be up to 15 per cent of a small business's or nonprofit's monthly revenue up to a maximum of \$5,000. Those details will be coming out very shortly. This is in addition to the numerous deferrals and supports that this government announced in the very early stages of the pandemic, from paying 50 per cent of WCB premiums, freezing and deferring education property taxes, abating the tourism levy, and much, much more.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, for the economy to reopen successfully, customers need to have paycheques. Our unemployment rate is the second highest in Canada. There are still more than 300,000 Albertans who have been laid off, and they don't know how they will be able to take care of their families. For many who can't get EI, CERB has been their only hope, but that appears to be coming to an end. To the Premier: will he commit today to expanding and reopening income support for Albertans who have no other option, and if not, why not?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I do want to acknowledge that the economic crisis caused by COVID-19 as well as, of course, the energy crash that has taken place in the province – I just want to acknowledge the hardship that many individuals and businesses are experiencing these days. We're committed to continuing to ensure that we're delivering supports for Albertans. We have a number of support programs that are delivered by Community and Social Services. We came out with the emergency isolation payment. We're committed to ensuring that Albertans' needs are looked after.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, those programs will leave Albertans wanting significantly.

Now, while we all want Albertans back to work, the Premier himself acknowledges that accelerating the reopening will mean a rise in cases, but how much they rise depends on whether or not people feel confident and financially able to self-isolate when they are sick. This means access to paid sick leave is going to be even more critical. Across the country provinces are working on plans, but here: not a peep. Will the Premier commit to ensuring that all working Albertans have access to paid sick leave at least during the remainder of this pandemic?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Labour and Immigration has risen.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. You know, as the hon. member knows, this program was announced by the federal government several weeks ago. We continue to have conversations with the federal government to understand the scope of that program. And I'd like to point out that

our government took immediate action, recognizing the importance of providing Albertans with funding so they didn't have to make the choice to self-isolate and stay at home versus not receiving a paycheque. We moved quickly with the emergency isolation support program in the first 90 days, until CERB came into effect, and we'll continue to work with the federal government about how this sick leave benefit may apply in Alberta.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we want to know is if it will apply in Alberta.

Policing and Racism Prevention

Ms Notley: Anyway, right across the province Albertans are calling for an end to systemic racism and violence; 15,000 people outside this very building telling us: black lives matter. Racism is here. It never left. The shocking treatment of Chief Allan Adam alone demonstrates this. Yesterday Alberta's deputy commissioner of the RCMP said that he doesn't believe systemic racism in Canadian policing exists. This is unacceptable. Will the Premier join me today in condemning these statements and calling for an apology?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I made public statements on this. Racism is real, and we have to do better. We have to do more. Thousands of people have spoken. They want our policing to be more reflective of their communities. We're calling on the federal government to take action like we're going to take action here at the provincial level. We're going to expedite our review of the Police Act and make sure that policing is more accountable to the communities.

Ms Notley: Well, apparently, the answer is no.

The Justice minister has committed to consulting with police chiefs, First Nations, and minority groups to find ways to act quickly – good thing – but as the saying goes, justice must not only be done; it must be seen to be done. This is a significant moment, and we won't find meaningful answers behind closed doors. To the Premier: will he agree to establishing a panel including members of the antiracism council, indigenous leadership, and Black Lives Matter to hold public hearings and make recommendations to this Legislature no later than this fall?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're working right now on our engagement strategy to make sure we go out and broadly consult across Alberta with indigenous communities, community leaders, ethnic communities, making sure that we hear the voices of those that came out to have their voices heard at protests across this province. We're going to get this right. We're going to make sure that we listen.

Ms Notley: We need independent and open hearings, and that's not what we just heard about.

Now, Mr. Speaker, over the last two weeks our offices have been flooded by thousands of e-mails from activists and citizens concerned about Bill 1. They see it as this government's tool for expanding police authority over racialized communities. This legislation allows for the banning or restriction of protests across the province, thereby impeding and eroding the very rights and freedoms these Albertans are fighting for. Will the Premier commit

today that Bill 1 will not receive royal assent until he has fully consulted with racialized communities on its impact?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 does not infringe on Charter rights, full stop. Lawful protests can continue. They were there last month. They can continue next month. This bill targets illegal blockades. We had a time in this country where complete supply chains were jeopardized. We can't have that going forward. That's what Bill 1 deals with. The right to protest existed last month. It will exist after proclamation as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Victims of Crime Fund

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, Devin Venables died tragically in 2002 after being sucker-punched outside a bar. His mother, Karen, relied on victims' services support personnel as her lifeline to navigate through the legal system. She joined me last hour to call on the Premier to immediately halt Bill 16, which will raid this fund and rob victims of crime of the support they need during the worst times of their lives. To the Premier: will you listen to Karen and commit right now to halting these cruel changes to the victims of crime fund?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the victims of crime fund will continue to be there for Albertans. This is about more, about \$20 million more for victims of crime and public safety initiatives. The real question here for that member is: why do they want to take \$20 million away from initiatives like drug treatment courts? Earlier this year we announced in Lethbridge the expansion of a new drug treatment court in that community. She might want to talk to the Member for Lethbridge-West about why they want to take that away from the people of Lethbridge. People that are recovering from addictions deserve drug treatment courts. Why do they want to take that away?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, it is perfectly possible to fund drug treatment courts without taking from victims. The UCP should absolutely not be paying for their unfunded campaign promises with money they took from victims. Somehow the UCP finds it acceptable to take federal money to pay themselves while they claim there's not enough money for victims of crime. If the Premier will not stop these cruel changes, will his government at least support further consultation on this bill so that victims of crime and the organizations that support them at least have the opportunity to have their say?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, that person was the former Justice minister. For four years she had an opportunity to fund drug treatment courts and failed Albertans. They failed those that are suffering from addictions. Shame on them for trying to take that money away from Albertans.

2:00

Ms Ganley: You are causing so much pain and suffering. If you don't take the time to consult, will you at least accept amendments to this heartless legislation to make it a little better? Bill 16 limits the benefits that victims of crime receive for injuries or death. That's right; it actually shrinks the pool of funding available to support victims. To the Premier: will you personally look into this cruel aspect of the bill and work with me to amend it or remove it?

The Speaker: I'd just provide some caution to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View for her use of the word "you" in that context.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I think this member needs to explain to Albertans why she didn't come to rural communities to listen to those that have been victimized for years. Why do they want to take away 400 law enforcement personnel that can respond to emergencies in rural communities? Those people want to know that someone is coming to an emergency. [interjections]

They're yelling right now, Mr. Speaker. They didn't listen to rural communities when they were in office; they're not listening now. This is here to keep people safe, and it's also here to make sure we have compassionate abilities in our justice system to deal with addictions. We're going to announce another drug treatment court again tomorrow. Why do they want to take that away?

Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: A recent survey of over 8,000 teachers saw that they are stressed, exhausted, and isolated. Teachers need support, but the government did the opposite by laying off more than 20,000 education workers. The UCP promised that EAs would be rehired, but now Edmonton public is reporting that UCP cuts mean that more than 600 full-time positions will be cut. More than 400 of those are full-time education assistant positions. You know who's not losing their jobs, Mr. Speaker? UCP partisan hacks with their hands in taxpayers' pockets. It's clear that this Premier broke his promise yet again to Alberta families. Will the Premier reverse his education cuts?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure all Albertans that we continue to have one of the best funded education systems in all of Canada. We are continuing to fund education to the highest level in Alberta, and that will continue.

On the reference that the hon. member is referring to, the Edmonton public school division, when I look at the numbers in this upcoming year, all school divisions will be receiving an increase. That particular board will receive an additional \$14 million.

Ms Hoffman: The Edmonton public board chair said, quote, those are 611 full-time equivalents or positions that will no longer be in our schools, in our classrooms, supporting students. End quote. Seventy per cent of Alberta teachers report that they are feeling exhausted and disconnected and that they are losing sleep over the struggles of emergency remote home learning. Money for political hacks but no money for students. Will the Premier at least stand in this place and admit that he broke his promise to Alberta students and their families?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat again that under our new funding model every single school division in Alberta will see an increase in their 2020-21 school year budget. I look at the Edmonton public school division: a \$1.017 billion budget last year, a \$1.031 billion budget this year. That is more money for the Edmonton public school division.

Ms Hoffman: More fees for parents, Mr. Speaker. That's a consolidated budget, not the government's estimates, what the government is actually putting into education. I know that the minister understands that. She was a board trustee and a board chair. The EPSB is also expecting thousands of new students, and we are in the midst of a global pandemic and should have fewer people in confined spaces, not more. Fewer teachers and fewer EAs means larger class sizes, with more students packed into each classroom. The Premier and the minister know this. Will the Premier admit that he has not only implemented cuts that are bad for education but that they're also bad for public health?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to clarify that what I just read, that \$1.031 billion, is actually funding that Alberta Education is providing to Edmonton public, not the consolidated number. This is the number.

Again, the new model that we have put in place has gone from 36 grants down to 15 grants – the same dollars that are being put out; more dollars, in fact, this year – and school boards have the maximum flexibility to direct those dollars to the classroom.

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

Calgary-Banff Rail Project

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, many Albertans were excited to hear about the potential rail connection between the Calgary airport and Banff. This government of Alberta and the Canada Infrastructure Bank have signed a memorandum of understanding to begin research regarding the feasibility of this potential passenger rail service between Calgary and Banff. I know I was excited as a Calgarian when I first heard about it, too. Could the Minister of Transportation update this House as to the potential benefits of this potential project?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is always interested in putting innovative research to work to find out how we can grow our economy and create jobs here in Alberta. The Canada Infrastructure Bank brings big expertise on large, complex projects like this, and we value their opinion. The potential rail connection would support local economies in Calgary and Banff and the areas in between. But for more detailed answers the hon. member probably needs to wait until the studies are complete.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker, as well. Given that a new passenger rail service between the Calgary International Airport and Banff would help grow Alberta's tourism industry and help our province's economy recover from the terrible COVID-19 pandemic, can the minister please give this House an update as to exactly how this potential rail project could boost Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we'll wait for the results of the study for detailed answers, but one could, I think, reasonably and easily speculate that with a rail link to the airport, we could attract more international flights from other places. Those could be important tourist links between the airport, Banff, Canmore, Kananaskis, Calgary, and, of course, extending from there across the rest of Alberta. While the possibilities are exciting, the details are coming, and I would ask the hon. member to stay in touch on that.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise again. Given that this government has worked tirelessly to ensure we're creating throughout our response to COVID-19 an environment that fosters investment and job growth and success in Alberta, could the Minister of Transportation update this House as

to the approach that the government is taking regarding the potential rail connection between the Calgary airport and, of course, Banff?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We intend to work with other ministries, with the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism, on how this link in the future could expand and be part of doubling the amount of tourism that we have between now and 2030. You know, under the Premier's and other ministers' guidance we would look for other economic development opportunities. The more people that lay their eyes on our beautiful province, the more that have a chance to say: that's a place where I'd like to live, that's a place where I'd like to bring my business, and that's a place where I'd like to open another branch and employ Albertans.

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

Black History Content in Educational Curriculum

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've lived in Alberta for over 40 years as a black man without ever once being exposed to our community's history. I had to seek it out and educate myself. If we're serious about confronting systemic racism in Alberta, we must ensure that students learn about the rich history of black people in our province, dating back more than 130 years. Fortunately, the work to integrate black history into Alberta's curriculum was started as part of our government's curriculum review. Will the Minister of Education commit that this work will be completed and that Alberta's black history will be taught in our schools, and if so, when can that be expected?

Member LaGrange: I want to say: absolutely, yes.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's wonderful to hear.

Now, given that Alberta's history also includes black people like Charles Daniels, who went to court in 1914 after a Calgary theatre denied him the seat he paid for, and Lulu Anderson, who also fought against systemic racism here in Edmonton that barred people of colour from even entering some businesses, and given that there are many, many stories of courageous and determined action against systemic racism, to the minister: will stories like Charles Daniels', Lulu Anderson's, and many other black Albertans' who fought for civil rights be included as part of this curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. It's a very great question. We have a great opportunity right now, given that we're relooking at enhancing the curriculum and building new curriculum, to incorporate those very things that you were talking about. I look forward to what comes before me as we develop the new curriculum.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her commitment. Given that I am tremendously personally and deeply grateful to many black Albertans who have studied, published, and promoted black history in Alberta and helped me personally connect with it and given that these scholars, artists, and researchers

include people like Cheryl Foggo, Bashir Mohamed, the Black Settlers of Alberta and Saskatchewan Historical Society, and the Shiloh Centre for Multicultural Roots, to the minister. I'd be very pleased to arrange and host a meeting for you to meet with some of these Albertans. Would you be willing to accept such an invitation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've already met with a number, but I would certainly be happy to meet with more. We look forward, as I said, as we develop the curriculum, to meeting with all of the individuals that would like to take part in providing enhancements to what is much-needed knowledge throughout all of the education curriculum.

Taxation and School Fees

Ms Phillips: The UCP have raised Albertans' income taxes by over half a billion dollars and charged us almost a billion dollars in new fees. A typical family of four in Calgary is paying at least \$1,250 more each year as a result of this budget. We're in a recession. People are losing their jobs, but their taxes and fees are still going up, and partisan hacks over at UCP HQ are taking even more of our tax dollars that are supposed to be for struggling businesses, not political parties under an RCMP investigation. Will the Finance minister give back the more than a billion dollars in income tax and fee hikes that he took from Albertans in this budget?

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it very rich to be lectured by the members opposite around raising taxes and increasing costs for Albertans. The members opposite, in fact, brought in the carbon tax, which was the largest single tax increase in the history of this province. They did it without campaigning on it. They did it overnight. It robbed Albertans of millions and billions of dollars. We will not be lectured by the members opposite on raising taxes and fees.

Ms Phillips: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans are paying a carbon tax to Ottawa and that it's bankrolling the UCP – I guess we can call it a tax for hacks now – and given that the same Calgary family I mentioned will also pay \$200 more this year just in school bus fees, can this minister at least commit to giving back the tax dollars he has taken for the UCP's party operations if he won't stop raising our taxes and school fees?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we will be rolling out an economic recovery plan here in the upcoming weeks. This plan will provide a template to ensure that Alberta is positioned to attract a disproportionate amount of investment as we recover, as the economy recovers in this province. That investment will create jobs and opportunities, create wealth for Albertans. That is our fundamental priority, to ensure that Albertans have good jobs to go to to provide for themselves and their families.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, when people are losing their jobs, why is it that we have just heard that it's the top priority of this Finance minister to put his hand in our pockets, take out more than a billion dollars in new taxes and fees, and why does this Premier have his hand in every Albertan's and every Canadian's pocket, including Justin Trudeau's?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, again, I find it really rich to be lectured by the members opposite in terms of raising costs and taxes on Albertans. When the members opposite were governing this province, they raised taxes on everything that moved. They added red tape, drove investment out of this province by the billions and,

with it, jobs and opportunities. We will create a business environment that attracts investment, creates jobs, opportunity, and wealth for Albertans.

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have heard from many of my constituents throughout the COVID-19 pandemic about the great degree of uncertainty it has caused in many aspects of their lives. Currently there is uncertainty around businesses reopening and Albertans getting back to work and other activities. There is also great uncertainty around postsecondary education as we continue to progress through relaunch and the pandemic. To the Minister of Advanced Education: how will the pandemic impact Alberta's postsecondary sector?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the important question. Of course, as the member has noted, the COVID pandemic has created a lot of uncertainty for all Albertans and, as well, for our postsecondary institutions. One of the ways in which our institutions have been affected has to do with revenue. Of course, with students not being on campuses, there are declines in revenue associated with parking fees and things of that nature. But there's still continued uncertainty ahead, primarily around enrolment. The pandemic has limited students' ability to work over the summer and earn and has limited international travel, so enrolment remains an uncertainty.

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that improving postsecondary outcomes and efficiency are key priorities of this government and given that the minister was set to implement a performance-based funding model and given that the minister delayed the implementation of performance-based funding until the next academic year, to the Minister of Advanced Education: which specific metrics and how did the uncertainty around these metrics lead to the decision to delay performance-based funding?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. You know, delaying performance-based funding for the time being is absolutely the right thing to do given the uncertainty that the member has noted. Some of the specific metrics that we've been looking at, to give you an example, has to do with enrolment. As I just highlighted a moment ago, there's still quite a bit of uncertainty with respect to enrolment patterns, both for domestic students and international students. In this environment of uncertainty it's very prudent to put performance-based funding on the shelf for the time being, but we will return to it next year in a more robust manner.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again, Minister. Given that this government is committed to strong and sustainable postsecondary education and given that there are numerous benefits to performance-based funding such as ensuring that institutions are connecting education to the demands of the job market and given that students are more likely to earn higher wages if they have completed work-integrated learning, to the same minister: how will

performance-based funding incentivize institutions to create more work-integrated opportunities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very pointed question. Of course, we know that students who participate in work-integrated learning opportunities have higher career success, more broadly. They tend to earn higher incomes and have a faster transition to work. That's why we are looking at work-integrated learning as a particular metric to use in the new performance-based model, so that we can work with postsecondary institutions and help incentivize them to create more work-integrated learning opportunities for our students. At the end of the day, we have to ensure that we do everything possible to set our students up for success.

Economic Relaunch Stage 2 Gathering Restrictions

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, leaders of religious communities were excited to hear about the new stage 2 recommendations of the chief medical officer of health as they relate to places of worship. However, when they consulted the document labelled *COVID-19 Information: Guidance for Places of Worship*, last updated on June 9, 2020, there was a little bit of confusion. With that in mind, I would like the Minister of Health to clarify. Is it indeed the case that there is no longer a restriction cap on religious services as long as community members attending religious services maintain the two-metre physical distancing rules?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Yes, it is true for worship services in a place of worship. If, for example, there was a wedding or if there was a funeral in a place of worship, then the seated indoor capacity limit would apply in that situation. For indoor worship services in a place of worship, as long as folks are still maintaining their physical distancing and other precautions are taken, then yes.

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

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that religious leaders would also like clarification on the number of attendees for school graduations, sporting events, and weddings, both indoors and outdoors, and given that these leaders want to be helpful in sharing the information quickly about the new measures in the communities that they lead and given that June is an important month for many public gatherings, namely graduations, can the minister please clarify how many community members may attend each of these events?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Graduation: it would depend on whether it's an indoor or outdoor event. If it is indoors and seated, the indoor seated capacity limit would apply, which would be 50. If for some reason, good weather, the graduation ceremony were to occur outside, for outdoor seated it would be a cap of 100.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Loyola: Thank you. Given that several ethno-religious communities provide food services at their places of worship, for example the Sikh community, and given that many communities

have helped as best as they can within the former COVID-19 guidelines and want to potentially do even more as the rules are relaxed, can the minister provide clarification if ethno-religious communities may proceed with food service and whether the government would be willing to provide PPE such as masks, gloves, and hand-sanitizers so that they are able to provide good service?

2:20

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for recognizing our faith communities being an important part of our response to the pandemic. As long as folks are still complying with the recommendations and the guidance of the chief medical officer of health that remain in place as we enter stage 2 relaunch, then the ability for the faith communities to continue to provide, as they've been an important part of the pandemic response – they will be able to continue to do so.

Points West Living Slave Lake

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, this morning Albertans woke up to the shocking results of a human rights group's investigation into allegations of severe neglect in continuing care facilities in Slave Lake. Advocates say cuts have caused staffing restrictions, resulting in the neglect at a facility that houses some residential school survivors. Albertans are beginning to notice a pattern of government neglect towards our most vulnerable. To the Minister of Health: this report is deeply concerning. What immediate actions are you taking to respond to it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I obviously was very concerned by the story and had my staff get a copy of the report. The ministry is going to be reviewing it. My staff also contacted the John Humphrey centre and will connect them with AHS to discuss their report and how to move forward. I think the facility will be very receptive because the general manager herself is Cree, and they have nine staff who are of Cree heritage. We also reached out to the local First Nation, which has a good relationship with the operator.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you. Given that 77 per cent of COVID-19 fatalities are seniors and that indigenous seniors face the added stress of physical, emotional, and cultural neglect and given that complaints to management in long-term care homes are unanswered, to the Minister of Health: it is clear that information regarding isolated and marginalized seniors is not reaching the public until investigations are done. Why aren't you taking urgent steps to ensure the safety of indigenous seniors?

Mr. Shandro: Well, in fact, AHS is on site in Slave Lake today, Mr. Speaker. They actually had a routine audit which was scheduled for later in the month, but they bumped it up a week, so they're on site right now. We take any concern seriously, but to be clear, we have a responsive system with strong oversight. That's part of why our facilities have done so well during the pandemic compared to other provinces. I will remind the House as well as the hon. member that AHS and the ministry do regular audits of accommodation and care standards in all facilities in this province.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that the audit review that was done in February found the organization in compliance and that it was only an independent audit that brought this forward and that

the investigators condemned the use of vulnerable seniors as a business commodity and given that government inspectors did not catch these problems in Slave Lake during the inspection in February, to the minister: do you agree with the human rights group that an independent public inquiry needs to be done in relation to the reports of numerous violations at Points West Living?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Look, I won't have this operator or the continuing care providers in this province in general being attacked by the NDP for their own political reasons. We take the report seriously, but this is a good system, including all of our independent providers in this province, and this is a good facility and a good operator. The site is highly rated. I note that on HQCA's resident and family surveys they have no complaints through the protection for persons in care. In fact, as we come out of the response to the pandemic, they've had no COVID cases in the facility.

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

Natural Gas Industry

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity announced in December that he was drafting a vision for Alberta natural gas, a recommendation of the Natural Gas Advisory Panel. This panel, appointed by the NDP, advised the former government to prioritize public-interest decision-making. This vision, widely anticipated by the industry, will support Alberta in strengthening our economy. To the associate minister: can you please update the House on when this vision will be made public?

Mr. Schweitzer: Nally. Nally.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Justice will know that the use of names is wildly inappropriate.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, our recent engagement with industry confirmed that Alberta has a huge opportunity to attract new investment to our natural gas sector. In addition, there are a number of channels within the natural gas value chain that we're going to explore such as petrochemical and hydrogen. We are nearing finalization of our natural gas vision for Alberta, and I look forward to sharing more with you this summer.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Alberta is facing real financial hardships and we must work to strengthen and restore our economy and given that the natural gas vision will help Alberta become a global supplier of clean, responsible, developed natural gas and that strong regulations for resource development are as important as a strong economy, to the associate minister: how will this vision contribute to creating jobs and bringing investment back to Alberta?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, we hear repeatedly that the environmental regulations in Alberta are the most stringent in the world, and we also hear that industry is concerned by the divisive nature of the NDP. Now, our natural gas vision is going to be a vehicle for a unifying front on the energy file. I would encourage members of the opposition to embrace this natural gas vision. Or is their ideological disdain for this industry going to be too much to handle?

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the advisory panel wisely asked Albertans to stand together, stand united, and given that supporting our economic drivers during times of job loss and crisis should be a no-brainer and given that our government has urged the members opposite to support us in supporting Albertans instead of inventing narratives that create division, to the same minister: what damage is caused when that NDP opposition spreads fabricated stories and mistruths on things like environmental monitoring?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, in 2018 when the then Premier curtailed oil production in the province, we stood shoulder to shoulder with them and said that it was the right thing to do. You know why we did that? Because Alberta's success is not a partisan issue. Now, when the members opposite find themselves looking for work in 2023, might I suggest they stick to what they know and take up writing fiction?

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

Opioid-related Emergency Medical Service Calls

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how to follow that.

Yesterday I asked the associate minister of mental health about the increase in opioid-related emergencies in Edmonton and what the government's strategy was. The associate minister claimed, shockingly, that he was optimistic that the number is going down. In fact, the numbers have doubled, so I'll try again. The number of emergency calls related to opiates more than doubled from last year. To the associate minister: how do you have the facts so wrong, and what will you do here now to address the opiate crisis?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic affects all Albertans. We know that with people who are suffering from mental illness or addiction, it's tougher for them. That's why we prepared one of the most comprehensive mental health and addictions recovery action plans in Canada. Our \$53 million investment is double all the provinces combined.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the associate minister also dismissed the more than doubling of opiate emergencies by saying that "with COVID-19 we anticipate that there will be some increase coming," and given that those struggling with addictions, the families and loved ones struggling with addictions, and those who work to support those struggling with addictions deserve more than this minister's brush-off with COVID-19, will the minister offer an apology for dismissing the pain and struggle that the doubling of opiate emergency calls has created among our first responders and families and tell them when they can expect him to act in response to the doubling of opiate emergencies that have caused all this harm?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the face of the unprecedented COVID-19, nobody knows how severely that will impact us. But make no mistake. Our government has prepared the most comprehensive plan to address that. On top of that, we also ensured that naloxone kits are widely available throughout the province. We have increased the availability of opioid substitution treatments and

ensured that more Albertans can get treatment. We're going to continue on that route.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the associate minister actually cancelled the IOAT program, I'm not sure where the alternatives are, and given that there was an increase of 138 cases of emergency EMS calls in Edmonton over the last year and given that the associate minister has claimed to be laser focused on this issue but when presented with the increase he could only point out that a report was being released next week and given that I couldn't get an answer yesterday, I will try again. Minister, lives are at risk and people deserve answers. Why can't you give us any?

The Speaker: The hon. the associate minister.

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It looks like whatever answer you give, it will fall on to deaf ears. Let me reassure that Albertans are working with our government. We have a plan. We have a comprehensive plan. Our plan is going to focus on recovery. We're going to focus on getting people out of addiction. We're going to fund detox. We're going to fund treatment centres. We're going to get people into recovery and to live a life of wellness.

Thank you.

AISH Deindexation

Ms Renaud: Disabled Albertans on AISH have met strict eligibility criteria around the severity and permanence of their disability as well as profound difficulty maintaining employment. AISH is their primary source of income, and despite the UCP spin about the generosity of these benefits compared to other jurisdictions, disabled Albertans who rely on AISH live well below the poverty line. The UCP chose to cut AISH benefits by deindexing in 2019, stating that they would consider indexing these benefits when the financial situation increases. To the minister: please explain what the criteria is and what disabled Albertans can expect.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to say that during this pandemic our government's focus has been on making sure that vulnerable Albertans are taken care of, and that includes individuals who have disabilities. AISH benefits continue to be maintained as they have been. Regulations haven't changed at all, and benefits will continue to remain in place as they have been.

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

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that the cost of poverty includes additional pressures on health care, mental health supports, emergency housing, and food banks but given that the UCP thinks a better use of tax dollars is subsidizing the cost of partisan fundraising, will the minister describe the cost-benefit analysis completed prior to the elimination of deindexing AISH benefits? And, really, what is the anticipated cost of this poverty that is continuing to accumulate every year that benefits aren't indexed?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that when we were first elected and we became aware of our government's fiscal situation, it became apparent that it was much, much worse than what was let on, and that's why some of these decisions were made to suspend indexing government-wide. In terms of moving forward, we know that we're going to be seeing double-digit unemployment rates and we know that we're going to be seeing a greater caseload growth in

our income support program, and we are committed to making sure that vulnerable Albertans are getting the supports that they deserve.

Ms Renaud: Given that this government has said that the best social innovation plan is employment and that this is not a reality for the vast majority of Albertans with disabilities – every year that goes by, they slip further and further behind; you cut AISH; you deindex – what is their role in your economic recovery plan? You know what? They're not buying the spin that you continue to generate.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, once again, we did not cut AISH. We did not cut benefits. Eligibility remains intact, and I'm actually quite disappointed that the member opposite takes every opportunity she can to create additional fear and anxiety within the disability community. This government is committed to rejuvenating our economy, particularly after this pandemic, and we will continue focusing on employment and taking care of the vulnerable. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Fire Ban

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, spring can be a perilous time for Alberta's forests. The snow has melted, and typically dry, warm weather follows. With the deadfall in our forests plentiful there's a higher risk of a devastating, large-scale fire. There are many times that with spring comes the equally dangerous winter melt, an excess of water rather than too little. This is true for my constituency of West Yellowhead. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: given the water-rich conditions in many parts of Alberta, why did your ministry implement a province-wide fire ban on all public lands and forest protected areas rather than one tailored to local conditions?

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

Mr. Dreeschen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member beside me for that very important question. In mid-April, at the height of COVID-19 pandemic, we took unprecedented steps to ensure public safety by implementing a blanket fire ban across Alberta's forested lands. We were concerned about our ability to fight forest fires and COVID-19 at the same time. Last year when we had our fire season, we had over 3,000 imported firefighters from across Canada and around the world. However, with COVID flight restrictions that was just not available, and we could not rely on them, so we had to defend ourselves. That's why we hired an additional 200 firefighters, totalling over 800 in the province, to make sure Alberta communities . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that many of my constituents voiced concern over the presence of snow and the volume of water still saturating the soil in most of West Yellowhead when fire bans were announced and given that weather and environmental conditions vary across a province as vast and diverse as ours, did the ministry contact the relevant local departments currently engaged in forestry management before making its decision to institute a province-wide fire ban?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the member. We do always consult with our wildland firefighter officials at Alberta Wildfire and at the local level, and they did raise concern. We even developed a contingency plan for the possibility of a COVID outbreak at one of our forest firefighting camps. We even had a 25 and a 50 and a 75 per cent reduction in staff and contract workers. Despite COVID and the extra measures, our brave firefighters helped to extinguish over 283 fires so far this spring. Even today they're combatting three fires, but I can thankfully tell you, those fires are contained.

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta has a sophisticated fire prevention system where fire risk is broken down into zones and given that the local conditions of each zone dictate the relevant fire risk of that area and given that our province's weather patterns vary greatly from region to region, can residents in rural Alberta reasonably expect a policy in the near future in which government does not institute fire bans for the entire province but ones based on regional fire indexes?

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a great idea from the Member for West Yellowhead, to actually tie spring fire bans to regional fire indexes. That is why more than 70 per cent of the fires that are caused by people in the spring – that's before the grass gets green and the leaves are out, and that's not a hockey playoff reference – are preventable. Alberta Wildfire has a constant, never-ending improvement mindset when it comes to fighting fires more efficiently and effectively to make sure that Alberta families are safe, and I'm proud of the work that they do every day.

The Speaker: Perhaps next time the member will just lean over and ask him those questions.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Energy Jobs and the Site Rehabilitation Program

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's energy industry is the largest subsector of Canada's economy as well as one of its biggest job creators for Albertans. However, the impacts of COVID-19 have still caused great hardship and devastation throughout the industry. I'm confident that our government will come together to ensure that these hard-working, proud Albertans will still have the means to provide for their families. To the Minister of Energy. You are a strong voice for Albertans in our energy sector. What will you be doing in response to the real economic hardships Albertans are facing?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. We will never stop fighting for our energy sector and the hundreds of thousands of jobs that are reliant upon it. The last three months have been the most difficult and challenging time for our energy sector in its entire history. Since the onset of the pandemic our government has been taking measures to help. We've deferred payments and levies, we've deferred the WCB, and we've worked with our sector to get access to federal loans. We'll never stop supporting them.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the oil and gas service sector in Alberta and especially in my constituency are struggling and given that jobs for Albertans start with the companies that employ them and given that I have heard many

stories in my constituency about operating costs exceeding funds coming in and given that more bankruptcies mean more job losses across the board, to the Minister of Energy. The site rehabilitation program has several rounds of funding for Alberta companies that will have many direct and indirect benefits on unemployment and the economy. Can you tell this House how many jobs this program will create across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:40

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The site rehabilitation program, supported by a billion dollars of funding from the federal government, will create about 5,300 jobs in this province. We launched the program on May 1, and there's been enormous interest in the program. There have been over 36,000 applications for round 1. In addition to the jobs that it will create, it will create indirect jobs and benefits in communities right across the province, communities like the hon. member's communities. We know that these communities need these jobs, we know that the energy sector needs these jobs, and this will be an important program for the recovery.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many service companies are seeing this site rehabilitation program as a lifeline to keep their doors open and the people employed and given that the eligibility requirements for the program make it widely accessible to the struggling service companies in Alberta, to the Minister of Energy. There has been much excitement about the site rehabilitation program across Alberta. Has your ministry seen large volumes of applications to this point, and when can we expect to see money in the hands of these companies?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As noted, there has been phenomenal interest in this program with over 36,000 applications for round 1 alone. We've introduced round 3 and will be introducing additional rounds in the days ahead. Round 1 is oversubscribed, but that's good news because there are many more to come. As of this morning we've reviewed one-third of those applications, 1,400 applications have been approved, and cheques have gone out the door already. In the coming weeks I plan to visit one of these sites as it's being rehabilitated. I'm looking forward to that, and I'm looking forward to seeing Albertans get back to work.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose has a statement to make.

Bethany Care Centres

Ms. Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Near the end of last year it was my pleasure to have a tour of all the Bethany care sites in Camrose. I'm told that Bethany is the largest employer in the city, and their annual payroll and benefits exceed \$43 million for the communities they serve. They specialize in seniors' care by providing independent living through seniors' care contained and life-lease options, continuing care, DSL 3, DSL 4, DSL 4D, home

care, day programming, affordable housing, community housing, DTRS, and PLRS. In total they serve 2,855 Albertans.

The Bethany Group is a public, not-for-profit organization providing health care and housing services in 28 communities throughout central Alberta. Every cent they receive is put towards their clients. They were originally established in 1922 by the Lutheran church to operate a home for the aged in Bawlf, Alberta. They are governed by the Bethany nursing home and auxiliary hospitals act. What strikes me most about the Bethany Group is that it invests resources to improve the lives of its clients, places an importance on building relationships not just with its clients but with similar organizations.

Through its work with partners Bethany allows all organizations to pool resources and better respond to the changing direction of community needs. There are over 700 direct employees of the Bethany Group and 130 employees of partner organizations. As I walked through these sites, I was met by smiling residents and warmly greeted by employees, who have a very friendly working relationship with the volunteers on the board. Since my visit the world has suffered from one of the worst pandemics in recent memory. I continue to give all those residents and their families my best wishes. I also want to acknowledge the tireless work of those employees during such a difficult time.

Thank you.

Teachers

Member Irwin: “I am exhausted. I miss seeing my kids and being able to check in with them.” “My school kids mean the world to me. It has been so hard mentally and emotionally, on top of the work, trying to balance being a mom, working with my kindergarten-age daughter with her school work and my toddler. It’s been a journey involving lots of tears and breakdowns.” “I was ready to walk away today. I’m so done. And then I got a message from one of my students. She needed me more than I needed to quit, so I will walk another day for the people who matter: my students, who I miss dearly.” “On top of being exhausted from the last 10 weeks of online prep, support, and delivery, I’ve also lost my position after this year because of funding cuts. Where is this going to end? Am I even going to have a job next year?”

These are just some of the many comments from teachers who reached out to me to tell me that they’re struggling. These aren’t just the feelings of a few; these are the feelings of most teachers. In fact, thousands of teachers across the province have just been surveyed, and the survey results confirm that teachers are tired. They’re worried. They’re struggling with their mental and physical health. They’re losing sleep thinking about their students who are falling through the cracks.

Teachers have done incredible work making the transition to online learning. They’ve gone above and beyond to meet the complex needs of their students. How have they done it? While their educational assistants are being laid off, leaving them to fill the role of both teacher and assistant. While being told that their professional autonomy is meaningless as their pensions are attacked by the UCP. While losing many of their colleagues – school counsellors, indigenous liaison workers, librarians, mental health workers – all due to budget cuts. As thanks, no matter how hard they work, no matter how much they adapt and show their resilience, according to this government, they’re not doing enough.

To Alberta’s teachers: on this side of the House we know how much you’ve done to support students during the pandemic. We know how much you will continue to do despite the uncertainty ahead. We thank you, we’ll always support you, and just like you’ll

never stop fighting for your students, we’ll never stop fighting for you.

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

Lac La Biche Flooding

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is saying that when it rains, it pours. Well, the people in my constituency, the good people of Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, can certainly confirm that to be true. Only weeks after a 1-in-100-year flood left downtown Fort McMurray under water, heavy rains have caused major flooding throughout Lac La Biche county and the Lakeland region.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you may remember that when I spoke about the Fort McMurray floods in this Chamber, I made a special mention of the help that was pouring in from across the province. While help was coming from across all of the province, no region was quicker or more generous in offering assistance than the people of Lac La Biche. I know that the people of Fort McMurray won’t forget that, just as we won’t forget the help that they provided during the fire. In fact, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo’s emergency services has already offered help to the Lac La Biche emergency co-ordination centre.

Mr. Speaker, as you may know, in rural Alberta your neighbours aren’t just folks that live down the street. People in small towns and communities know that we are stronger together, and living three hours apart does not stand in the way of that notion. In fact, just today I had constituents and friends reach out to see how they could help the people in Fort McMurray and help the people in Lac La Biche. I can say from my own experience that Lac La Biche has always been a great neighbour and not just to Fort McMurray. The time has now come for us to honour that and give what we can.

I have been in constant contact with elected officials from the Lac La Biche region, and I drove through the area of Lac La Biche and Plamondon this past Sunday to see some of the damage first-hand. Mr. Speaker, the people I have spoken with in Lac La Biche are optimistic that they will be able to weather this storm and get back on their feet, but they will need help.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition that has been signed by thousands of Albertans urging the Members of the Legislative Assembly to give priority to funding education according to student enrolment growth.

The Speaker: I’m sorry. Hon. member, do you just have the one petition?

Mr. Schmidt: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. Perfect. And then you have some tablings as well, I understand?

Mr. Schmidt: I do. Yes, that’s correct.

The Speaker: That’s fine. Upon the completion of presenting petitions and presenting tablings and reports, they can just go in the tabling box on the tabling table.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has a notice of motion.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have two notices of motions today. First, I'd like to provide oral notice of Bill 22, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020, sponsored by my colleague the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

2:50

Second, Mr. Speaker, I wish to provide oral notice of Government Motion 22, to be put on the Order Paper in my name as follows.

Be it resolved that

- (1) the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future, and the committee shall be deemed to be a special committee of the Assembly for the purpose of conducting a comprehensive review pursuant to section 37 of that act;
- (2) the committee may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
- (3) in accordance with section 37 of the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act the committee must submit its report to the Assembly within one year after beginning its review, and that report is to include any amendments recommended by the committee.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I rise with the requisite number of copies of a document entitled Expected Operational Funding for 2020/21 School Year, which highlights school board funding for 2019-2020 and for 2020-21 and clearly indicates that every school board is receiving an increase.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will take advantage of your generous and magnanimous patience because I have three tablings that I'd like to make today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a report developed by the Alberta Sand and Gravel Association called Aggregate Development in Alberta, Recommendations Related to Delays and Inconsistencies on Environmental Permitting.

The second is the appropriate number of copies of a letter from a group of concerned Edmontonians who desire to see current monuments to western Canadian history be improved to offer more balance and accuracy in their commentary on western Canadian history.

Then on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a document called Human Rights Group Alleges Indigenous Seniors Neglected at Slave Lake Continuing Care Facility.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Shandro, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists annual report 2019; pursuant to the Public Health Act the Public Health Appeal Board 2019 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. members. I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 4

Fiscal Planning and Transparency (Fixed Budget Period) Amendment Act, 2020

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak at the Committee of the Whole stage for Bill 4, the Fiscal Planning and Transparency (Fixed Budget Period) Amendment Act, 2020, allowing for a fixed budget period within the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. It's unfortunate that this government brought forward legislation with no fixed budget date, which was, in fact, part of the recommendations of the MacKinnon panel. There are some recommendations of the MacKinnon panel that I find quite regrettable that are being implemented and others that are far less disappointing, given their scope and impact, that are not being recommended. The MacKinnon panel did recommend a hard, fixed, and predictable date for budget every year. You know, certainly, a government has the right to modify those kinds of recommendations.

This bill, as well, was not contained in the UCP platform. The UCP platform did promise a fixed election date. We haven't heard much about that lately, but here we are debating this pretty thin bill. Usually bills amending the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act are rather lengthy documents, a number of changes to, you know, tax codes and consequential amendments and so on. By contrast, this piece of quite weak legislation is uncharacteristic of the Department of Finance. My first observation on looking at this bill of a couple of pages long or whatever it is was: oh, this is far less reflective of the seriousness of Treasury Board and Finance. It's far less a Ministry of Finance bill than it is a Ministry of Silly Walks bill. It is not necessarily a good piece of legislation in its current form, and that's too bad because it could be fixed.

All this bill does is suggest a budget window so that Albertans will know the month of the year when the government brings forward plans to do things like raise their taxes. Albertans will know roughly the month that the government brings forward plans to raise their fees and the money flying out of their pockets by almost a billion dollars. We will at least know a budget window, a window of time when this is going to be happening, a window of time when mass layoffs and cuts to postsecondary institutions will ripple through communities like Lethbridge, hurting both the public- and the private-sector employees in cities like Lethbridge. We'll at least have a window on that. I will at least have a window on what kinds of – for example, in the back of the budget you have enumerated a bunch of the transfers from the federal government. Now, we already know that there is one specific transfer coming from the federal government to the UCP to fund their partisan operations, but we'll know what other transfers are coming from the federal government, their amounts, and so on. We'll have a window for that. That's good.

This bill itself doesn't contain within it any incentives or sanctions. That is to say, generally speaking, in legislation there's a consequence for doing the wrong thing. I know that not always with

this government there's a consequence for doing the wrong thing, but in general that's what legislation provides for. One of the things that really weakens this bill is that there's no carrot, no stick to ensure that cabinet actually abides by a range of dates set forth in this bill. So then the question is: like, why are we doing this? Why are we spending our time doing this when there's no real sanction for not doing it?

You know, I think the government themselves understand very well the sort of thinness and potentially not very defensible nature of this bill because they didn't even issue a news release on it. Usually a piece of legislation – if you're going to bring it, take the time to have Parliamentary Counsel draft it, and spend all of our time bringing us into this Chamber to have a conversation about it, usually you'd also want to have that conversation with the public via members of the news media. But they didn't really even do that. Again, I go back to my previous observation that I don't even know, really, what we're doing here with this bill.

I think that this piece of legislation actually, you know, undermines the seriousness of the work that is contained within the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. There's some really important stuff in there, and that's why Alberta has actually performed so well over the years through all kinds of different governments. Heaven knows, things were pretty unstable before 2015. There seemed to be, you know, a new Premier kind of with the changing of the seasons. But even through all of that instability, even through some of the old PC government's, you know, best efforts at not being overly transparent or accountable, our legislation around fiscal planning and transparency provided for really good budget disclosure, a really good sort of layout to the documents.

3:00

The public knows how to use them very well. That's why we've always performed very well. The C.D. Howe Institute actually has a measurement – right? – that they publish every year around fiscal transparency, accountability measures of various kinds, and they compare all the provinces. We always do very, very well, and certainly when we were in government, we led the country on that index. But a lot of those mechanisms for reporting, you know, the quarterly stuff, annual reports, all of that: that has been provided for over some years to this House and to the public.

You know, having been around Alberta politics for a long time, I've read a lot of budgets, going back to the 1990s, and even just the way that they are presented is better. If you're trying to do a crossjurisdictional analysis with other provinces, you'll find that that can sometimes be quite difficult because our numbers are presented more clearly.

That's why it's kind of too bad that this piece of legislation is kind of a nothing, right? I think it runs contrary to the history, the institutional memory we have in Treasury Board and Finance, the level of expertise we have among the public service there, the kinds of pieces of legislation that we have in place to make sure that, you know, while Albertans may have good faith, democratic disagreements about how we spend our money – and certainly we have had those over the last few years that I've been in politics – at least we know what we are spending money on in there. So there's a common, understood statement of facts presented in the budget documents every year.

You know, this could have been much better, and it really could be a lot better in terms of building on or fixing this suggestion of a budget window. That's awfully vague, Mr. Chair, and because of that, it doesn't really hold the government to anything. Heaven knows, I think this is a government that needs to be held to its commitments.

Now, another thing I want to talk about a little bit here is that when we have a less vague budget window, that is to say that if we

fix some of the pieces of this legislation and at least, you know, try to – how would my mother put it? – make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, then we might look at the importance of having a more fixed budget time so that we can have a better reckoning and a more honest conversation with Albertans about the state of the finances.

You know, there's no question that right now Alberta is facing a very difficult time. The question for the people who sit in chairs on the floor of this House is whether we're going to make a bad situation worse or whether we are going to make choices that actually help ordinary working folks get through a really, really serious downturn. When you look at the economic indicators across the country, you know, it's us and Newfoundland that have taken the biggest hits. We know people are suffering out there.

We know, too, that it was in and around the time that this budget was presented that we already had a number of very, very worrying economic indicators. I think it's important to recognize that Albertans were suffering economically and that jobs were being lost by the tens of thousands before this 2020 budget was introduced on February 27 and certainly by the time that it was rammed through with the government using extremely extraordinary powers to move through a Committee of Supply process, I would argue a quite undemocratic process, quite frankly, given the way that it was done. You know, we had 50,000 people lose their jobs. Those are individual livelihoods, our constituents, all of our constituents here in this House.

You know, our deficit was already off by a billion dollars; our projections were already completely offside of what economic projections were happening in the big banks. I don't know about you, Mr. Chair, but if I compare between what a government is saying and then a whole bunch of big banks that stand to make a whole bunch of money if they get the projections right, I think I'm going to go with the folks that are making decisions in the investment houses around economic growth projections and not the stuff that appeared in this fairly politicized document in 2020. When we saw the government of Alberta projecting 2.5 per cent growth and then you see the TD at 1.8, Scotiabank at 1.6, Royal Bank at 1.7, CIBC at 1.8, nobody in the corridors of finance in this country believed what was written down on the page by the government of Alberta. And, in fact, when the budget was introduced even just a few days later, the Finance minister claimed that Rome was burning around him. That's not exactly a sign of strong economic growth.

There are a number of problems contained within that budget. There are a number of problems with how the budget was moved through. I would say that it is at the very least against the spirit of the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act and at the very least against the spirit of our previously very good ratings from folks who watch these things and compare them across the country. It is certainly not consistent with most norms in the Westminster democratic system in terms of how we came to have a budget in 2020. There's no question about that.

But now we're kind of seeing a little bit more of this politics introduced into the budget system. You know, like I said, Mr. Chair, I've been around this House for a long time – not on the green carpet but in the Annex, in the backrooms, whatever – and even in the Klein years the budget papers took a certain form, very, very similar with almost no deviations from what we did while we were in government. The projections, all of those things: you can quibble with the contents of those documents, but in general they conformed to some interpretation of the truth.

And now we're seeing another amendment to the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act that just kind of introduces this vague political element where it absolutely doesn't belong. So, you know, if you're going to suggest a budget window as, like, a nice thing to

have, that's not even in your platform, then might I suggest that we not necessarily waste the Legislature's time with kind of a nothing bill. There are probably ways to amend this to make it more specific, to ensure that we have a little bit better consideration for what it might actually do, what the bill might actually affect, and to actually accomplish the goal that is apparently set out, which is that we have more budget predictability.

That was what the MacKinnon panel recommended, and I certainly don't have any quibble with that particular recommendation. There was a lot of other stuff in there that was, to my mind, ridiculous nonsense, but we can, you know, disagree about that. That's our job as MLAs. So it is better to have more specificity. It's also better to have an actual consequence if you don't follow the law. That is also a thing that could be contained in this legislation and that I think would increase its seriousness considerably and make it more commensurate with the existing seriousness of our Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act and the various other pieces of legislation that the Minister of Finance is responsible for.

3:10

Those are my introductory comments, Mr. Chair, on this matter. I'm sure that we will continue to have a robust debate even though, you know, at this current time I'm not sure this bill actually as written necessarily merits much enthusiasm. I don't imagine there's much enthusiasm coming from the government side either, seeing as they didn't even put out a news release. I think it actually can be made better, so we might have some ideas on how to do that as we move along in debate.

With that, I will conclude my remarks, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much. Thank you to the Member for Lethbridge-West, who took the opportunity to speak just before me and is the critic for the Finance portfolio. I think there are many great things that she covered there. I won't cover all of them because she's done an excellent job.

You know, the first thing I'd like to start with is that I think this bill is misnamed. I think it should be called Not a Fixed Date for Budget and a Lack of Transparency in Delivering the Budget because that's what we're really seeing here.

I mean, the period is great, one of 28 days it can happen in February, but there is no fixed date. This is pretty thin gruel in terms of a bill that's before us, and it looks like, as the Member for Lethbridge-West was suggesting and I'll underline as well, this is padding the legislative agenda of the government at this point in time. There really is nothing here, and if they wanted to do something, they would have done far more in terms of becoming more transparent.

I know that, of course, there are fixed election dates in this province now. Once every four years, the third Monday in October, municipal elections take place, as do school board elections. Everyone knows that. Everybody works towards it. They have that information years in advance, and they benefit from kind of knowing that and getting their acts together and putting their papers in, et cetera, and getting their teams together. It is more democratic. It is better for people who want to get involved in the democratic system to have a fixed date, and it's happened for decades in this province, and it works quite well.

Now, the government had an opportunity to do that same sort of thing here, but they didn't, so you have to wonder why they didn't. You know, what's the benefit to the government by not having a

fixed date? I can think of many. For instance, they can drop a budget whenever they want to drop a budget, watching the news and the way that the government is being perceived and then timing the drop of the budget to benefit the government itself. Again, it's not very democratic. It looks to take advantage of many sectors of society, not the least of which is the opposition to keep them on their toes. Who benefits from that? Just the elected officials in the room who are on the government side.

Who doesn't benefit from this incredible lack of transparency? I can think of three groups right off the top, of course. All Albertans don't benefit from not having a fixed date, something that if there was a fixed date, they would be able to look to it, look at the documents that are dropped that day, try and understand if it's in the best interest of Alberta society, and then make some decisions about it. Are they happy? What do they want to see more of? Can they get involved in pushing for something further in the next budget?

The second group that's not benefited, of course, is stakeholder groups who are involved in the work of government, who liaise with government, who want to advocate or lobby with government. They are not benefited at all by having a period or an uncertain time for a budget.

The third group that has not benefited by the lack of transparency that this government seems to win the prize for – and that's not just me; that's other people that are saying that they're looking at the financial documents that this government is bringing forward and really sort of not seeing where they meet the test – is the bureaucracy of Alberta. The government bureaucrats, administration, not only those in the Finance department, who work with the rest of the 20, 21 other departments that are in the government to see all their documents come forward that roll into the budget process, but also the people right at the knife's edge, I guess, of creating the budget: there are dozens of those people. They're not benefited by not having a fixed election date. They're not benefited by a fixed election period, as this government seems to want to continue to go down the road of.

It's a more family-friendly approach to say, you know, "This is the time when the budget will be dropped; we have to set our work plans up to get to that date in a responsible way" instead of saying, "It could be one of 28 days; we'll keep working together, but it could be the first week, it could be the second week, or it could be all the way to the last day of February." It's not very family friendly to expect that bureaucrats will essentially put their lives on hold at the whim or discretion of their elected masters, who may come up with a date or several dates during that period. If they don't like the way the news cycle is going and they want to kind of miss something particularly bad, they can say: "Well, we'll not do it then. We'll do it later." Or, if they have in their mind that they want to do it later and they see things lining up against them, they could drop it early. Those kinds of things aren't helpful for bureaucracy. You need planning work schedules to get the work done instead of demanding that they stay up all night and provide numerous drafts of plans to get you towards a budget.

The other point that I wanted to mention, you know, is that I certainly agree with the Member for Lethbridge-West with regard to B.C.'s example that they've set, with the third Thursday in February being the fixed date for a budget delivery. I note from looking at the bio of our current Deputy Minister of Finance that she comes from B.C. She worked under that regime, I believe, in terms of providing support to her elected masters to get a budget prepared for the third Thursday in February. I just wonder why that same DM hasn't been able to convince these political masters here that that was in the best interest of not only her department, that she

is the CEO of, if you will, but also that B.C. seems to have its act together.

I will point out that when we were in government, as the Member for Lethbridge-West said, we were the top province in terms of delivering fiscal documents, that C.D. Howe said were the best in the country in terms of their preparation, their clarity. That wasn't always the case. I can remember where a previous Finance minister in this province, under the PCs, was at the bottom of the heap. We had to do work, after that PC Finance minister left the scene and we replaced him, to consolidate our budget documents back into an operations budget and a capital budget. He had a third budget there that was problematic, from all of the people who looked at it, from a fiscal policy point of view and an accounting point of view.

We along with I believe New Brunswick topped the list of all provinces and territories two years running, and that's not happening nowadays with this government and the documents that you're putting out.

3:20

The other point that I wanted to bring up was with regard to the bill that's before us. As the Member for Lethbridge-West has indicated, it's a pretty thin bill, and I'd characterize it as padding the legislative agenda of this government. But in my reading of the bill and my sense of it when we're talking about a fixed budget period, it wasn't in the direction of the MacKinnon report. It seems to me that this government is trying to tick a box and say to Albertans: "You know, we have covered this off in coming up with this bill. We have covered it off, and we've given you what you want in terms of greater transparency." Well, that's not actually what's happening.

As the Member for Lethbridge-West indicated, it was quite egregious in terms of the supply that we all went through here before COVID, on February 27 and before, where there were six or seven ministries delivering their estimates in this room for a six-hour period. I've never seen that sort of thing. We certainly never would have considered doing that. We had estimates for weeks when we were government. The fact that this government thought that it would be okay to be in this room together and have six hours of debate for five or six different ministries for a budget that's in the 50-plus billion dollar range: it just was mind blowing to me.

I come from city council, where we spent longer on budgets, much smaller budgets than this government ever contemplated providing us as opposition and Albertans, not only the opposition but all Albertans, who get an opportunity through the estimates to watch it on the channels or to watch it on computers or to come down and take part in it, not take part in terms of speaking but to oversee it. It was egregious, in my estimation, of a government who believed they could ram through that sort of approach and not even blush at the wrong-headedness of the whole thing.

Mr. Chair, as I've mentioned, I think there are many groups that are not benefited by the bill that's before us. I think the only people who are benefited is the government in the fact that they can be less transparent. If they wanted to name this bill correctly, it should be the Not a Fixed Date for Budget and a Lack of Transparency Amendment Act. That would seem to be more accurate than what we're dealing with today.

Just before I take my seat, I will say that the third Thursday in February, as is done in B.C., is in the interests of greater clarity and democracy. Those are the things that we should be striving for as a group as opposed to being somewhat sneaky about when a budget gets dropped.

I think I'll look at taking my seat now. Thank you very much for the opportunity to address this bill in its entirety. It's quite a brief bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members? I see the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much for the opportunity to stand up and speak. I'll just be brief. I'd just like to point out that there's a very good reason why this was never dealt with under the NDP government, and that's the fact that we never were back early enough in February to promote a budget date in February. The idea that a fixed budget date would come out in February: probably it goes against the grain of the NDP government because they don't like to come back to work in the spring that early.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to express my support for Bill 4, Fiscal Planning and Transparency (Fixed Budget Period) Amendment Act, 2020.

Before talking about the importance of this legislation, first I would like to express my deepest sympathy and condolences to all the families and friends of those who have lost their lives in the COVID-19 pandemic.

I also would like to state my appreciation for the hard work of all the front liners – the doctors, nurses, caregivers, and every medical staff as well as the essential service workers – who committed to be there and provide the needed service to Albertans during the time of crisis. This same appreciation goes to all government officials and staff, who worked tirelessly to make sure that the health and safety of everyone is well protected, and, lastly, to all Albertans, who have worked together and helped each other while following all the government's guidelines and recommendations.

Going back to the bill, let me start by stating my appreciation to the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance for introducing this, fixing the period when the budget will be tabled for the new fiscal year. If we look at the past and similar legislation, including the government accountability act of 2000, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the Financial Management Act, and other financial acts related to government appropriations and expenditure, it will indicate that there was no provision for the time when the government estimates, the fiscal plan, or the business plan would be tabled.

Bill 4 would provide enough time for effective discussion and debate on policy choices for the upcoming fiscal year. It creates certainty and assurance for effective budgeting. It will add more clarity and valuable fiscal rules and strategic objectives, which make it easier for stakeholders and the public to understand and for them to anticipate the government's fiscal policy course throughout the economic sequence.

We all know that presenting materials in the budget estimates has a significant impact on a government's approach of planning and overall management of strategic programs, services, and expenditures and on the quality of information provided to stakeholders. Stakeholders need to be aware of when key budget tasks, activities, and decisions will occur so that they have an opportunity to prepare, plan, and participate in the process. That is what the government has been doing though there is no specific period or fixed time when it should be done, aside from doing it before the commencement of the new fiscal year.

The preparation of a schedule helps ensure that all aspects of the budget development have been considered and that satisfactory time has been provided. The best practice, in co-operation, follows a highly regimented budget preparation and a set schedule so that

the completed budget is ready to be used at the beginning of the next fiscal year.

As I was engaged in business for about 25 years before becoming a member of this Chamber, I know the importance of setting the proper period of budgeting so that the business could operate smoothly and I could better lay out my plans, expenditures, and strategies for the coming future. This bill provides consistency and clarity to the existing financial legislation, and it's a great help to all government ministries, agencies, and publicly funded organizations to have sound financial information for them to intelligently make adjustments and for certainty in decision-making for the coming fiscal year.

Also, it has been mentioned by the minister that it is one of the recommendations of the MacKinnon panel report on the improvements in fiscal reporting and transparency, which stated that Alberta should establish a fixed budget date. The reason was that "a fixed date would help entrench a tradition of timelier budgets," thereby improving fiscal transparency and providing more budget certainty. It is also stated in the report that the lack of a fixed budget date "can cause considerable uncertainty to organizations and entities which depend on provincial budgets to determine their own budget plans." Thus, this bill corresponds to the recommendation wherein we would be seeing the tabling of budget estimates within the month of February before every new fiscal year.

This will also provide ample time to the ministries and government officials in planning and preparing budgetary estimates to be tabled and debated thereafter. Accordingly, the government will have the flexibility to choose the proper date to table the budget so that it could adjust to changing market conditions while at the same time assuring stakeholders of having it done in the month of February.

Some may have commented that it is not the exact recommendation in the mentioned report. If you look carefully, the spirit and intent of the recommendation are within this amendment. This is also in line with the commitment of the government, which is to provide organizations and stakeholders the needed time to plan their budgets.

3:30

The amendment being introduced by this bill, Mr. Chair, is a genuine commitment by the government to express a message that we are dedicated with respect to transparency and accountability. We want to stop the practice of past governments introducing their budgets in a manner where stakeholders were left with a limited number of days to prepare and adjust to what had been laid out for them.

The province of British Columbia has had a determined date for tabling their budget since 2001, Mr. Chair, and that is the third Tuesday of every February and one week after the opening of the spring session of their Legislative Assembly. If you would compare it to the bill, we have all the days of the month of February to table it, and should we be able to do it in the last week, that is not much of any disparity from that of B.C.'s budget. On the other hand, if everything is going well, let's say that there is not much of any market change and everything has been flowing as planned, we could even table it earlier than B.C.

Having said that, Mr. Chair, the NDP have continuously insisted that it should be on a fixed date. They appear to be concerned now but were not able to make it part of the legislation they enacted in 2015, the existing Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, which repealed the Fiscal Management Act and was also called Bill 4 of the 29th Legislature, First Session. In the Second Session thereof amendments were made to the act through Bill 10 but did not state any fixed budget date or period. I just want to restate the comments

made by my hon. colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul at the start of second reading that the previous government's tabling of their budgets was far closer to the beginning of the next fiscal year – April 14, 2016; March 16, 2017; and March 22, 2018 – than the one that is proposed by this bill.

Mr. Chair, I know there is no prohibition for any member of this House to propose any amendments to a bill, but I cannot just accept why the members of the NDP would say now that they have a better idea on this bill when they themselves weren't able to make it part of their legislation when they had the chance.

Let me close by saying, Mr. Chair, that we all know and have discussed the importance of timely budget pronouncements. We should consider as well that the preparation of this takes place months prior, and it is a continuing process. Consultation has to be made while proper and up-to-date data have to be obtained. That is why a more flexible period is needed so as to correctly come up with a manageable number when we publicly speak of the government's budget for the future fiscal year.

Again I commend the minister for coming up with this bill, and I'm glad to cast my support for it, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members wishing to join debate on Bill 4? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise in this place and speak to Bill 4, the Fiscal Planning and Transparency (Fixed Budget Period) Amendment Act, 2020. I think I spoke a little bit earlier in this place about how I thought that this budget act doesn't actually accomplish anything at all. It's a little bit tiring and disappointing to see members of the government caucus rise in this place and repeat the same old talking points over and over and over again. We know that an opposition's job is to critically analyze bills. We've looked at this bill, and we can see basically no real reason for it.

When you bring a bill to this place, you expect that it is well researched, you expect that it is well thought out, you expect that there was the full force of government having done the work to ensure that it's a good bill. Then we come in and we see a bill that doesn't even address the issue it purports to address, right? I think that's pretty disappointing. It's pretty upsetting that government members will get up in this place and not even address the questions that I think my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo here has raised or my colleague from Lethbridge-West has raised as well.

It's pretty disappointing that members of the government won't even acknowledge and instead will resort to partisan mudslinging, Mr. Chair. I think the member earlier indeed actually tried to say that because the former government had not brought this and had not done any work on this, it was a completely invalid point. I think that's very rich coming from a member who actually himself spoke in this place against coming in to work in the mornings. When every Albertan goes to work at 9 o'clock or 8 o'clock in the morning, that member spoke against that in this place when we were trying to bring that in just four years ago. I think it's pretty rich when government members get up in this place and they speak at length and repeat old, tired talking points and try to sling mud at the opposition. I think that that is something that's disappointing. I think Albertans will be disappointed.

Instead, we should be talking about the actual clauses and problems with this bill. We should be talking about what the stated goal of this bill is and what we are trying to accomplish with this bill. The government members should be trying to explain why a fixed budget period, which was not recommended by the MacKinnon panel, the panel that they hold so dear – it was not

recommended by the actual blue-ribbon panel that this Premier speaks of with such high regard. It was not recommended; it's something that was actually not suggested. Why are these members of the government now getting up and saying that this is the only way forward?

That is a question that I think members of the government have to actually critically think about, have to actually get up and talk about. They should explain to Albertans why not having a hard, fixed, predictable date is actually valuable. The question here isn't: when do we come back to this place, this Legislature, or what should be in the budget? The question is: should we provide Albertans, should we provide this Legislature, should we provide every single person that uses this democratic institution with the certainty of knowing when we should expect the budget – right? – when we should expect to know what each department will be able to spend in the upcoming fiscal year, when we should know how drastic, in this case with the Conservative government, the cuts will be? How many students will lose their funding? How many students will lose PUF? How many EAs will be laid off? How many parks will be sold off?

Mr. Chair, all those types of questions we should have certainty on when they're going to happen. We should have had certainty on when this government was going to raid pensions. We should have certainty on these types of issues. With all the uncertainty this government is trying to bring into this province, with all the uncertainty that these ministers are coming in and attacking our public institutions, dismantling our institutions here, with all that uncertainty we should have at least some certainty in terms of what these organizations should be planning for.

In this case and as we saw just yesterday, when school boards are being asked to lay off in Edmonton, for example, over 700 staff members, over 400 of which are educational assistants, which this ministry had said explicitly were going to be temporary layoffs, Albertans should be able to plan for that. Those boards that have to make those decisions, that have to make those layoffs, those families that will have less supports in their classes, those families that will see their students suffer and excel less in their classes because of the decisions of this government: they should at least be able to know when it's going to happen, right? The government should have the decency to tell Albertans when they want to make these draconian cuts, Mr. Chair. I think that's something that's very reasonable. I think it's something that this bill does not do, does not accomplish. This bill does not actually accomplish the thing that it purports to accomplish. It does not accomplish the thing that is in the title.

I think government members should get up and explain that, right? Government members should get up and instead of just commending the minister, as the member who just spoke previous to me, instead of just getting up and talking about how great a job the minister had done, perhaps he should critically look at the bill and try to explain the clauses compared to the name and try to explain the clauses compared to the MacKinnon panel recommendation, compared to the blue-ribbon panel's recommendation. I think those are all very important things that government members should get up in this place and do. Government members should get up in this place, and perhaps they should do their jobs – right? – and criticize and think about what the bills that are being proposed are doing.

Simply put, Mr. Chair, this is exceedingly weak legislation. It's legislation that does not have provisions that speak to whether there would be a punishment or incentive for ministers to accomplish this, to accomplish the fixed budget period. I know that the members that were here in the previous Legislature, members that were here when our government brought in changes like this, they

spoke at length to that. I know my colleague here from Calgary-Buffalo will remember that.

Members of the now government and then opposition spoke at length on how it was important to have actual sanctions in place or to have actual incentives in place so that legislation is followed. At this point this government could simply choose to ignore this amendment. They could ignore Bill 4 and do nothing and say, "Well, there are 28 possible days, but we're going to go on day 29" because they want to. The government could absolutely do that because there would be no penalties. There would be no problem with the government breaking their own law, right? When government members can't even get up and speak to that and can't even get up and explain why that would be okay, why they would be okay with their own ministers breaking the rules of this place, then that is something that I think we need to actually take a critical look at.

I think we should have some real discussion about it. I'm excited here in Committee of the Whole. I expect that there will be some very exciting amendments coming forward that will address some of these problems. I think that in its current incarnation it's absolutely a bad bill. It's a bill that doesn't accomplish those goals. It's a bill that doesn't accomplish its stated intent, and it's a bill that government members should actually look at and wonder why a bill – I think my hon. colleague from Lethbridge earlier mentioned that normally when you look at a fiscal planning and transparency amendment, it's going to be a big bill because this is a complex topic and a lot goes on. Instead, we see this very short bill with a lack of any substance, with a lack of any forethought, with a lack of any measures in place to actually accomplish the things it wants to accomplish. I think that's going to be very disappointing.

3:40

I think the government members should get up and speak to that. They should explain to Albertans why they think that it's okay, why they don't want to hold their own government to account, why they don't want to represent their constituents by holding the government to account. I think those are questions that we're going to need to see answered and we're going to need to see explained and that Albertans are going to want to see answered and explained.

I mean, it is really interesting because it's something that just wasn't in the Conservative platform. The government likes to speak at length, Mr. Chair, on how thorough their platform was. It was hundreds and hundreds of planks. There were hundreds and hundreds of points. They speak at length about that, and then they come in and they say: well, we have to do this because the MacKinnon panel recommended it. Well, news flash. The MacKinnon panel did not actually recommend this, and it wasn't in the platform.

If they want to speak to how great and important this is, then they should explain that. They should explain. Rather than just saying, "Well, the minister did such a great job; congratulations," they should actually get up in this place and explain why the minister brought this forward. The minister should get up and explain why this is important. Government members seem to be unable to do that. Government members seem to be unable to do anything other than repeat talking points. I think that's disappointing. I think government members are not thinking critically about why we are in this place, why we are actually talking to this bill, why we are actually in this Legislature doing these debates.

I think it's interesting because this simply does not align with what they have stated and have tried to do in the past, which is implement the things that are either in the platform or in the MacKinnon panel. This is simply neither of those, right? So when the government members get up and use that as their talking point,

when they get up and use that as their excuse, use that as their justification, Mr. Chair, it is interesting because it shows that they are either unaware of what was either in the report or in this legislation or that they don't care that they may be misleading when they use those words.

I think that's actually quite disappointing. I think that it's an affront. I think it's an affront that they would either intentionally mislead or that members of the government may use claims that simply don't align with what's actually in the . . .

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

The Deputy Chair: A point of order has been called. I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise on a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). The member opposite suggests that the government is misleading the public. Now, there was a lot going on in that speech. [interjection] Well, a lot of words were going on. I actually appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar agreeing with me that maybe not a lot was happening, but there were certainly a lot of words, and included in those words were: misleading the public. I know that that is not the intention of this government, and that would certainly be imputing false or unavowed motives, so I ask that that member withdraw that comment. Now, if I misheard that member, that's fine, but I did hear "misleading the public," and that is certainly not the intention of this government.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen to respond.

Member Loyola: Yes, Mr. Chair. Correct me if I'm wrong, but as it pertains to this particular order, it is a specific member. If the member on our side were to specifically focus on one member, then perhaps it would be considered a point of order, but because he's not referring to a specific member but, in fact, the government in general, I don't see that there's a point of order here.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. members. This committee and the Assembly with regard to comments such as were made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South have historically in large part, for the most part, I think, aligned with the assessment as was provided by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, so in this case I would not find a point of order.

I would, however, caution the hon. Member for Edmonton-South. I was listening quite closely to his comments as I did feel that they were coming up to the line with regard to whether something would be considered potentially unparliamentary, whether it's through causing disorder or making allegations.

If the hon. member could please continue. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South, with 10 and a half minutes. Of course, we're in Committee of the Whole, so there will be other opportunities as well. Please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Of course, I would never refer to an individual member in this place. I would only speak generally of the government and the government caucus.

I do know that there are going to be many opportunities to speak in this place, and I'm pleased that I have at least 10 minutes

remaining at this time and perhaps many more blocks of time as we move forward.

I mean, as we move forward with this legislation and as we talk about things like amendments that we want to bring forward to this legislation, I want to make it pretty clear that this is a poor piece of legislation and that government members should be embarrassed by it, right? They should be embarrassed when they get up in this place and they speak about the MacKinnon panel and say how this was recommended – I believe that I may have the actual point number here; it's recommendation 25 in the MacKinnon report, Mr. Chair – because that's simply not true. It's simply not true when government members say that this was recommendation 25 in the MacKinnon report. Instead, what the MacKinnon panel actually recommended to this place, what they actually recommended to this government was a fixed election date, and this is obviously not a fixed election date. It obviously gives 28 possible days. Then on top of that, when it gives 28 possible days, it doesn't actually say: well, if the government decides to go before or after, what's going to happen anyways?

We know that this government has made a habit and a pattern of sometimes not listening to the rules – right? – sometimes not following the rules and not doing the things that are prescribed in the legislation. That's the choice of this government. They have the right to make that choice, Mr. Chair, but what we've seen before and we've seen happen in this place, indeed, is that sometimes those rules get ignored, and we don't want that to happen. If we do want to support this piece of legislation, I think, if government members want to move forward with this piece of legislation, then they should pretty clearly say: we want to make sure it actually gets followed; we want to put in things like sanctions. The government should be penalized if they fail to, and the government should have penalties or some sort of incentive, whatever it may be, so that this government will actually follow this legislation.

It's pretty disappointing that members of the government caucus won't get up and actually explain why they think it's okay that the government can continue to get away with breaking the rules, can continue to not follow the rules. I think that the rules that we want to bring forward, if we do bring them forward, should be abided by. I think that's pretty clear.

I mean, I think there's a lot going on in this House, but in this bill in particular sometimes there's not a lot going on. It's pretty shocking because when the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board brings forward a bill, you usually expect it to have some meat, right? You usually expect there to be a lot going on because it is one of the most complex ministries – I know that my colleague here will agree with me – and is one of the most difficult ministries in the entire government. That's a good thing because the finances, \$50 billion of Albertans' money, should be complicated. It should be something that we strive to manage with the best expectations. Albertans should be able to reasonably expect to know when we're going to be making those decisions and how we're going to be making those decisions and when they can expect things like consultations to happen, when they can expect things like review of those processes to happen, when they can expect things like estimates to be happening.

All of that would be possible if this government had done what was in the MacKinnon report, had done what was in the recommendation, which is actually to set a fixed election date. Of course, again I'll say that it wasn't in this multihundred plank, super well-thought-out platform of this government, who has the biggest mandate. This government talks about how big their mandate and platform were, Mr. Chair, and when they talk about how big their platform was, they keep talking about how it was the most well-thought-out platform and it was the most amazing platform and

everything in this platform will get accomplished, that they've accomplished over half of this platform already. Well, this wasn't even in the platform, right? It wasn't even in the platform. It wasn't in the MacKinnon report, so what is this government doing? It becomes very difficult to explain. It becomes very difficult to understand.

Instead of actually getting up and trying to explain why it wasn't in the platform that they said was so thoroughly thought out that they didn't need to do anything else because everything was in the platform already, and instead of explaining why it wasn't in the MacKinnon report – the MacKinnon report actually recommended the opposite of this – this government has just gotten up and said: "Wow. The Finance minister is doing a great job. Congratulations." That's the actual talking point they're using, Mr. Chair. It's surprising because the bill is so short that our Finance critic has basically outlined that it's unprecedented to amend the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act with such a short bill, right?

3:50

I think it's something that we need to look critically at and I think government members should look critically at and get up here and explain to Albertans, explain to their constituents, explain to the opposition why this is okay, why this pattern of behaviour of bringing in bills that don't actually accomplish their goals, was so weak that, in fact, the government actually didn't put out a press release on it. Not only was it not in the platform, not only was it not in the MacKinnon report; the government was so ashamed of bringing forward a piece of legislation like this that simply didn't have anything in it and didn't come from anything other than perhaps the Finance minister's congratulations from his own caucus that they even neglected to put out a news release on this, right? Mr. Chair, that's pretty shocking. I don't think that once, when we were in government for four years, we neglected to put out a news release on a piece of legislation. That's the most basic thing, right? You hit "reply all" in the e-mail and you go: "Hey, everybody. We're introducing a bill, and it has these, like, five things in it." Well, in this case, like, two things in it.

Mr. Chair, that is the basis of what we're trying to talk about today, the basis of this bill we're trying to explain. What is it accomplishing, and why is it accomplishing these goals? We simply don't have the answers. The government simply is unable to provide those answers or is unwilling to provide those answers. They haven't been standing in this place, they haven't been explaining to Albertans, they haven't been making sense of this bill, and I think Albertans will be disappointed. I think Albertans will be upset. They won't understand. They won't understand when they're going to see these big cuts, they won't understand when they're going to see things like police funding cut, they're not going to understand when they're going to see things like school board funding cut, and they're not going to understand when they're going to see things like social services funding cut, children's services funding cut, and all of these types of programs because this government refuses to actually accomplish the things that they were recommended to do, right? This government refuses to bring forward legislation that actually accepts this.

I'm optimistic that we'll be seeing an amendment here soon that addresses some of these concerns, that addresses some of these issues. I mean, I certainly don't think it will address the problem of this government being so ashamed that they wouldn't bring forward a news release on the issue. Luckily, we'll be able to speak to that. We'll be speaking to the public about that as well. I mean, it certainly doesn't address the fact that these government members have been unable to provide anything, any justification for why they

support the bill other than they think the Finance minister is doing a great job.

I mean, that's a little bit disappointing. It's a little bit disappointing that they go on and they speak about these issues, they speak about this legislation, they speak about the MacKinnon report and their platform and all these things and then can't even justify why this bill exists, right? They can't even justify where the idea for this bill comes from. The Finance minister can't even justify what the origin of a fixed budget period was versus the actual recommendation, which is a fixed budget date, right?

I mean, I'm looking forward to having some more conversations in this place. I know that there are going to be many opportunities for me to rise and speak to this bill and many other bills as well. As you know, Mr. Chair, here in committee we have the opportunity to speak as many times as we like as long as one of my friends here, one of my hon. colleagues, would give me the opportunity of rising in between my remarks to hopefully let me get a glass of water or something.

It's certainly going to be an interesting debate as we move forward because as we move forward, we're going to be seeing why this government, I think, doesn't want to put in a fixed date. I think they're going to have to explain that. I think they're going to have to get up and actually tell Albertans why they think the MacKinnon report was wrong, why they think they shouldn't have to follow the recommendations of the MacKinnon report. I'm excited to hear about that. I'm excited to hear why these government members are going to get up in this place, congratulate the Finance minister, and then speak as to why the MacKinnon report was wrong and instead they should be using a fixed budget period and not a fixed budget date.

That's something that I think is going to show what this government actually thinks of reports they don't agree with. It's going to actually show what these government members think about positions they don't agree with, and I think that's pretty exciting. It's pretty exciting that we'll be able to hear this from government members because it is a rare sight to see a government rise in this place and actually explain, right? It's pretty rare to see a government caucus member or even a minister rise and actually explain their legislation because this government as a pattern does not like to explain their legislation, does not like to consult on their legislation, does not like to actually justify their legislation to Albertans.

We've seen some very negative consequences from that, Mr. Chair, right? We've seen legislation go very poorly and have very adverse effects for many, many people across this province. We can see some of that happening right now. You can look at the effects of Bill 1, for example. Our e-mails are flooded with thousands of responses to that. There's so much going on in this place, and it's a little bit disappointing that the Finance minister couldn't find the time to make something happen in this bill. That's the really disappointing part. We spend so much time in this place debating important legislation, debating things that will make a difference positively and sometimes, in the majority of cases, I think, from legislation this government puts forward, negatively, that impact the lives of Albertans and the lives of our constituents.

Instead, the Finance minister uses the full might of his budget, uses the full might of his department, uses the full might of his platform and the MacKinnon report, except not really, and uses the full might of this to come forward with a piece of legislation that doesn't accomplish the things it sets out to do, doesn't actually speak to either the platform or the MacKinnon report, doesn't do any of these things.

Then government members get up and say: great job; you really do deserve to have that full ministry behind you, fighting to not

accomplish any of these goals and to not be able to explain any of these things. That's basically what this government is doing, right? That's basically what the government members who have spoken up to now have managed to do. They've explained that the minister is doing a great job because he's doing a great job and because this legislation is so great. That's basically what members of the government have been able to do.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to see if I can match the enthusiasm but maybe give poor *Hansard* a bit of a break after my friend and colleague from Edmonton-South. I thought I spoke fast. Wow.

You know, I think we've been having a good conversation this afternoon about the relative thinness of this piece of legislation and the fact that if you are going to bring in either a fixed budget window or a fixed budget day, there should be some specificity to it. Otherwise, why are we here? Why are we even having this conversation?

Certainly, my friend and colleague from Edmonton-South really, I think, did a good job of saying that it's just kind of odd that we would be having this kind of debate in a time, I think, when things are so serious for the people of Alberta. We're in the middle of a recession. We've had tens of thousands of jobs lost. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost income and security, and parents are feeling very stressed about the end of the school year and what is to come. You know, there's just a lot of really serious stuff happening right now in Alberta. To be debating a tiny little piece of legislation that doesn't really, I guess, clarify anything in terms of the budget-making process or help communities plan for the future and what their budgetary allocations are going to be, because there's no sanction if the government doesn't follow the law, well, I mean, it's just quite silly, Mr. Chair.

We're going to endeavour to help out a little bit, so we will be moving an amendment. I have the copies here, Mr. Chair. If you could just guide me through what the process is now because I haven't done this since the social distancing time.

The Deputy Chair: Sure. The easiest process is to just grab them.

Ms Phillips: Okay.

The Deputy Chair: They will bring us copies.

Ms Phillips: Do I need the original?

The Deputy Chair: We need the original.

If anybody would like them to share a copy with you in this House, just put up your hand. Otherwise, we'll just put them onto the tabling tables in the back corners.

If the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West would please just read it into the record, and we will continue.

Ms Phillips: Thank you. I would like to move an amendment to Bill 4, Fiscal Planning and Transparency (Fixed Budget Period) Amendment Act, 2020, to be amended in section 2 in the proposed section 4.1 as follows: (a) in subsection (1) by striking out "during the month of February" and substituting "on the third Thursday of the month of February" and (b) by striking out subsection (2) and substituting the following:

(2) If, for the purpose of holding a general election, the Legislative Assembly is dissolved at any time between August 31 and March 1 of a fiscal year, the responsible Minister shall, no

later than 120 days after the day on which the general election is held, table in the Legislative Assembly the main estimates for the fiscal year that immediately follows that general election.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Just for the benefit of the House, this amendment will be referred to during debate as A1.

Please continue.

4:00

Ms Phillips: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to introduce amendment A1 to Bill 4 just as some introductory comments, and then I think I will turn the matters over to my hon. colleagues. One of the reasons for this is, as we discussed, you know, having a window. If you are going to do this, let's actually give people some certainty. The third Thursday of the month of February is quite customary in any event. That's why that is there as it is. It's been in and around that time for many, many years, most budgets, not all.

The second section, Mr. Chair, deals with the advent of an election. Oftentimes, because of our fixed election window legislation, that was brought in by the Redford government, which we all sort of – again, it was this kind of window idea. You know, I actually don't really object to it because in any event I do like the predictability of it. But I also am one of those people who really clings to some of the Westminster parliamentary traditions, so having that piece of Americanization of a fixed election date I was always a little bit uncomfortable with. But if there is a general election in the window prior to February, basically, the responsible minister shall bring a budget 120 days after the general election.

The point of that is to give communities, municipalities, schools, postsecondary institutions, and others, but in particular schools – and we saw this problem in really stark relief this last spring, 2019. When schools can't plan for the September school year, if they don't know what their budgetary allocations are – and there was this really tough period of time after the 2019 election when school boards were really fumbling around in the dark in terms of how they were going to best serve kids and parents and families come September because they didn't have a budget.

This would go some way to solving that problem and making sure that the folks that this Chamber serves – that is to say, not ourselves but our constituents, our communities, our school boards, our municipalities, our various agencies, boards, and commissions, our law enforcement, our first responders, all of those folks that the decisions that we make here affect – have some certainty in a timely way after an election, not just at the whim of the government, when they feel like maybe politically it's a good time to do whatever they're going to do.

This solves two of those problems within this legislation, Mr. Chair, and that is why we have moved the amendment. I hope that the members of the House take it in the spirit in which it's intended, which is that if we're going to have this bill, let's strengthen it up a little bit, make it real. I think that it's something that we can support.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen to join debate.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm honoured to rise today to speak on this amendment. Just a couple of things to say here kind of addressing some of the comments that have been made by the members prior speaking on this even before the amendment was moved. In particular, there were some comments about being embarrassed from the member who spoke earlier. I can't remember

his constituency, but I did call a point of order on him, so that should bring some clarity to it. What is embarrassing is a number of the things that this opposition has done in this Chamber since coming back after Christmas, particularly things like Bill 202. Bill 202 was an affront to the legal system, and that was an embarrassment. I am surprised that members of that side would even support something like that. That was certainly embarrassing.

What's also embarrassing is that those members would actually have the audacity to come in here and talk about lack of consultation when we're looking at the opposition that, when in government, introduced the single-largest tax increase in the history of this province without consultation, Mr. Chair. That is embarrassing.

What's also embarrassing is coming in here and complaining about the kinds of legislation that we're debating because it doesn't directly relate to COVID. There are a number of bills on here that aren't directly related to COVID but nevertheless are important. I would never apologize to the opposition for asking them to do their jobs and be in this Chamber and actually debate legislation that is important to Albertans, that we've been asked to bring. Complaining about being here is embarrassing.

What's also embarrassing, a little bit, is the idea – I mean, looking at the track record of the opposition, this idea of February, Mr. Chair: if they were in government, this amendment would probably say April because, heaven knows, these guys never wanted to sit here any time before March. [interjections] Heaven forbid they'd be in the Chamber to do their job, and while I'm talking, I'm hearing . . .

Chair's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika. However, the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika is the one with the call right now. I think this is actually in response to previous comments made by another member from the other side of the House from the Member for Cardston-Siksika, and given that he is the individual with the call, I would expect that if – I enjoy a good heckling like anyone else, but if it continues, then I will of course call this House to order, and we will elevate the circumstances from that moment on. Going forward, the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika is the only one with the call.

Please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schow: I'd like to thank that member there for chiming in. I'm glad she's actually paying attention, but I did just mention the amendment. I'm glad that you're paying attention to this debate.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but I would say: please direct your comments through the chair as well. Thank you. Please continue.

Mr. Schow: Through you to that member, Mr. Chair, I just look at this, and I think that it is so ironic that the members opposite would come in here and talk about things that are embarrassing when the greatest embarrassment is a number of the things that those members did when they were in government. I think there's just so much to say here, and I'm not going to go into all of it at the moment because I think, honestly, there's so much to say.

In any event, I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak on this amendment.

With that, Mr. Chair, I adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 7

Responsible Energy Development Amendment Act, 2020

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments at this time? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 7, Responsible Energy Development Amendment Act, 2020. I spoke to this bill before, and I reiterated our commitment that we do agree in principle that for greater certainty of everyone involved with our industry, we need to have a streamlined process. We need to have timelines that people can be assured of, that things will be moving smoothly.

But at the same time I think it's important that we also take consultations and assessments involved in the process very seriously. In particular, when we talk about consultations and assessments, we are also talking about – for the most part, consultation also relates to indigenous rights and indigenous communities. When we were in government, we supported indigenous consultation, and we actually worked with them to develop their capacity to build that consultation, build that capacity for them to be part of the process.

4:10

I think we need to be very careful when we are setting some kind of arbitrary timelines because we have many examples in the past that we can learn from where when we walk roughshod over indigenous rights, when we try to create shortcuts, things end up in court and do cause further delays. That's happened with Northern Gateway. That happened with the Trans Mountain pipeline. Those examples, I guess, necessitate the need for the government to take consultations very seriously, in particular when it comes to consultation with the indigenous communities, because their right to consultation is enshrined in the Canadian Constitution and it's their constitutional right to be consulted.

With that backdrop, I would like to move an amendment which reads: that Bill 7, Responsible Energy Development Amendment Act, 2020, be amended in section 5 by striking the proposed section 60(3) and substituting the following: “(3) A regulation made under this section . . .”

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you. I think that just for the purposes of effective debate what we will do is that we will circulate the amendment first so the members have an opportunity to see it, and then after we'll read it into the record. This, for the benefit, also, once debate restarts, will be referred to as amendment A1.

Thank you, hon. member, if you could please continue. If you could do me a favour and just restart reading it into the record, that would be appreciated by me. Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair, and I will.

The Member for Calgary-McCall to move that Bill 7, Responsible Energy Development Amendment Act, 2020, be amended in section 5 by striking the proposed section 60(3) and substituting the following:

- (3) A regulation made under this section
 - (a) prevails over any rule that is made or amended by the Regulator with which it conflicts or is inconsistent to the extent of the conflict or inconsistency, and
 - (b) must be construed so as to uphold existing aboriginal and treaty rights recognized and affirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 and not construed so as to abrogate or derogate from those rights.

This amendment is important for a number of reasons. I think, first and foremost, it sends a strong signal, it sends a strong message to indigenous communities that this Legislature will respect and uphold the rights that are guaranteed under the Constitution.

Secondly, I think this amendment is a reminder as well that when we do assessments, when we do consultations, we learn from the past projects – how they were dealt with, how consultations were done in those projects – and learn from the court decisions respecting consultation on those projects and make sure that for any future projects we take consultation seriously and we get consultation right to avoid any delays and to avoid ending up in lengthy court battles with indigenous communities.

With that, I urge all members of this House that they support this important amendment. This will make this bill better. This will send a clear message to our indigenous communities that we as legislators respect and uphold those rights. It's important that we do so because more recently the government has taken steps, the government has made announcements that are cause for concern for many indigenous communities. I remember last year the government was talking about selling Crown lands in the Treaty 8 area. That was certainly cause for concern for First Nations across Treaty 8 because they want to be consulted. They have those rights in those lands. They have vested interests in those lands, so certainly that caused confusion, and that announcement or that conversation was not well received by indigenous communities across this province.

Secondly, I think that it's important that we do so because more recently AER suspended environmental monitoring, and they did that without any consultation with indigenous communities across the province. We have asked the government many times about that, and they were saying that that's an AER decision, and they were hesitant to intervene in that decision notwithstanding that they had the power to do so. Then we found out that indigenous communities wrote to this government that they are not happy with that decision, and they wanted government to overturn that, they wanted government to reinstate monitoring, and they wanted government to consult them going forward in decisions that impact their rights, that impact their communities.

For that reason I think that it's an opportunity for this government to clear that confusion and make this a part of this legislation and send a clear message that in resource development, yes, we want certainty, yes, we want clear timelines, but that will not be done at the expense of indigenous communities' treaty and aboriginal rights. That's why I'm urging the entire House to support this amendment.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen to speak.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this amendment to Bill 7, the Responsible Energy Development Amendment Act, 2020. I would like to recommend to the House that this amendment be adopted because it is recognizing something that the courts have already indicated is not only necessary but required by law.

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

The government can proceed with this act, if it likes, without this amendment, but the consequence will be that they will be setting themselves up for a lawsuit from First Nations communities because it's a clear violation of decisions that have been made recently in this province. The courts in this province have recently

come down with a decision with regard to the Fort MacKay versus Proper Petroleum controversy, that the government is required by law to recognize treaty rights in the decisions affecting resource extraction in their treaty lands. It's a clear decision that's been made. It's been handed down by the courts in this province in recent weeks. I think that if the government wishes to defy the courts and have a constitutional challenge on their hands, I guess that would be consistent with their previous behaviour but not consistent with any of the declarations that have been made that they respect indigenous rights in this province.

4:20

Frequently I have asked this government to take a stand on indigenous rights, and inevitably they say the right things, but when it comes down to actually doing things, they don't do the right things. That's very problematic. I'm concerned that the government has sat down to make a bill that was directly affecting a primary concern of the Treaty 8 nations and, of course, all nations in this province and neglected to consult with the nations that have successfully won court cases on this very issue. I'm very concerned with how the government feels like they can deny the rules that courts have laid out in recent weeks and deny everything they say about honouring the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and their commitment to reconciliation and then present a bill to the House that turns all of those apparent good words that they have said on its head.

I'm concerned that this government has put forward a bill that amends things with the intention of favouring the extraction industries over the rights of indigenous people in this province. It's not like they couldn't have sat down with the indigenous people and come up with a much more complex and thoughtful bill that introduced changes to the process. I know because we went through a two-year process of discussing with the nations when we were the government about some of the changes that they would like to see, not because the First Nations are against resource extraction; it's because they want to really, truly be partners in resource extraction. I notice this government put this bill forward without any reference to any of the requests made by First Nations for changes in the consultation process regarding resource extraction. I mean, that's a complete denial of everything they've said about their commitment to indigenous people. How could you possibly do that? I can give some very specific examples about that.

For example, in our previous process one of the things that came out of our discussions with indigenous people was – the request was to “require proponents to involve First Nations and Metis Settlements in the development of consultation plans for large, complex projects that require Level 3 consultation.” That could have been in this bill. That could have been part of the process of how they were going to amend the AER process so that First Nations' concerns were, in fact, addressed, consistent with the court decisions on Fort MacKay versus Prosper Petroleum. You could have done that. You could have been onside with the law, could have been onside with reconciliation and onside with the Treaty 8 nations, but you chose not to do that.

Another thing they asked that I don't see in this bill is to “develop and implement clear and reasonable criteria for adjusting consultation timelines to respond to specific community circumstances/situations.” That directly relates to the content of this bill. That's a piece that was brought forward by First Nations, and you guys have completely neglected to include that in this bill. That's what this amendment is attempting to do. This amendment is attempting to bring some of that concern back into this. You say on one side of your mouth that you respect First Nations

communities in this province, and then you act differently. This is really unacceptable.

Another thing that the First Nations have been asking with regard to this consultation process is to change Alberta's definition of accommodation to

avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse impacts of a Crown decision on First Nations' Treaty rights or traditional uses, or Metis Settlement members' harvesting or traditional use activities, through measures such as: adjust project; develop mitigating measures; change proposed activity; attach terms and conditions to authorization; reject project; or provide financial compensation.

That's a very comprehensive, very clean request of this government, yet you completely neglected to include it in this bill.

It seems to me that there is a very difficult balance to be made in this province between resource extraction and the appropriate desire to have an efficient and satisfactory process for appropriate resource extraction and the balance with our moral and legal responsibilities to First Nations communities under the treaties that we have signed in this province and that we have said that we will agree to.

You have completely neglected that balance and have simply made a decision to ignore the requests from the First Nations about how consultation on resource extraction could be conducted and instead went to your pals in the resource extraction industry and said: "Whatever you do, it doesn't really matter what the First Nations think about it. We're going to do what you want us to do. Too bad for the nations. All those things we said about concern for First Nations and respect for reconciliation really don't mean anything if we can build our tight relationship with a few members of industry." It's completely unacceptable. I don't know how you can sit here and allow yourselves to conduct yourselves in this way.

Another one that I notice is completely neglected in this is the request from Métis settlements and First Nations to "invite First Nations and Metis Settlements to provide a written submission prior to" final adequacy decisions, which actually applies only to level 3 consultations. I notice that's not in here. I can go on – I've got 14 of these – and I certainly will, as we talk about this bill in the future, introduce more of these ideas because these are ideas that were built in a two-year process of speaking to First Nations and Métis settlements about how it is they'd like to see the consultation process change.

It really is disturbing to see this government come in and throw out a two-year-long process with our First Nations and Métis partners after you pretended to believe in appropriate reconciliation with First Nations. Clearly, it didn't matter at all when it came time to write a bill, did it? It didn't matter when it was time to sidle up to your buddies and get something good for you and good for them. It doesn't matter how that affects the First Nations at all. Very disappointed. Very disappointed to see the government act in this particular way, a government that is free to wag their finger whenever they get a chance to raise their eyebrows at us on this side of the House, yet don't have the moral strength to stand up for it when they're actually writing a bill.

I think it's important that we accept this amendment because, as the amendment says, we must uphold existing aboriginal and treaty rights, recognized and affirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act. It's the law. You're neglecting the law. You're neglecting your relationship with the First Nations people.

Just this week the grand chief of Treaty 8 put out a public statement about his concern about how this government is neglecting the treaty that has been signed between the Treaty 8 nations and this government and has made it really clear that when you do these kinds of things, they will be responding by taking you to court.

4:30

Now, we know that it'll take some time for them to get this to the Supreme Court of Canada, but we know, from all the decisions that have been made up till this time, that they'll win when they get there. The courts have been very clear about our responsibilities regarding First Nations' rights under the Constitution with regard to the signing of treaties. But you know that you can get away with this for a while until the courts force your hand. A completely unacceptable moral position to take, that you will do something that you know is wrong, but you know you can get away with it for a little while.

I think it's important that we adopt this amendment and that we stand up and actually commit ourselves to doing something for First Nations to recognize the fundamental thing that they have asked of us, and that is to respect their rights under the law. It seems pretty simple in a democracy that one would want to do that: respect citizens' rights under the law. You can do all of the performative things that say that you respect First Nations and that you believe in reconciliation, but if your behaviour puts a lie to that, then it's unacceptable.

I recommend to this House that they adopt this amendment, and I look forward to having further conversations about the moral integrity required to ensure that your words match your actions. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The committee has under consideration amendment A1. Are there any other comments or questions to be offered with respect to this amendment? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A pleasure to see you in that seat, occupying with a smile a place of honour in the House. I look forward to seeing you there more often. The debate, of course, this afternoon is one that's very, very important, and it involves very timely matters that the world is focused on right now. That happens to be inclusion, inclusion of all those parties to the big issues in our society that have felt left out, that have not been enabled to participate fully in our society's operation. That goes right to the heart of the matter here with respect to the amendment that we are looking at today, amending Bill 7, the Responsible Energy Development Amendment Act, 2020.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I'm of two minds, Mr. Chair, with respect to this amendment. It's certainly an amendment that I'm very grateful has come forward, but I'm also saddened that it seems to be necessary to bring it forward. Realistically, in this House and in this Legislature and all Legislatures across this country and certainly, I would think, globally, this type of an amendment shouldn't be necessary. It should go without saying that the rights of indigenous people in consideration of energy projects and in the approval process of the types of energy projects that the AER will consider, will undertake to offer to the public should be inclusive right off the bat. Aboriginal and treaty rights and recognition of those should not have to be specifically demanded of each individual regulator that might be holding hearings on energy development or other public projects that would require public hearings.

Here we are at a time when the world is really watching, and we're insisting as an opposition, by bringing forward this amendment, that indigenous populations of this country, the First Nations, have their voice, that they rightfully have enshrined in the Constitution, respected and recognized in the process of approving energy development projects in this country.

I of course, like I think all members of this House, have many hundreds of First Nations people living in my riding. While it is an urban riding and not home to a First Nations reserve, like many ridings across this province and throughout this country we'll find that the indigenous population lives amongst us in an urban setting by the thousands and are part of our population, and their voice needs to be heard and recognized in every avenue of our social organization. That is certainly including the Alberta Energy Regulator and its deliberations over energy projects as well.

Too long have we failed as a society to absolutely enshrine and recognize the value of our indigenous voices. The official recognition that we now are putting in place with the proposal of this amendment is something that was brought forward and enhanced by, I think, a very timely process. The TRC, as of course it's called across Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and its, I believe, 96 recommendations that were brought forward was a real wake-up call to this country and to Albertans, especially to those who were nonracialized, let's say, formerly known as the white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, those amongst us of European descent who are quite often blissfully unaware of the very difficult lives that many racialized groups amongst us and in particular the indigenous population of our country were having to live.

I remember hearing stories about even on farms in the Thorhild area, where the only times that generations of people who were born in my mother's era – the only time that she would have heard about the indigenous population wasn't by having schoolmates in her classes, but it was of itinerant farm labourers who would come in the fall to help with harvest, and they would live in granaries or some type of tent accommodation. It was labour that was relied upon, and it was hard work, but that was the only interaction, really, short of perhaps some indigenous participation in the Thorhild rodeo, that most folks of my mom's era would actually ever get with the indigenous population.

That type of almost wilful blindness is something that has to be a thing of the past, and I think we're seeing today, this week, this month, these past couple of months in this province, you know, seeing 15,000 people on the grounds of the Legislature talking about Black Lives Matter and the racialized population demanding that they be heard, recognized, valued, respected, and not subject to some of the horrific treatment that they have been subjected to. In this day and age it's important to not only say that we believe, as we do in this amendment, that indigenous, First Nations people need to be heard via the process of the energy regulators in this province but we enshrine that and make it clearly visible. It's kind of like saying one thing and backing it up with our behaviour. Enshrining this in the legislation, Mr. Chair, is the type of thing that our First Nations population, I believe, rightfully deserve and have been demanding. Lip service is something that First Nations people in this country and globally have been subjected to for years. They hear lots of things.

4:40

I remember reading a book, that I think is something that all members of this House should avail themselves of, when I was in university on the study of First Nations people. I did some courses in First Nations history and aboriginal title to land in this country under the tutorship of the then chair of the anthropology department at the U of A, Dr. Michael Ash. The book was written by Dr. George Manuel, and it was called *Fourth World*. Of course, we've heard of the First World, the Second World, the Third World. We've heard of third-world countries. Well, George Manuel referred to indigenous populations globally as being members of what he called the Fourth World, as the title of his tome reiterated.

Of course, it looked at the treatment of First Nations people, aboriginal people, indigenous people – various names were used in that book – globally, and the pattern has been pretty systemic throughout the world. Whether it be western countries or even more dictatorial countries, whether it be the United States or Canada, no matter what continent it would have been on – it could have been New Zealand, Australia, North America, South America – the treatment, primarily by European powers, colonializing powers of fourth-world people, or indigenous populations, has been a woefully similar story and a very sad tale, indeed.

It's in a small way to recognize the horrific wrongdoing that's been done over generations to First Nations people that this amendment is brought forward. It's in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, and it's an affirmation of our acceptance, of our responsibility to truly reconcile. That, of course, I hope, is something that we're doing and being seen as doing in a very genuine way by our First Nations residents in this province by bringing forward this amendment and making sure that nothing in the legislation guiding the policies of the energy regulators in this province during the process of analysis and evaluation of an energy infrastructure proposal should be done to abrogate or derogate from those rights of the First Nations people who would be affected by such a project.

I once again ask hon. members – even though the book was written probably 30 years ago now, it's, I think, a very critical tome. If one doesn't have the historical sense or the perspective of how internationally, how globally the connection between indigenous people has been cemented by the colonializing powers, George Manuel's *Fourth World* will help give all members a significant understanding of the importance of changing our ways and doing so in a way that reflects our new-found recognition that reconciliation must follow the light of truth that we've seen in this country shine upon us and actually make things happen. That recognition and acceptance of past wrongs is reflected by actually doing something like changing one's behaviour or by being inclusive. That's what we're doing with this amendment to Bill 7, ensuring that the regulator does nothing to derogate or abrogate from the constitutional rights that our First Nations people have in this country.

I know that when I talk with people in my constituency, First Nations people who live in Edmonton-McClung, to feel fully part of the community that they live in rather than being sort of the invisible population that works under the radar that only ends up getting heard when they're screaming and yelling or when they're reacting to some wrongdoing or they're resisting oppression, these small measures that we're taking here are important in their lives.

This is a bill that will touch upon not only individuals in my own constituency whose relatives may live closer to energy projects, but there are pipelines running right through my constituency, Mr. Chair, and it happens to be a significant part of the Trans Mountain pipeline that runs through my constituency. For even the west-end residents of Edmonton-McClung to know and to read an amendment, if it should be passed in this House today, that demands that the First Nations population who live amongst us even in west Edmonton must have their rights recognized and upheld by an energy regulator as it deliberates on a project that goes through their neighbourhood in west Edmonton.

I'm sure it may not be the subject of everybody's conversation at the Safeway store, but if indeed there comes a period of time when maybe there's some objection – and I know there were some difficulties with getting the pipeline through the community, crossing the river into my community, but the company worked hard and did consult with the community and was able to deliberate. But if, indeed, there had been maybe a little bit more consultation and active effort to seek out the indigenous population who live

right in west Edmonton, it may have been a slightly different procedure. It may have been a little quicker.

I know one of the route problems was the destruction of local flora, trees along the pipeline right-of-way and what could be done. People were pretty shocked and upset that the trees had to be cleared because they had to have an overhead clear, visible sightline to the pipeline right-of-way, and it took a lot of time. Some of the trees, the larger ones, had to be downed, but there was an effort to replace or resituate some of the trees from the pipeline right-of-way to a nearby piece of land that would maintain the green nature of that space that this pipeline was travelling through as it crossed the river into my constituency.

I can only speculate now because I certainly didn't hear. I have no knowledge of any specific effort to seek out the voices of the local indigenous population right in Edmonton-McClung, where the pipeline was going through. I can only speculate as to the different pace that these negotiations might have taken between the community and the company laying the pipeline, the twinning of that piece of pipeline, in fact, if indeed the indigenous community voice had a mandated seat at the table.

That, indeed, makes one pause on a small scale to consider that, you know, if it can have potentially a local stirring effect right at the constituency level, just think on a pan-provincial level and a national level what that recognition would mean to not only the First Nations people who are having their rights enshrined in this amendment but also to the population in general, the Alberta population, who would perhaps have their heads snapped back a little bit and say: oh – you know what? – we didn't really think about that, and you're right; there is another voice at this table that needs to be heard. Guess what? In hearing that voice, there's a value to it. There's a different angle to the story. There's a philosophy, an ideology there that we haven't been listening to forever in this country. It's a philosophy and ideology. It's a perspective with respect to an attitude towards nature or our natural surroundings and towards how we approach the development of energy projects in this province, in this country. It's one that looks beyond the life of a project. It's one that looks seven generations beyond the here and now.

4:50

While many say that the indigenous philosophy is one focused on being in the here and now rather than becoming, as the western philosophies often espouse – one is, in a western philosopher's mind, a product of one's plans whereas in the First Nations philosophy, if I've got my studies right from Dr. Ash's classes, we are focused on being. However, being doesn't mean just simply this particular point in time. It means being seven generations from now as well. That's the sort of oral history, the oral dogma that you'll find indigenous populations will judge their decisions that they have to make and will consider the long-term effects in a very in-depth way.

This amendment, Mr. Chair, is an effort to in some small way enshrine that long-term thinking and to attempt to exact some of the value that the First Nations population in this province can bring to the process of developing our energy resources in the future. Rather than seeing the First Nations population as an obstacle to energy development, one should see the value that they bring to the table as a very productive and positive force in ensuring that they are enshrined in our process forever.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members looking to join debate on A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to start my comments by thanking my hon. friend from Calgary-McCall for bringing forward this important amendment to this legislation. This amendment, I think, tries to strike the right balance between timeliness of review by the Alberta Energy Regulator with appropriate consultation with parties that will be affected by the decisions that the regulator will make.

I thought it might be valuable to talk about a couple of things. First of all, I want to go back to the foundations of the Alberta Energy Regulator and talk a little bit about the work that was done to set that regulator up and why I think this amendment is important to getting the regulator back to the original vision that was set out for it when it was created in 2013. I also want to talk a little bit and build on some of the comments my friend from Edmonton-McClung made about indigenous consultation because I think those are two really important considerations that we need to keep in mind when we decide how we're going to vote on this amendment.

Now, when the Alberta Energy Regulator was set up in 2013, the intention was to create the best-in-class energy regulator. A lot of the work that was done to inform what a best-in-class energy regulator would look like was done by a professor named Cary Coglianese. I'm sorry if I'm butchering the pronunciation. He's a professor at a university in Pennsylvania. He's widely lauded as one of the foremost academics with respect to regulators and how they perform their work. He said that any world-class regulator needs to be founded on "utmost integrity, empathic engagement, and stellar competence." Now, I won't address the issues of utmost integrity and stellar competence when it comes to the Alberta Energy Regulator. I think they're maybe falling short on those two goals. But with respect to empathic engagement we certainly see this government rushing to reduce or eliminate the role of the Energy Regulator to conduct this kind of empathic engagement and sacrifice engagement on the altar of timeliness.

You know, it's important to consider that a world-class regulator is not just measured – how well a regulator is doing is not just measured by how quickly it deals with applications and how quickly it processes those applications. It also needs to take into consideration other values such as environmental impacts and landowner and First Nations rights. I think that this bill, unless it's amended, would shift the balance in favour of timeliness at the expense of dealing with landowner and First Nations rights. I think that this amendment goes a long way towards rebalancing the Alberta Energy Regulator's dual purposes of proceeding with applications in a timely manner but also providing those decisions after having done adequate consultation.

I think that the premise upon which this bill was built is a faulty one. In the UCP platform and certainly in press releases and other communications that we've seen from the UCP since they've been elected to government, they've really mimicked or echoed the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers' talking points that our regulatory system is broken because we're not dealing with applications as efficiently as Texas. I'd like to just take a few minutes to discuss why that's a faulty system. In fact, when the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, or CAPP, talks about timeliness, they've pointed out in their submissions to the government that it takes four times as long to process an application in Alberta as it does in Texas and therefore the Alberta Energy Regulator needs to throw out its duty to consult and just get on with processing these applications as quickly as possible. Mr. Chair, nothing could be further from the truth.

CAPP has seriously skewed the data when it has compared Alberta's regulatory system with Texas. In fact, it's only a very, very small number of applications to the Energy Regulator that take four times longer than it does in Texas. Thousands and thousands

of applications are received by the Energy Regulator every year, and on average most of those applications are dealt with in two days, not two weeks, not two years. Almost all of the applications that the Alberta Energy Regulator deals with are dealt with in two days. So, you know, I would take issue with CAPP's assertion that the Energy Regulator is not doing its work fast enough because when the bulk of the applications are dealt with in two days, Mr. Chair, honestly, I don't know how much faster we could possibly process these applications unless, you know, it's the true intention of the government to throw out the regulatory process altogether. I don't know if that's true or not. They've certainly thrown out some important environmental protections during the pandemic, and it remains to be seen if those will be reinstated once the pandemic is over, but I digress.

The other issue that was related when CAPP made their submissions to the government that led to the introduction of this legislation, which I think will be made better by adopting the amendment that we're considering right now, is the issue of nonroutine applications. They've suggested, by skewing the data again, Mr. Chair, that the number of nonroutine applications has doubled.

5:00

I would submit to the members of the Legislature that, yes, in terms of the percentage of applications that the Energy Regulator gets, it has doubled, but we are talking about a minuscule number of applications. In 2018 the Alberta Energy Regulator had approximately 400 nonroutine applications that it was asked to deal with out of over 10,000 applications that it was asked to deal with. So a very, very small number of these applications have to go through additional scrutiny and are not completed within the two-day timeline that apparently CAPP wants to impose.

The issue with nonroutine applications is that the applicants haven't sufficiently met the needs of local people when they've made the application, so those things need to be scrutinized a little more closely, and that's what the bill, unless it's amended, is trying to end. I would submit to members of the Legislature that this bill is trying to fix a problem that doesn't exist. We have an energy regulator that is dealing with most of the applications in a very timely way. In fact, we run a serious risk of shutting out important voices in the regulatory process if we proceed with this bill without the amendment that's before us.

I think that this is indicative of a pattern that the government has established. It only listens to the biggest, most powerful industry voices, and it shuts out everyday Albertans. We're seeing that with the bill that's before us now. We've seen this with the rescindment of the coal policy that has governed coal development in this province for the last 50 years. We've seen it with the issue of parks. This government doesn't intend to listen to the voices of everyday Albertans and is intent on only listening to the voices of the most powerful, wealthy corporations that seek to do business in this province.

I think that by adopting this amendment, we will at least rebalance the power here and give the opportunity for everyday Albertans to at least have input in a small number of applications. I don't think that we will run the risk of shutting down or hobbling the regulatory system in any way if we adopt this amendment. In fact, we'll only strengthen the ability of the Energy Regulator to conduct the empathic engagement that it was initially intended to do.

Now, clause (b) of the amendment deals with the duty of the regulator to uphold existing aboriginal and treaty rights recognized and affirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act. You know, I will echo my friend from Edmonton-McClung's concerns around

this being a time to understand what indigenous voices are saying and improve our systems so that we are much more inclusive. Now, I can't speak with any knowledge or experience about the indigenous experience here in Alberta; I don't come from that community. I am probably the whitest person that anybody will ever meet. But it is incumbent upon me as a white person, I think, to understand what indigenous people have experienced in life in this country.

It's especially important, when we're considering this bill and this amendment, to understand what the experience of indigenous people has been with respect to resource extraction in the province. I found a very good article that explained very succinctly the experience of indigenous folks. It was written by Rob Houle, and it's dated June 1, 2020. He said that when resources were turned over to the province of Alberta – I can't remember the date; it was in the early '30s – indigenous people weren't consulted. In fact, not only were they not consulted, but they weren't even allowed to participate in the process whatsoever. They weren't allowed to engage any legal counsel. They were just shut out of the process entirely.

You know, as a result of the history of Alberta ignoring and not properly consulting indigenous communities, right now on the books, according to the 2018-19 public accounts of Alberta, the government of Alberta is facing over \$94 billion worth of lawsuits from indigenous communities. So I think those two facts, the facts that indigenous communities have continually been shut out of resource development in this province and that the government continues to engage in lawsuits because they haven't done an adequate job of consulting with First Nations before they're dealing with these extraction issues – it's important for us to adopt this amendment so that we can be better partners with indigenous Albertans when it comes to the development of our resources.

Because Albertans need to have their voices heard in the regulatory processes, especially indigenous voices, that have been too long shut out of the process, I think it's important for all members of the House to vote in favour of this amendment and improve the work that the Alberta Energy Regulator does on behalf of the people of Alberta.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Chair, I move that we rise and report progress on Bill 7, Responsible Energy Development Amendment Act, 2020.

[Motion carried]

The Deputy Chair: Just a quick reminder for the House that we will also be reporting progress on Bill 4 as we previously voted on that.

The committee shall now rise and report.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche . . .

Mr. Hanson: Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

The Speaker: Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. It's my first day.

Mr. Hanson: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 4 and Bill 7. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader and Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to ask for unanimous consent to revert to Notices of Motions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Notices of Motions (reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to make a correction to the notice provided for Government Motion 22 by the Government House Leader. The substance of the motion is to remain the same, but the reference to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future should instead be replaced with the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship.

Thank you.

5:10 Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 17 Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020

[Adjourned debate June 9: Mr. Deol]

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone wishing to add additional comments? The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020. As the critic for mental health and addictions I feel that it's something that is actually an important topic that we're discussing in the House. Now, just to give a little context and a little bit of history around the act, historically it has had a sunset clause in it which has automatically always referred it to a committee to look at the act, the implications of the act, and to see if at any point it should be revised. Most recently that happened in 2016, and there were recommendations that were made by the Standing Committee on Families and Communities, some of which were followed through on and some that are still outstanding.

What has happened since then, however, and what has brought us here today, of course, is the court challenge for an individual that was treated at the Foothills hospital in Calgary. Now, what we know from the court challenge and from the rulings that occurred is that there were recommendations made to the government that needed to be addressed in regard to ensuring that individuals' rights were not being infringed upon when these orders were being put forward or imposed on the individuals by our medical teams and our health professionals.

We know that the court ruling stated that section 2, sections 4(1), 4(2), 7(1), 8(1) and 8(3) were considered Charter infringements. Now, the interesting thing about the Charter infringements is that what we see in the legislation as of right now is that we've only amended section 2 and section 8(1). Currently section 4 has not been amended. Sections 7 and 8 have also not been amended. This

brings up some questions around why only certain sections of the act have been amended and why different parts of the court ruling have not been addressed specifically in this piece of legislation.

Now, in addition to that, I have been starting to hear from stakeholders around these pieces of legislation. There were recommendations made to the Minister of Health by a variety of stakeholders in regard to what they would have liked to have seen in the changes to this piece of legislation given the fact that it was being opened.

Although I appreciate that, you know, the Health minister chose to address specifically some of the recommendations and rulings by the lower courts, there was an opportunity here to do some really great consultation and actually implement some of the consultation and some of the recommendations that our community partners have made. My understanding in speaking with some of the community partners is that that is not actually what happened, that that is not the case, that the pieces that were amended were only specific to the court case and, again, not all of them. The opportunity to strengthen this piece of legislation and to actually make it work with the different community partners that are actually supporting individuals when they are not being, you know, dealt with in health care settings would have been something that would have been beneficial.

We do know that community treatment orders are part of this piece of legislation, specifically in section 37. When we look at community treatment orders, we're looking at the fact that an individual is actually being ordered to maintain treatment while living in the community. Well, we know that there are a variety of agencies that provide additional supports to individuals when they're living in the community, and they had recommendations around how they could continue to support individuals but ensure that the legislation was enabling them to be able to do that effectively.

These are some considerations that have come forward in consultation that I have been having, recognizing that we've only had the bill for a few days, so I'm sure I will be hearing from more partners and that there will be more requests for consultation.

Because of that, Mr. Speaker, and because of the history of how this piece of legislation historically has been treated, I would like to move an amendment. I will wait until you have a copy of it.

The Speaker: Thank you. You can grab the original for the table and me a copy, and then I'll call upon you to proceed if you wouldn't mind.

Hon. members, this will be referred to as REF1. If you are requiring a copy of the amendment, please indicate by show of hands. The LASS will be happy to deliver you one. If not, there will be additional copies on the tabling table.

The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader to proceed.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will read the amendment into the record for all to be able to know. I move that second reading of Bill 17, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 17, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Now, again, I feel like this amendment is in order and is appropriate, and I think that it would be something that the government should look at and consider.

There are a couple of reasons for this, the first reason being that this is traditionally how this piece of legislation has been dealt with, recognizing that it usually has a five-year sunset clause in it, but given this court ruling, that needed to be accelerated.

Now, the reason that this typically is referred to the Families and Communities Committee is because this gives the opportunity for individuals who are impacted by this piece of legislation – so family members, individuals that may have been under a mandatory treatment order, a community treatment order – to come to the Legislature to speak to their elected representatives and to talk about their experiences and how things could be done differently.

I do recognize that there was, of course, this court challenge and that there were rulings based on that, but there was an opportunity here, and the opportunity was to make sure that all Albertans had a say in how this act is used and how it impacts Albertans. I think the important thing we have to recognize is that the Mental Health Amendment Act really restricts an individual's freedoms. It can and is used to ensure that individuals who may be a harm to themselves or to others can be treated in a hospital setting without necessarily having the full consent of the individual. They are diagnosed and they are assessed by medical professionals that deem that them having access to treatment is in their best interest and therefore overrides what we would typically consider our own individual freedoms.

We know this because the court has ruled that the use of this act in the way that it was implemented and the requirements for how people were reporting and how the reassessments were being done and the ability of individuals to have access to legal representation and, of course, advocates were not upheld in this piece, so because of that, we need to take this piece of legislation quite seriously.

5:20

Again, I think that this is an opportunity to send this back to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities, to hear from Albertans, and to really look at how these orders are used and how we can ensure that the voices of the individuals that are being impacted by this piece of legislation are being heard. There might be a conversation around maybe legal counsel as a mandatory referral. Maybe that goes to legal aid. Maybe that ensures that there is an opportunity to ensure that there is some form of legal representation when these orders are put in place. Maybe it has to do with ensuring that we expand and we look at the role of the mental health advocate and whether or not, when these orders are put in place, there needs to be an automatic referral to the advocate to ensure that the advocate is actually sitting down with individuals and making sure that they understand what their legal abilities are and how they can work through the process of these assessments.

It would also be looking at how Alberta Health Services ensures patients and families are provided the necessary information that they are required to have so that they understand the difference between a community treatment order and actually being held under a treatment plan within a hospital or how they could even have a community treatment order eliminated. There are lots of opportunities here.

Again, I have to reinforce to the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions as well as to the Minister of Health that I am hearing from community members, I am hearing from agencies that say that they may have been consulted with but that the recommendations and the ideas that they had around how this piece of legislation could be expanded and dealt with have not been respected, nor have they been implemented in this piece of legislation. Again, having them be able to come to the committee, to have their voices heard, to be able to provide the recommendations to the members of the committee so that they can determine whether or not this piece of legislation is actually doing what it's intended to do and that they can also, you know, make sure they understand what a qualified health professional is – I don't know if the actual conversation has happened with the Psychiatric

Association or the United Nurses association or the physicians around whether or not they're open to the qualified health professionals and expanding that role.

In fact, if you look at the definition within the act, it also includes, like, audiologists and speech pathologists and a variety of different professionals that are not specific to working with individuals with mental health. You know, they may have some concerns with being able to have this ability and this power within a piece of legislation that is definitely outside the scope of their typical practice. So there are a variety of different things that I think the committee could look at.

I also think there needs to be a recognition by the government that they actually removed the sunset clause out of the piece of legislation. Now there is no requirement for this piece of legislation to even be reviewed ever again, which we have a fundamental problem with on this side of the House because, again, this is a piece of legislation that has the capacity to infringe on the freedoms of an individual. Now the government is saying: whatever changes we make, there is no requirement for a committee to review that legislation. The sunset clause was put in place to have this legislation reviewed every five years for a specific reason, and that was to ensure that the powers of this bill were adjusted as needed to ensure that we didn't have situations like that which occurred at Calgary's Foothills hospital.

There are definitely some concerns in this piece of legislation and, I think, concerns that Albertans have a right to talk about. They should be able to come to a committee and have those discussions. I think the fact that this government has removed the sunset clause out of the legislation is actually speaking to the fact that they don't want to hear from Albertans in regard to this, which I find deeply concerning. I think that all members of this House should support this amendment to refer it to the Families and Communities Committee and hear from your constituents and ensure that when it comes to supporting individuals with mental health, we are doing the right thing and we are making sure that their abilities and their freedoms as individuals are protected as much as being able to address their mental health concerns.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak to the referral motion, REF1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise on Bill 17, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020, and specifically speak to the referral amendment. I've not had a chance to speak to this bill. I've had some time to read through it and to listen to the comments of my colleague. You know, I want to use this opportunity to talk about mental health broadly. I don't think I've had the chance too much in this House to speak to the importance of mental health. I'm certain they're all working very hard right now and likely not watching, but it's a good opportunity to give a shout-out to all the folks working in mental health and addictions right now, all those who are on the front lines, who are doing incredible work, work that's extremely hard at the best of times, let alone in the midst of a pandemic. So thank you to all those working on the front lines right now.

You know, I'm so proud of the work that our government did when it came to investing in mental health. It's an issue that's important to me for a number of reasons, the first of which is that I've struggled with my own mental health challenges in the past. It's hard to talk about. We all know that we've got much work to do when it comes to lifting the stigma around mental health. Trust me; it wasn't that long ago that I certainly wasn't able to speak

about it and to reach out. I'm proud to be able to talk about that now and to encourage folks, if they are struggling, to reach out as well. We know that COVID, the pandemic, has certainly exacerbated mental health crises not just here but across the province. So I'd encourage folks that there are supports and that you can just search mental health Alberta. There's a whole range of supports available.

I won't speak for a long time, but I'm looking forward to getting more on the record when it comes to Bill 17. I want to echo some of the comments that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Manning stated now, so I want to just follow up on my point there. I noted that there were a couple of reasons why it's so important that we speak to mental health. Like I said, I had my own personal experiences. But I also have the opportunity to represent a riding wherein we have the bulk of many of the social service agencies in Edmonton, which includes a number of organizations that are working directly with mental health and with folks struggling with addictions. We've got a number of the supervised consumption sites in our riding. As we know and as the data supports, many of those folks who are struggling with addictions, who are making use of the supervised consumption sites are experiencing mental health challenges as well.

You know, I see it. I see it in my neighbourhood every day. I see the effects of poor mental health on our communities. That's why I want all of us to really think about getting this piece of legislation, Bill 17, right. My biggest concern, as my esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Manning pointed out, is the lack of consultation. We have incredible folks on the front lines who work in mental health day in and day out, and they are telling us that while some of them had their voices accessed in consultation with the development of this bill, they've not seen a report. There are others who are saying that they weren't consulted. I would like to know: were folks with lived experience consulted as well?

These are the questions that we need to be asking. I think it's a perfect opportunity to bring this back to committee to ensure that we have a full range of voices, including folks working on the front lines, including folks with lived experience, and that they know that they've been heard on this one.

5:30

With that, I would like to again urge the House to consider our amendment for referral. Please take a look at this legislation. It's really important. As your own minister said – your own Minister of Health is on the record with media saying that we need to do the right thing, that we need to get this right. I agree, Minister. We need to get this right.

With that, I will adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

Firearms

20. 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 a chief firearms officer for Alberta designated by the government of Alberta in accordance with the Firearms Act (Canada).

[Adjourned debate June 9: Mr. Hanson]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has three minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Mr. Hanson: Not necessary, sir.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate?

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, we have problems in this country. I'd say that every country has some kind of issue or another, but in Canada we have an ongoing yearly concern with regard to motor vehicle crashes. Every year we are confronted by the unfortunate circumstance of so many lives cut short on our highways and roads. Last year, nationally, there were approximately 2,000 vehicle-related deaths, with about 10,000 serious injuries, serious life-altering injuries, caused not just by accidents but by dangerous and illegal use of these motor vehicles.

A Lamborghini, so often fetishized by car enthusiasts and celebrities alike, looks quite menacing. It instills the passive bystander with a feeling that this car can go really fast, and indeed it can. The Lamborghini Aventador can reach speeds of 100 kilometres per hour in just 2.9 seconds. It has a top speed of 360 kilometres per hour. Why would such a vehicle be available to Canadians when the top speed of any highway in Canada is only 120 kilometres per hour? For what purpose would this vehicle be required?

That is not all. In case my colleagues in this Assembly felt that I had a particular dislike of Lamborghinis, I assure you that I do not. The recent Porsche 918 Spyder, Ferrari 812 are also known for their impressive horsepower and top speeds. In fact, the Ferrari 812 is even called the Superfast, and I, for one, can't stand spiders. Maserati, BMW, Bugatti, McLaren, Aston Martin, and Bentley all purposely produce vehicles that are extremely fast and, as such, can violate the top speed limits in Canada and Alberta. Not only do these companies produce such products for wide-scale public consumption, but as I look more deeply into the issue, I was shocked to learn that every single major car manufacturer in this country produces vehicles that can easily violate the various traffic safety laws currently in force. Some of them also receive federally funds to do it.

What is required for this violation to occur, Mr. Speaker, is simply the will of the driver to do so. Not only that, but if the federal government is serious about meeting the obligations of the Paris climate change agreement, then the fuel-injected V12 engines used by some of these specific models I have mentioned may also find themselves far outside of new emission standards, not to mention current versions of such popular family vehicles as the Cadillac DTS or Chevrolet's Suburban. The most interesting fact about those two models is that the Prime Minister himself utilizes upwards of five of these vehicles in his government-funded motorcade.

But there really is nothing to fear. After all, every owner and operator of a vehicle in Canada has gone through an extensive government-structured and -mandated driver's education course. During this process they have learned the basics about vehicles and their lawful operations such as proper storage, maintenance, and the all-important pretrip vehicle inspection just to ensure that it is safe to drive, of course. Any potential driver must pass both a written

and a practical exam in order to prove that their knowledge of vehicle operations and traffic laws is adequate before being allowed to purchase and drive one of these impressive machines. Yet still there are accidents. There are even incidents of brutality and senselessness where whole families are sometimes lost and the tragedy of that loss ripples outward and affects the many.

So with this knowledge I ask this Assembly today, in support of Government Motion 20, why the Prime Minister decided to single out law-abiding firearms owners. According to Statistics Canada police-reported gun crimes amount to less than one-half of 1 per cent of overall police-reported crime. Only 20 per cent of this number involved long arms, and only 6 per cent involved fully automatic or sawed-off shotguns; in other words, weapons not legally available to the public. So hundreds of millions of dollars will be spent by this federal government, the freedoms of decent, responsible Albertans trampled upon, and the livelihoods of our already struggling businesses compromised so that, at its most generous interpretation, one-quarter of one-half of 1 per cent of crime can be prevented, if and only if the criminals choose to follow the rules they, by definition, do not already follow.

Every lawfully owned so-called assault weapon belongs to an owner who went through an extensive background check, attended a course on safe operations of a firearm, and had to pass both a written and a practical exam. They are also required to store their firearm in a safe and responsible manner as outlined by the federal government.

Proof of the futility of more firearms restrictions can be found in the recent tragedy in Nova Scotia. As I mentioned, I was born and raised in that province, and the tragedy that occurred there struck all too close to home for myself and my extended family. As I mentioned a few short weeks ago, my cousin is still reeling from that loss. The perpetrator in that incident did not legally acquire his firearms. According to the RCMP all three of the original firearms used in that incident were purchased in the United States and then brought over the border illegally. Professor Irvin Waller of the University of Ottawa, an expert on violent crime in Canada, has suggested that, in fact, it will always be relatively easy to get guns across the border from the United States.

What this Prime Minister has done by using the victims in Nova Scotia to initiate an ideologically based gun confiscation is abhorrent. My constituents in West Yellowhead, on top of energy price reductions, an economic contraction, an ongoing rural crime wave, and a global pandemic, must now worry about the federal government seizing their property and considering them criminals. This recent display of contempt for the livelihoods and enjoyment of so many law-abiding firearm owners only serves to further condemn the Prime Minister's already poor reputation this side of the Greater Toronto Area, all this while the federal government has failed to secure the border against the smuggling of illegal firearms.

That is why I stand today in support of Government Motion 20. I know that with an Alberta chief firearms officer this issue will get the level of attention it deserves from the point of view Albertans expect. This government is standing up for law-abiding firearms owners by declaring its intent to bring in more Alberta and get rid of as much of Ottawa as possible, because if we were to sit idle now, Mr. Speaker, will the next step that the Prime Minister takes be to ban certain types of vehicles because, in his opinion, what reasonable or responsible Canadian would need such a vehicle? I'm sure his attempts at improving public safety in this way would also involve an involuntary buyback program to purchase these malevolent vehicles at a fraction of the value. It might seem like this would be nonsensical and alarming; however, if the Prime Minister is willing to use these exact same tactics with law-abiding firearms owners, where will he stop?

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly . . .

- (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.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or a comment for the member. The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

5:40

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Member for West Yellowhead has a very rural constituency, and I was wondering if he could elaborate on what a potential firearm ban or what an overreach from Trudeau would look like for his constituents.

Mr. Long: Thank you for the question. I'm one of many people in this Assembly, I'm assuming, that had constituents reach out about this immediately. Believe it or not, I have a number of firearm owner constituents that I consider friends. I hope that's not a shock to anyone. West Yellowhead has a very diverse culture. People who are already questioning whether Alberta belongs in Canada according to the actions and the words of our Prime Minister: this fuelled that fire even more so. Thankfully, my friends are very reasonable folks and simply have used that fire to further ask our Alberta government to ensure that we're standing up for them and our province, yet I don't expect those calls to diminish in the coming days, weeks, or even months. That's why, for me, it's so urgent that we do show our support for our legally obtained firearms owners and show them that we are going to continue to be a voice against abhorrent actions and the disdain that the Prime Minister is showing for them and for our province. As I say, that's why this motion is so important for us to bring forward and to pass in this Assembly.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else?

Seeing none, is there anyone that wishes to join the debate? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to discuss Motion 20. Basically, Motion 20 recognizes that the criminal use of firearms is primarily illegally smuggled firearms. It expresses opposition to the Liberal gun ban and urges the Alberta government to take all necessary steps to assert provincial jurisdiction on this issue.

Now, in order to unpack what we have going on with the Liberal gun ban, we need to go to the actual order in council on the government of Canada website. It says: "Whereas the Governor in Council is not of the opinion that any thing prescribed to be a prohibited firearm or a prohibited device, in the Annexed Regulations, is reasonable for use in Canada for hunting or sporting purposes." Who decides what's reasonable for hunting? I know they didn't ask me, and I've made my living most of my life in the hunting industry. I haven't heard of any of my colleagues in the hunting industry being asked either. Who did they ask in the sport shooting groups? I'm guessing no one. If they did, they didn't listen to the answer. I know that if they'd asked any of us, the answer would have been clear: spend your energy on criminals. But I think I know who made the decision, politicians with antigun ideology.

Now, let's look at the rationale for this gun grab. Again this is right from the order in council. "The Regulations address gun violence and the threat to public safety by assault-style firearms." There it is plain. They aren't banning certain types of firearm

loading actions. They're not banning based on what a particular gun can do. They're only banning on the style, what they look like. Now, what is it about a gun and its look that makes it "a serious threat to public safety"? I don't know either.

It goes on to say:

The prohibited firearms are tactical and/or military-style firearms and are not reasonable for hunting or sport shooting. Individuals may have used some of the listed firearms for hunting purposes on the basis that they were previously classified as non-restricted firearms.

It says that Canadians may have used these guns for hunting because they were legal, but now we have made them illegal, so now you can't use them. Now, I thought they said that they were banning those that weren't reasonable to use for hunting, but then they admit that they are being used for hunting. Makes sense, right? Not really.

Now, let's get to this quote. "Any firearm having a 20 mm bore or greater (e.g. grenade launchers) or a capability of discharging a projectile with a muzzle energy above 10 000 joules (e.g. .50 calibre sniper rifles) will also be prohibited." Now, remember the quote "serious threat to public safety." Has anyone ever heard of a .50-cal or grenade launcher, for that matter, used for mass shootings? No? Me neither. I do have friends that own .50-calibre guns and shoot them at targets and get a lot of enjoyment out of doing so. Who do they hurt? Absolutely no one.

Here's another quote from the order in council:

The disposal of the prescribed prohibited firearms is dependent on voluntary compliance by affected owners and businesses.

Can anyone guess who won't be voluntarily turning in their firearms? You're right. Criminals; you know, the people who shouldn't have firearms. But you know what? Maybe criminals will turn in their firearms. If they can buy them in the U.S. and smuggle them into Canada and sell them to the Liberals for a profit, they just might do it.

Now, here's another quote:

Calculation of the compliance rate will be complicated by the lack of information about non-restricted firearms and their owners.

How can this be effective if the compliance rate is complicated? You're right. It won't be effective. It's about ideology, not effectiveness, being perceived to make a difference, to virtue-signal to groups that are impressed by this action.

We do actually have evidence that it won't be effective: the infamous long gun registry. An estimated 65 per cent of firearms owners registered at least one rifle or shotgun, and no more than half of all long guns ended up in the registry. That's not success. More than one-third of owners did not register, leaving more than one-half of long guns unregistered. Do you know who did register their long guns? Me and others who didn't want to be criminals by not filling out paperwork, which, by the way, is a victimless crime. Do you know who didn't register their long guns? Criminals, both government-created criminals and real criminals.

Here's another quote from the website:

The amount of compensation being offered per firearm may also affect the level of compliance.

Yes, now we get into compensation. I know that the Liberals like to spin this as a buyback program. Let's see how this buyback program works. They tell you that you must sell your gun at a price they decide, and if you don't, you'll be arrested, charged, and your gun will be confiscated anyways. That's not a buyback program. I can make a lot of money buying something when I decide the price and the seller is forced to sell under the influence of a threat, except that in the real world that's illegal. It's called extortion.

This is where it gets interesting. Again right from the order in council on the government of Canada website:

It is likely that businesses selling newly prohibited firearms would experience a reduction in sales and as a result may reduce staff or cease operations . . . A Conference Board of Canada study completed in September 2019 determined that sport shooting and hunting contribute \$5.9 billion to Canada's GDP, as well as \$2.9 billion in labour income. The sport shooting and hunting industries also support [about] 48 000 jobs.

It goes on to say:

These figures may be affected in the short term by the prohibition on certain firearms, but these impacts may be mitigated by increases in purchases of new firearms that are not being prohibited.

So let me get this straight. They admit that this could have devastating effects on our economy and jobs at a time when our economy is already suffering, but the answer to this negative effect – get this – is to buy more guns. Only in a Liberal mind does this make sense.

But wait. There's more. It gets better.

There is . . . risk that affected firearms owners may elect to replace their firearms with models unaffected by the ban.

And here's the punchline:

This risk may be mitigated by adding additional makes and models to the list of prohibited firearms in the future.

Let's get this straight. The answer to taking away guns is buying more guns, and the answer to buying more guns is to take away more guns. You can't make this stuff up. This is where you would normally use the emoji of your head exploding. I apologize; I shouldn't have called that a punchline because it isn't funny. It's more of a punch in the guts to law-abiding, common-sense Canadians instead of a punchline when we realize the absolutely bizarre and twisted rationalization of this gun grab.

Remember what I've said. It's not about safety. It's a misguided, ideological, political action that serves no real purpose other than to make people feel good about themselves. Meanwhile it's destroying jobs, businesses, and taking away the rights of Canadians, with no positive effect.

5:50

Now, they're saying that this could cost \$250 million. I'll take you back to the long gun registry failure. The Liberals of the day said that it would cost less than \$2 million. The cost ended up close to \$2 billion, 1,000 times more. There was a minimum of \$60 million just for public relations programs, \$18 million of which went to the advertising agency at the centre of the sponsorship scandal; \$227 million in computer costs, including complicated application forms that slowed processing times; and \$332 million for other programming costs, including money to pay staff to process the forms. We can easily see how costs can balloon when the Liberals do math.

We don't know what is included in the \$250 million projected cost. Does it include administration and the RCMP time and energy for buyback, never mind the enforcement for noncompliance? For what? To take away guns from law-abiding citizens? Police time and energy wasted and more bureaucracy instead of more enforcement. How about we spend money on something that might make a difference, like getting to the root of the problem? It's crime. It's criminals, gun smuggling, not law-abiding citizens.

Another quote:

Recognizing that some Indigenous and sustenance hunters could be using previously non-restricted firearms for their hunting and may be unable to replace these firearms immediately, the Amnesty Order includes provisions for the limited use of these firearms for such purposes.

If this is about safety, why the indigenous exception? Does their safety not matter? If they need them for hunting, why are the

Trudeau Liberals saying that these guns are assault guns and not reasonable for hunting? Obviously, they are hunting guns, and there are hunting guns on this list. They are not assault guns unless some criminal uses them to assault someone.

Again quoting from the government website:

Indigenous persons are victims of homicides involving firearms at a much higher rate than the Canadian population and this figure appears to be increasing.

The Trudeau answer for the safety of Canadians is to take away guns. So what's the answer to homicides of indigenous people? Allow the retention of those same guns. It makes no sense, proving again that this isn't about safety. This is opportunistic. Trudeau and his Liberal comrades like to bring up the Nova Scotia shooting, but Trudeau said that he would take away firearms even before the Nova Scotia incident. He's using those people as a cover for his ideological gun grab. We need to respect those that lost their lives and their families, who suffered a horrific loss, not use them for political pawns.

If a person who for whatever reason decides to try to kill or hurt people uses a one-and-a-half-ton truck, as happened in Edmonton a few years back, we don't ban one-and-a-half-ton trucks. Actually, in comparison, we don't ban two-ton trucks. The Liberals aren't banning the illegal guns that are used in crime; they're banning the legal ones. But I digress. Do you know why we don't ban one-and-

a-half and two-ton trucks? It's because they're useful tools. We all know that the problem isn't the truck. It's the person that drives the truck and uses it as a weapon that's the problem.

Using a gun as a weapon to hurt people or commit a crime is the problem. These guns aren't the problem. It's the criminals that are the problem. What does this Liberal gun ban do to criminals? Absolutely nothing. Taking away legally owned guns from law-abiding gun owners, who are not the problem, will not affect criminals. So how is this safer? How can this stop crime? It can't and it won't because it isn't about safety. It's about ideology.

Thank you. With that, I'd like to make a motion to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Nally: We'd like to adjourn, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Perhaps you might make a motion to adjourn the Assembly.

Mr. Nally: I'd like to make a motion that we adjourn till 7:30.

The Speaker: Well done. It's like it's your first day.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:54 p.m.]

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