



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, June 15, 2020

Day 31

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, June 15, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Suzanne Harrison. In observation of the COVID-19 public health guidelines outlined by Dr. Hinshaw, please refrain from joining in in the language of your choice.

Ms Harrison:

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would bring to your attention that in the Speaker's gallery, just about to leave, are Suzanne's children, Capri Harrison and Thatcher Harrison. Welcome to the Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Postsecondary Education Review

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to make an important announcement that will revitalize and strengthen Alberta's postsecondary system. Last year, as members of this Assembly will know, our government convened a panel of experts to investigate Alberta's finances. In their conclusions the MacKinnon panel found that

there does not appear to be an overall direction for Alberta's post-secondary system.

They also noted that

the current funding structure doesn't link funding to the achievement of specific goals or priorities for the province such as ensuring the required skills for the current and future labour market, expanding research and technology commercialization, or achieving broader societal and economic goals.

With this in mind, the report made the final recommendation that the government of Alberta

consult with post-secondary stakeholders to set an overall future direction and [establish] goals for the post-secondary system.

As well, we also know, Mr. Speaker, that workforce needs are changing. A report of the Conference Board of Canada found that employers across seven of Alberta's major industrial sectors

emphasize the need for a postsecondary system that is responsive to labour market needs and agile to keep up with changing environments.

With this in mind, we have set out to hire an outside consultancy to assist government with this important work. Today I'm proud to announce that a firm has been selected and that work will soon be under way to develop Alberta 2030, a 10-year strategy to transform postsecondary education. This transformation is essential and will ensure that our youth are set up for success in the best possible way.

Let me tell you a little more about what the review will cover. First and foremost, the review will help to understand the changing nature of work. As a result of technological changes, increases in automation, we know that the future of work will be substantially different from today.

Secondly, the review will help ensure that we equip our students with the skills that they need to succeed.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, we will work with the review to find innovative and creative solutions to bring the cost of our system down. As I've noted many times in this Assembly, Alberta retains one of the most expensive postsecondary systems, and we must deliver a more efficient system in a thoughtful and deliberate manner.

Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, we will analyze and improve the governance structure of our system. We will explore whether the current six-sector model is appropriate and suggest new ways to improve transferability and accessibility under a new model.

Lastly, the review will also help us to identify ways to strengthen the commercialization of research. Our institutions are home to incredible new discoveries, and it is important that we strengthen industry collaboration so that researchers are able to commercialize their inventions. By achieving these important goals, we will ensure that we set up our students for success in the best possible way.

In closing, I invite all members of the Assembly and all members of the postsecondary community to participate in this process, provide their feedback, so that together we can build a stronger system for all Albertans.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West to respond.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, now more than ever we need to have strong postsecondary institutions throughout the province to ensure not just the economic recovery but I think the building of our society as well. While it's important to make plans, long-range plans, I think it's important to take a trip down memory lane to see where this UCP government has gone over the last two successive budgets. We see special attention directed to postsecondary institutions in both of the last budgets in the form of significant cuts to operating expenses and other forms of support from this provincial government.

While this UCP government likes to talk a good talk about supporting postsecondary education, let's not just look at 2030 but look at what's happening here in the next few weeks and months. We have many institutions across the province that are literally in an existentially difficult situation from which they will have difficulty recovering. Mr. Speaker, it's an emergency situation in which our postsecondary institutions are on the edge of a precipice. We don't have to look any further than, for example, the Banff Centre, which just laid off most of their staff here in the last week or so. Now, certainly, that's a lot to do with the pandemic, but it is also due to and caused by the last two successive budgets that came from this UCP government right here in this Chamber. We need to make sure that we are investing in our postsecondary colleges, our trade colleges, our polytechnics, and universities now more than ever.

I know, as the former Minister of Education, K to 12, there's a very large cohort of young people that are just in grade school now, but guess what, Mr. Speaker? They will need postsecondary positions in the next few years as well. We need to make that investment, and we need to know that we are in an emergency situation here and now in our postsecondary institutions, and we need to make sure we step up and fulfill our responsibilities to our universities, our colleges, our trade schools and polytechnics.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

1:40

Elder Abuse Awareness

Ms Lovely: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I stand to recognize World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. Every year on June 15 in Alberta and throughout the world people unite to lift their voices against elder abuse. We have marked this day since 2006 to help reduce the stigma around elder abuse and remind people that help is available.

We know that rates of abuse of all types, including elder abuse, increase during crisis and disaster. There is heightened concern during COVID-19 for the potential increase in elder abuse. The need for isolation and distancing increases the risk of financial, physical, and emotional abuse as well as neglect. Our government is working with civil society partners and with police forces on increased measures needed to respond to family violence, including elder abuse.

Mr. Speaker, our government has supported the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council in its mission to support a community response to elder abuse. The council is a province-wide network of professionals dedicated to promoting the well-being and security of older adults through the development of resources to address and educate about elder abuse. This year the council launched an awareness campaign that includes tools available to help raise awareness. Earlier today the hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing presented this year's official declaration to the council.

Mr. Speaker, our government will do everything it can to prevent and end elder abuse and to ensure the safety of all Alberta seniors. Today wear your purple with pride to show your support for prevention and to recognize World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction

Mr. Nielsen: Ever since the UCP created a ministry for red tape reduction, I've been keeping a close eye on it to ensure the office actually helps Albertans. I, like many Albertans, have been confused on what the function of the office actually is. We know it's costing Albertans \$13 million. What has it done? Usually red-tape bills like Bill 22 are filled with miscellaneous pieces of housekeeping legislation, that could have been done by other ministries, piled in with some very substantial changes which the ministry responsible for should be the spokesperson for and the face of. The UCP likes to put a bunch of wide-ranging changes together into an omnibus bill and claim that it reduces red tape when, in reality, it creates confusion and, ironically, creates more red tape.

At his press conference for Bill 22 the associate minister kept deferring questions from the press to different ministers who were not there. This does not make the process more efficient; in fact, I would argue it makes it more inefficient. I was asked about this as

well, and I did not have an answer for why the UCP would logically want to do this. Graham Thomson wrote on Thursday:

I have to admit, I've always had trouble understanding exactly what it is that ... Alberta's associate minister of red-tape reduction actually does.

It would seem [the associate minister] himself has the same problem.

While the UCP spends time on this confusing project, Albertans are struggling and are being left behind. This weekend Calgarians faced a devastating hailstorm that damaged substantial amounts of property and vehicles. Albertans are already paying more in auto insurance, and this government has done nothing to help. We are in the middle of a pandemic, and the UCP is currently in a war with doctors and rural physicians, who are leaving rural communities, which is damaging access to care. Students are wondering what the future of their education is going to look like while school boards such as Edmonton public are forced to lay off over 600 staff. I say these things because, in all the uncertainty right now, the government has a job to do. Rather than just trying to justify the cost of a \$13 million associate minister passion project, the UCP should direct their attention to those who most need it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Economic Relaunch Stage 2

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday marked another critical milestone in our province's road to recovery from COVID-19. Thanks to the dedication and perseverance of Albertans, the province is now in its second stage of relaunch and more than a week ahead of initial predictions. It is a testament to the strong will and commitment of Albertans. The last three months have been incredibly difficult for our province, for families, and for the business community across Alberta. Having to cancel special events, postpone weddings, and remain physically distanced from loved ones are sacrifices that I commend Albertans for making for the greater good of all.

As I walked around my community of Grande Prairie this weekend, I spent some time reflecting on how much and how quickly things have changed. For example, seeing children playing again on our playgrounds, hair salons with a steady stream of customers, and people leaving the gym after a workout felt so normal yet retained a sense of novelty and renewed hope. These were not the sights we saw this spring, Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure you recall.

Although the vast majority of the economy was able to continue operating, that was little comfort to the many small-business owners who had invested their time and savings into their restaurants, gyms, bars, and boutiques, to name a few. Many of the job creators and contributors to our communities were put in a very challenging situation when they had to severely reduce operations or close their doors entirely. That makes it an even greater accomplishment for Albertans to reopen ahead of schedule and with even more businesses included at this stage than were originally planned. It's an important first step in getting our economy moving into the future.

Of course, we must remain careful about physical distancing and practising good hygiene like regular handwashing for the foreseeable future. But if I know anything, Mr. Speaker, it's that Albertans are always up for the challenge. I would like to thank all Albertans for doing their part to help us get this far this quickly. It's because of you that we are experiencing success today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Speaking of normality, it was a pleasure to see the fountain on in front of the building today.

The hon. the Member for Edmonton-South.

Premier's Approval Rating

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a tough slog for the most unpopular Premier in all of Canada. Despite his daily attempts to sway the residents of the province that he's doing a good job, people just don't seem to be hearing him. How is he doing on the economy? Only 43 per cent approve. The only province lower: Newfoundland. On jobs? Even worse. Thirty eight per cent approve. Now, this is the leader who ran on a platform of more jobs and more economic growth, but instead the province is forecast to see the GDP shrink by 11.2 per cent; the largest shrink in the country.

I have to tell you that I think people had other ideas when they voted for this leader to bring back the so-called Alberta advantage. When it comes to dissatisfaction, our Premier ranks number one. His approval has been steadily falling since the election last year. I bet he was hoping for that crisis bump that all of the other Premiers have been seeing but he has yet to benefit from. In fact, recent polling indicates that 56 per cent of Albertans believe they would be better off with someone else in charge. But the thing about increasing approval ratings is that you have to be doing things right. You have to be listening to what the people you serve are saying to you.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to this Premier, maybe – just maybe – he forgot some of those earplugs that were still left in the box. How else do you explain the continual fighting with doctors, causing them to shut their practices and move to other provinces? How else do you explain the slashing of educational funding for children that need it most? And how else do you explain the nonsensical need to push forward on an agenda that no longer makes sense or does what is right for Albertans today, right now?

But might I offer some advice? Today the Prime Minister is more popular in Alberta than the Premier and his party, so maybe – just maybe – he can ask his new best buddy and party donor for a handout of a different kind and get some advice. Given the direction this province is heading, I am sure the Premier will be asking for that and more from Ottawa very soon.

High School Graduation 2020

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I want to extend a heartfelt congratulations to the graduating class of 2020. Graduating is an accomplishment that all students should be proud of. Some will move on to further their education, learn a trade, or compete in business and the workforce as valued members of their generation. The years in school, however, have not been spent simply memorizing equations and dates. Time getting an education is just as much about the struggles one faces and overcomes as the mistakes made, and in turn, corrected. It is through this process that true knowledge is gained. Whether passing a course one was struggling with or scoring that vital goal after coming off the bench, the lessons of life have been ever present. Should this year's graduates choose to accept these lessons, they will live their lives without regret and accomplish what they hold most dear.

Yet some of the traditional rites of passage familiar to so many of us were denied to this year's alumni. In the last few months they've seen their world turned upside down by a pandemic, the likes of which the world hasn't seen since the 1918 Spanish influenza. This changed the way they learned, the way they interacted, and the way society operates. All the while, the

expectations on our graduates never changed. Yet, in spite of it all, they managed to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, my message to the 2020 graduating class is: whatever path you choose to take, know that regret does not come from failure but by failing to give your entire effort to the passions that drive you. Press on toward your goals with the knowledge and strengths you have gained, and only look back to remember what you have learned along the way. Congratulations, graduates of 2020.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Calgary Storm

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Houses damaged, basements flooded, windows smashed, and cars damaged beyond repair; this weekend's storm in Calgary was devastating. To be honest, it sometimes seems you just can't win for losing, and I sympathize with Calgarians and, yes, even with this government sometimes for all that has to be addressed. That being said, the fact is that there are tens of thousands of Calgarians who will face huge costs, and their insurance just will not cover it all. Will the Premier declare this storm a disaster so that Calgarians can access disaster relief funding?

Mr. Kenney: First off, we join the Leader of the Opposition in sharing our greatest distress for Calgarians and others impacted by the terrible hailstorms on the weekend, where many saw massive property damage to their homes and their cars, after so many months of adversity for so many of those families.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke earlier today to the president of the Insurance Bureau of Canada and encouraged, through him, their member companies to provide immediate service to those affected. I've been in communication with the mayor of Calgary. I've not heard a request for a disaster declaration from the municipality, but we will continue to stay in touch with them.

Ms Notley: Well, one resident said, quote, most of the cars in our parking lot don't have windows anymore; there isn't one single panel on my car that doesn't have hail damage.

Mr. Speaker, this government allowed car insurance premiums to skyrocket, so it's hardly surprising that many Calgarians cancelled their car insurance during COVID-19. Now they'll have to pay even more for a storm they couldn't avoid. Will the Premier declare a disaster, and will he specifically make help available to people who experienced uninsured damage to their vehicles?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to vehicles, of course, car damage is covered under the most comprehensive coverage options for insurance. I should let people know that there is a special Insurance Bureau of Canada call centre number available to help with the inquiries at 1.844.227.5422.

With respect to the declaration of a disaster, the Leader of the Opposition knows that that is not a matter of political discretion. The Alberta Emergency Management Agency is conducting hydrology tests to determine whether or not this was an extraordinary event, which, together with a request from the municipality, could lead to such a declaration.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the type of insurance that the Premier offered is not the type of insurance that many, many Calgarians enjoy the benefit of right now. So they've been left out,

and they are facing significant fiscal challenges as a result. Moreover, Calgarians need assurances now. They don't want words; they need assurances from the Premier. Once again, will the Premier declare a disaster, and will he commit to Albertans that they will cover the costs of uninsured vehicles that have been destroyed?

Mr. Kenney: Well, what I commit, Mr. Speaker, is that I will not politicize disaster response, which is what the NDP always seeks to do. They love nothing more than politicizing disasters. It's like political catnip for the socialists over there.

For the people of Calgary we are working closely with the municipality, with the insurance companies, with the Emergency Management Agency of Alberta, which is conducting tests on hydrology to see if this indeed was an extraordinary event. We'll take all measures necessary to help protect people.

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

Ms Notley: Well, you know, the Premier can attack us all he wants, but I really hope that he will stand up for the people of Calgary.

Bill 22

Ms Notley: Now, Bill 22 is setting the energy sector up for endless conflict and court battles by handing the total approval of oil sands projects to the AER sort of. The courts are clear. It is actually Alberta's constitutional obligation to negotiate these projects with indigenous people on a nation-to-nation basis, yet the Premier is outsourcing his job to an unelected body that has no authority to engage with First Nations and is already being sued by them. Why is the Premier inviting more legal challenges instead of doing his job and engaging indigenous people in the respectful way that they deserve?

Mr. Kenney: I have engaged indigenous people in the respectful way that they deserve. I'll remind the Leader of the Opposition that this cabinet has held two Crown-First Nations summits in our first year in office. The NDP, in four years in office, held none with a gathering of all of the chiefs of Alberta, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to see the enormous progress that has been made. In fact, I understand that the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation has already received over a dozen solid requests for support. I just met this weekend with Treaty 6 Grand Chief Billy Morin of Enoch about the enormous progress that's been made in partnership with this government and economic development.

Ms Notley: Well, it seems that this Premier has learned absolutely nothing from his former federal government's failure with the NEB on TMX. I have to wonder if he's even read that decision or even read the act, based on that answer.

But Bill 22 also closes Energy Efficiency Alberta, and as much as the Premier likes to rail against any effort to go green, this is actually about the economy. Now, notwithstanding the infamous light bulbs, EEA created more than 4,000 jobs and generated \$850 million in economic growth. Premier, every other province has these programs. Why are you undermining economic diversification at a time when we need it the most?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me decode that question for Albertans who might be watching. What the NDP leader wants us to do is to bring back the NDP carbon tax. The measure to which she is referring was the final extirpation of last vestige of the NDP carbon tax, a tax on everything, that they lied to Albertans about, that added thousands of dollars of costs for Alberta families and

small businesses. Not only do we not apologize for that measure; we are proud to have kept our word in scrapping the NDP carbon tax.

Ms Notley: One thing Energy Efficiency Alberta did was to create more jobs than this Premier. Meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, the minister could barely describe his bill to the press. Let me help. They're sneaking in clauses to give ministers more power. For instance, the Energy minister will be able to go behind closed doors and change royalty rates on a whim. No OIC; no public notice. Why is this government so committed to taking decisions about the value that all Albertans get for the resources they own into the backroom? What are they trying to hide?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, when she talks about creating jobs – you know what? – I've got to confess, the NDP is right. They did create a few jobs with that boondoggle, mainly through Ontario contractors who were subsidized with the carbon tax to change light bulbs and shower heads. Well, the Albertans that I know believe in personal responsibility and are perfectly capable of changing shower heads and light bulbs on their own initiative and on their own dime.

The Speaker: The hon. member . . . [interjections]

Order. Order. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall is the one with the question.

Judge Appointments

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Justice recently fired the entire committee that advises him on naming judges. He dismissed a panel of majority women and replaced it with a panel of majority men. The committee that he dismissed included a majority of people of colour, including two indigenous people and a member of the LGBTQ2S community. To the Premier: can you tell the House what representation of diverse communities you appointed to this new panel?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and we'd like to thank the former committee for their hard work. Through their efforts we appointed seven Provincial Court justices just recently, five women and two men, through their recommendations. We thank them for their hard work. As is common with governments, we've refreshed that committee. We're working now to refresh the list.

I hope the member doesn't try to go down this further, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, they don't try to go down this path. I've got my orange envelope here. It has NDP appointment lists. I'll gladly go row by row by their ministry.

Mr. Sabir: One of the minister's appointments, Leighton Grey, has criticized the appointment of women to the bench. Quote. Eight of the past 10 superior court justices appointed in Alberta were women. Today it was announced that 5 of 7 new judges appointed to our Provincial Court are women. If Lady Justice is truly blind, then why does she see gender? End quote. Does the Premier share this new UCP adviser's sexist opinion that there are too many women being appointed as judges in Alberta? If not, will he condemn it right now?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, this line of questioning is absolutely disgusting. Right here, right now I warned this member not to do this, but I've got my orange envelope here, NDP appointments. Anne Wilson donated over \$25,000 to the NDP and was appointed

by the former NDP Justice minister to this committee. [interjections] The NDP don't want to hear that. They're heckling right now. They don't want to hear about their record. End the hypocrisy. End this line of questioning.

The Speaker: I'd just caution the hon. member that use of a prop inside the Assembly would be inappropriate.

Mr. Sabir: After receiving the minister's appointment to help him name judges, Mr. Grey also publicly promised, quote, to disregard identity politics of any kind. Mr. Speaker, people around the world are confronting systemic racism in their justice systems. We all know that this problem will not solve itself. It demands action. Albertans must have a judiciary that reflects the diversity of our province. Why are the Premier and his minister driving us back towards a court system that is stacked with old white men?

2:00

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we just commented earlier that the vast majority of the most recent appointments were women. We're looking for the most qualified people possible, and in the last round of it the majority were women. That's just a fact.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let's take a look at the next round of appointments. Alberta Human Rights Commission: Jean Munn donated over \$13,000 to the NDP. Wow. We also had three other people that they appointed to the Human Rights Commission that donated over a thousand dollars to the NDP. There was also a Provincial Court judge appointed by the NDP with no real record of donating but all of a sudden maxed out their donation. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre is the one with the question.

Mask Availability and Costs

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The danger of COVID-19 and a possible second wave remain very real. Nevertheless, Alberta doctors are stepping up and seeing patients in their offices again. To manage the risk, they need masks, but buying a box of masks from this UCP government can cost a doctor's office as much as \$65 for a box of 50. The exact same box sells for half that price at major retailers like Costco or Canadian Tire. To the Premier: is it that your government is really inefficient at procuring and selling these masks, or are you punishing Alberta physicians with a 100 per cent markup?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud that we were the only province in this country to provide free PPE to businesses that needed it. Over the past few weeks the Provincial Operations Centre made over 5 million deliveries of PPE to non Alberta Health Services businesses and organizations, and I want to commend them for their work. As we transition towards recovery, we are prioritizing PPE delivery to those at the highest risk of COVID-19 exposure, but we are helping connect businesses with PPE vendors through the Biz Connect website.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Alberta's family doctors are facing a significant drop in patient volume due to COVID-19 and this government's forced changes and cuts. Many have been forced to lay off staff. Many are questioning whether

they'll be able to pay their leases. On top of this, Alberta doctors are paying out of pocket for the masks they need to protect themselves, their families, their staff, and their patients. The pandemic is still here, but the protection promised by this Premier has vanished. Premier, why are you failing to protect Alberta's front-line family doctors?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, I remind the hon. member that during the pandemic we initiated a number of virtual codes to help our family doctors to be able to care for their patients outside of meeting with them face to face, and we've also announced that those codes are going to be permanent. We're providing alternative tools for our family physicians to be able to see their patients and be able to keep their clinics open.

Mr. Shepherd: At times, Mr. Speaker, I have to think that with friends like this, Alberta's doctors don't need enemies. This isn't what this Premier promised when he staged a video shoot of himself loading Alberta masks onto jets bound for Ontario, Quebec, and B.C. While we support helping our neighbours, this Premier promised, and I quote, that these contributions will in no way undermine our capacity to provide the critical protective equipment and ventilators to Alberta's medical professionals and to other associated front-line workers. End quote. Premier, Alberta's family doctors are still facing COVID-19. Why are millions of the masks paid for by Alberta taxpayers not here to protect them and their patients?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am proud of the work that our government did during this COVID-19 pandemic. The Biz Connect website has information on vendors, including ATB Nexus and Rapid Response Platform Canada. I checked this morning, and Rapid Response Platform Canada currently has over 148 million surgical masks, over 53 million N95 masks, and over 34 million gowns and much more. The government was proud to help businesses meet the immediate need for PPE, and that work will continue.

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

Prescription Drug Fill Limits Economic Relaunch Stage 2

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The COVID-19 pandemic forced many industries and Albertans to make tough choices. On March 20 government announced that prescription drug refills will be limited to 30 days. Now, although it was a necessary measure to maintain the drug supply, it had many Albertans worried about the costs of more frequent refills and having to make more trips to the pharmacy. Now that Alberta has passed the peak of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations, can the Minister of Health please update this House on the relaxation of prescription refill limits?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To handle the critical drug supply issues that affected Alberta and the whole world during COVID, we along with other provinces recommended that pharmacists dispense a maximum 30-day supply of prescription drugs. This was a temporary measure to help ensure that pharmacies had enough medication for people in need, and it helped to stabilize the drug supply chain here in Alberta and throughout Canada. I'm pleased to say that the conditions have improved, and effective

today pharmacists in Alberta can begin to give out larger quantities again, up to a 100-day supply.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the Minister of Health for that response. Given that during the COVID-19 pandemic drug shortages have been a source of concern at the provincial, national, and global levels and given that guidance was issued in March to limit the dispensing of prescription drugs to a 30-day supply with the intention of stabilizing the supply chain and slowing the demand for medication, can the Minister of Health please inform the Legislature why it is now safe to relax the 30-day supply limit?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were concerns at provincial, national, and global levels about the shortages of medications, supply chain issues, and stockpiling of medications during COVID. Pharmacists worked hard to manage these issues and to ensure that Albertans had access to the medications that they needed during the pandemic. We're confident now that it's time to relax our guidance on 30-day supply limits for most prescription drugs. The drug supply chain has begun to stabilize, and starting today pharmacists can resume filling most prescriptions as they normally would.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the many changes to how Albertans access the health care system and given that necessary measures like prescription fill limits and the cancellation of elective procedures have seriously affected many people in our province and given that Albertans have done very well to flatten the curve and speed up the rate at which our province safely reopens, again to the Minister of Health: in addition to the lifting of the 30-day prescription fill limit, what other measures will be lifted now that we are in stage 2 of relaunch?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province has successfully controlled the spread of COVID since stage 1 restrictions were lifted, allowing us to safely move forward with stage 2 of the relaunch. With that caution in mind, stage 2 includes the reopening of public libraries, wellness services, movie and live theatres, community halls, K to 12 schools for diploma exams and summer school. Events and gatherings can also be larger in stage 2 with specific guidelines in place. I want to stress that no one should feel obliged to participate in any activity until they're ready and they're confident to do so.

Automobile Insurance Premiums

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, this weekend Calgarians faced a devastating hailstorm. Streets flooded, and cars and homes were hit with hail ranging from the size of golf balls to baseballs. Now, the UCP so far has rejected our calls to support Albertans who are paying too much for auto insurance, and the hailstorm this weekend in Calgary is going to make insurance premiums even worse. To the minister: once again, will you please reinstate the 5 per cent annual rate increase cap our NDP government put into place?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, want to acknowledge the loss experienced by many Calgarians over the weekend as a result of the hailstorm. I recognize that it has created real hardship, but one thing we will not do is reinstate the rate cap. When the NDP implemented the rate cap, it had a predictable negative outcome for Albertans. It resulted in less competition and fewer options. This government will not make that mistake.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that Albertans are driving less due to COVID-19 but are paying more for insurance, the UCP should step in and help Calgarians who have had their cars damaged. Given that we know the Premier's former chief of staff, Nick Koolsbergen, is a registered lobbyist for the insurance industry and given that this is a clear indication of where the interests of the UCP lie, will the minister base their insurance policies on their constituents who are struggling to make it, or will they continue to reward their insider friends and lobbyists?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think talking about who lobbies government is an important topic, but only the NDP would ignore people whose homes and cars have been ripped apart to talk about this important administrative thing when they should be talking about getting people help on the ground now, which is what our government is focused on, which is what the NDP failed to do, which is why they're over on that side. We're worried about people today, getting them back in their homes, getting them back in their cars, and getting them looked after. Everything else will be in due course. Their priorities are not in line with Albertans'.

2:10

Mr. Carson: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that I am moving a motion today on taking measures to better regulate the insurance industry and given that Albertans are paying as much as 50 per cent more for insurance since the UCP removed the cap, and the pandemic has put Albertans in further financial hardship, to the minister. Later today you will have the opportunity to stand up for your constituents and save them money. Will you finally side with everyday Albertans, or will you continue to side with profitable insurance companies?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the NDP, this government will side with everyday Albertans. That's why we've appointed an expert panel that will provide recommendations to this government to ensure that we can deliver and provide a sustainable, affordable, and accessible insurance system for Alberta motorists. The NDP rate cap was a mistake. It failed. It resulted in higher premiums. It resulted in fewer options, less competition. We will deliver for Albertans.

Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities

Ms Hoffman: Last week I received a letter from Leslie Ronaldson, the executive director for the Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities, who said that the minister had cut their funding. The society promotes diversity and inclusion for schools and communities. In the letter Ronaldson says: at a time when we are in need of more programs and resources developed by safe and caring schools – they are so critical to our youth – it's truly unfortunate that we are in this position. To the Minister of Education: why are you cutting supports for marginalized students?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the member opposite did not do her homework before making these egregious

claims. The reality is that Alberta Education has not cut funding to this organization. In fact, the last time this organization received any grant from Alberta Education was in 2014, under the PCs, and the NDP provided no operational funding to this organization while they were in government. We respect the important work that this entity has done in our schools and in our communities. We are pleased to see that their programming will carry on in other locations.

Ms Hoffman: Given that this program is closing under this minister, given that when we were in government they continued to sustain their operations, given that this society has provided programs and resources and workshops for safe spaces for children for 24 years and given that the UCP has rolled back protections for LGBTQ2S-plus youth and students with special needs, to the minister: why did you grab taxpayer money for partisan hacks at UCP headquarters when clearly there's a need to also support students? Why did you cut funding for vulnerable Alberta students?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm not sure where she's coming from. I just finished reading that we have not cut funding to this program because we haven't provided funding in the past for this program. The last time it was provided was in 2014. The NDP at no time provided operational funding to this particular program. We continue to support our LGBTQ-plus students, and we will do so in our schools and beyond. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. For a Monday you're quite an excitable bunch.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities has done vital work for decades and given that it even survived the deep and brutal cuts of the 1990s and given that marginalized students are experiencing turmoil, hatred, and prejudice now more than ever, is the minister content to be remembered as the person who was in charge and took money for partisan purposes for her UCP staff while turning her back on safe and caring schools in Alberta and that they closed while she was the minister?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. The only thing I'll say is that the NDP must be remembered as the party that gave zero to safe and caring schools. We are continuing to provide safe and caring school environments within our schools, and we will continue to do so. Again, we have not cut any funding to this organization. They provide a valuable service, and we look forward to the programming that they'll carry on in the locations that they carry them on in.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Grande Prairie Regional Hospital Construction Capital Projects in Northwestern Alberta

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even before I was elected, I followed the Grande Prairie regional hospital project with great interest as a concerned resident. I also supported the project and the vision for expanded services that the project would eventually bring to the Grande Prairie region as a member of the hospital foundation's capital campaign cabinet. I toured the project as recently as this past February. It seems that after years of delays and errors this hospital project has finally gotten back on track and that work may be close to complete. Can the Minister of Infrastructure inform this

Assembly on the status of the Grande Prairie regional hospital project?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I would like to commend the Member for Grande Prairie for her tremendous advocacy on behalf of her constituents. I'm really, really, really thrilled to inform this House that we are just a few feet away from the finish line on this project. Later this month Alberta Infrastructure will turn over the keys to Alberta Health Services for the commissioning of services in the building. This is good news for Grande Prairie and all of the north.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the tremendous news. Given that the hospital project may be nearly complete from the Ministry of Infrastructure's construction phase and given that Alberta Health Services must commission the building in order for it to actually be ready to accept patients and provide world-class health care to the people of the northern Alberta area, can the Minister of Health tell this House what the commissioning process looks like, how long it will take, and when the people in my constituency of Grande Prairie will actually receive service in their new hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to add my appreciation to everyone involved in the project. Commissioning is a critical process and includes cleaning, installation, testing of equipment, care processes, and training of staff as well. It also includes the implementation of connect care, the province-wide health information network. It's complex work, and it has to be done right. AHS is aiming to have the bulk of the work done, complete this year, but with the impact of the pandemic we'll have to wait and see for a firm date later in the process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given the long-awaited news on the Grande Prairie regional hospital project and given this need for job-creating infrastructure projects to get people back to work in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic and further given the prolonged financial challenges that Alberta has faced in the last five years, can the Minister of Infrastructure tell this House about other projects in the Grande Prairie region and their potential economic impact?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, in addition to finishing the construction of the Grande Prairie regional hospital, I have some good news to share with the folks in northwest Alberta: \$80 million for Grande Prairie composite high school, \$35.3 million for the Grande Prairie O'Brien Lake West K to 9 school, \$29.8 million for the Harry Balfour K to 8 school in Peace Wapiti, and \$24.6 million for St. Patrick K to 9 school. All these schools are at different stages of finishing, planning, and designing, and the people of Grande Prairie...

Medical Diagnostic Imaging Test Coverage

Mr. Nielsen: When this government appointed an Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, the thought was that the minister would reduce red tape, not find every opportunity to add more. Last week I was joined by two health care professionals concerned by

this government's ban on them ordering diagnostic imaging. This decision causes delays for patients, adds barriers to health care, and increases red tape. Will the minister of red tape commit to immediately cutting this red tape?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This was a change that was proposed last year. It was implemented on March 31 of this year. I'm happy to go over it again. Last year we proposed that we would stop public funding of imaging services ordered by chiropractors, physiotherapists, and audiologists in conjunction with services they provide that are not publicly insured. The reason is simple. Public funds should not be used to pay for services that are related to uninsured private health services.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that chiropractor Dr. Wendy Coburn described this policy move as, quote, wrong and said that it would create out-of-pocket costs for patients and given that this government is proudly taking money from the pockets of Canadians to finance their partisan fundraising but shows no regard for the needs of Alberta patients, will the minister of red tape justify to this House why we are spending \$13 million for him to sit on his hands?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This was a change, as I said, that was implemented on March 31, as noted in the usual bulletin to health professionals. Patients who need diagnostic imaging can still have it paid for by the public insurance plan when it's ordered by a physician or a nurse practitioner who is paid for by the public insurance plan. This change aligns us with B.C. and Ontario. It's targeted to save a modest amount of money to better manage use of diagnostic imaging throughout the province.

2:20

Mr. Nielsen: Where were you and other ministers when he needed help answering a press conference?

Given that Jeffrey Begg . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member will know that the use of a preamble after question 4 is not appropriate, particularly in that context.

Mr. Nielsen: Given that Jeffrey Begg, a physiotherapist with 23 years of experience, said that these changes would result in more visits to doctors' offices, walk-in clinics, and hospitals and given that this red tape will create as much as \$10 million in new costs to taxpayers while delaying Albertans getting the diagnostic treatment that they need, is the minister of red tape only interested in reducing regulations around worker safety, or will he fix this awful decision today?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Diagnostic imaging is typically part of the process of diagnosing an illness or an injury that is done by a physician or a nurse practitioner. The restriction is not just meant to be limited to physiotherapists or chiropractors. It also applies to physicians who provide an uninsured service. For example, if a physician provides an uninsured service such as cosmetic surgery, no portion of that uninsured service should be claimed to Alberta Health, including the diagnostic imaging.

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

Postsecondary Education Review

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday we found out the latest from this minister of postsecondary education, the announcement of a \$3.7 million contract to outsource a review of our colleges, universities, polytechnics, and trades. This money could have been invested in supporting advanced education on a more immediate, emergency level; places like rural areas like Canmore or Vermilion losing programs. To the minister: exactly how much money do you plan to waste on your ideological drive to cut funding to this sector, and how many more jobs will be lost due to the upheavals that you are causing?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is mistaken. The upheaval was caused by the members opposite. As was noted by the MacKinnon panel, they left us a system that lacks strategic direction and lacks co-ordination. That's precisely why we're engaging in this review. I can't understand why the member opposite is rising to object to this review. I encourage the member opposite to engage with us and participate with us so that we can build a stronger postsecondary system. We're very focused on the future, on the changing nature of work, and on helping to ensure that we set our students up for success. I invite him to help out.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Given that months ago, in fact, offering some humble advice from myself that the minister should shelve the performance-based funding scheme in order to stabilize the industry and to make sure our postsecondary is part of the economic recovery and given that the minister himself then delayed the implementation of performance-based funding multiple times at the beginning of this year and that now it seems to be on ice indefinitely, to the same minister. The outsourcing of this review to postsecondary: why are you doing it, why did you outsource it, and why are you spending so much money?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is partially correct. We do chat on occasion and, you know, he does provide some recommendations and suggestions, but I have to admit that I usually don't take him up on his comments and suggestions for many obvious reasons. As I've mentioned in the past, as it relates to performance-based funding, there's a lot of uncertainty right now. There's still a lot of uncertainty with respect to the fall. We're not sure what international travel will look like, what that will do to international enrolment, what will happen as a result of domestic enrolment as well. We've made the very prudent and common-sense decision to delay performance-based funding for the time being.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has the distinction of being the most secretive government in Canada and given that this government has used panels and reports to back up their intentions in the past, to the same minister: will you commit today to publicly releasing the contract signed by McKinsey – \$3.7 million, which is a lot of money for a review of this – and a detailed account of how that \$3.7 million is going to be spent every step of the way?

Mr. Nicolaides: Again, Mr. Speaker, I encourage the member to help, participate in the important review that is under way. As I mentioned already, the review is oriented towards looking at the next 10 years. It's important for us to think about not just the

challenges that we have today in the postsecondary community but to think long term. That's why we've tentatively labelled our transformation plan: Alberta 2030. We owe it to our students to do everything possible to ensure we set them up for success. The world is changing. We need to ensure that they have the sharpest skill set, knowledge, and competencies they need to get ahead.

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

School Re-entry Plan

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week our government announced the re-entry strategy for all students in Alberta. While I'm sure this is great news for many parents, the return to in-class learning is not without risk regarding COVID-19. Given that the public health orders may or may not continue to be in place by September, to the Minister of Education: how is Alberta Education assisting school boards across Alberta to ensure that the health of all students continues to be protected as the school year progresses, and how will that be monitored?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Currie for the question. We have developed a comprehensive school re-entry plan which allows students to return to school while continuing to protect the health and safety of our staff and our students. We are providing both the school system and parents with the direction and certainty that they are looking for to get ready for the 2020-21 school year. This plan contains three different scenarios, and school authorities will plan for each one to ensure that our students and our staff continue to be protected regardless of how the COVID-19 pandemic progresses.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many schools, including some in my own riding of Calgary-Currie, will struggle to retrofit their facilities to put public health measures in place and given that the Calgary board of education's budgeting ability has left us perhaps wanting more and that it will be expensive to ensure that the public health measures are ready for the fall, to the same minister: how can our government put parents' and guardians' minds at ease as students and their families prepare to return to school?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every school authority is receiving an increase from our government for the upcoming school year. The CBE alone will be receiving an additional \$20.6 million increase for the '20-21 school year. We are confident that the boards will have the funding they require to adapt to the new public health measures. If boards are struggling, however, we will help them through our department to adapt to any of the three re-entry scenarios. Parents and guardians can rest assured that schools will be ready for the 2020-21 school year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that there were many struggles for students and teachers as they transitioned to learning from home and given that not all students have the resources necessary to fully participate in at-home learning and I, for one, have talked to many parents in my riding about this exact issue, to the Minister of Education: if, in

September, students continue to need to stay at home, are Alberta school boards prepared to continue to effectively teach our kids at home?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of our school authorities are preparing for each of the three scenarios. In-school classes resume with near-normal operations with some health restrictions: that's scenario 1. Scenario 2: in-school classes partially resume with additional health measures. Scenario 3: at-home learning continues. While our original transition to at-home learning was done on short notice, school authorities have had the time that they need to ensure that they are prepared for each option. Our education system has stepped up to support our students, and I anticipate they will continue to do so. I want to thank all our teachers and our school supports.

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

Hotel and Tourism Industry Supports

Member Ceci: Thank you. As hotels enter into what is typically their strongest season, occupancy rates are at 10 per cent, and there's virtually no light at the end of the tunnel. In Calgary there's no Calgary Stampede this year, no summer tourist season uptick, and no fall convention business. Hoteliers are struggling to be heard in these COVID times, in particular by the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism. On behalf of these operators to the minister: why can they operate the restaurants at virtually full capacity in phase 2 while, at the same time, the government is limiting them to 50 people in their larger meeting rooms?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The best thing we can do to support all businesses, including hotels and restaurants, is to let them open safely under the guidance of the chief medical officer of health and the sector-specific guidelines, and that's exactly what we've done. As a result of the hard work of Albertans in keeping infections low, we were able to advance stage 2 a week ahead of schedule. The members opposite can continue to spew their vitriol and negativity. On this side we're focusing on positivity.

Member Ceci: Didn't know I was spewing.

Given that normal occupancy rates for early June are roughly 70 per cent, rising to full capacity through much of the summer and given that occupancy rates are at 10 per cent now with no increase in demand expected for the foreseeable future with travel restrictions and a closed U.S. border and given that hotel operators are telling us that deferrals offered by government don't work for them and given that letting operators keep the tourism levy in a weak market is a drop in the bucket, to the minister: what else are you going to do to help Alberta's hoteliers?

2:30

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The tourism levy that we are abating from March to December of 2020 will leave an additional \$16 million to \$27 million in hands and pockets. I guarantee you that I've been speaking to many more businesses than the members opposite, hundreds if not thousands combined on all the roundtables. The number one thing that they wanted was more cash and

liquidity in their pockets. That's what they've received. We're also working with Travel Alberta for further supports for our tourism industry while we follow the chief medical officer's advice to keep travel within the province.

Member Ceci: The third question: she read my mind. Given that there are more than 15,000 empty hotel rooms in Calgary right now and given that these hotels have had to furlough roughly 6,000 employees and given that hotel operators have told us that marketing right now is the key and that there's an opportunity to grab longer term market share as governments in other jurisdictions hold back on their spending, on behalf of hotel operators that I've talked to, to the minister: will you commit to moving the tourism levy out of the general revenue and ensure that all of the funds flow to Travel Alberta?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we're working with Travel Alberta for more supports for our tourism industry. Travel Alberta has also launched a stay-cation Worth the Wait marketing campaign as we move out of COVID and into recovery. The 10-year tourism strategy that we're working on has three phases of response: recovery, relaunch, and rebuild. We're focusing on helping our businesses and our economy relaunch. This side of the government has always supported our job creators. Can't say the same for the members opposite.

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

Public Service Pension Fund Administration

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier stood in this House and called those who worry about AIMCo's investment returns economically illiterate. He said that public-sector pensions provide defined benefits which must be paid regardless of the success or failure to the connected pension fund and gleefully pronounced that investment returns are irrelevant. To the Premier: do you truly not understand that in the event that these pension funds become insolvent due to your government's mismanagement, it will be Alberta taxpayers left footing the bill?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we absolutely recognize that good returns strengthen pensions and ultimately result in lower premiums over time. But we also know that defined benefit pension plans, in fact, are guaranteed. The benefits will be there for future public servants when they retire, and they're backed by Alberta taxpayers.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this Finance minister has repeatedly referred to AIMCo as beating the benchmark in most years – and he is not talking about their record on pensions – and given that when it comes to benchmarks that really matter, like the ones set by the LAPP's board, AIMCo has missed that benchmark for 44 straight quarters, to the minister: why have you really tethered Albertans' many pensions and trust funds to AIMCo? It's obviously not about the returns – your Premier admitted as much – so what's really going on here?

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me remind this House again of the reason and purpose for consolidating pension funds in AIMCo. There's an abundance of research that demonstrates that the larger the funds managed, the more efficient the management that can occur,

and, in fact, it can be managed at a lower cost. Our consolidation of pensions under AIMCo will ensure that ATRF, Alberta teachers, for instance, will save \$20 million; Alberta taxpayers, \$20 million. This side of the House is concerned about providing efficiency for Albertans.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans understand that the heritage savings trust fund's investment performance directly impacts the government's ability to pay for public services and given that Albertans are still waiting for this minister to finally tell them how much their heritage trust fund lost due to AIMCo's highly suspect volatility-based investment strategy – \$2 billion, \$4 billion – and given that Albertans want to know if we lost \$500 for every man, woman, and child – or was it a thousand? – to the minister: at this point why would Albertans trust anything your government has to say on this issue? Do the right thing and commit to reversing Bill 22, or are you incapable . . .

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the NDP again are creating fear and spreading misinformation around Alberta public-sector pensions. We strengthened Alberta pensions with Bill 22. We continue to have confidence that AIMCo will deliver excellent results over time. AIMCo has exceeded benchmarks, again, 8 out of 10 years. They have a long-term, excellent track record. We will ensure that they're positioned to continue to deliver for Alberta public servants and for Alberta taxpayers.

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

COVID-19 and Care Facility Visiting Rules

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last three months our government has taken extensive steps to protect long-term care centres, and for good reason, with most of the deadly outbreaks in the province and around the world being in seniors facilities. As we begin to relaunch from the COVID-19 pandemic, I've heard from a number of constituents in Livingstone-Macleod who have family in long-term care centres, wondering when they will be able to see their loved ones. To the Minister of Health: what are the current restrictions on visitors in long-term care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a great question. Residents in continuing care can have an essential visitor, or they can have a visitor when they are near the end of life. Outdoor visits are also allowed with an essential visitor and one other person. We're very much aware of the impact of isolation, and our approach is actually a bit more permissive than some other provinces are in Canada, but this is a matter of life and death. We've had 116 deaths in our continuing care facilities compared to more than 1,600 in Ontario and more than 4,500 in Quebec.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has the call.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many families are desperately looking forward to seeing other family members and given that this desire must be balanced with the absolute need to protect the most vulnerable Albertans among us, but given that long-term care centres are home not only to the elderly but also to those with severe disabilities that require full-time care and for whom isolation from loved ones can be especially hard, again to the minister: what are we looking at for potential options to allow those who are less vulnerable to disease to see their loved ones earlier?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health is rising.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Some nonseniors do live in continuing care, and, as I said, we're mindful of the impact of isolation on residents of all ages. Restrictions have a high cost for everyone, especially residents in continuing care, but all residents are at similar risk due to the setting itself as well as the underlying conditions and treatment in the facilities. Continuing care residents are best served by a single standard, but we need to look at every possible option to reduce the impact on the quality of life for those residents.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answers. Given that Alberta seniors and those with disabilities have had a hard few months with so little social interaction and given that we are seeing cases drop and that we have entered phase 2 of our relaunch strategy, implying significant progress against the COVID-19 pandemic, can the Minister of Health please inform us of what processes would have to be in place and what benchmarks we must hit in order to allow Albertans to see their loved ones that are in long-term care facilities?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like all jurisdictions, we want to ease restrictions in continuing care as much and as soon as possible, balancing safety with the need for human connection and social interaction. We're looking at identifying specific criteria, likely a combination of several factors such as the number of active cases in a community, enhanced visitor screening, and capacity to mitigate risk at the site level. We need to be cautious because, as I said earlier, this is literally a matter of life and death.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Child Care Review

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Children's Services made an important announcement regarding consultations on child care in Alberta. Our government is committed to improving access to high-quality, safe, accessible child care for all of those who need it, and I believe that this is an important step in the right direction. I've heard from many of my constituents in my riding hoping that a review like this one would be coming. To the Minister of Children's Services: what discussions led to the decision to enter into consultations on the quality and safety of child care in Alberta?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the great question. The Child Care Licensing Act is expiring early next year, so we wanted to make sure that we got feedback from child care operators, from front-line workers, and from Alberta parents about how this act could work better for them. Industry associations like AECEA and the Alberta Association of Child Care Operators plus individual centres indicated that they wanted these consultations to proceed sooner rather than later, and I'm pleased that the MLA for Grande Prairie is taking the lead on this important work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.
2:40

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that reviewing Alberta's child care legislation and regulations was

deemed important enough to be a priority as we all safely relaunch from the COVID-19 pandemic and given that this review has a wide mandate of giving parents and early childhood educators a say on red tape reduction, quality of care, and safety, can the Minister of Children's Services please explain to the House what kinds of questions and issues are being raised by parents and educators through the survey and through the virtual tabletop sessions?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a great question because one of the things we heard most through the red tape portal online were concerns about the regulatory burdens faced by child care operators across this province. Our colleague the MLA for Grande Prairie has begun those conversations with the sector last week, and we've also got online surveys going out to make sure we can hear directly from all operators, all workers, and all parents across this province. Last week we heard that child care operators in southern Alberta were very happy to have accreditation discontinued, and they've provided their feedback on how quality can be enshrined in legislation rather than in stacks of paperwork. We're so grateful for their feedback and are looking forward to hearing more.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that a large part of the review will focus on the safety of children in care, including physical, emotional, and psychological safety as well as ensuring high-quality child care is available across Alberta and given that our government has recently announced a partnership with the Respect Group, to the Minister of Children's Services: will the legislative review look at the potential of making important training like the one offered by the Respect Group a larger part of child care operator qualifications?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the great question. As a government we have continued to fund professional development training and wage top-ups for staff. We know that's a hugely important part of high-quality child care. We're now providing an adapted version of respect-in-school training to all early childhood educators in Alberta at no cost to these centres. This training responds to concerns that we heard as a government around how COVID-19 has changed the way children and youth are interacting with their typical community resources and their peers and ensures reaching them where they are, be it at day camp or daycare or youth sports, and building safe and nurturing environments for our smallest citizens.

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

Members' Statements (continued)

Veterans Association Food Bank

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, when times are tough, Albertans come together and selflessly donate their time, money, and other resources to help each other. I saw it during the floods back home in Calgary, and we all witnessed it, the outpouring of support from groups and individuals to help with the fires in Fort McMurray. Now as we reopen from COVID-19, we see it again, Albertans helping Albertans

everywhere you look, and, yes, that even includes on Facebook and Twitter sometimes.

I wanted to highlight a particular group which has taken the proverbial bull by the horns and been there for a very important community. That group is the Veterans Association Food Bank. They provide assistance to the brave women and men who are willing to pay the ultimate sacrifice for our freedoms and rights. They are a group of veterans helping veterans, and their plans include helping with more than food. Their future plans include supporting our veterans in their mental health. The Veterans Association Food Bank has future plans to incorporate peer support groups and veterans-only AA groups, amongst other initiatives. They are stepping up, stepping up to help as many veterans as they possibly can as we work through the aftermath of COVID-19. That is what we need; we need more groups and individuals to step up and help each other.

Thankfully, that's exactly what Albertans are doing because, as we reopen, we face new problems. We will face the consequences of physical distancing on our mental health, but if we come together as we have many times before, if we as Albertans step up and be there for each other and double down on kindness, then we shall carry the day. We will rebuild our connections and improve our mental health together.

Thank you to the Veterans Association Food Bank for supporting our veterans, for using your food bank program as a stepping stone to implementing and incorporating new initiatives to benefit all veterans.

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

Postsecondary Education Review

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the government announced that they hired McKinsey to review and to transform Alberta's postsecondary system. But this government has already done that, to a degree. They've taken a world-renowned public sector providing high-quality education and turned it upside down. I can think of many better uses for \$3.7 million – it's a lot of money – starting by reversing the deep cuts to the sector which have forced mass layoffs, shut down satellite campuses in rural communities, and forced the cancellation of trade programs at rural colleges.

As more young people graduate from high school and have been unemployed, otherwise looking to retrain, the sector needs to be supported as an economic driver that will help to build Alberta's path to recovery. For that, it needs investment, Mr. Speaker.

Let's make sure that this report, 2030 vision, is not just a blueprint for cuts, is not to make postsecondary education inaccessible for young Albertans and so many Albertans looking to retrain in a down economy. The Minister needs to provide answers to students and adult learners about how he's going to ensure access to postsecondary learning in the short term and one year from now, when the report comes out. Students cannot afford to rack up another year's worth of rising tuition and living costs and take on massive amounts of debt, especially at this time. A plan for 2030 must start with a plan for 2020 immediately, or our trades, colleges, and universities will suffer irreversible damage.

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

Insurance Industry

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think there's something wrong with our insurance industry. It might be related to municipal

building code inspections or the trade professions' accountability. I'm just not sure. But we must recognize that this is a very complicated problem with no easy solution. You see, my constituents and I know something about recovering from natural disasters. We've faced down fire and flood, and in that time we've experienced shortfalls in recovery attempts that were, needless to say, unanticipated.

Hillview condos lost their complex in the great fire and still haven't moved in. In fact, they've been asked for over \$100,000 in additional assessments as they attempt to rebuild. Currently a legal matter, one wonders whether it should have been an insurance responsibility to rebuild, if safety codes inspectors could have identified concerns, or whether condo associations have the quality to manage a complex rebuild.

The province paid out \$647 million to support victims of the fire. Alas for many of these folks, they did not qualify due to technicalities. While residents are still struggling, Red Cross is sitting on \$19 million in unallocated funds that were collected to support residents affected by the fire.

Residents in the lower downtown of Fort McMurray were hit with a 1-in-100-year flood. Residents discovered clauses that indicated that their comprehensive stormwater and sewer water backup was null and void when associated with an overland flood. The province put up over \$150 million to support McMurrayites.

Now, the insurance industry has called for a national action plan on flooding, including investing in resilient infrastructure, flood mapping, and the availability of overland flood insurance. I'll challenge that and say that we need to evaluate, compare, and clarify an industry that is subjective and not objective. Regardless, it is clear that the status quo is not working. This is, however, a complex situation to resolve, and we must move forward with intelligence to get this done right for Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Calgary Storm

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parts of northeast Calgary were hit by a devastating hailstorm this past Saturday evening. We saw intense hail and torrential rain, which caused massive destruction across northeast Calgary. It smashed cars, destroyed homes, flooded basements, and left cars submerged on streets. It all happened in a matter of minutes, and there was nothing that could be done to prevent this. Thankfully, I have not heard of any injuries, and nothing has been reported. But now Calgarians are left to pick up the pieces.

This comes at a time when our province is already reeling from the impacts of COVID-19. Many have lost their jobs and had their hours reduced. I have already heard from many constituents and people around northeast Calgary who are saying that the damages to their vehicles or homes may not be fully covered by insurance. The damage to vehicles is a huge cause for concern. In the face of rising insurance and because of the lapse of the insurance cap and reduced driving due to COVID-19, many Albertans have parked their insurance or moved to third-party insurance policies.

This unexpected damage is now devastating the financial well-being of many in my riding and across Calgary during these already very difficult times, many of whom are among the Albertans who are unemployed and can't afford to pay for these costs out of pocket. At this critical time we need to come together to support each other, and we need the government to step up and declare this hailstorm as a disaster so that those affected by this devastation can

access disaster relief programs. Calgary can't afford it; people can't afford this. Premier, they're counting on you.

Thank you.

2:50

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to provide oral notice of Government Motion 23, to be put on the Order Paper in my name.

Be it resolved that

- (1) a select special Public Health Act review committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to review the Public Health Act, consisting of the following members: MLA Milliken to be the chair, MLA Rosin to be the deputy chair, MLA Ganley, MLA Gray, MLA Hoffman, MLA Long, MLA Lovely, MLA Neudorf, MLA Shepherd, MLA Turton, MLA Reid, and MLA Rowswell;
- (2) the committee may limit its review to sections of the Public Health Act that the committee selects for its consideration;
- (3) the committee continue despite a prorogation of session and may without leave of the Assembly meet during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
- (4) reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertisement, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair;
- (5) in carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may utilize the services of employees of the Legislative Assembly Office or, with the concurrence of the head of a department or an officer of the Legislature, utilize the services of employees of the public service employed in that department or office;
- (6) the committee must submit its report to the Assembly, including any amendments to the act recommended by the committee, within four months after commencing its review;
- (7) if the Assembly is not sitting at the time the report of the committee is completed, the chair of the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk in accordance with Standing Order 38.1 and forwarding a copy to each Member of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to provide oral notice of Bill 23, the Commercial Tenancies Protection Act, sponsored by my colleague the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has a tabling.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies, that I will deposit in the appropriate spot at the appropriate time. I made reference to a quote in an article from the *Edmonton Journal*, Government's Red-tape Legislation Stumps the NDP and the Minister who Tabled It, where journalists had lots of questions but the minister didn't have any answers.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has a tabling or two.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have with me today the requisite number of copies of correspondence in support of Bill 201, the Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act, the first one from Springbank Air Training College, which strongly supports the bill. They are the purveyors of the WestJet flight path training, and that message is from their general manager, Jade Jewell.

The second I have from Cavalier Aviation Ltd., president Jayme Hepfner – they are one of the few authorized Cessna service facilities in Canada – operating out of Springbank Air Training College facility and also with Mount Royal University, strongly supporting the bill.

Also, Aurora Aerial, who are in the RPAS, the remotely piloted aircraft systems, business: this is a strong letter of support from their CEO, Mr. Alan Tay.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 201

Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act

The Deputy Chair: We are, I think, at about 81 minutes left in debate on this. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill at this time? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has risen.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the Assembly for the opportunity to address in Committee of the Whole my private member's Bill 201, the Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act. It's always a pleasure to rise and to encourage support of this bill and to provide further context around the strategic and essential role that can be played by the establishment of this council when enacted.

I think that each and every member of this Assembly will find that they have a tie in their own constituencies to vital air services, community economic opportunity around the aviation or aerospace sectors, or to supporting diversification and innovation in the Alberta economy, often, again, right in their back door and backyard, as they'll find, as I have, that there are businesses around this province in almost every constituency that are involved with air services, with pilot training, with aircraft maintenance work, with other economic opportunities around the industry as well.

I'm going to give a few examples. One of those is the flight training schools, which we heard quite a bit about because they were very anxious to get back up in the air and to training their local and international pilots. Just a little example of some of the geographic spread of that: we have Absolute Aviation in Wetaskiwin, Adventure Aviation in Grande Prairie, Border City Aviation in Lloydminster, Calgary Flight Training Centre in Didsbury. We have Mount Royal aviation, Calgary Flying Club, and Springbank Aero Flight Training as well as Springbank Air Training College in Springbank, Centennial Flight Centre in Sturgeon county, Cooking Lake Aviation in Sherwood Park, Edmonton Flying Club in Parkland, and others across the province in such places as Lethbridge, Cold Lake, Fort McMurray, Villeneuve Airport, Three Hills, Penhold, and Medicine Hat. I hope that's touched a number of your constituencies out there.

Again, I know that you'll find, as you do your own research, that there are aviation and aerospace businesses and operations and organizations, associations, across this great province. These are just really a few centres of aviation training, inspiration, and excellence around the province and a great opportunity for us to export that expertise by bringing pilots here for training from

around the world. There is, again, a severe pilot shortage coming even during the current environment, but we are actually seeing a timing out of many of the baby boomer pilots, and that's a big, big opportunity.

Parallel to these organizations that I've mentioned are organizations such as Elevate Aviation, a nonprofit group encouraging and inspiring young women led by their executive director and former air traffic controller Kendra Kincade, whose mission is to provide a platform for women to thrive and succeed through aviation. She's been holding a regular series of webinars – I've participated in a few – and she is bringing people together not just to be pilots but also aircraft maintenance engineers, in her former profession, air traffic controllers, to make those accessible and open and to encourage young women to get into this as a career as they go forward, as she has enjoyed. We are lucky to see so many women getting into the business.

Now, the other side is the airports and aerodromes and heliports we hear of across the province. There's a pretty long list of those. I did a little bit of research in looking at those. We have 22 international air transportation, IATA-certified airports, representing some of those very confusing airport codes, which I know a lot of but even found out that I don't know some of them, from YEG and YYC to less known YBW and YZU. These include your communities from across the province as well, communities such as Cold Lake, Edson, Fort Chipewyan, Fort MacKay, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, High Level, Lethbridge, Lloydminster, Medicine Hat, Nisku, Peace River, Red Deer, Rocky Mountain House, Slave Lake, Villeneuve, Wainwright, and Whitecourt. These are all IATA-certified airports. Of course, I challenge you to identify the three-letter codes attached to those.

We also have 66 heliports serving hospitals and health centres. Again, we don't think of those often as certified and registered airports in this province, but they're in the hospitals and health centres from Banff to Boyle and from Consort to Viking. There are 66 of those around the world that transport patients and injured people through the good works of STARS and HALO and other air services across this province, that are vitally important to the work that is done in the aviation sector across the province and deserve the oversight and strategic planning that the strategic aviation advisory council will offer.

We have 229 other airports, aerodromes, and heliports across the province serving Albertans each and every day in the most remote parts of this great province, not to mention a half-dozen active Armed Forces' airfields protecting our borders and skies. This touches every part of our lives and provides safety and emergency care to Albertans each and every day, and it is a vital, vital part of not only our present but our future as we make sure that the less accessible parts of our province are accessible.

3:00

Mr. Chair, these are services, facilities, and opportunities that are far too important not to have strategic oversight from industry experts involved with that, working alongside government and our ministry officials to ensure long-term oversight, strategic planning, seizing of global opportunities, and to take advantage of hard-fought and natural advantages that we enjoy across many aspects of the aviation and aerospace sectors, not to mention the rich aviation history and legacy that I've mentioned in the past.

Mr. Chair, these will do well in addressing and, I would say, in ensuring that we need the support for the formation of Alberta's first-ever strategic aviation advisory council, which, again, I think of as a council of experts who will then liaise and take submissions from and engage with subsector experts from across this sector and bring that together and make recommendations to government that

will allow us in Alberta to fire on all cylinders and to truly take flight with our aviation and aerospace sectors in the future.

Mr. Chair, I would encourage all the members of the House – and I'm grateful for the support from all sides of the House thus far. I'm open to any questions and certainly suggestions and ideas around how we can make this strategic aviation council better and how we can make it work best for all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to speak to this? I believe that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore caught my eye first.

Mr. Nielsen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Wow. It was looking really close there. I appreciate the opportunity to add some comments here in Committee of the Whole on Bill 201, the Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act.

Of course, I first want to start by thanking the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this bill forward. Very clearly, based on tablings that I've seen, some of the comments that he's added through the course of debate here so far, he has brought forward a very robust knowledge of the industry. Probably the fact of spending 20 years in that industry might have helped just a little bit. It certainly gave us the ability to look at some of the things that maybe we have been overlooking in the past as a province. You know, I think back to when the debate around the Edmonton city airport was going on and how controversial, how heated that became. I'm wondering now: could that advisory council have been able to inject some knowledge within that debate? Unfortunately, we'll never know at this point.

You know, I guess that as I'm looking at this bill – and I'm sure the member will probably get a chance to pop up later and maybe add some thoughts around this – from a technical point of view, I suppose, creating yet another council or a committee could suggest creating red tape. As the red tape critic I'm maybe wondering: what kind of discussions occurred with the red tape minister? Was there any push-back, potentially, about doing this, or did he get any, I guess, signs of urgency that he might need to go out and cut into all kinds of other areas in order to fulfill that mandate of one in, one out, cutting by one-third, things like that, or potentially just rushing ahead to try to make room for this? I'm curious about some of those things.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

Of course, we've also seen comments from the government, by the Premier around fiscal reckoning. You know, I mean, it would be unfortunate if we had gone through all the work to pass this – again, I commend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for, quite honestly, I think, providing an opportunity at diversification, more so than what I've seen from the government here so far. But will the government be supporting that work going forward? It would be great to pass this, but to have it then sit on a shelf somewhere and at some point in time maybe we'll look at it again? Here is an opportunity where we can use all the knowledge that lies right here in Alberta to be able to spur Alberta's economy forward in possibly an area that we've neglected before, in the past. I'm looking forward to maybe even hearing from the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction around that or from the member and some of his comments.

I was very pleased to see the level of stakeholder engagement on this. Of course, that's probably to the credit of many years in the industry and all the contacts that you've been able to reach out to. I look forward to seeing what this council will be able to advise

Alberta on, how we can move forward, and I'm hoping that the government will take this seriously as they go. Especially given some of the things – you know, partially because of COVID, the downturn in the economy itself – the airline industry has taken a beating, quite honestly. I believe our flagship – hopefully, the member will remind me exactly what term he was using for WestJet. On the number of layoffs that have happened there and at Air Canada, of course: hopefully, there's a way to be able to bring those people back sooner rather than later and just around the business that's being done at both of our international airports in the province and even some of our smaller ones and how we can better utilize some of those smaller facilities.

With that, I look forward to the rest of the debate in Committee of the Whole. I will be supporting Bill 201 to move forward, of course, to third and, most likely, ultimately that we pass this bill and give Alberta the best chance we can at diversification within the province. Again, I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for all his work that he did in putting this bill together and for his work even presenting it to the private members' committee as well, of which I am a member.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. If I just may quickly respond to the member here so that we can keep that very timely, I know there have been some concerns. Are we creating red tape by doing this? There's a certain point in time, to the member, respectfully, when you have to move ahead and you have to take not red tape but move forward with ambition and with vision, and I think this is an opportunity to do that. We can bring in industry experts, and we have lots of incredible people within our ministries and across government to do some work. But there are no better people to tell us about what their industry needs and how we can help them to advance forward and to grow that industry in Alberta, which is the ultimate goal, than to listen to the industry experts.

The structure of the council allows – and I've had lots of conversations, and I've reminded many people that have helped me to get where we are with the bill that just because they've helped us get to where we are, it doesn't mean they're going to be at the table. But they can be represented at that table, and the council has the opportunity to have some breakout working groups to address subsectors and also, as is outlined within the bill itself, to receive submissions or to engage in other ways with sector and subsector experts. I'm hoping that that is really driven by those businesspeople that will come forward and that their recommendations will be equally insightful.

In terms of overlap, you know what? If we can overlap a little bit with the ministries and the good work that's being done there but can encourage them and nudge them and give them some tools to enhance what they're doing to diversify the economy, I think that's very good.

In terms of the lack of focus that we may have seen in the past, you know, one of the things that drove me to bring this bill forward was a loss of some pretty strategic air services, in my mind. As someone with an industry background, when Cathay Pacific Cargo, a company I worked for, started flying into Calgary, I was pretty thrilled to see a tail on the ground there and was able to attend the inaugural welcoming of that flight. That launched in October 2014.

When they left in I think it was April 2019, of course with very little fanfare on the cancellation of it, I made a phone call to one of my friends who was formerly on the passenger side and was the vice-president of cargo for Cathay Pacific North America. I asked

him: what was his interaction with the Alberta government, and was there anything there? I was pretty shocked. He said that they had not had one conversation or one phone call. So we're not doing it as well as we need to. We need to do it better. I'm hoping that something like the strategic aviation advisory council will actually encourage that to happen through recommendations that we need to take the services of our partners that are choosing to do business in Alberta, I think, more seriously.

3:10

In terms of the bill itself, if we pass it – I'm hoping we will and that I'll have the support to do so – it does not come into effect until December 31 of this year. I know that that might sound like a long time now. Certainly, we could use the help to drive those recommendations forward so that we can actually have the right people at the table, and I think that's very important. All the people that I've spoken to – it doesn't actually mean that they're going to be at the table – have been warned that this is going to be a lean and mean group and that they're probably going to be paying their own way. We'll provide some meeting space and, as the bill says, some secretarial support from the Ministry of Transportation at this point in time. The decision on how and who this council would be attached to formally will be decided, of course, by Executive Council, as I recall correctly, an order in council on it.

In terms of the airline industry, the member is, I think, very, very insightful in that we're running into a time here which has been decimating for the airline industry, and we need to show some love to our friends at WestJet, who have their hubs and their base of operations and the largest number of their employees here in Alberta. We need to ensure that they understand and that they know we understand how important they are to the Alberta economy and to employment and to the GDP of our great province. But it is also not limited to WestJet. "Flag carrier," I think, was the term I've used before, the provincial flag carrier. We have national flag carriers. We also have to equally respect the investment and the hard work done by Air Canada and Air North and so many other airlines – Flair and Swoop and so many others – and also the international carriers. Without them, we won't have the competition we need and/or the opportunities to get people to Amsterdam and to Beijing through Hainan Airlines. We need to work very closely with those.

I hope that answers some of the questions that the member posed there. This is a very complicated field, and this bill is rather complicated in itself. So just an opportunity there to look at it. There's big breadth there, but there's also, I think, reflected in that, a huge opportunity that I'm learning more about each and every day.

To your point on the letters of support that I've received, I knew a few of them. I've met way more, and I've learned so much about the industry, particularly on the RPAS, the remotely piloted aircraft, and the UAS and the UAV, the technology that's being employed in this province that can help us across the forestry sector, the energy sector, in so many different industries. That we could actually create a centre of excellence here in Alberta is extremely exciting.

Thank you to the member for the support, and I hope that that has helped to allow him to support this bill as we go forward. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you so much, Madam Chair, and especially thank you to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for putting forward this amazing bill, which I'm so proud to rise in this House today to support, Bill 201, the Strategic Aviation Advisory

Council Act. I would also say, through you, Madam Chair, how much I appreciate the passion and the professional knowledge the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has on this file, as seen in this bill, and I would also want to recognize the passion and experience of my other colleague the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland and his incredible input on this bill as well.

Madam Chair, I support this very important private member's bill for many reasons, but in my time speaking today, I want to cover three key reasons why. I support this bill, including its air services strategy, on the fronts of economic development, tourism, and rural economic development. I believe this bill will have immense benefits for those areas as well as many other areas. Then, if I have time remaining, I want to talk about my local airports in Strathcona county, Josephburg, and South Cooking Lake, because I believe this bill is not only good for our big airports in Edmonton and Calgary but also our rural airports here in Alberta. We can never forget about rural economic development. When I say that, I'm looking at our wonderful members here from rural Alberta, including my good friend the Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

I want to begin with: this bill will strengthen and support economic development in the area of foreign direct investment. For Alberta to grow economically in the 21st century, we must engage with the rest of the world, and this bill is focused on international engagement and, thus, foreign direct investment. We must build the Alberta brand globally, and this bill is focused on that, supporting broader economic development, tourism, and diversification objectives. We need to engage with, through also airline strategic connections, the major economic superpowers of the Asia Pacific: China, Japan, and India. The Asia Pacific represents 60 per cent of the world's population, 40 per cent of global fossil fuel consumption, and a third of global trade. We need to be engaged. I know the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and all members of this House, on both sides of the aisle, understand this important point. We will do that by building the Alberta brand via the skies, via this act.

More corporate connections across the world, including to China, India, and Japan, will be absolutely critical, and this bill supports that. We are a small jurisdiction, Madam Chair. We're 4.3 million people. We must connect with the rest of the world, and this bill facilitates stronger connections in the 21st century through the aviation industry.

We also must emulate Texas in this regard. We're often called Texas of the north, and I'm quite proud to have that nickname, Madam Chair. Texas is an energy superpower, like we are, a subnational jurisdiction. In the early 1980s they went from overly relying only on energy to, following the energy crash in the early 1980s and a really nasty banking crash as well, focusing on diversifying their economy beyond fossil fuels, and one of the key sectors they targeted was aviation. Now Texas is a major hub and also an aviation industry powerhouse. So we can really emulate Texas in this regard as well.

I am excited on the front of foreign direct investment, Madam Chair, for Bill 201 to support this very important objective for Albertans.

Also, Madam Chair, I'm very excited on the front of tourism. This bill will focus on tourism and, thus, on supporting the Alberta economy. In 1970 fewer than 200 million people world-wide engaged in tourism, travelled abroad. Now that number, as of last year, has surged to 1.5 billion, led by Chinese outbound tourists of 150 million. We need to engage these markets for tourism for our great tourism spots all across our province, for Banff, Jasper, and all across Alberta, including my beautiful riding of Sherwood Park.

Madam Chair, Chinese and Japanese tourists are some of the highest spending tourists in the world. Annually Japanese tourists

spend some \$20 billion, and now, recently, Chinese tourists have eclipsed them in their tourism purchasing power. We, again, must engage these markets, and the Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act does just that. Thus, it has my strong support.

We have great examples of Alberta airports engaging with other international airports for great economic effect, Madam Chair. I think back to 2010, when the provincial government along with, obviously, the federal government co-operated to get a flight from Calgary to Tokyo, Japan. What happened with that flight was that in three years the tourism numbers tripled to 66,000 tourists. I'm excited about our Shanghai flight from Calgary. I believe that's been going on for about four years. Let's get more of these critical markets, be it South Korea, India, Southeast Asia. I'm so excited. This bill will fundamentally help boost tourism at a time when we really need it. That is another reason why I strongly support this bill.

Also, critically, I support this bill fundamentally – I say this to all my colleagues in this House, the people's House – because it will support rural economic development. The history of aviation was well laid out by so many members here, including and especially the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and the story of Alberta's aviation industry begins with rural Alberta. I won't go through that because it's already been eloquently recorded here in this House.

3:20

I want to start in 1972, when Peter Lougheed, one of our most visionary Premiers, laid out his vision for rural economic development via our rural airports, that synergistically feed into Calgary and Edmonton. This began at the end of 1972 with the government proposing to build a network of rural airports, that are so critical. I see them in my municipality, too, of Strathcona county, with, again, Josephburg and South Cooking Lake. I'm excited about this bill because Alberta only succeeds so long as rural Alberta succeeds, and what I like about this bill put forward by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is that this is an inclusive bill that includes that the economic development benefits will also be shared with rural Alberta. Again, on that front, Madam Chair, this is another reason, the third I have outlined here in this House, why I strongly, with great passion, support this bill.

Now, in my remaining time, Madam Chair, I would be remiss if I didn't talk about my two local airports, yet another reason why, as a local, constituent-loving MLA, I support this bill. I firmly believe it will support my two airports in my constituency. Let me take the remaining time I have here – time is getting tight, but I want to just mention some highlights of my two airports and how they will greatly benefit from Bill 201.

Now, I had the honour to visit the South Cooking Lake airport last year. Great people. Here are some amazing facts about just a local airport that we have here in Alberta. There are so many great local airport stories, and I know that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland could share some. The South Cooking Lake airport is Canada's oldest operating public airport. It was founded in 1926, and the people out there are just absolutely amazing, so passionate about their local airport. This operates as a nonprofit entirely by volunteers. It's an amazing, strong-community story. There are about 200 aircraft based there. There's a training school. I've been to the training school. I've talked to the training instructors. What I like, too, about Bill 201: it'll also focus on expanding training schools, because especially the Asian pilot market is growing, so we could become an airport pilot training hub. I'm really excited about that, Madam Chair.

Finally, I just want to quickly talk about the Josephburg airport. This is Strathcona county's official municipal airport, Madam Chair, and it's managed by Strathcona county. It's used primarily

for privately owned commercial aircraft, and the lands around the property are primarily for agricultural purposes.

I'll conclude my remarks. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair, for giving me the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 201. I would like to thank my good friend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this bill forward. I know he has a lot of passion for economic development and tourism. Also, I would like to commend the previous speaker, the Member for Sherwood Park, for actually representing the airports in his riding very passionately on behalf of his constituents.

Madam Chair, while aviation is a federal government subject, there are roles, responsibilities, and services offered by the provincial government that are impacted by the aviation industry. As such, the government of Alberta needs to be informed and make the correct policy decisions with expert advice in order to help grow and diversify our economy. While most people realize that the international airports are regulated federally, in Alberta they are incorporated provincially under the Regional Airports Authorities Act. The creation of this committee could look at a review of the Regional Airports Authorities Act. This law is over 30 years old, and some things have changed in aviation in the last 30 years. As per the act:

- 21 The purposes of an [airport] authority are
- (a) to manage and operate the airports for which it is responsible in a safe, secure and efficient manner, and
 - (b) to advance economic and community development by means that include promoting and encouraging improved airline and transportation service and an expanded aviation industry

for the general benefit of the public in its region.

Could you imagine the outcry if an airport authority refused to advance economic and community development and refused to allow the aviation industry to grow? We'll come back to this.

Alberta has four such incorporated airport authorities: Calgary, Red Deer, Edmonton, and Fort McMurray. I'm surprised more airports haven't taken to using this law to incorporate. Airports are about more than moving people and cargo. They are centres of employment, growth poles of a specific sector known as the aerospace industry. As the world moves to freer markets and more people take to the skies, new aerospace businesses are needed to supply the products and services that passenger and cargo haulers need.

One of those businesses is Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, HAL, an Indian aerospace and defence company headquartered in Bangalore, India. They recently did a deal with British Aerospace to create an updated version of the Hawk jet training aircraft. This is the same aircraft the Royal Canadian Air Force leases to train its jet pilots, and that lease is coming due in four years. Wouldn't it be something if, because of this committee created by Bill 201, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and Alberta's low tax and favourable economic development conditions, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited set up operations in Alberta to build aircraft for the RCAF and the air forces of the world to lease?

Aviation and aerospace are global industries. Canada and Alberta in particular have a role to play to staff the pilots, flight attendants, mechanics, and air traffic controllers needed to grow this sector at home and abroad. Madam Chair, I dare say that we have a role to play to train the next generation of pilots and mechanics, both civilian and military, for the entire world right here in Alberta. It means engaging the flight schools across the province. It means

having more than one aircraft maintenance school at SAIT in Calgary. Maybe NAIT should get back in the business. Maybe Grande Prairie Regional College or Keyano College, from my almost second home, Fort McMurray, have a role to play in training mechanics.

In order to train pilots and mechanics, we need airports. In fact, Alberta may have too many airports. Premier Lougheed went on a spending spree in the 1970s, and just about every community has one of their own airports. But businesses like to cluster, and like businesses, some airports will survive and some will return to gravel and dust.

We have some great airports here in Alberta. Recently I actually asked my good friends the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont to join me in a tour at Edmonton International Airport, and it was very impressive, Madam Chair. Edmonton International Airport has invested in air cargo. Just last year it paid off in spades. Amid a global 5 per cent decline in air cargo traffic, Edmonton International was able to grow the market 3.3 per cent. Edmonton International beat the global market on air cargo in 2019. Although I'm from Calgary, I actually praise Edmonton for that reason.

As trans-Pacific airports like Vancouver become crowded and congested and the new carbon composite technologies are used to develop aircraft like the Boeing 787 and the Airbus A320, enabling aircraft to fly farther, quieter, and with less fuel, the Edmonton and Calgary international airports will become those trans-Pacific gateways and alternates to Vancouver, Madam Chair. It's very timely that we develop an alternate to Vancouver. One need not go to Vancouver for a 14-hour direct flight to New Delhi, for example. It can be flown from Edmonton or Calgary, as the Member for Sherwood Park said.

3:30

It means going out and making the business cases to those airlines to skip Vancouver and fly routes directly to Alberta. It means filling those planes with passengers and cargo, too. That's where the experience of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek comes into play, Madam Chair. He worked with Hong Kong Airlines, Cathay Pacific for a long time. Sometimes it means that Edmonton and Calgary might have to work together on attracting and retaining certain routes that are marginal.

Ottawa lobbied a trial balloon a few years ago about privatizing, as in selling off the land the international airports operate on to investors. I was very surprised by the reaction, Madam Chair. Calgary, the bastion of conservative thought, came out wholeheartedly opposed to such a move while Edmonton, home of the NDP, said: let's wait and see. This was completely the opposite reaction as to what was expected. Calgary was so opposed that they teamed up with Vancouver and Ottawa to co-ordinate their opposition.

Privatization brings about a degree of discipline on airports so that they do not create grandiose palaces like the Taj Mahal and overbuild before needed, driving up airfares for consumers and making flying expensive. Expensive flying limits passengers, which limits routes, which limits connections to the world and air cargo and limits economic growth. This committee, created by Bill 201, could look at airport privatization concerns.

Another matter: this committee that Bill 201 creates could provide advice to the government with respect to the disputes at airports. I know of three disputes in Alberta that are affecting economic development. The first one: a county has tried to get water and waste water for more than five years to an airport, but the airport keeps holding up the agreement and construction. Meanwhile potential tenants, fed up with the holdups at this airport

and the inability to buy title lots as opposed to lease lots, have gone and built their own airport nearby, reducing the economic impact of the original airport.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It is my honour and pleasure to rise and speak in support of my friend and colleague's bill, Bill 201. One of the crown jewels in my constituency is the Camrose Airport, which serves the city of Camrose and surrounding area. Of note is a 4,500-foot runway, which can accommodate corporate jets. The manager, Wayne Steele, proudly shared with me that he has clients coming out of Winnipeg and Red Deer. This traffic provides economic benefit to our community. When these travellers land, they usually rent a vehicle, purchase gas, buy meals, and occasionally stay overnight in one of our many hotels. This service deisolates our community. The major airports in Calgary and Edmonton are not needed as a facility to land. Our community realizes this benefit.

Aerial applicator companies stop at our airport and spread fungicide for the agriculture community. Support equipment is set up at the Camrose Airport. The long runway allows couriering of large loads, which reduces the cost to farmers. A faster application with fewer trips is required. The region had not seen that level of applications in 25 years. Due to the high level of moisture only an air application was successful. Last July the aerial applicators were in our area for two weeks. The value of this service was worth millions of dollars of crop which was at stake. The crew stayed at hotels, used restaurants and other services in the community. The aerial applicators are expected to be back again this year.

Wayne Steel, the manager, shared with me that he worked for the Alberta Transportation aviation branch from 1981 to 1996, where he was one of four in the branch who put the Alberta airport development program into effect. The recipients to upgrade airports were made by caucus committee. Ironically, he's now operating at the airport level and experiencing the planning of his program.

The Camrose Airport accommodates the needs of fixed-wing ambulance services provided under contract by Alberta Health. STARS did not exist in the '70s. The communities depended greatly on the small airports during that time. The fixed-wing airports still provide this important service. STARS flies from accident to hospital and in between hospitals.

Small airports accommodate the needs of law enforcement as well. The RCMP uses the airports for transportation of prisoners. Judges and magistrates use the airports to make their way to more remote areas.

The Camrose Airport also serves recreational pilot needs and, in the past, flight training schools. For decades we had our own flight school, which is trying to be revitalized. Federal regulations are holding them back.

Within my constituency Hardisty, Killam, Tofield, and Viking all have small airports as well. Bashaw has a grass strip which serves as a takeoff and landing airport. Aerial application operations work out of these small airports in my constituency. The runways of these airports are smaller and shorter and are able to accommodate small planes; 3,000 feet is the typical runway at these community airports.

I'm so proud to have an active airport community in my constituency and grateful to have Wayne Steel as the manager of our Camrose Airport. He worked in the industry for 44 years and brings a great deal of knowledge. Thank you to Wayne Steel for the contribution that you've made to our community and to the industry, and thank you to the small airports. We're so grateful to have that service in our constituency. I'm glad that the Member for

Calgary-Fish Creek has brought forward this important bill that has a very important impact on my community, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 201? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek: thank you again for bringing forth this very important bill to our aviation community. You know, again, I fly planes as well, and I love all of the comments my fellow colleagues are making about their strips and the businesses in their area. The Minister of Infrastructure: again, it's exciting some of the business opportunities that are out there. We have a lot of depth in our economy. Oftentimes we get criticized for not diversifying, and I think this is one of the chances to come up and actually diversify our economy.

I was really happy to see – and I'm going to give a plug for the member of Lethbridge – that their city actually took over the operation of the airport down there. Every couple years they used to have the Lethbridge air show. This year I think was the year, and it got postponed, obviously, for COVID, but the fact that that city council stepped forward and said, "Hey, here's an opportunity for us to run this thing as a business model; it can attract into areas and do that" literally helps with this aviation council coming forward to help foster those type of ideas. When you get some like-minded folks in the room that are energetic, they can look at different areas and bring it from the different facets of that industry, and it's really going to be very meaningful.

Out in my area, again, I've mentioned the two airports, the Villeneuve Airport and also the Mayerthorpe Airport. I was very interested to see that there was a council meeting recently with Lac Ste. Anne council, and they voted to honour Mr. Peter Trynchy, former minister from this House, to actually name that little airport that he was part of to get built up there back in the day. They're going to change the name to Peter Trynchy airport. Now, it should also be noted that that gentleman gave up, you know, his life to his constituents. He also was in a retirement home up there as well within that area.

When we're looking at some of the other things that could come out of this, we're talking – and the Minister of Infrastructure had spoken about, you know, maybe developing a new jet program, maybe developing something there. It wasn't too long ago, I think, in history that the Avro Arrow was out there. Now, this was a Canadian story. It was Canadian history, and, unfortunately, a lot of folks have lost that. At that time during development we had the most advanced aircraft, the most advanced jet aircraft in the world at that time. And what happened was that, due to short-sightedness and competition, et cetera – one gentleman was mentioning that Diefenbaker killed it; I mean, that's part of the history – we allowed that industry to go to the wayside. Again, it was during cost-control measures. It was during a bunch of things. There was pressure from the United States and the Soviets on us. Sputnik went and launched.

But out of that program we didn't realize how good we had it, how far advanced we were. When that program was cancelled, they were literally robbing all of the engineers who were involved. Little things like the space shuttle program came out of it. Little things like the Concorde came out of those groups. NASA inherited a ton of aeronautical engineers from that: Lockheed Martin, the Skunk Works.

3:40

Looking at some recent information, again, we're in a fifth-generation fighter-type program now, maybe pushing towards sixth. At that time it was first- or second-generation. That thing was

two to three generations ahead of itself. Those are the types of things for innovation that we need to start launching again and to give the young entrepreneurs the ability to do that. Again, to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this forward: I think that's going to foster it again. We've sold ourselves short for a number of years, and here's the time to really think big again, to take some of that pride, to bring it back, to tap into the technology that we have, to tap into the innovations that we have through artificial intelligence and otherwise to do that.

One thing I would mention again, sir, is that on that council, don't neglect the experimental and the amateur aircrafts. That group has so much latitude. When you think of SpaceShipOne and you think of Burt Rutan, the innovations they've taken forward, those are the ones that actually have commercialized space travel. That came out of that type of community of fostering those types of ideas. Anyone who's developing those avionics can do that. Anyone who wants to use alternate forms of propulsion or alternate engineer designs for lift or balance or otherwise: that's all part of that. It allows it really to foster and grow.

What you can see is that from the statistics from the federation of aviation council in the States, they've seen, in general, that aviation accidents actually decline. Everyone's been working on this for years, and you're looking at the balance of flight, what takes place during the flight envelope, and they had seen a massive decline over the last 10 years. Most of it was attributed to actual personal GPS units that you could take in the aircraft. The conventional mainstay takes a long time to bring along, but the experimental crowd, the amateur-build guys, they were allowed to develop this software, and they were supplements. These are the types of innovations that can be adopted and brought forward quite more readily.

I did write down some notes. I didn't want to miss anything today, but I'm probably already halfway through and mixed it up anyway, so might as well just throw those to the side.

The Villeneuve landing network: I want to talk about that a bit. It was Mayor Hnatiw from Sturgeon county who actually pulled that together because it's in her backyard. She ended up getting three other mayors that came on board with that initiative, again, understanding regionally that we could pull it together and the benefits that would come from all of those areas.

We also have Alexander First Nation as part of that group, the city of Morinville, the city of St. Albert. These are the types of things that, when you drop that little airport in your backyard, you can start to capitalize on it. If it's things like infrastructure – if we have dollars to spend on infrastructure, we can start building this out. When we're talking economic trade and tourism, those are the types of things that we can talk about fostering this, the flight training, et cetera.

To the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek: thank you for bringing this forward. Obviously, everyone here knows that I'm going to be voting in favour of this, and I hope that we actually wholeheartedly embrace this and think of ways how we can grow and diversify our economy through aviation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 201? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak in support of Bill 201, the Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act. As my colleagues have done before me, I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for his work on developing this bill. The opportunity to bring forward a private member's bill is a rare privilege, and I know that the

member has translated his personal passion for this sector into the objectives of this bill.

The creation of this advisory council builds on the rich aviation history that we have here in this province. Names like Wop May and Max Ward are just very, I guess, commonplace and kind of household names in Alberta because they have such a history, particularly in northern Alberta but, of course, all of Alberta. There's a great deal of potential to grow and develop this sector, and this bill will help us do just that.

The council will focus on the following. First, a strategic approach to air services that encourages economic growth and tourism. Of course, that's something we campaigned on, to grow the tourism industry in Alberta.

Second, strategic use of aviation programming when it comes to commercial and pilot training. Of course, that's something that even myself – someday I would like to become a pilot, too.

Third, improving services to rural and remote communities. Obviously, that's important. There are some parts of rural Alberta that are virtually only accessible by plane, so having those places serviced is incredibly important, of course.

Fourth, expanding research, development, and training in the aviation and aerospace sector. Of course, that's industry. That's diversifying our economy. That's things that could be happening right here in Alberta.

Fifth, support for emergency medical and fire responses that use aviation infrastructure. Of course, again, medical and fire response: I mean, that is so important to our communities.

Sixth, support for aviation services in the agriculture industry. Of course, we know that our agriculture industry has its trying times and everything, but obviously if we can help them in any way, we need to be able to do that, and this will help in that process.

Seventh, federal policies that impact aviation services in the country. You know, because this is an international industry, we have to work with our federal counterparts to accomplish some of these things.

Now, Madam Chair, that is, you know, quite a comprehensive list of issues for the council to consider and make recommendations on. When I look at this list, I am struck by how expansive the aerospace industry is and how many other industries it impacts. I think I speak for many when I say that we tend to think of the aviation industry quite narrowly in terms of personal and professional travel; for example, packing our bags for a family vacation, standing in line at security, making sure all our liquids and gels and aerosols are all under the limit, and of course the list goes on. But this council will take a holistic and nuanced view of the whole industry, considering everything from training to research and development and from tourism to agriculture.

When considering these areas, the council will need to research and analyze information, consult with key stakeholders, and prepare an annual report with recommendations for the minister. The council will also have the ability to request any necessary information or data from any ministry to assist in making its recommendations, receive submissions from any individuals or groups who are relevant to the council's work, and publish any submissions that are included in their report to the minister. These provisions will give the council the tools they need to effectively make recommendations and to share information with Albertans.

Madam Chair, there's another important section that I want to highlight in this bill, and that is the composition of the council. Again I commend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for these robust provisions. This section relates to who will be appointed to the council and the sectors or organizations they will represent. I'm going to quote directly from section 6(3) of the bill.

The members of the council must include . . . individuals from the following sectors . . .

- (a) airlines or commercial aviation;
- (b) aerodrome, airport or air-navigation authorities;
- (c) economic development, trade or tourism;
- (d) pilot-training institutions and programs;
- (e) aircraft maintenance training institutions and programs;
- (f) aerospace engineering or emerging technology;
- (g) search and rescue, emergency medical or air ambulance;
- (h) emergency management, agriculture or forestry;
- (i) consumers . . .

Of course, that is a very important one.

- (j) legal, finance, labour or professional organizations.

This list, again, represents a lot of diverse perspectives that make up the aviation industry.

To close, I want to thank again the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this important piece of legislation forward. The detailed provisions of this bill reflect his past professional experience in this industry, and if you were ever to step foot into his office, you would realize that his passion is truly there. COVID-19 has had an unimaginable impact on this sector. That is what makes this bill and the creation of this council even more timely. While I know the member couldn't have foreseen the challenges the industry is currently facing, I am proud to support this piece of legislation that is needed now more than ever.

To borrow a phrase from the member, I look forward to seeing Bill 201 take flight. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 201 in committee? I see the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Madam Chair. Bill 201, Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act, is a timely addition to the legislative agenda from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and I want to thank him for his leadership on this file. I believe the government of Alberta is going to need strategic policy advice on a number of matters pertaining to the aviation community in order to help facilitate Alberta's economic growth and job creation.

One of those matters came up three years ago or so, when the federal government floated the trial balloon of privatizing, which was selling the land base of Canada's national airports system airports, beginning with the big eight, which were Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Halifax, where there is still a federal land ownership component. The result would have been a conversion of the land assets to billions of dollars to the federal government that could then be spent on whatever they want but preferably capital for infrastructure. Of the 26 national airports system airports 22 still reside on land owned by the federal government.

3:50

Thirty years ago Transport Canada owned and operated most airports across the country as well as the air navigation system. Most of the infrastructure was built to the highest architectural and technology standards in the 1950s and '60s, but by the mid-1980s the system was aging and approaching the end of its useful life. Competing priorities for public funds and government debt levels were pushing the government-operated model to a breaking point. Federal budgets would not bear the replacement cost of the airport and air navigation systems, which were increasingly ill-suited to growing traffic and new security requirements as a result of violent attacks targeting air transport.

Following a series of studies in the 1980s and the privatization of airports in the United Kingdom, Canada took the first steps into

privatization by commercialized air navigation services, Nav Canada and the larger airports, and adopted the user-pay approach to building and operating air infrastructure across the sector. The operation of the largest 22 federally owned airports, those with traffic above 200,000 passengers per year and/or located in provincial capitals, was transferred to local authorities. The Alberta provincial Regional Airports Authorities Act of 1989 governs airport authorities that are incorporated within Alberta.

Transport Canada officially handed the management of the Calgary International Airport to the Calgary Airport Authority on July 1, 1992, and the Edmonton International Airport to Edmonton Airports on August 1, 1992. It is worth noting that one of the airports within my beautiful constituency, the YMM, Fort McMurray International Airport, received the same authority in 1999.

These corporations entered into leases with the federal government, paying Ottawa tens of millions annually to operate airports on these grounds. In 2018 Edmonton International had to pay almost \$20 million to Ottawa for the lease; Calgary International was \$42.5 million. Those costs rise annually, sending more and more money to Ottawa, and less and less money can be spent on paying down debt from capital expansion or lowering handling fees for airlines and passing the savings on to consumers. That is money that is just sucked up and disappears into the big black hole that is Ottawa instead of reinvested locally into the airports themselves to make them globally competitive.

The federal landowners and provincial incorporation of the authorities complicate the airport relationship in Alberta. Any privatization will necessitate two things: bringing a bill to the Legislative Assembly containing amendments to the Regional Airports Authorities Act and sign-off of any privatization move by Ottawa by Alberta. For some odd reason people fear privatization. Even more surprising was that Calgary International's leadership and appointers came out swinging against privatization while Edmonton International took a wait-and-see approach. Privatization introduces free-market discipline on spending decisions of the airport authorities and has the potential to lower charges to airlines and passengers. Did you know that because of the Toronto overbuild, Pearson International is now the most expensive airport in Canada to fly through?

The World Economic Forum ranks Canadian airports amongst the best in the world for infrastructure quality, at 16 overall, but ranks Canada 135th for cost. Canadian airports are beautiful, top-of-the-line facilities, but they are expensive, and passengers pay for them.

Privatization also empowers airports to access capital for improvements they never had access to before. European and Australian airports have been privatized, and the C.D. Howe Institute estimates that the eight largest NAS airports could raise between \$7.2 billion and \$16.6 billion. The C.D. Howe also estimates the value of the Calgary International at approximately \$150 million to \$1.2 billion, and Edmonton International is valued at anywhere from \$400 million to \$1 billion. Incorporation under the Regional Airports Authorities Act enables airports to access debt financing through Alberta Capital Finance Authority, providing the backing of the provincial government's credit rating and borrowing facilities for the debt.

If privatization were to proceed, according to a Moody's report from February 2017 all bondholders of the current airport debt would have to be paid back before privatization could occur. Under a privatized environment, rents currently paid to Ottawa can be converted to dividends paid to shareholders. Just think what AIMCo could do for the pension plans and the heritage fund by owning the international airports in Alberta. They already own a stake in the London City Airport and make money off that. Why? Because

airports are safe, stable investment assets. Funds raised in the sale of these lands could then be used by Ottawa to fund the capital improvements needed at airports such as Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Lloydminster, Grande Prairie, Peace River, High Level, and, of course, Fort McMurray.

The Canada Transportation Act review by David Emerson took a look at airport recommendations.

Rather than placing the emphasis on extracting maximum revenue for government [for] these public assets, the objective of privatization should be to encourage their development and operation as critical drivers of the competitiveness of the Canadian economy.

Madam Chair, there are lots of things in the CTA review for all of the other airports that are not internationals to consider as well. It might be something for this committee to look at should it be created.

Madam Chair, there is more than one way to conduct a privatization of airports. In the first instance, one can monetize the rent revenue stream under the ground lease by selling it to a private investor who would then name directors to the board instead of to the federal government. That is something that has been occurring in my region, in the Fort McMurray region, with our airport authority since approximately 2009.

In the second case, one could privatize the operation of the airport through a new concession or management contract and implement legislation to dissolve the existing leases and airport authorities. Note that the second option would be a little bit more complicated in Alberta, and Alberta and Ottawa would have to work together to implement this.

A third option is a partial sale of the airport lands and assets, forming an equity partnership with a private-sector manager who would own at least 49 per cent of the airport and be responsible for the operation under the contract. It requires legislation to dissolve the existing leases and airport authorities, but it is worth noting that the Birmingham International Airport in the United Kingdom has operated under a similar model, with a minority equity stake held by the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan. Again, Ottawa and Alberta would have to work together to implement this model.

Also for consideration is selling the airport lands and operations and converting the existing airport authorities into a share capital, for-profit business corporation under the Canada Business Corporations Act and selling the airport lands to the authorities. This would require provincial legislation to continue or transfer assets and liabilities.

Finally, one could dissolve the leases and the existing authorities and sell their assets to a private company or a consortium of investors. Up to 100 per cent ownership of the airports could be offered in one sale, as was done in the large airports in the United Kingdom in the 1980s. Or the sale could be completed in tranches over a period of time, as has been done in the past with the sale of Canadian Crown corporations like Petro-Canada or Air Canada.

Madam Chair, my goal here was to outline that there are a number of issues surrounding airport privatizations of the two biggest international airports in Alberta as this is a matter that will need to be watched, prepared for, and dealt with, working collaboratively with Ottawa due to the nature of the incorporation of Alberta's international airports. This is very much a topic that I believe the strategic aviation advisory committee formed under Bill 201 will be in a very good position to look at and be aware of and provide advice on should Ottawa move to sell the airport lands and finish the privatization that was started in the 1990s.

I again would really like to thank my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek for proposing this private member's bill and his leadership

on this file. I know that everyone at the YMM airport very much supports this.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 201 in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 201. I've had the opportunity to address it a little before, and I think the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek knows that I support the work. I want to start by thanking him for bringing this forward.

There are a number of things about the bill that I am hoping will come as a positive result for the province of Alberta, and I'd like to address those first, but then I will take a few moments to talk about a few of the things that I've been thinking a little bit about the bill. Perhaps even the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek can respond if he happens to be so motivated.

The first thing that I think is really great about the bill is the fact that it really draws attention to an important part of Alberta's industry and development and certainly brings together a wide variety of people to work together to help us to build what I think is critical infrastructure for our province.

4:00

You know, being on the left of the spectrum, I certainly see that there's an important role for government to support the establishment and building of infrastructure, and I really, truly believe that a lot of the development that has been possible here in the province of Alberta would never have been possible unless government intervention had occurred. We know that happened extensively in the oil sands and also, as has been mentioned by a number of speakers, with airports under the Lougheed administration.

It's quite delightful for me to watch members opposite all talk about how important it is for governments to be involved in the development of positive industries in the province of Alberta and, in fact, go through some of the history which highlights that it's, in fact, through government intervention that we've actually had some of the greatest success in this province. I wish they would continue to use that analysis with just about all of the rest of the bills that we have here in the House. I encourage them to take that and do that.

We know that there are a number of things that come out of a program such as the one that has been established here. I've mentioned already a focus on investment, but I think there are also some really important province-building initiatives that come out of this. Tourism has been mentioned, and I absolutely and fundamentally believe that tourism is the way to go. In our world, as economies change dramatically, one of the things that will happen is that there will be an increased number of people that are able to become tourists at an international level.

I'm a bit older than quite a few of the people in this House, but I remember that when I was a young person, a family every once in a while would get an opportunity to go travel somewhere. Often Disneyland or Hawaii were the big ones when I was a youth. It was considered quite an exception and, you know, quite a privilege to be able to jump on a plane and head off and do that kind of tourism. Now I don't think that that's quite true. Many people include plans in their budgeting that include international tourism once or twice a year as a standard practice rather than the exception, one that made everybody else a bit jealous in my grade 6 class, I'm sure, when we watched other kids head off to Disneyland. I must say that my parents eventually brought me, so thanks, Mom and Dad. I think that tourism is a really big piece of it.

One of the things that I think is important about this bill is that it doesn't just recognize those large airports that go to international locations, but it also recognizes the role of smaller airports in this province. I think that's another Alberta-building phenomenon. I think that it's very important that as we build our tourism and more and more people have the chance to become tourists, we don't want them just simply flying into Edmonton and Calgary and spending time in the big cities. We certainly want to create very readily accessible opportunities for them to leave the big cities and go to the fantastic places that Alberta has to offer. Of course, you know, I've spent a significant amount of time travelling in northern Alberta, going there very often by plane, and I've been in everything from the big jumbo jets, which have hundreds of people on them, down to small planes, where there was only the pilot, myself, and one other person sitting in the seat behind us, to get into places like Fox Lake.

Now, I think it's really important that this type of bill be thought through a little bit. Are we making sure that we're not going to create an Edmonton- and Calgary-centric program, that there truly is a voice for the smaller communities, and that there will be opportunities for smaller communities to have a voice in the development that will help their areas and the type of tourism that will help their areas? I hope that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek can assure me of that. I'm fairly confident that he agrees with me that that's an important part of the work that we have to go forward.

I do have some concern, however, that I don't see – and perhaps the member can, you know, bring me up to date a little bit if I've missed something here. I don't see a significant role for indigenous voices in this. I'm sure that members are quite used to me bringing that topic up basically in every single bill because I think it is my responsibility. I'm always asking the question: have we simply asked indigenous people, "Is there something about this bill that might affect you in some way, might give you pause for concern, or at least should we be creating a very visible and obvious space for you to enter into the discussions and participations?" For example, is there any guarantee or any process that will encourage or allow or enforce, even, indigenous participation on the boards so that there's at least one member there who's saying, "Hey, this is the effect it might have on my community" or "Here are the great things it could do for my community if we were able to move in a particular direction"? So I'd love to hear from the member a little bit about his thoughts about indigenous participation.

I know, for example, that when the City Centre Airport closed down, an airport was built out just off the Devon highway, and it's used quite widely by pilots in this area here. In fact, a friend of mine is a manager out there. I thought that, you know, this is a great thing, and I was really happy to talk about it. I went to Enoch First Nation and spoke to Chief Billy Morin at the time. This was maybe about three years ago. I said to him, "How has the airport affected you?" thinking: "Wow, this is positive. Maybe it allows them to do some more industry-type investments. It's very close to them, literally across the highway from them."

His response to me was that they were very concerned about it. In fact, they had made an application or were considering, perhaps, an application to have the airport shut down, which surprised me a little just because I wasn't ready for that answer. What he said to me was that the problem is that they're making a hundred per cent of their decisions without any reference to how it's affecting the Enoch reserve. One of the things they did was that they built their runways, perhaps on specifications that are necessary for air travel such as the direction you're facing for predominant winds and things like that, such that essentially a hundred per cent of the planes take off from the airport and fly straight at the reserve and

go right over the First Nations. He said that it really had a significant effect in terms of wildlife in their area and has decreased the quality of life for some people who happened to live on the west end of Enoch reserve, so they had some serious concerns about it.

Now, he wasn't against it. In fact, one of his solutions that he was considering at the time was: "Maybe we should just buy it so that we can, you know, work with the flight community and make positive choices for our community and maybe alter things like the direction of runways but also make sure that we're getting the benefits since we're taking all of the pain of hearing these planes constantly running across our territory. Perhaps we should be involved." I'm presenting this not as a negative about an airport in the local area but, rather, the fact that the First Nations didn't have a chance to speak to it and didn't have a chance to ensure that their interests would also be met, particularly when the result was that they were suffering much of the consequence.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 201? Any members? There are about six minutes left.

Mr. Gottfried: I'll be very quick. Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for his comments and questions. You know, I think that there's a lot of content that you put there and context on it. Tourism, of course, is a huge opportunity for us. What starts out often as a necessity turns into convenience, opportunity, visibility, competition, and the opening up of tourism sometimes when you're serving areas. Your comments about remote locations and our indigenous communities, I think, are very much the focus of the remote airports because many of our remote communities – some of those communities, accessible only by air, at least certain times of the year, have to receive many of their goods but also emergency services, medical services, and other things are there.

4:10

Just looking through a list of the airlines, not just in our local indigenous communities but, of course, to the north, Air Tindi, First Air, Aklak Air, Buffalo Airways, Canadian North, Summit Air, Air North, and others serve very remote communities even further across the borders into the Northwest Territories and Yukon. Again, very vital to the services, to the accessibility, to the safety of the people in those communities. So your point is well taken on the indigenous communities. I think it will be well reflected in the airports and the management of those airports, and some of the flight services that operate there will be front and centre, whether that be in medevac services, whether that be in some of the firefighting services and others as well.

So I hope that that answers that, and I would certainly welcome another opportunity for conversation on this outside the Assembly. Of course, we have third reading coming ahead, and I'll defer the last couple of minutes to the member on the other side to comment as well.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much. I really appreciate the response to my questions. I would ask whether or not there'd be some consideration given to actually having a designated, reserved seat for an indigenous person on the central board, at least, so that we guarantee that there's at least a voice, you know, nothing more. I think those kinds of things are important.

The last thing I just wanted to mention – I know we only have a few minutes, about four minutes, left here in this debate – is whether or not there's been consideration given to people with a focus as passengers as opposed to industry members on some of these

boards and committees. The needs and desires of industry are sometimes a little bit misaligned from the needs and desires of passengers. Occasionally industry, you know, either has to or chooses to make decisions that are not quite what a passenger group may wish to have. Clearly, they are for-profit agencies and so on and have to make decisions.

In many places in the world such as the European Union they've put together a passenger bill of rights and ensured that industry couldn't always make the decision to take the profit mode over the fairness to passengers. I don't find in the bill any mention of a passenger bill of rights. Just wondering whether or not this committee could, as part of its mandate, be directed to consider participation of passengers on the committees, on the boards as well as take on some responsibility for designing an appropriate passenger bill of rights for the province of Alberta.

I know that this could be done nationally, and I know that the Prime Minister has addressed this, but I think that one that would be focused here in the province of Alberta would not be amiss as we try to make sure that the people here in the province of Alberta are always truly the beneficiaries of the things that we do in this province. Whether it's, you know, the preservation of the land, the growing of our industry, and the development of our culture in our relationships with each other, it's the people that ultimately have to be the focus of the work that we do. If we had, ultimately, good industry but people were being mistreated or starving, we would of course be against that. In this case, I guess I would just apply that by saying: if people's interests were somehow being subverted at a time when perhaps they could be considered to a greater degree – and I know that that can be difficult because flights in and out of the north can be very much predicated on weather, so we need to find a balance.

How do we make sure that the industry doesn't suffer every time the flights are cancelled because of weather? But at the same time we don't want people in the north always in the situation where they're at a loss if circumstances are such that the airline is unable to make appropriate accommodations for them when flights are cancelled and so on.

I certainly know some people that literally have to travel overnight to arrive at an airport, so it means they've come a long way. As I say, if you're in Fox Lake and you want to get to the airport in High Level, you are talking about at least a three-hour, four-hour journey. I'm sure that I could mention a hundred other small towns where that's the reality. So I would like to see the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek consider: what is the role of passengers in all of this? How do we ensure that there is a structural way in the design of these committees to ensure that passengers' needs and desires and wants are fulfilled in the work of this committee? Again, much like . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but we are at our time limit here, so I shall call the question on Bill 201, Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act.

[The clauses of Bill 201 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Mr. Ellis: Sorry. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I apologize for the delay. I would like to move that we rise and report this bill. Thank you.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Getson: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 201. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Motions Other than Government Motions

Automobile Insurance

504. Mr. Carson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to take measures to better regulate the automobile insurance system in Alberta, including but not limited to the establishment of reasonable rate caps, to prevent further undue financial hardship for Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to my motion, Motion 504. Now, in November 2017 our NDP government moved forward with a 5 per cent rate cap on private passenger vehicle insurance premiums, recognizing the hardship that insurance premium increases were having on Albertans and addressing the need to take immediate action. In August 2019 this UCP government made the unfortunate decision to let that cap on insurance premiums lapse with no plan to support drivers moving forward other than announcing a committee, from which we still have heard no results. Because of that decision to no longer support Albertans trying to get affordable vehicle insurance, we have seen premiums across the province increase by as much as 30 to 50 per cent at a time, when insurance payouts for injuries and damage are not increasing at nearly the same rate.

Our MLAs' offices have received hundreds of e-mails regarding this very important issue, many of them explaining that they had never been in a collision before, that they had no prior tickets and really had no reason to be seeing drastic insurance increases in the first place. We've shared these messages with the UCP government, but the issue of unaffordable insurance continues to be ignored as the UCP to this day has not provided any support or any reassurances to Albertans looking for answers.

4:20

Now, to make matters worse, the pandemic has negatively impacted Albertans' ability to pay for these increasing costs. Many families, as we all know, have lost income and have at one point or another found themselves unable to work, whether because of lack of child care or having to be quarantined for 14 days, which has effectively made their vehicles 3,000-pound paperweights. Unfortunately, while the rate at which Albertans are driving their vehicles has fallen by as much as 50 per cent in many instances, we have not seen insurance companies in Alberta reduce their insurance premiums through the pandemic to reflect this reality in many cases. Now, in many cases the increased premiums remain in

place despite the drastic reduction in Albertans driving on our roads.

We saw many North American jurisdictions, specifically in some American states, post an across-the-board premium reduction from certain companies for their policyholders. For instance, Allstate Insurance, which insures 18 million Americans, offered a 15 per cent premium refund to their clients at the cost of \$600 million to the company. We were hopeful that we might see such programs introduced here in the province, but while some companies have shown that support, it has not been the case across the board. With no pressure on these companies from this UCP government to make these changes, it is not surprising that in most instances those changes never came.

Because of this, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic our NDP caucus called on the UCP to introduce common-sense policies, which included a 25 per cent blanket premium reduction for the months of March, April, and May to reflect the reduced driving activities of Albertans through the pandemic. We also called for an immediate freeze on increases, retroactive to April 1 for all general insurance premiums, to remain in effect until government-mandated social distancing had been lifted. Now, both of these policies were rejected by the minister and by the UCP, and Albertans continue to be left with no support from their provincial government. The fact is that insurance companies are generating enormous profits while Albertans struggle to make ends meet, even more so through the pandemic when passenger vehicles are being used at a much-reduced rate.

At the same time that Albertans are struggling to pay for their insurance, this UCP government has been nearly silent on this issue and instead has been more focused on taking federal handouts from the Trudeau government to pay for their debt-burdened partisan party office. Instead of listening to Albertans who are struggling to get by through the pandemic, the UCP is meeting with lobbyists and insiders such as the Premier's former chief of staff and UCP campaign director, Nick Koolsbergen. The Premier even bragged in this very Legislature that his insurance is going down by hundreds of dollars this year. Now, this is a clear disconnect from what Albertans are facing and shows that the Premier does not take the issue of reducing insurance premiums as seriously as he should.

As I mentioned, concerned citizens from across Alberta have reached out to our offices and connected through social media to share their stories about increases of as much as 30 to 50 per cent. A senior – many seniors, really – specifically reached out to my office to share their story of how they went from paying \$780 a year to over \$1,500. Their record was clean, and they wanted answers about how the government could let this happen, and they continue to wait for those answers, Madam Speaker. This really wasn't a one-off, and for several months Albertans have been looking for any kind of answers from this government but have been told to wait for a committee report, which still has not arrived.

Madam Speaker, it is imperative that we take action now to support the many Albertans who are struggling through the pandemic and at the same time are being asked to pay 30 to 50 per cent more in many instances than they paid last year simply so that these insurance companies can take increased profits back to their shareholders. These companies are telling Albertans that they are no longer profitable, but the truth is that they know that this UCP government will give the industry whatever they want because insurance companies poured hundreds of thousands of dollars in political action committees to support this government in the last provincial election, and now they want the favour returned.

I truly hope that everyone in this Assembly will consider the circumstances within our province right now and recognize that it has never been more imperative that we take action to support

Albertans who are struggling to pay for their insurance. People have lost their jobs because of the pandemic, and in many cases families are deciding if they can even afford to drive their vehicle anymore.

Now, while payouts for injuries and vehicle repairs remain relatively level, Albertans are being asked to pay increasingly large amounts of money to profitable insurance companies, and while the Finance minister says that he, quote, strongly encourages insurance companies to take action, it is going to take more than wishful thinking to support Albertans who need relief today. With the recent hailstorms in Calgary causing massive damage to property in the neighbourhood of \$1 billion, there is no doubt that insurance companies will be looking to recoup costs in any way they can. Even worse, there are Albertans who are no longer able to afford insurance after the UCP removed the cap on private passenger automobiles and will now be left to pay the full cost of the damages from the hailstorm.

Albertans need our support. By voting in favour of this motion, you can show that you hear these Albertans, that you support these Albertans, and you support taking action to ensure all of our constituents are not priced out of driving for good.

Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to Motion 504. I hope all of my colleagues in the Legislature will support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I will just clarify that you have moved Motion 504.

I will now recognize the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today. I speak in opposition to Motion 504. Our government chose not to extend the 5 per cent rate cap on automobile insurance set by the previous government. This was done because the rate cap imposed by the NDP was merely a Band-Aid that failed to address the underlying and systemic problems within the automobile insurance system. Basically, the NDP kicked the can down the road, did not want to put in the work that was required to ultimately deal with the cost pressures and the fundamental factors that were pushing premiums up.

The rate cap maybe sounded like a good deal for drivers, but in reality it failed to contain the cost increases for many motorists, and it caused a number of serious unintended consequences, Madam Speaker. The rate cap did not apply to individual driver policies, and I think this is important to know. Rather, it was a cap on insurers' Alberta-wide income from automobile insurance premiums. That meant that many Albertans still saw their auto insurance premiums increase by up to 10 and even 20 per cent despite the rate cap. In fact, out of 2.7 million insured vehicles, during the rate cap 53 per cent of drivers saw their insurance rates increase by more than 5 per cent. Again, that's under the NDP's rate cap.

Madam Speaker, more importantly, the rate cap created unintended consequences. As often happens when a government interferes and provides some type of rate cap and interferes between a willing purchaser and a willing seller of a product or good, typically there are unintended consequences, and this rate cap was no exception. Under the rate cap a motorist had fewer and fewer options. Insurance companies pulled back options. In fact, many Alberta consumers could not take on a policy where their premiums could be paid monthly. If they were going to take insurance, they were forced to pay the whole premium up front, which caused great hardship for some Alberta motorists. A number were denied collision and comprehensive coverage, again, as insurers pulled back their products because of the rate cap.

You know, when we see the hailstorm and the incredible loss that many Albertans have incurred as a result of that hailstorm, no doubt

there were some that didn't have comprehensive coverage because they couldn't purchase it from their broker due to the rate cap, and that's so unfortunate. One of the other losses, ultimately, of options was not being able to access coverage through their broker at all as insurance companies pulled back their offering and in some cases simply did not offer automobile insurance through certain brokers.

Madam Speaker, reintroducing the cap would cause many Albertans to face these same issues again while still doing nothing to ultimately deal with the systemic issues that are driving up the cost of automobile insurance. Instead of ignoring this issue, pushing it down the road with another failed rate cap, our government is working to find long-term sustainable solutions for Alberta motorists. That's why we've established an independent expert committee to conduct a review of Alberta's automobile insurance system and consult with Albertans, industry stakeholders, and, most importantly, Alberta consumers.

4:30

I have received a draft of the committee's report and have begun to take a look at the recommendations. Now, I'm still waiting for a final report from the committee, but I expect it very shortly. They've provided recommendations for how we can address the underlying problems that are forcing up rates in the province. Madam Speaker, finding a better way forward does not have to pit consumers against insurance companies. I really believe that there will be a way to go forward where we can provide a sustainable model for insurance companies but, ultimately and most importantly, an affordable model that provides a predictable outcome and compensation for loss for Alberta motorists.

Our government is taking measures to make the automobile insurance industry and system affordable for Albertans. Madam Speaker, a rate cap will not solve this problem, and that's why I do not support this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Motion 504? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I'd like to thank my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday here for bringing this motion forward. I think it's an important motion and one that we should take some time thinking critically about.

I think it's interesting that the minister uses the analogy here of putting a Band-Aid on the insurance system. Really, what the minister is doing is that he's ripped off that Band-Aid, and now he's shoving his finger in the wound and twisting it. That's basically what he's doing to Alberta consumers. That's basically what he's telling Alberta consumers when they are going to be paying higher premiums, when they are going to be incurring further restrictions on their insurance.

Really, Madam Speaker, it's interesting because the Minister of Finance doesn't even seem to understand what is happening on the insurance file, right? We can look at the insurance file and we can see that the loss ratios have remained fairly steady and, in fact, between 2016 and 2018 have dropped 7 per cent. The loss ratios in insurance have actually dropped 7 per cent, so the insurance companies are making more and more money. Between 2016 and 2018 they made 7 per cent more money. Indeed, it actually exceeds the profits, double what that cap was.

We see that the Finance minister is really blowing smoke here when he talks about how these insurance companies need these massive rate increases. We know Albertans don't believe him, right? We know Albertans do not believe him when he says that. That's why we've been seeing hundreds if not thousands of letters to our offices. That's why we've been seeing people who have told

us they've seen insurance rate increases of as much as \$800 to \$1,500 a year for, in some cases, seniors with perfectly clean driving records. We've seen single mothers see their insurance bills double.

Really, in the middle of a pandemic, in the middle of a global crisis, a global economic crisis, this Finance minister does not have the compassion to actually look out and understand that we have the ability to make a difference in these people's lives. We have the ability to actually go in and help people right now, and we can do that by, for example, reducing their insurance premiums or at least reducing the rate at which their insurance premiums will increase.

The Finance minister, it appears, has not been able to put two and two together, has not been able to actually look at the numbers, look at the facts but, instead, has commissioned this review to go and tell him why he should increase the insurance premiums, why he should allow insurance premiums to increase, why he should allow Alberta consumers to pay more, and why he should ask Alberta families to suffer more.

I mean, it simply doesn't make any sense. It simply is ludicrous that the Finance minister would take this position, and I commend my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday here for bringing forward this motion because it is a reasonable position to say that consumers, especially right now in the pandemic, when they are driving less, should be paying less. They shouldn't be paying more, right? I think that is a very reasonable position to be taking. I think it is a very reasonable stance to be taking when we know that in this time of uncertainty many people have lost their jobs or have significantly reduced their hours.

Now we're seeing again, like in Calgary just this weekend, that there were massive hailstorms that are causing significant damage to homeowners and automobile owners, and we're calling for insurance relief because insurance relief will actually have meaningful impact for these families. Insurance relief will actually have meaningful impact for people who have now perhaps hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages. It is pretty simple.

Rather than listening to Albertans, rather than listening to the families that are suffering, rather than listening to the people who are paying sometimes nearly twice as much in insurance bills, this Premier, again, is listening to a lobbyist who used to be the former chief of staff and the UCP campaign director, Nick Koolsbergen – right? – and that's the shocking thing about this. It's shocking that this government has folded to lobbyists, that this government has folded to insiders, to campaign officials instead of actually siding with Albertans, right? That's what this government is doing.

That's why I think this motion is so important. This motion actually says that we believe we stand with Albertans. I think every single member of this House who votes for this motion stands with Albertans in saying that we should be trying to provide them relief in this difficult time, that we should be trying to make their insurance more reasonable in this difficult time.

Instead, this Premier rose in this place and he bragged about how his own insurance went down, and then this Finance minister folded to the same lobbyist that ran that Premier's campaign. That is the relationship that this government is taking with the people of Alberta. That is the perspective this government is taking with the people of Alberta. Instead of acknowledging that some Albertans have seen their insurance rates double because of this government's lack of action or actually have had negative consequences, instead of acknowledging that, this Premier will get up and brag about how he saved a couple of hundred bucks and that that's so great for him. That's what this government's values are. It's all about them, Madam Speaker. It's all about how their pocketbooks will benefit instead of actually making sure we're looking out for the people, instead of actually making sure that families that may currently be

on CERB as their only source of income may not have to see insurance increases, may not have to see that significant insurance increase, particularly after we've seen some significant damaging storms in the last little while here.

Madam Speaker, I think that when our government introduced a 5 per cent rate cap, we had the backs of Albertans. We were standing up for Alberta families. We were standing up for those who needed the support the most, and instead this government has ripped off that support and is twisting its finger in that wound. We know that it's going to have negative impacts. We know that it already has had negative impacts, right? It doesn't make any sense that in the middle of a pandemic, in the middle of a global crisis, in the middle of a time when a significant number of Albertans are unemployed, in the middle of a time when a significant number of Albertans are on programs like CERB, we wouldn't go back and try to support those families, that we wouldn't go back and say: hey, maybe the government did mess up. They don't get everything right. In fact, in my opinion, they don't get a lot right, but indeed they could admit that this had undue and adverse consequences, that this had actual, real consequences for real families, for people who actually have to pay their bills every month.

Instead of actually recognizing that Albertans are suffering, instead of actually recognizing that Albertans have bills to pay and that Albertans have to live with the consequences of this government's actions, what this government will do is that the Premier will brag about how he had his insurance premiums reduced by a couple of hundred bucks, and the Finance minister folds to insurance lobbyists, folds to the campaign director of the UCP. That's what we're actually talking about. That's why this is so shocking, that's why this is so dangerous, and that's why it is so obvious to Albertans that this government is not standing up for them, that this government is not fighting on their side, that this government is not trying to implement a policy that will actually benefit them.

Madam Speaker, in the Premier's own words, he saved a couple of hundred bucks, right? That's the actual justification for being able to not bring in an insurance cap again. That's actually what the Premier said in this place in question period. That's shocking because families don't get to save that couple of hundred bucks that the Premier did. Instead, families will see significant increases to their premiums. Instead, families will see significant increases well in excess of inflation. Families will see increases to their premiums well in excess of the loss ratios of the insurance companies. Instead of looking out for those families, this Premier is looking out for his campaign donors, his campaign staff, and the large insurance companies, who are making millions and millions and millions of dollars.

It simply is shocking – right? – that even in a time of pandemic, even in a time of crisis, even in a time when thousands of Albertans are unemployed or have seen reduced hours, this government cannot stop and think compassionately, that this government cannot stop and actually recognize the effects they are having on families, that this government cannot stop and actually look their constituents in the eyes and say: we are going to do something that'll make your costs less, that'll make your month-to-month bill a little bit less. This government is unwilling to actually go and take that step.

That's what's shocking because I think this motion pretty clearly speaks to how we have to have a better regulated auto insurance system, including the establishment of the rate caps, which, again, Madam Speaker, the Finance minister has shown he very clearly does not actually understand, that he does not actually look at the loss ratios and understand that insurance companies have been making more and more money over the last several years.

4:40

Madam Speaker, the Finance minister may get up and say: well, between 2014 and 2016 the loss ratios increased 8 per cent, right? Yeah, this is true. The 2014 and 2016 loss ratios increased significantly. Well, what happened in 2014 to 2016? Well, the Fort McMurray fire happened. That's actually why insurance companies here in Alberta lost significantly more money, and then they lost an additional 8 per cent in their loss ratios. If the Finance minister had actually gone and read the reports on how insurance companies were doing in this province instead of commissioning a committee, a panel to tell him how to increase the rates, instead of commissioning a panel that is going to go listen to his lobbyist friends, if the Finance minister had actually done the work and tried to do the research, he would see that insurance companies have recovered, basically – now they're at 83 per cent of 2018 in their loss ratios – identically to the prefire loss ratios.

The Finance minister simply does not understand the file – right? – and we're trying to help him out here. We're trying to tell the government that there is a simple solution that we can bring in that was already in place that was helping consumers pay less, that was helping consumers have a more stable financial situation, that was helping consumers be able to more accurately project their bills from month to month or year to year. It was a simple program that would allow insurance companies to continue to increase their rates at the 5 per cent that we implemented. This government could of course choose a different number. Under this motion it doesn't prescribe a rate.

However, this Finance minister would not even go so far as to say that there was a reasonable rate increase amount. Indeed, by rejecting this motion, this Finance minister is saying that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. That was interesting. You know, I think the Member for Edmonton-South has just proven a bit of a theory I've compiled over the last while with some of the members opposite, that they have two switches, either angry or off. I'm not sure about him referencing what the minister has been doing here in pulling folks together in the industry to actually consult with the experts, to actually look at what's taken place, to come up with some reasonable items for Alberta constituents here, the folks that are actually paying these bills in the industry.

With that, I'd like to kind of carry on with my points and observations that I've made through a little bit of, well, research, if you would. This wasn't necessarily my bailiwick, in my backyard, so, like many of the folks on our side, we actually did look into this. We actually did consult, and I'd like to go through that.

Last September our government allowed a 5 per cent cap on car insurance rates to expire because we'd made commitments to Albertans to reduce red tape, Madam Speaker. Not only did our government make a commitment to reducing red tape, but this cap that was imposed by the prior NDP government was merely a temporary solution that failed to address the root cause of the issue, again, coming back to the root cause, understanding what the problem is, and trying to address that root cause so that we don't have unintended consequences. The rate cap did not work to help Albertans secure the best possible rates, and it surely did not help the insurance providers by offering those best rates.

The motion put forward by the member opposite will have grave consequences for Albertans seeking affordable car insurance now and in the future because it fails to address the underlying systemic issues with Alberta's insurance system. That is why our government established an expert advisory committee to address

the issues within our automobile insurance industry, that the former government had failed to address with, again, the quick-fix solution of a Band-Aid.

The advisory committee has a mandate to provide recommendations for Alberta's automotive insurance system that are based on the following principles: one, a private-sector delivery model for automobile insurance; two, fair, accessible, and affordable insurance for Albertans; three, timely and appropriate outcomes when claims are made; four, a viable, sustainable automotive insurance system.

What I want the public to understand is that the former cap was not eliminated because the opposition had their name on it. It was eliminated because of the consequences associated with imposing that cap, Madam Speaker.

Our government has been committed to strengthening Alberta's economy since coming into office. Albertans need an economy they can rely on, an economy that allows Albertans to access services, an economy that gives Albertans the opportunity to choose the services that they want, an economy that Albertans can rely on when times are tough. Creating this kind of economy is only found by allowing the market to dictate prices, not the government.

The motion put forward by the opposition member is not a solution this government will support because it's not a solution that solves the root cause of the issue, Madam Speaker. It's a proposal that merely allows the government to add their fingerprints on an industry that does not require the government's touch.

This motion by the members opposite argues that by failing to adopt more regulation in the automobile insurance industry, Albertans will be subject to further undue hardships from heightened rates and premiums. Yet the only hardship that Albertans would experience is accepting this motion and instilling again another arbitrary cap that discourages insurance providers from offering affordable insurance rates. Businesses cannot provide affordable services if the government continues to impose unnecessary red tape. In this case, to the members opposite: let's start calling it orange tape. That only hurts the people who need the services, hard-working Albertans and their families.

Frankly, this motion signifies the essence of why the former government failed so miserably to support Alberta businesses. The former government always had an urge to impose their presence within the market, an urge that was costly as many businesses had to shut their doors as Albertans were losing their jobs across the province, Madam Speaker, not so long ago. The former government's incessant need to regulate business in all sectors is what created the seismic slowdown of business development in itself. This motion will do the same if passed.

Again, Madam Speaker, it failed once, so let's try putting it in again and failing twice as bad? We're not going down that path. I will not be supporting this motion for the reasons I have cited here, and I hope the opposition members reflect on what's been proposed and its consequences, that they've seen are no longer welcome in this province. We're not going back. We're not doing it again. I fully am not in support of this motion for the reasons cited, and I hope the rest of the Assembly feels similar to how I do.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise this afternoon to speak to Motion 504. I will assure the previous speaker that there are more than two switches, not angry and off. As I usually try to do, I stick to the language: what's being said, what's being talked about, the context that it's

in, and everything like that. When we look at Motion 504, we're talking about reasonable rate caps. I've now heard a couple of times about bringing back what was already in place. That's not what this says. This says, "reasonable rate caps", which means we would have to figure out what that is. Again, it's always about the language.

I think it's actually rather fitting that we're speaking about Motion 504 right at this moment because, as we know, earlier this afternoon during Members' Statements we had a member rise in this House and right off the hop say: I think that there's something wrong with our insurance industry. I would agree. I think there is something wrong, and I don't expect the member to have all the answers on how to fix it. That would be completely unreasonable. I don't think I have all the answers either on what we could do to make it better for Albertans, but what I do know is that we have to do something.

Now, I did want to talk a little bit about some of the things that I did hear the Finance minister talk about earlier in his remarks to the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, bringing forward Motion 504. First, he talked about kicking the can down the road. Let's look at kicking the can down the road. We've seen this government offer businesses and Albertans the chance to defer a whole bunch of stuff. Is that not kicking the can down the road, Madam Speaker? It kind of sounds like it to me. You know, when I hear, "Well, that's all you guys did," well, I hate to tell you this, but that's what you guys are doing right now, kicking the can down the road. People are going to be on the hook for those expenses later on.

The other thing I wanted to look at as well, when we were talking about the consultation process that was used around looking at the insurance industry – and, of course, we're all waiting with bated breath around that review and what it holds and how we might be able to move forward on the insurance industry. I did notice you said that you especially consulted with Alberta consumers. I can't help but ask, Madam Speaker, when I look at Motion 504 and the consultation that went into it: was it the same kind of consultation that we got around the pensions? There are a lot of people that don't feel that they've been heard around their pensions, so forgive me for being a little bit distrustful about how much consultation actually went into this review of the insurance industry, which is fitting as to why the Member for Edmonton-West Henday brought forward Motion 504 around this.

4:50

I'm certainly not going to stand here and begrudge the insurance industry for wanting to make a profit. They're a business. That's what they do. We pay for that service with the hope that we never have to use it. But from what we've just seen in recent events over the weekend down in Calgary with that hailstorm, I don't think there's one single member in this House whose heart doesn't pour out to those people in Calgary that suffered damage to property, to vehicles. I know that my wife, any time there's even the remotest little bit of hail, goes running out into the backyard to cover up all of her flowers and stuff. I'm, like, "What are you doing running out in a hailstorm?" but that's what she does, Madam Speaker. There are chairs and tables, trying to cover up everything. Of course, the folks in Calgary certainly weren't able to do that. I'm glad none of them tried to do that, especially with the size. The damage was significant, and it's going to be a huge burden for the insurance industry to pay out on that.

I'm getting correspondence to my office around the rate hikes that are coming. I mean, some of my seniors have said: "Look, I've been driving for the past 40 years accident free, ticket free. Why is my insurance jumping up so significantly?" My gosh, we've heard reports of as much as 50 per cent increases in insurance rates. When I'm looking at that and then I couple that with the economic

downturn that we're in, you know, the pandemic that came upon us – and the government wasn't even willing just to put a pause on things for just a moment, to say: hang on; let's get a grasp on this. No. Instead, what we're saying is: "Well, we're waiting for this report. That's all going to be great."

The problem is that people are in trouble now. They can't afford their insurance rates. They're looking at parking their vehicles, which, consequently, of course, if that happens – for people that want to go to the local drive-through to get one of the masks that they're talking about, well, now that has just become a barrier to being able to do that. I must admit – and I'll have to give the individual kudos for ingenuity – that I saw a picture on the Internet of somebody that had a bit of a cardboard box looking type of car going through the drive-through. You know, top marks for ingenuity in order to get in there, but I don't think that's a viable solution for people. They need to drive their cars, for those that are able to access getting to work or that will need to access it in the future.

When we look at Motion 504, this would give us the ability to talk about whether there could be some reasonable things that we put into place in the meantime, while we're waiting for this report to come out, while we're waiting to see what it contains and how we might be able to move forward. We have to do something now. By the time that report comes in and we digest it and figure out what to do, that may be too late. There will be people that will be selling off their cars because they can't afford the insurance.

I've already had a handful of people say that. It's, like: "Yeah. Well, I'm putting up my car next week. My insurance has gone too high. I can't afford it. Hopefully, there will be a bus that's running so that I can get to work." Most of the time these individuals are in situations where they're in lower income jobs, so they're just barely managing to make their rent. They're just barely managing to pay their bills and put food on the table and don't need a drastic insurance rate hike. Here we have the ability to at least talk about it, figure out a way we can help people now and not after the damage is done and the report comes in, assuming that we've consulted with consumers in a better way than we, say, consulted with the people on transferring their pensions.

I certainly stand in support of this motion. I'm hoping that, you know, members opposite will take this sincerely – this is just me talking about the language, what's going on right now, the things that I'm hearing – and not just take a stand against the idea of this simply because it came from the opposition.

At the end of the day, we were all elected by our constituents. We weren't elected by the insurance companies. We weren't elected by shareholders or whatever in those insurance companies. We were elected by our constituents, and I know that we're all hearing from them. It can't just be the opposition that's hearing from them. I've heard from a lot, not only in correspondence that I've received into my office, not only in phone calls that I've received into my office but in the interactions that I've gotten even just running into the grocery store, Madam Speaker. Certainly, we've always had those conversations at a social distance.

I really urge members of the Assembly to vote in favour of this motion. We get the opportunity to have a conversation about what we can do now, reasonable rates.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, it's not super relevant, but my son has figured out how to get ice cream through the drive-through on his bike.

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

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to start out by clarifying a few things. Earlier in the debate we heard from the

Member for Edmonton-South, who really demonstrated his lack of understanding of the insurance industry. I want to clarify a few things. Behaviour is a very good indicator of what things transpire and how things go about. One of the things that happened after the rate cap was put in place by the previous government was that a lot of insurers decided to leave Alberta and take their business elsewhere, which created a lack of competition in general in the insurance market, which actually drove up prices.

Insurance isn't something that is just a price issue. You can insure yourself anywhere from a Hyundai all the way up to a Rolls Royce. I'm a big advocate of having literacy when it comes to insurance because it's not all about price. It's about the coverage. It's about knowing what you need and taking that acceptance of what your acceptable risk is for the asset that you're looking to insure. It's something that I have become very passionate about. I came to learn extensively about the insurance industry after the fires in the Fort McMurray region. It is something that I've really taken a keen look at. From a cursory glance, the idea of a rate cap looks very interesting.

I just want to assure the House that our government is keenly aware of the issue in our insurance market. It's worth noting that Alberta pays amongst the highest for automobile insurance in Canada. I think that we're the third highest, in fact, and this is unacceptable.

I'm glad that the opposition recognizes that insurance is a challenge here in the province of Alberta, but I'm disappointed that the opposition's only contribution to this problem is to put forward a failed policy. Despite the disastrous failure of the cap that they imposed while they were in office, they somehow believe that this is the panacea, the cure-all for insurance. This insurance cap failed to control premiums for Albertans. It made it more difficult for so many to access coverage, and ultimately it did nothing to actually fix the underlying issues that caused the increase in insurance costs.

Madam Speaker, when the previous NDP government introduced their 5 per cent rate cap on average annual rate increases for private passenger automobile insurance, many Albertans actually saw a larger increase in their insurance because the cap applied to the insurance company's entire portfolio and not to individual insurance policies. Under the cap more than half of our 2.7 million insured vehicles on Alberta roads still saw increases of more than 5 per cent, and that, Madam Speaker, equates to more than 1.4 million vehicles, so 1.4 million vehicles in Alberta saw an increase of more than 5 per cent under the 5 per cent rate cap that was instituted by the NDP government.

5:00

To top it off, approximately 193,000 vehicles saw rates increase by an astonishing 10 to 15 per cent. Not only did the cap fail to contain insurance premiums for many Albertans, but the restrictions actually contributed to many people being denied coverage and some being asked to pay for a full year's premiums up front rather than monthly, making it unattainable for many to get insurance, and it forced many consumers of insurance to go for the cheapest possible cost rather than the best fit for them and their families.

It's worth noting that the rate cap was absolutely not sustainable, and as a result many companies that sold both auto and home insurance were forced to leave the province, like I mentioned earlier, and it left many of my constituents and your constituents with fewer options when it came to their household insurance as well as their automobile insurance, and that created ripples that we still feel today.

Insurers have been paying \$1.12 in claims for every dollar they receive in premiums in Alberta. Madam Speaker, you don't have to be spectacular at math to understand that if you are paying \$1.12

for every dollar that you take in, eventually that is going to be a massive problem.

Unlike the opposition, our government is taking the steps necessary to find a sustainable, long-term solution to contain auto rates in the province. Last year our government appointed an automobile insurance reform advisory committee to propose meaningful reforms for our auto insurance system and address the root cause of the problems in this system, something that the previous government simply was not willing to do. This committee has been tasked to find solutions that will ensure that private auto insurance is fair, accessible, affordable for Albertan drivers, and to ensure that those injured in traffic accidents can rely on timely and appropriate support when claims are made.

These past months the advisory council has been engaging with Albertans, legal and medical experts, and key stakeholders to develop their recommendations. The NDP claims that lifting the rate cap is the reason Alberta insurance rates are going up, when the truth is that the NDP's interference in the private market is what created the issues in our current insurance process. They actually exacerbated the problems that were already there because they didn't address the root causes of the recent increases.

Our government is working hard to find a real solution that will balance affordability, fairness, sustainability for all looking for automobile insurance in this province. Again, Madam Speaker, this motion has been put forth with a good intention, but it is merely an unsustainable Band-Aid which was already tried and has already failed.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I look forward to seeing the report from the automobile insurance reform advisory committee, and I thank the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board for his leadership on this file and our government's commitment to actually solving the underlying issues that are in our automobile insurance. I've always believed that it is better to find and deal with the root cause of a problem rather than simply the side effects because you will be able to find a long-term, sustainable solution.

With that, I want to thank you, and I would urge everybody to vote against this motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has the call.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. You know, I've been listening very carefully to the rhetoric and the worn talking points from the government side of the House and taken extensive notes on this, because it always is a bit frustrating when you hear people talk about problems and pretend that they're addressing the issue at hand when, in fact, they're addressing a very different issue and pretending that the application of the different issue is going to address the issue at hand. I'll take some moments to explain why I think that that's the problem here.

The first thing I want to do is just point out the fact that we actually have some fairly fundamental agreement on both sides of the House to a central issue of the argument, and that is that there are some significant issues in the insurance industry here in the province of Alberta. The previous speaker, for example, just mentioned that Alberta pays the third-highest price for insurance in the country, which is already by itself something that tells us that perhaps it's something we should worry about, because insurance costs are significant.

I know that many of the small businesses that are in my area have talked about how the insurance costs have been very difficult for

them during this COVID time. It's just one of those realities. It is a significant issue for people trying to be successful both, you know, individually, at the family level, and in small businesses. We all agree on that, that insurance is costly and that something needs to be done about it. The Finance minister stood up time and time again saying that they want to do something about it. They complain that we have a Band-Aid, but they're not saying: you're trying to fix a problem that doesn't exist. They never say that. What they're saying is that they don't happen to agree with the resolution that we're bringing forward. So we know that he agrees that the insurance industry in Alberta needs intervention and needs a resolution of a significant problem.

We know as well, for example, that the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo said earlier today, "We need to evaluate, compare, and clarify an industry that is subjective and not objective." So here we have members of the UCP government clearly pointing out that there is a problem that needs to be dealt with here. That's not really in debate. So I say thank you. Thank you for recognizing that the fundamental reason for bringing forward Motion 504 here is one that we all agree on.

Now, the question is: now that we've all agreed that there is a problem, do we want to do something about it or not? That's the real question. I think that the opposition side of the House believes that we actually need to do something about this. We need to do something about this because it is having serious effects on members of the public in the province of Alberta. We have been seeing over the years a significant number of people being in the position where they are unable to obtain the insurance that they need because the cost, the price, has gone up too high for them to be able to obtain that.

Now, in fact, the Minister of Finance is not disagreeing with that point, by the way. He's not saying that people weren't having problems with financing. What he's complaining about is that there are some consequences for the application of the issue that we have brought forward under Motion 504. He's saying that some people will have negative consequences as a result. But, again, that's a disingenuous argument because he's not comparing the number of people that were suffering under the previous regime to the number of people that are suffering under the one that the NDP government put in place. If he were doing an honest comparison, he wouldn't be able to make the statement and the claim that he's been making. What he's suggesting is that while there are some people who had their insurance rates rise under the 5 per cent cap – he implies that that was not happening before the cap, or that somehow more people have had that experience as a result of the cap, or that the amount of increase has been more under the cap, none of which he has demonstrated in this House.

In fact, I suggest that all the opposite is true, that, yes, there are people that have had negative consequences while the cap's been on. Maybe some of that has even been exacerbated by the cap. But any fair reckoning and looking at the statistics of what was happening for people in this province would suggest that a far greater number of people were suffering without intervention than were suffering during intervention.

5:10

Now, the minister keeps getting up and saying that people have been hurt. Okay. I agree. I'll accept that. There is a percentage, but he has not demonstrated that that percentage is greater than it was without the cap. In fact, I think we can suggest that it was much greater without the cap. We know that even when we talk about the issues that are at hand here, the minister stands up, reinforced by some of the backbench MLAs, and says, "Oh, my goodness. Under the cap some people's insurance went up by outrageous amounts,

including up to 10 per cent,” we just heard the last speaker say. Yet we know that since they took off the cap, a significant number of people have seen their rates increase by 50 per cent. You can be as outraged as you want at the fact that a small number of people had an increase of 10 per cent when there was intervention, but it’s disingenuous if you’re not five times as upset about the fact that people are experiencing a 50 per cent increase since you took off the cap. It just doesn’t stand a logical analysis to complain about this in the manner that they have.

And I’m particularly concerned about this idea that somehow this is just a Band-Aid. Now, I recognize it is not the ultimate solution. Nobody has suggested that. Well, that’s not true. The government has suggested that somehow we are pretending it was an ultimate solution, but that is a complete falsehood. That has never been suggested; only by the members of the government because they’re trying to obscure the truth.

The truth is that we had a bleeding problem, and in medicine there is a very clear rule. The rule is that until you are able to resolve the underlying problems, you treat the symptoms. Every doctor, every nurse, every medical practitioner will tell you that that is what you do. It’s not just an issue of: let’s do nothing until finally we have some kind of report that maybe suggests a way that we could do that more fully or more substantively on an issue that we all in the House agree on. What we’re debating here is the fact that the government doesn’t want to do anything to staunch the bleeding until they’ve had a chance to do the major surgery.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of the motion other than government motion to close debate, I invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday to do just that.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise once again, this time to close debate on my motion, Motion 504, which, of course, reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to take measures to better regulate the automobile insurance system in Alberta, including but not limited to the establishment of reasonable rate caps, to prevent further undue financial hardship for Albertans.

I appreciate the time that each of my colleagues took to stand and speak to this important initiative, and I also welcome the perspective of everyone who took the opportunity to join in the debate. There is no doubt that the issue of insurance affordability affects all Albertans. I think that that has been acknowledged this afternoon, especially right now as we continue to feel the impacts of the global pandemic before us. We must consider the impacts that each of these costs are having on all Albertans. We have all heard stories through one way or another of how these increasing costs from insurance companies are hurting our constituents, and we must take action now.

We have, unfortunately, not seen any action on this file from the current UCP government, and the public’s calls for action have overwhelmingly been ignored. When questioned on the decision to cancel the 5 per cent cap on private passenger auto insurance premiums, the only answer that we received from this Finance minister was that these Albertans should, quote, shop around, which was very unfortunate. Now, the fact is that this UCP government made the decision to leave Albertans at the whim of the insurance industry by removing this 5 per cent cap and then told those same Albertans that they don’t have any answers right now.

It is quite a pattern that we’re seeing from this government. They’re reducing supports on one hand without any answers to

make things better, at the same time reassuring all Albertans and the members of the opposition that one day, you know, behind closed-door consultations they’ll have an answer for us, which simply is not acceptable at any point but especially not right now.

It is simply unacceptable to let these premiums continue at the rate that they are when our communities can least afford it, and the Premier’s comments about how he personally saved \$200 this year on his auto insurance really shows how truly disconnected he is from this important issue.

Finally, I would like to thank all Albertans who took part in these conversations and provided feedback to my office and all MLAs’ offices. We’ve heard stories of insurance premiums rising upwards of 30 and 50 per cent even with a clean driving record and no past fines, which is simply unacceptable. Now, many of the members of the UCP have stood up, as the last speaker noted, and said that the cap on premiums has resulted in increases as much as 15 per cent while it was in place without recognizing that the increases, once again, as the last speaker just mentioned, have increased even more so without the cap, so it’s simply not an acceptable answer. Members of the UCP have also stated that people trying to insure their vehicles had to pay their premiums up front or were unable to get insurance at all. That is still something that has not changed since they got rid of this cap, so it is simply, once again, not an acceptable answer to move forward with.

This file requires immediate action for the benefit of all Albertans. By supporting this motion, you are at the very least showing and recognizing that something needs to be done. Cancelling initiatives that were supporting Albertans and then claiming the resulting increase to costs was somehow a result of those changes and not as a result of this UCP saying these companies could charge as much as they want is, once again, simply not acceptable.

I thank all the members who took part in this debate. I hope that the government really considers the importance of this motion, recognizing that they don’t have any answers for us right now and that we continue to wait for the panel to come back with deliberations. It just needs to happen sooner. With that, I’d like to close debate on Motion 504.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 504 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:17 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

The Speaker: Oh, my goodness. Whew. We’ll just all wait for the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland to return to his chair.

Mr. Getson: I’ll pay \$50, Mr. Speaker, to a charity of your choice.

The Speaker: Oh, my goodness.

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Carson	Gray	Nielsen
Ceci	Loyola	Sigurdson, L.
Feehan		

Against the motion:

Armstrong-Homeniuk	Hanson	Nixon, Jeremy
Copping	Horner	Pon
Ellis	Issik	Reid
Getson	Jones	Toews
Glasgo	Loewen	Turton
Glubish	Long	van Dijken

Goodridge	Nally	Williams
Gotfried	Neudorf	Yaseen
Guthrie		
Totals:	For – 7	Against – 25

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 lost]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 21

Provincial Administrative Penalties Act

[Adjourned debate June 10: Ms Ganley]

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone wishing to join in the debate this afternoon? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to join in the debate on Bill 21, the Provincial Administrative Penalties Act. It was brought forward recently by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, who is also an MLA for Calgary-Elbow in the city I come from. It's my pleasure to talk to this for my first time since this bill has come before the House, my first opportunity in second reading. I'm conscious that my colleagues the Member for Calgary-McCall and the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who are both lawyers, had an opportunity to speak to this earlier on. I don't have the benefit right here before me, but I do know that their views are recorded in *Hansard*. I'm sure that their arguments were cogent in terms of understanding the impacts of the Provincial Administrative Penalties Act, and I'll be glad to add to those right now.

You know, I can appreciate that there is a desire to look at the issue of driving under the influence and to get better laws in place both for the legal system that is inundated with many, many, many cases of DUI and for people who want to assure themselves that they're getting the best treatment under the laws in this province. I think that the bill is quite substantive; obviously, it's over a hundred pages. There's a lot to take in, and that's what I've been doing to try and get myself apprised of all of the changes that are in this bill.

The point that I'd like to make is that if it's a challenge, of course, for the opposition and others to take in all of the information that's in this bill, there's certainly a challenge in our society for the stakeholder groups, interested participants who want to also take in the information and make some decisions about the efficacy. Will this bill do the job that's important for all Albertans, which is, of course, saving lives and reducing drunk driving or driving under the influence, a goal in our society, I'm sure, that we all support and that is not a partisan issue? We want people to be protected in our society from people who are driving under the influence and who are using a motor vehicle and shouldn't be.

I do know that there have been some individuals and certainly MADD that have taken a position where they welcome the law and sanctions introduced in it. They talk about it having been proven very effective in reducing impaired driving and saving lives in other provinces. The province that I think the individual from MADD is talking about is B.C., which has a longer history than other provinces that I'm aware of with these kinds of administrative penalties being put in place. That's certainly something that I'm going to be looking into in greater detail to make sure that the outcomes that the individual from MADD spoke to as being achieved in other provinces are actually achieved and benefit the government of Alberta by undertaking a similar kind of work.

I want to look at the purpose of the act, though. I think that's on page 6, and it speaks to the reason this bill is before us. As I said, there are some current difficulties in our court system with the number of DUIs that are before the courts, the number of people who have penalties, criminal charges, and aren't being dealt with in a timely fashion. The first purpose of the act, of course, is to "adopt a simplified form and process for administratively enforcing contraventions." That's, right off the hop, I think, somewhat of a challenge. Again, working my way through the bill and certainly with understanding municipal law and the last four years of provincial law-making, this is a challenge in terms of trying to figure out if this is in fact going to be a simplified process for individuals in our communities if they fall under the sanctions or the administrative initiatives that are in this.

5:40

The second purpose of the act is to "establish a consistent framework for the resolution of the contraventions enforced by issuance of an administrative penalty." Of course, that's what we all want, society, to be treated as equals before the law. The current situation is that if you can get a lawyer, can pay for a really good lawyer, oftentimes your results in the court system are better than those who don't go before the courts with a lawyer or have a substandard defence for them. So "a consistent framework for the resolution of the contraventions enforced by issuance of an administrative penalty" is something I have some questions about and would like to get some further feedback from stakeholder groups, civil trial lawyers, and others who deal with these sorts of things.

The third purpose of the act, Mr. Speaker, is to "ensure that the process used to administratively enforce contraventions and the procedural safeguards applicable in administrative enforcement proceedings are proportionate to the regulatory nature of the contravention." You know, I'm not a lawyer, so I'll have to talk to my colleagues who are lawyers and look more into that significant purpose of this act which is here.

The fourth one is to "resolve disputes in relation to administrative penalties in an expedient manner consistent with the procedural protections mandated by this Act." I'll certainly be reviewing further those resolution-of-dispute mechanisms that are in this act.

The fifth one is to "affirm that the consequences for a contravention enforced by the issuance of an administrative penalty may not include imprisonment." I certainly understand that. Our prisons are full, Mr. Speaker, and if there are other ways to deal with and ensure that people who break the law with regard to driving under the influence can correct that behaviour and are accountable for their behaviour, I think that is something that's worth while to consider and worthy.

The last purpose of this act, as it's stated here under (f), is "to enhance access to justice by establishing an administrative enforcement process that can be readily understood and provides for a simple method of disputing a notice of administrative penalty."

These are the things that the act purports to want to achieve, and I think from the perspective of a nonlawyer, I would say that I'm not sure this act will be achieving all of these things because I think it's going to be somewhat convoluted, certainly initially, for people who are found in contravention of .05 or .08 blood-alcohol content or other drugs in their system, and I'm not sure this purpose of the act actually achieves what it's set out to do. I'm not sure there's going to be a readily understood process in society for this bill when it becomes law.

Those are some of the questions I wanted to bring forward. I think, in fairness, that there are people who we should listen to from

the side of wanting to dig further into this bill before it becomes law, and in that regard, I'm certainly open to talking with those individuals, those groups before this bill moves into third reading and gets passed.

I think we can learn a lot from the B.C. situation, for sure. They kind of set the ground and were first in this regard with administrative penalties. You know, the ability to look at the provincial government website on this issue and what they've done is certainly one I want to take a greater time to undertake, and I think all of us should do that. I think we should have some opportunity to hear from those who are in the legal profession in addition to the Solicitor General and Justice minister and my colleagues who I mentioned. There are those who work in this field, certainly in the Justice ministry as well, who have advised the minister on this bill, and it would be interesting to hear from them in terms of the crossjurisdictional review that they have been able to undertake and the efficacy of those laws in other jurisdictions.

I want to perhaps also mention that the way this bill will work with other substances is a concern. It's just because, you know, the typical thing that we've seen, that we've dealt with historically is alcohol, and we know those systems really well in terms of blowing and the people's understanding of their rights with regard to blowing or not blowing. They've seen that movie played out in our society for decades as a law enforcement tool to help keep our roads safe. What we haven't seen and what is fairly new in Canada and in Alberta is the legalization of cannabis. We haven't seen the work to get detection in place, either people or other tools that can assist in the detection and be held up in a court of law.

Those are all questions I have. I certainly agree with wanting to make our roads safer for everybody. They should be, and anyone who gets behind the wheel who has consumed is taking that chance on the safety not only of themselves but people in society, and that should never be the case. They should always have a designated driver or take some other precautions to not get behind the wheel. So changing all of that to increase not surveillance but detection: it's critical that we do that in a way that will ultimately support changing that person's behaviour. The Provincial Administrative Penalties Act is something that I think we potentially need to have greater clarity on from important stakeholders before we move in the direction of fully completing all three readings of this.

Those are some of the challenges for me as an individual. I certainly will listen to the debate here tonight and in the future through watching on the screen or reading in *Hansard*, but I think we should take some time to understand some of the questions and ask some of those questions relative to the purpose of the act that is here in terms of: will what's here actually meet the purpose of the act that's set out from (a) to (f) on page 6.

As I started off saying, I mean, this is a pretty substantive bill. We want to make sure that the sections that are amended or thrown out will actually assist in making our roads safer for everybody and reduce drunk driving or driving under the influence of other substances in our society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Is there anyone wishing to ask a brief question or comment under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is rising to join in second reading.

Ms Sigurdson: That's right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to also join the debate on Bill 21, Provincial Administrative Penalties Act, which has been brought forward by the Minister of Justice, the MLA for Calgary-Elbow. Of course, first reading was

back on June 4, so not too long ago, and we know that this bill – and my hon. colleague talked about this – is quite a substantive one. It is actually over 200 pages. It covers a lot of territory, but the basic part about it is, of course, that it changes our model of administrative penalties for impaired driving. It does that by sort of borrowing a bit from B.C., our neighbour to the west. B.C. has kind of been a bit of a leader on this issue in Canada. Back in 2010 they implemented legislation that I believe this bill is sort of templated on somewhat.

5:50

There are some kind of controversial pieces of it. It does, right off the bat, decriminalize impaired driving for drivers on their first offence. It changes things quite substantially, and of course when anything like that happens, we must make sure that we're understanding that and if that's a good step forward. Certainly, I feel that on this bill we need sort of more answers to those questions to make sure that we're moving in the right direction. We need to hear more from stakeholders who have direct experience with the police to know whether this is exactly what we should be doing here in Alberta. That's a question about that first piece of it, that it would be decriminalizing that first offence of impaired driving. It's something, I think, to really be very reflective of and not just sort of accept that lock, stock, and barrel right off the top, because it is a substantive change, and we want to make sure that it is the right change for our province.

Of course, we want to make sure that our roads are as safe as possible, and we do not want drunk drivers on our roads. We want as many lives saved as possible. Any death is a tragedy, of course, so make sure that the changes we make to this legislation that will become law are the right ones, understanding if that is actually the most effective way to go.

Certainly, we know that now when an officer has reasonable grounds to believe that a driver has committed an impaired driving offence and they issue an administrative penalty, right away that will trigger a 15-month suspension. This is the current system. A driver can drive again after 3 months if they install an ignition interlock device. Even though it does say that they have a 15-month suspension, if they do have this ignition interlock device – of course, they can't drive a vehicle if they have been drinking at all – then they are able within three months of that to drive again. Certainly, in the beginning, too, just right after they have been charged, their vehicle is seized for three days according to the current legislation, and as I was just referring to earlier, they are criminally charged with that first offence. They do have a criminal charge of impaired driving.

That's what our current situation is, and this legislation is now looking to shift that somewhat. The officer again can stop someone on reasonable grounds that they believe they're impaired, and they can issue an administrative penalty. Again that 15-month suspension is also part of this, and a driver can drive again after three months if they install an ignition interlock device. Those are consistent with the current legislation.

One of the parts that's different is that the driver will also receive a 30-day vehicle seizure. What I just mentioned previously is that it's only three days now, so of course that's quite a significant shift, that the vehicle would no longer be accessible to that person for those 30 days. Also, a \$1,000 fine is part of it, and the person driving that vehicle who has been found to be impaired will have to complete a mandatory impaired-driving education course.

I mean, I just want to talk a little bit about that education piece. I think that that is an important move. Sometimes, unfortunately, people do things without understanding exactly the ramifications from them, so having people take that course, especially since

they've just been found to be an impaired driver, hopefully will change behaviour. We know that education does change behaviour, so I think that that makes a lot of sense in this legislation, and I think that that's an important move forward.

Just as a side note, as a mother of three sons who all are driving now and have been for some time, I think that this piece is very important because I certainly paid for all three of them to take an extensive AMA program when they were learning to drive and mostly were accident free. There were a few little bumps and scrapes here and there, but I think that all three of them are pretty responsible drivers. So I think that that's to be commended. I think that it's really important that we realize our responsibility when we get behind that wheel because we know that it's a very dangerous thing to drive a vehicle. If you have a good understanding of sort of what the risks are and you're a good defensive driver, then that is definitely going to make our roads safer. So I think that that part of the proposed legislation, for people to complete a mandatory impaired-driving education program, is a good move forward. So I commend the government on that.

Certainly, one of the things that we know is a challenge for us here in our province and, I think, in most provinces in Canada is just the demands on our court system, the demands on our enforcement officers, just the time required to fulfill all the things

they must do to carry out, say, charging someone or stopping someone because they've been an impaired driver. What we understand from the current system is that it's about five to eight hours or more per file, as they call it, or per individual who would be driving under the influence. So that's a substantial amount of time, five to eight hours, that any officer – and administrative staff, perhaps, are counted in that, too – would have to commit to doing that, and that's quite onerous. That's a lot of time to do that.

One of the things that this proposed legislation is saying is that the police can issue this process in an hour or less on average. That's a substantial difference. It's really quite significant. So streamlining – I know that this government cares very much about red tape reduction. I mean, this would fulfill some of their, you know, overarching goals as a government. I think, you know, that's a good move forward. It's a more efficient process, it seems, that they're identifying, and according to what people are understanding, it's going to be much . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; however, the time is now 6 o'clock, and the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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