



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, July 21, 2020

Day 48

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

Second Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UCP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UCP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UCP)
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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UCP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
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Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
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Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UCP)
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Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

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United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee

Chair: Mr. Milliken
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Dach
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Yaseen

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, July 21, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen, 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.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of guests joining us this afternoon in the galleries. First and foremost, it's my absolute honour and pleasure to be able to introduce to all members of the Assembly two very, very special people. They are the parents of the hon. the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism, Tony and Josie Fir. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also in my gallery are some very good friends of mine that happen to reside in Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville: Ruven Rajoo and his daughter, who is in grade 6 – we had a great opportunity to tour the Legislature together with her – Xyila Rajoo, and, additionally, a good friend of mine, Sheryl Cymbaliuk.

Also today a guest of the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane: Mr. Mike Simpson from the Canadian Energy Centre.

Last but certainly not least, guests of the Minister of Environment and Parks: Gina and Kylee Crouch.

Would you all please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

School Re-entry Plan

Ms Pancholi: Every day I stand in this House and represent the people of Edmonton-Whitemud. Sometimes that means bringing forward issues that I don't have direct experience with. Then there are times where I'm hearing directly from my constituents about issues that coincide with my own life. Over 65 per cent of my constituents are families with children, and they are overwhelmingly concerned right now with the safe reopening of schools. As a parent of two school-aged kids myself, one starting grade 2 and one who will step through the doors of her school for the first time as a kindergarten student, parents are losing sleep wondering what school will look like in the fall.

As all parents know, any of the three possible scenarios cause anxiety. As schools reopen fully, we're worried for the health and safety of our kids, a fair concern given that, unfortunately, every day our COVID numbers go up. We're worried for school staff who will be responsible for maintaining physical distancing while also teaching, cleaning, and possibly providing online learning as well. We're worried about whether smaller classes are even possible with no additional money from this government.

How will cleaning supplies be paid for? How will kids safely get to school on transit or school buses? What happens if COVID-19 shows up in our schools? If one student or teacher in the class gets

it, does the whole class have to isolate? Are there enough substitute teachers? If our child has to be away from school for two weeks, how will we as parents be able to stay home from work? What if there is an outbreak? Does the entire building shut down? Who takes care of our kids so that we can work? Are our jobs secure if this happens multiple times? What about our kids' mental health? This doesn't even begin to cover, Mr. Speaker, the challenges of scenario 2 or scenario 3.

Mr. Speaker, this is what parents in Alberta are concerned about, not equalization or union bosses or any of the other distractions that this government is waving around to avoid drawing attention to their inaction. Many parents are saying that they will simply keep their kids home. They don't feel confident that schools under this government's watch are safe. To have these concerns dismissed as fearmongering by the Education minister and no promise of financial support to school boards shows exactly where this government's priorities lie, and it is not with Alberta families and children.

Bill 30 and Private Health Service Delivery

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government has recently introduced Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. For weeks the opposition have been spinning the contents of this bill with inaccurate talking points of switching to a privatized, two-tiered, Americanized system. Right now I want to speak the truth about this bill.

Bill 30 clearly states that our government believes that a single health authority is the most effective and efficient way to deliver health services to Albertans. Mr. Speaker, for decades thousands of surgeries have been delivered through chartered health care facilities within Alberta. To be exact, 15 per cent of the surgeries performed in our province are done in privately contracted health care facilities. Currently 43 chartered facilities exist in Alberta, all of which have existing agreements with Alberta Health Services. In addition, almost every physician in Alberta currently operates as a private corporation. This is nothing new. It existed under the NDP. It takes place across Canada and has for decades.

The proposed amendments in Bill 30 will actually help the health care system by reducing red tape and administrative burden so that current and new chartered facilities can provide more publicly funded surgeries to help reduce wait times. Let me be clear. These are publicly funded, universally accessible surgeries. This supports our platform commitment of reducing wait times and strengthening our public health care system to better serve patients.

Also, as a part of the Alberta government's bold and ambitious recovery plan, we're committed to building new hospitals and upgrading old hospitals. Investing in this critical infrastructure will support our health care system for generations to come. Our government increased health care spending by \$500 million to help fight COVID-19, and no matter how difficult things get, our government will continue to maintain and support our publicly funded health care system.

While the NDP continue to use the same tired, divisive, fearmongering, misinformed talking points, I will continue to speak the truth and set the record straight.

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

COVID-19 Protective Measures and Economic Recovery

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since March Albertans have experienced many ups and downs because of COVID-19. Even as I speak now, more testing is being done, and more cases are being found. The virus is still a threat. In my riding of Calgary-

Currie we are definitely doing our part. In fact, the Richmond diagnostic centre is the busiest COVID-19 testing location in all of Alberta. I drive by it several times a day, and each time, seeing how busy it is, it is a constant reminder of how easily this virus can take hold and spread. So we have a choice. We can protect each other by following public health orders and making good, common-sense decisions to stay safe, or we can let the virus run loose.

What steps can we take? Well, first off, don't be afraid to wear a mask in public or on transit, especially when you are indoors and can't physically distance. Cover your mouth when you cough. Wash your hands. Stay home when you are sick. But now let me be clear. The goal is to try to get back as soon as we can to something that looks like a normal economy. We want to open up the bars and restaurants, get kids back to school, sports, concerts, but in order to get all that, we need to keep the curve flat. Because of your sacrifices and our amazing front-line health care workers, we have managed to keep ourselves as one of the freest jurisdictions, with one of the best public health outcomes in the world. Alberta's COVID-19 response was and is the envy of many western and democratic nations, but it is not the time now to take our eyes off the prize.

We now have Alberta's recovery plan in full swing. We are building new infrastructure, roads, schools. We are accelerating economic diversification as we diversify our economy to the industries of the future, all while still supporting our global ESG leading energy sector and creating tens of thousands of jobs. Mr. Speaker, Albertans are smart and entrepreneurial and resilient, and we work hard to make sure that life is better for our families both today and in the future. There is not a pandemic out there that will change that for any of us.

Thank you very much.

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

Economic Diversification

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Economic diversification is a critical goal for our province. Just a few years ago the NDP government had a plan to attract investment in renewable energy, technology, arts, petrochemicals, and many other sectors. This plan was developed by working closely with experts and industries, and it was working. But that was of no interest to the UCP. After doing a predetermined review, they cut almost all of those programs and called diversification a long-term luxury they could not afford, cancelling private-sector investments that were already on the way and chasing away companies planning to locate in Alberta.

Instead, they bet on a \$4.7 billion giveaway to corporations already making profits in excess of half a billion dollars a year, a policy that resulted in a net loss of over 50,000 jobs in under a year, and that was before the pandemic and the drop in the price of oil. Now suddenly, 15 months into their mandate, they're advertising diversification like it's a brand new idea they came up with last week, like they didn't mock and deride it for years.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, this current campaign comes after over a year of complete inaction from this government to diversify the economy. This new plan appears to be nothing more than a weaker version of what our plan was. The highlights of the UCP plan include attracting less than half of the private-sector investment that our NDP plan would have attracted.

Now, I'm certainly willing to admit that this is an improvement over what they brought last year, and it certainly will do a lot better for Albertans than their last plan did, but I still think there is more

they can do to improve it. They might start with a little intellectual honesty, by admitting they were wrong in reversing our plan, that they have learned something and decided to change course. I definitely think this is a positive step, but that should come as no surprise to the members of the UCP since it's our plan.

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

Electricity Transmission and Distribution Charges

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A topic of great concern for my constituents and many rural Albertans is the transmission/distribution costs on their electricity bills. I receive steady e-mails and calls from frustrated, angry Albertans pleading for something to be done. It's well known that our transmission system was overbuilt under previous governments. Assumptions were made regarding the demand trends of the province, assumptions that they would continue, and they haven't.

Not only is our grid overbuilt, but it has been designed to build reliance on our neighbours through maximized connectiveness with interties between B.C.'s hydro and our fellow thermal generators in Saskatchewan and Montana. We are now typically a net importer of power. These net imports have averaged around 2,000 gigawatt hours in 2018 and '19.

The irony is not lost on many of my constituents who have lost their jobs prematurely at one of the Westmoreland Coal mines, that supplied coal to a generation site at either Sheerness or Battle River, that they now get to pay more for transmission to import coal-fired power.

The real kick in the teeth for my constituents is in regard to distribution. Rural Albertans pay more for distribution than urban, but rural Albertans in areas where ATCO is the distribution facility owner pay much more comparatively. That includes much of central-eastern Alberta as well as all of the north. The rationale would be that there are more kilometres of line per site, so the cost is higher. This is unfair and targeted to the very areas that are home to much of the province's generation and overbuilt transmission infrastructure.

At the AUMA AGM in 2019 a resolution was brought forward that the AUMA advocate for affordable, predictable electricity prices and to reduce any disparities in transmission and distribution charges across the province. The resolution passed with an overwhelming majority despite Mayor Nenshi speaking out against it. I'm encouraged that Alberta's government will be reviewing distribution and transmission this fall and am hopeful that rural equity will be the outcome. It's time.

Bill 30 and Investment Attraction

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and bring forward an issue on behalf of a constituent, Hamza Khan. He reached out to me to share his concerns with Bill 30 and the UCP's continued unpopular changes to health care. The UCP's rush to privatize and Americanize health care is putting patients at risk and driving doctors out of Alberta. He expressed concern with the fact that Bill 30 will give regular Albertans fewer services while the government still taxes Albertans the same. It leads the way for more private surgeries to be done in Alberta. It politicizes the Health Quality Council of Alberta, and it continues to lay the groundwork for the continued privatization of our health care. There is never a good time for this, but in the middle of a pandemic is a particularly heinous time to privatize care.

But beyond the change to our health care system, he reached out to me to express concern about what these changes mean for society

as a whole. He said, and I quote: if the UCP really want to attract business and investment, they have got to ensure that Alberta is a viable place for a company to invest and have its employees reside in, not create a situation where all of our institutions, although imperfect, are left to dry.

The UCP like to claim that they are the party of the economy, businesses, and the taxpayer, yet they so often neglect what brings people and businesses to these communities. Supporting our communities through strengthened public services such as health care, education, and child care will help more than just those sectors. It will make our province a better place to live.

I am thankful that constituents such as Hamza Khan reach out to me to share their concerns. It is our duty as legislators to listen. However, I can only do so much as an opposition MLA. I know that all members of this Chamber are being inundated with e-mails, phone calls, and letters about changes to our health care system and concerns that doctors are fleeing our province. I hope that all members of this House take the time to truly consider that correspondence, and I hope that Alberta constituents continue to make their voices heard.

Blue Ridge Lumber Milestone

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, last week I had the opportunity to spend time with people who contribute immensely to this province's current and future well-being. For many years Blue Ridge Lumber has been a key component of Blue Ridge and the surrounding communities. Our province depends upon the lumber industry for its success, and this is especially true in rural Alberta.

Lumber companies perform essential conservation and ecological work that ensures a future for not just the industry but for all Albertans, yet we seldom mention or celebrate these companies for what they are able to achieve and contribute environmentally. I felt honoured to be present at Blue Ridge Lumber's celebration for their 200 millionth tree planting. That's right, Mr. Speaker; 200 million trees have been planted by the amazing team at Blue Ridge Lumber, including over 9 million trees this year alone.

As many know, I spent nine years working at a pulp and paper mill. My family, like many of the others in West Yellowhead, has been provided for by the workers directly and indirectly involved in the forest industry. It is such an honour to represent people like the ones that work at Blue Ridge Lumber. The hundreds of workers this company employs should feel a great sense of accomplishment. Speaking with some of them the other day, I was impressed with the pride and ownership they take towards ensuring that they have a sustainable industry for years to come. This would not happen without the environmental stewardship they display on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is proud to represent forestry companies across this province. During our time in government so far, we have increased the allowable height of wood-constructed buildings, committed to increasing allowable yearly harvests, and just recently reduced the corporate tax rate, making Alberta by far the most competitive tax environment to invest and do business in Canada. Alberta's government is showing commitment, just like Blue Ridge Lumber, to the future of the forest industry, which is vital to Alberta's economic recovery.

To the people at Blue Ridge Lumber: thank you so much for your hospitality, and keep up the great work.

Support for Agriculture

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, farming is not an easy profession. Family farms in my constituency have been struggling with many challenges. The past four years have seen terrible harvest conditions. In particular, the 2019 harvest has been nicknamed the Harvest from Hell due to not only devastating weather conditions but also trade uncertainty and the federal carbon taxes on grain drying. Farmers that have been unable to fully harvest their fields in the fall are left with trying to harvest their previous crop and seed the new crop within a very tight timeline in the spring. When that's not a big enough issue, the extreme moisture conditions we have seen lately can render entire fields unable to be seeded or fields already seeded largely drowned out.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government has launched the Alberta recovery plan. This ambitious plan to get our province back on track is not only about creating many new jobs, but it is also about keeping the jobs we have. We continue to deliver business risk-management programs designed to help food producers recover in these difficult times. Farmers can participate in AgriInsurance, AgriStability, AgriInvest, and AgriRecovery. Our government listens to the farmers, and we are working to find more solutions to help out our farmers to maintain and grow agricultural employment.

Additionally, we are helping with mental health supports. If you are experiencing an immediate personal crisis, please call the mental health hotline at 1.877.303.2642. Producers can also call 211 for counselling, financial, or legal resources. Both of these supports are available 24/7, so do not hesitate to call if you need help.

We will get through this together. Our government is doing everything it can to help our farmers in need of recovery. Farming may not be an easy profession, but it is one well worth doing, and hopefully soon the sun will shine again in my constituency.

Thank you.

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

Bill 32 Labour Relations Code Amendments

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 32 reaffirms workers' rights and their right to choose whether they want their hard-earned money going to partisan political causes. This is not an attack on workers or an attack on unions. Giving members more choice and freedom with their own money should have gotten complete support in the House.

We want to provide employees and job creators with clear and transparent rules, which will promote efficiency and productivity within the system. This bill is about choice and is strengthening employees' rights by granting union members more say in where their dollars are going by requiring unions to provide their members with financial statements, both a proper exercise of democracy on a significant matter – the changes to the current legislation will restore balance and economic stability, including updates to rules, and reduce red tape, that will encourage employers and employees to work together to reach agreements.

With a more flexible policy it will encourage job creation by reducing these burdens on employers. We recognize that reducing burdens on employers is a critical part of economic recovery as many businesses have been greatly impacted as a result of the public health crisis. Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act champions the individual rights of all Albertans that are in a union, will support economic recovery, restore balance in workplaces, and get Albertans back to work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Paid Sick Leave during COVID-19 Pandemic

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been several days since the announcement of Ottawa's safe restart agreement, which comes with a plan for national paid sick leave. Now, other Premiers are glad to see it: B.C.'s John Horgan, Yukon's Sandy Silver, Manitoba's Brian Pallister. Heck, even Doug Ford says that it's a major help in addressing the pandemic. Yet this Premier has been strangely silent. Yesterday the labour minister would not give a straight answer. So a simple question, Premier. Be crystal clear. Will all Albertans have access to 10 days' paid sick leave and, if so, at what pay rate, and when will it start?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for the question. However, the preamble was inaccurate. I've not been silent on this. I issued a statement, following the completion of the federal-provincial-territorial safe restart agreement, thanking the federal government for its collaboration after six weeks of negotiations with this and other provinces. I specifically identified one of the positive advances as federal funding for sick pay to facilitate people who do need to stay at home. As was the case with other provinces, we'll be releasing the details of the application of that program here in Alberta in the days to come.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday in failing to answer the questions asked of him, the minister of labour mumbled something about future announcements, much like the Premier. Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland was on the radio here in Edmonton this morning talking to Albertans, and she gave us clarity. She said: the federal government will pay for 10 days of sick leave for every Canadian who doesn't have it. So why is the Deputy Prime Minister announcing this while the minister refuses to give us those kinds of details? When will you give Albertans the specific details on how this works? They need that information now.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the safe restart framework was finalized three business days ago, the end of last Thursday. I know that my colleague the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration is working as quickly as possible with his officials and with their federal counterparts to finalize the precise parameters. I don't believe any other province in the country has yet done so. The support will be there as per the safe restart agreement.

I would remind the House that this government took the initiative of providing for emergency isolation payments at the very beginning of the crisis, before there was any federal support for this.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this deal has been under negotiation for weeks, months. Cases are climbing, and Albertans are nervous. People must feel safe and secure to follow the direction of the chief medical officer and self-isolate if they're feeling sick. They need to know that income support will be there if they need it. Last time the Premier referred to it, he launched a broken website for the emergency supports, then cancelled it prematurely, leaving tens of thousands of eligible Albertans in the lurch. Premier, they can't go through that again. They need to know that there is assurance that you are on this. When will they get that assurance?

Mr. Kenney: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the agreement was finalized with the federal government three business days ago. The support will be there.

Only the NDP could say that no one got support from the emergency isolation payments when, in fact, 90,000 Albertans received over \$100 million, more than twice what had initially been budgeted, more generous in that respect, Mr. Speaker, than any province in Canada. It would be nice if the Leader of the Opposition, instead of running down Alberta, would actually celebrate the enormous response of this province to help people cope with the crisis.

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

Ms Notley: Well, apparently, we were the only ones that spoke to the tens of thousands who were left in the lurch when it was prematurely ended.

School Re-entry Plan and Education Funding

Ms Notley: Now, on March 15, when we closed schools, there had been 17 new cases of COVID for a total of 57. Fast-forward to yesterday. Alberta reported its highest daily increase since April: 368 new cases in just three days. The Premier and his minister now say that this is "near-normal" circumstances for reopening schools with no extra funding. It sounds like the Premier is asking parents to send their kids into rooms with more than 30 other kids even as the pandemic deepens. Premier, how is that near normal?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is right to be concerned about the recent increase in active cases in Alberta. We as a province, of course, have been maintaining very high levels of testing, but we are concerned to see small increases in the number of hospitalizations and ICU admissions, which is why we renew our call on Albertans to exercise the same great care and personal responsibility that they have over the past four months, to follow scrupulously the guidelines of the chief medical officer of health.

With respect to schools, I would point out to the Leader of the Opposition that many jurisdictions around the world have successfully reopened schools with very few cases associated with ...

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier knows very well that he's cut per-student funding two years in a row. Without new support our kids will be at risk. Health and safety experts are saying that we need to get class sizes down to 15 children per class. Right now we're somewhere between 20 and 40 children per class. We don't know for sure because, of course, the Premier absolved himself of accountability and stopped keeping track of that number. Simple question: will the Premier be providing the extra funding needed to implement safe class sizes when we reopen, and if not, why not?

Mr. Kenney: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the leader stated another falsehood, as is so often the case, in her preamble. In fact, the government has maintained per-student funding. Every school board is receiving at least as much funding this year as it did last year. I'd point out that Calgary Catholic reopened for summer classes this summer with regular class sizes without incident with respect to the pandemic. The Minister of Education will be making an announcement about a strategy for the safe reopening of the schools this fall following public health advice and extensive

consultations with superintendents, school boards, teachers, and others.

Ms Notley: Let me get this straight. We have \$7 billion to derisk Keystone XL, but we can't find a fraction of that to derisk our children from getting COVID-19. Even before the pandemic, in many schools kids were being packed in like sardines. This Premier owes parents a better plan than telling school boards to spend their reserves on buying more hand sanitizer for classrooms that have 40 children in them. Once again, will or will not this Premier put protecting the health and safety of Alberta's children ahead of all of his other issues?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, of course, we put the health and well-being of people first. I can't understand the NDP's effort to set up in opposition to one another policies to create jobs and employment and growth versus support for the safe operation of the schools. [interjection] The angry NDP leader is heckling yet again. It's unfortunate to hear that she's still angry with Albertans for having fired her in the last election, but I can tell her this much. We are committed both to getting Albertans back to work and to safely operating Alberta schools. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. [interjections] Order.

The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Kindergarten COVID-19 Related Safety Measures

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Kindergarten is scheduled to resume in September, but teachers and parents haven't heard how it will be done safely. They have heard, though, that the minister fired more than 20,000 educational staff in the spring and that the UCP is already funding education at lower levels than the NDP government, than we were before the pandemic. This government spent \$4.7 billion on a no-jobs corporate handout. Why did the Premier pick shareholders' profits over the safety of Alberta's children?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, as a mother, as a grandmother I'm absolutely concerned about the safety of our students and our staff. It's the reason that we went to at-home teacher-directed learning in the first place. We were one of the first jurisdictions in all of Canada to do that because we were concerned about the safety of our students and our staff. We are continuing to be concerned. We have a very comprehensive plan. We have seen through the summer that it actually works. I'm looking forward to sharing that with the rest of the province at 3 p.m.

2:00

Ms Hoffman: Kindergarten kids don't go to summer school, Minister. Anyone who has ever entered a kindergarten class knows that they have different rules and they have different supports. Kindergarten students don't typically sit in desks or use lockers, and they all sit together on the carpet for storytime. Because of this, Ontario has kept their classes at 15, but in Alberta the minister's messaging has been to expect near-normal conditions. Parents and teachers know that times aren't normal, and they want to know that public health rules will be followed. Will the Premier finally put children before his \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Of course, we put the interests and the safety of our children and our staff as the number one priority. We have been working very closely with the chief medical officer, Alberta Health, and all of the

education partners to come up with this very comprehensive plan. I can share with all Albertans and I want to reassure all Albertans that we have the confidence of the superintendents, of the employers, of the school boards. Students will be back in a safe environment.

Ms Hoffman: I know teachers who are bracing for kindergarten classes of 25 in the morning and 25 more in the afternoon. Kindergarten teachers provide hands-on support for their students. They do everything from helping kids put on snowsuits to wiping their noses and so much more. Teachers and parents want to know that a child's first year in school will be positive and that it will be safe. To make that happen, we need more staff and more space in kindergarten and in other levels as well. Premier, it's not too late to put kids before corporations. Will you finally provide new funding to keep kids safe this fall? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education has risen.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I can share with everyone that we have got an additional \$250 million in stimulus IMR funding, of which \$15 million is being used by school boards to look at COVID-related issues that they need to address. We also have increased funding. Every single school division in this province is going to see an increase in their funding in the upcoming school year. There is \$363 million in reserves. I reiterate: the absolute priority is the safety of our children and our staff. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West is with the call.

Postsecondary Education Funding and Tuition

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With most postsecondary classes in Alberta being delivered online this fall, over 10,000 students from across the province have signed petitions asking the colleges and universities to freeze tuition for the upcoming school year. This just makes sense, yet due to this government's heavy-handed cuts to our province's postsecondary sector, schools are being forced to raise tuition next year just to stay afloat. Premier, should students really have to bear a 7 per cent tuition hike just because of your mismanagement?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's no surprise that the member opposite wants us to interfere and micromanage with every aspect of our postsecondary institutions, but we're not going to do that. We believe in leaving our institutions alone and helping them free up their capacity to innovate and be entrepreneurial. We're giving them the tools. They're making the decisions at the end of the day about the operational decisions that the postsecondary institutions . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. I had no problem hearing the question. I'm having significant difficulty hearing the answer.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education has 10 seconds remaining.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, they're just angry because we're taking a very different approach, one that is seeking to unlock the entrepreneurial spirit of our postsecondary institutions. We're leaving operational decisions to the institutions, to the board of governors, who know best.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, a 7 per cent increase for online courses: a lot of students will just simply say that it's not worth it. Students can't afford to pay for the full price of their tuition. They

are saying that they can't come back to school unless there's a reduction in their tuition, and they're saying this in the form of petitions of more than 10,000 signatures and growing very quickly. Premier, you like to boast that you're a fan of direct democracy. This is pretty darn direct, to me. Why don't you listen to these students?

Mr. Nicolaides: Yeah. Well, just to reiterate that point, we are fans of direct democracy, which is why we've brought important amendments and legislation forward to give Albertans more choice and more voice in the democratic process, which those members refused and objected to. Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to postsecondary education, again, our institutions are making the most prudent operational decisions while making sure to provide a safe learning environment for our students. They're making those decisions. They know best. We're working with them to encourage and facilitate a safe fall for all of our students.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, Edmonton and Calgary chambers of commerce have said that it's critical to provide universities and colleges with the funding they need so that they can produce the next generation to lead Alberta's economic recovery. Even a collection of former MLAs took out a full-page ad in a local newspaper saying that to support institutions like Augustana is necessary if this government is "serious about rural economic development and encouraging our young people to receive an education and make a life in rural Alberta." Premier, how can you stand there and do nothing as your policies drive students out of rural Alberta?

Mr. Nicolaides: I don't know where the member opposite has been for the last year and a half or so, but, Mr. Speaker, we're doing more than enough. We are providing over \$10 million to organizations like Careers: the Next Generation, Women Building Futures. We're supporting and strengthening the commercialization of research on our campuses. We won't do what those members opposite did, which is continuing to dole money out the door with no accountability and not tying funding to any kind of outcomes or deliverables. Under their watch we saw continued dollars spent in postsecondary education; however, no increase in postsecondary participation and no positive benefits.

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

School Re-entry Plan

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This summer school authorities who administered in-person summer school programs operated them under the guidelines through the province's school re-entry guidelines. After months of being out of school, students who chose to participate in summer school programming were finally able to return to the classroom and learn directly from their teachers. Can the Minister of Education please explain how many school authorities offered in-person summer school and if there were any concerns about our provincial guidelines?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. Calgary Catholic, Chinook's Edge, Medicine Hat public, Northern Lights, Parkland, and Progressive Academy have all offered in-person summer schooling and have had no COVID-related outbreaks. The member is absolutely right that all of these school authorities operated under our government's guidelines as part of the school re-entry plan. While only a small

sampling, the success we've seen in the summer school programming shows that our comprehensive re-entry plan works, and we are prepared for the safe re-entry of all of our students.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that six school divisions across Alberta offered in-person summer school programming this year and given that there were no COVID-19 outbreaks at a school and given that this sample demonstrates that the guidelines developed by our government are working, can the minister please explain to this House why the NDP is wrong – I said "wrong" – in claiming that our plan will not support a safe transition?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP's approach to school re-entry has done nothing but cause anxiety within parents, and quite frankly it is irresponsible. Just yesterday the Member for Edmonton-Glenora held a press conference to critique our plan, and when asked what the NDP plan was, she had nothing – nothing – concrete to offer other than saying that our plan isn't good enough. The reality is that we have a comprehensive plan that will allow our students and staff to return safely to school. It's time for the NDP to stop their political games, stop raising fear, anxiety amongst our parents.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the NDP's misguided rhetoric of fear and division has resulted in parents being worried for their children's safety and given that Alberta has continuously been a leader in Canada on managing education during COVID-19 and given that the minister will be making an announcement later today about school re-entry in September, can the minister please tell this House and parents why our government is confident in our school re-entry plan?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's quite simple. Our plan has been proven to work. We saw that with the successful re-entry in in-person summer school programming this year. This plan was developed with significant engagement with our education system partners, and the individuals who operate our schools on a daily basis have confidence in our plan. We see it. I look forward to releasing more details this afternoon and continuing to work with all our education system and the chief medical officer of health to do everything we can for a very safe and successful school re-entry.

Thank you.

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

2:10 School Re-entry Plan and Education Funding (continued)

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few months we've all learned that we need to stay two metres apart from each other to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Now, I imagine that all MLAs have visited classrooms in their constituencies, and we all know that the two-metre separation means that we're going to need more space for students and staff to keep everyone safe. In my riding many of our schools are already overcrowded. Will the Minister of Education provide additional funding to support

additional space in order to keep students, staff, and families safe? Has the minister looked at renting new spaces for classes this fall? Please be specific.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. As I said earlier, school divisions are in the position to look at how they do the day-to-day operations. What I can tell you is that we have a very solid plan with detailed guidelines, health guidelines, that were developed in conjunction with the chief medical officer, Alberta Health, and our system education partners: the principals, the superintendents, the school boards. They are confident in our plan, and we can assure parents that we will be bringing students back safely.

Mr. Dang: Given that parents don't trust a single word coming out of this minister's mouth and given that all of us have also learned that we need to frequently wash our hands and frequently wipe down surfaces and given that in a school like Johnny Bright in my riding, which has almost 1,000 students, the soap needed for every one of those students to wash their hands several times a day every day and the cleaning supplies needed to wipe down tables and desks several times a day every day will become a significant budget item, what new funding will the minister provide for cleaning supplies to keep students safe, or does the minister think that safety is somebody else's problem?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A hundred and twenty million dollars more overall for school boards in their upcoming funding; \$250 million in capital stimulus and renewal funding, of which \$15 million is being directed towards COVID; \$363 million in reserves; a new funding model that increases and allows for maximum flexibility for all school boards across the province; superintendents telling us that they have confidence in our plan, that they are going to bring students and staff back in a safe manner: that's what I can share with the member opposite. He can come and listen to the announcement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's very clear that the minister doesn't understand the difference between maintenance and cleaning and given that students need to be spread across multiple classrooms that will need multiple teachers and given that all the cleaning work that needs to be done to keep everyone safe means that we need more custodial staff, will the Minister of Education provide funding for additional instructional and custodial staff to manage these extraordinary circumstances, or will she force students, staff, and families to compromise education just to stay safe?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that the member opposite has not read the guidelines, has not taken the time and the effort to look at the comprehensive guidelines that we have developed with Dr. Deena Hinshaw, the health parameters that have been put in place to guide the safe re-entry for our students and our staff. I really find that deplorable. I think that they need to go back and have a look at the actual guidelines. If nothing else, please listen in today at 3 o'clock. We will share that with you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Provincial Parks and Coal Mining Policies

Mr. Schmidt: Yesterday I asked the minister of environment a series of legitimate questions about his extremely concerning policies to move our public parks into private hands. His answer: nothing to see here; Albertans will be able to enjoy them for a long time to come. One of the things that Albertans will be able to enjoy is coal mining, which I expect isn't on the top of the list for many of our visitors. To the minister: is it really the plan to put coal mines on public land, former parks, and all along our mountain ranges? Can the residents of Canmore expect The Three Sisters to be The Two Sisters by the time he's done?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar: it never ceases to amaze me how well he can get things wrong every day. Yesterday he actually referred to us selling land inside Kananaskis. Now, if the member took some time to actually check out the Kananaskis Country Recreation Policy, signed by Premier Ralph Klein in 1999, he will see within that policy that it says that you cannot sell public lands – cannot sell public lands – inside Kananaskis. This government remains committed to that policy. That policy is still in place. At the end of the day this just comes down to the NDP making things up as they attempt to fund raise on the backs of Albertans. We won't let that happen anymore.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that I've been asking this minister questions for months and that this is the first time it appears that he's done any kind of homework on the file and given that scientists and companies around the world are looking at ways to reduce or replace metallurgical coal in steel production and given that our parks, on the other hand, are irreplaceable, Minister, will you commit to making all plans regarding parks, public lands, and coal mining public and let Albertans tell you how they feel about your plans? It's called consultation, Minister. Do I have to do this for you?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member may be confused yet again. The Alberta Energy Regulator regulates coal mines inside our province. They have a robust process, which we are committed to in this province, which includes public consultation, which will have to take place for any mine to be built inside the province of Alberta. Category 1 lands, which he's referring to, still remain protected. This government remains committed to that protection. But let me be clear: we are also not opposed to metallurgical coal and putting our people back to work. This government believes in balancing the environment with putting people back to work. The NDP believe in putting them out of work.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that our process is so robust that the federal government is saying that they have to take responsibility for the minister not doing his job and given that the Premier himself was touting our mountain parks as the reason for the NHL selecting Edmonton as a hub city and that parks are an important opportunity for Alberta's long-term economic growth, why on earth would this government do anything to undermine this important factor for our long-term economic growth? How are we going to keep Alberta an attractive destination when you're closing our parks and cutting down mountains?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, cutting down mountains? This member is beyond ridiculous at this point, from my perspective. Here's the reality: the mountain parks remain protected. Our government remains committed to protecting category 1 lands,

including on the eastern slopes. But, yes, in other areas we will work through the Alberta Energy Regulator and, if it's environmentally friendly, will approve mines to put people back to work. This province believes that we can balance environment with development. Alberta is open for business. The NDP were fired. Now we can get back to work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis has a question.

Provincial Parks and Environmental Protection

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as the MLA for Banff-Kananaskis I'm fortunate to represent some of the most beautiful places on Planet Earth. But over the weekend the NDP launched a clickbait campaign on the notion that parklands would be sold off in Kananaskis Country and other areas of the province. Despite this campaign's catchy slogan and the Leader of the Opposition herself stating that no parks would be sold and their environment critic clarifying on June 9 that technically parks are not for sale in Alberta, can the Minister of Environment and Parks please set the facts straight and clarify some of the changes occurring within Alberta's parks and why?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, parks are not for sale, but we are pursuing partnerships for managing certain landscapes inside our province with both nonprofit groups and First Nations and others inside our province, just like the previous NDP government did with the town of Sylvan Lake when they turned over the Sylvan Lake provincial park to the town. That has gone well since 2018. I commend the previous environment minister for that decision. We're going to continue to follow that lead to work with nonprofits, indigenous communities, and municipalities to make sure that we can manage to the best of our ability across the province, but we will continue to protect our environmentally sensitive areas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for clearing that up. While Banff-Kananaskis is surrounded by breathtaking views – I know how important the Rocky Mountains are to recreators and tourists alike – yesterday the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar stood in this Chamber and outlandishly asserted that our government was considering pursuing residential and other property development in Kananaskis Country. Given the importance of this area to many Albertans, can the Minister of Environment and Parks please put these fears to rest?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar never gets tired of getting it wrong. But if he took some time and studied the policies that are in place when it comes to Kananaskis, he would know that according to the 1999 Kananaskis policy, that was put in place by Ralph Klein, you cannot sell any public land. In addition to that, no third-party ownership will be permitted even on leased land and no second homes or cottage developments will be permitted inside Kananaskis. This government remains committed to the Kananaskis policy. We will continue to conserve that very special area in our province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Well, our government values the importance of research and conservation of our beautiful province. As part of their save

parks campaign the opposition put out several graphics featuring animals, one of which was supposed to be a wolf but was, in fact, a coyote. Given that our opposition seems to have little actual knowledge about our province's biodiversity despite claiming to be champions of the environment and given that they did little actual conservation work while in government besides maybe protesting the odd pipeline, can the minister please highlight some of the work our government is doing to undertake to protect Alberta's beautiful environment?

The Speaker: There is some challenge there, connecting the first question to the third question, but I provided some leniency to other members of the House, so I'll do the same.

Mr. Jason Nixon: A lot like the challenge the NDP has telling the difference between coyotes and wolves, evidently, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is that we're doing lots for the environment. Through our land trust grant program, for example, we've invested in 60,000 hectares of ecologically sensitive landscapes that have been conserved so far for \$74 million in funding. The province has recently provided \$3.9 million in grant funding to the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute for research on biodiversity. We have the biggest grizzly bear DNA study in the world taking place right now in this province. Of course, we've created the subregional caribou task forces, something the NDP failed at.

Economic Diversification

Mr. Bilous: Eighteen dollars per barrel short: that's the current difference between the government's estimate for WTI price and reality, and this is one of the better days in months. The government knew that its estimate was wildly optimistic when it introduced it in its budget, and now the Premier has doubled down on his failed \$4.7 billion corporate handout. To the Premier: isn't it clear now that this failed approach of corporate handouts and flip-flopping on diversification has proven to be a recipe for high debt and slow growth?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we are confident that by improving the business environment in this province, we will attract investment and put Albertans back to work. What the NDP did was raise taxes, collected, actually, fewer tax dollars in the following three years, and sent tens of billions of dollars of investment out of this province and, with it, jobs and opportunity. We are creating the most competitive business environment possible, that will attract investment, create jobs, and position this province for a recovery.

Mr. Bilous: It hasn't created a single job so far.

Given that the biggest commitment to diversification in the government's recovery plan is a set of signs advertising it along the highway and given that the government had initially cancelled most diversification initiatives after an alleged six-month review without any replacement or plan, Premier, when will you finally take action and develop a real plan for diversification, something more than advertisements along the QE II, at least?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, this government cancelled a whole series of failed programs of the NDP. We are taking, firstly, a broad-based approach to broadly improve our business environment that allows entrepreneurs and businesses to allocate capital to those sectors of the economy that will succeed and will be sustainable. Moreover, we've also announced the innovation employment grant, which will provide specific support to the innovation and tech sector, which will disproportionately attract that type of capital into the province.

Mr. Bilous: I'd hardly call a 3 to 1 return on investment failed.

Given that the Finance minister specifically said that diversification is, quote, a luxury we can't afford, end quote, and given that what this Finance minister can afford are giant billboards with the word "diversification" on them littered across the province and given that putting a new name on a program that you cut, like SHRED, is not a plan, to the Finance minister: isn't it true that the only thing you're diversifying is your taxpayer-funded advertising campaign?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, diversification is very important to this government, and I will assert that at the end of three years you will see a much more diversified economy than we witnessed and observed at the end of the NDP term. Our innovation employment grant is a vast improvement over those failed programs that we cancelled that the NDP brought in. We're confident that it will return investment, bringing additional investment into this province in the tech and innovation sector, which will be critical to our recovery.

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

Minimum Wage

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me start my question by stating a fact that the other side of the House needs to hear: all Albertans deserve a fair wage. It should be a fact that everyone in this House can agree on, but sadly the UCP through their words and actions have shown they don't. The labour minister led the way while this government slashed the minimum wage for youth workers. This government has shown that they're not above lowering the wages of Albertans to pay for their failed corporate handout. So to the minister of labour: do you commit to standing by the \$15-per-hour minimum wage, or should Albertans expect to feel your hand in their wallets again soon?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We discussed this matter, I think, two weeks ago in this very Chamber, where the question was asked to the Premier: are we going to stand beside our general minimum wage? The answer is yes. It's in our platform, and we will continue to support that going forward.

Ms Gray: Given that this government described working Albertans as heroes for their struggle and sacrifice during the pandemic and given that this government is once again targeting holiday pay, termination pay, and overtime of working Albertans and given that the government is giving itself broader powers in Bill 32 to grant exemptions and variances to entire industries, does the minister commit to not implement further workarounds like wage differentials so that all those currently making \$15 an hour will maintain that minimum wage? We know that the UCP loves to exploit loopholes. Will you actually honour your campaign commitment, or is this another case . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were elected on a commitment to restore balance to Alberta's labour laws, and that's exactly what we're doing. When the NDP was in government, they implemented Bill 17, which added costs and a tremendous amount of red tape on employers. This drove jobs and investment out of this

province. We are committed to getting investment and jobs back. We are committed to getting Albertans back to work.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister proudly said that they stand by their \$15-per-hour general minimum wage but given that the minister wouldn't say that they wouldn't use exemptions and variances to grant big exemptions to different restaurant lobbies and given that working Albertans are already struggling because of the pandemic and the economic crisis and they shouldn't have to worry that the government that claimed to have their backs is planning to put a knife there and given that profitable corporations should be able to use a portion of the Premier's \$4.7 billion handout to pay Albertans \$15 per hour, will you commit to not lowering the minimum wage?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As was just said in my answer a couple of minutes ago, the general minimum wage will remain the same. What we're hearing over here is a campaign of fear. There were variances prior to Bill 17, and when the previous government passed Bill 17, they maintained the opportunity for variances. We are doing the same. There will be variances there so we can address specific issues with particular companies and particular industries. This was done by the previous government. We're going to do it moving forward. The members opposite are doing a campaign of fear, and Albertans shouldn't stand for that.

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

Indigenous Peoples' Economic Development

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the crash in oil prices our province is facing an unprecedented economic challenge. Many of the indigenous communities and individuals that I've spoken to sincerely want to be partners in prosperity and support the responsible development of our oil and gas industry. As part of our recovery plan our government is looking to stimulate economic growth, attract foreign investment, and create jobs in our province. To the Minister of Indigenous Relations: what programs are available to our indigenous people that will help support their economic development and aid in our economic recovery?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We are committed to working closely with indigenous peoples and helping them get back on their feet during this pandemic. Our economic development issues include the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, which is close to announcing its first project. It also includes the aboriginal business investment fund, and it will provide eligible indigenous community-owned businesses with up to \$500,000. This funding is for ventures that demonstrate social and economic developments for their communities. Not only do we believe in indigenous peoples' resilience to recover, but we believe in their future as business owners and job creators in Alberta.

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

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for your answer. My riding of Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche is home to a significant number of First Nations and Métis individuals as well as numerous indigenous corporations that have been partners in prosperity for decades. Given that indigenous

community-owned economic development projects are central to improving social and economic outcomes for indigenous peoples and communities and given that I know that many indigenous corporations are eager to get back to work, to the minister: can you please give us an overview of the aboriginal business investment fund's application process?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you for the question. The application guidelines and forms are both available online at alberta.ca and require a comprehensive business plan. The fund supports indigenous community-owned economic development projects that show a long-term viability and economic benefits. ABIF projects have already created 300 full-time jobs, 150 full-time construction jobs, and 130 spinoff businesses. ABIF is a great example of how our government is committed to being partners in prosperity with indigenous people and to restoring Alberta's economy.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that this funding program follows a competitive evaluation process and given that indigenous-owned businesses play a key role in creating jobs for First Nations, Métis, Inuit people as well as many nonindigenous Albertans and given that the ABIF is a significant investment on the part of our government, to the minister: what can you tell us about the previous projects that demonstrate the viability and success of the aboriginal business investment fund?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, since 2015 ABIF has provided \$25 million in funding. Businesses have successfully used the aboriginal business investment fund to purchase heavy equipment for construction in oilfield maintenance operations, build gas stations and grocery stores, expand a gravel pit, and build hotels and expand tourist operations. One great example is the very successful Stoney Nakoda travel centre of highway 1 on the way to Kananaskis Country.

Ms Rosin: Hear, hear.

Mr. Wilson: Yes. It's a great place to stop if you're planning to go on a hike this summer.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Riverview has a question.

Affordable Housing

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this House we debated a motion on affordable housing, and while this government patted itself on the back and claimed it was doing the right thing, the reality is that they've made disgraceful cuts to programs introduced by our government. The UCP slashed the \$120 million indigenous housing capital program to only \$32 million while doling out billions in handouts to big corporations. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: why does the government have billions for big corporations but can't even bother to maintain funding for indigenous housing?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, this year for the capital grant we allocated a budget of \$470 million for three years. Accessible affordable housing is a critical issue for vulnerable Albertans and seniors. By pursuing the mixed-income models of what we're doing now for housing in partnership with the private providers and all the related industry, we make sure that Albertans are getting the most value for their tax dollars – that's what this government does and people voted for – and have a place to call home.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the minister has outsourced her work to provide affordable housing in Alberta to the Member for Calgary-Cross and given that affordable housing advocates are deeply concerned that the review that member has been tasked to lead will see more privatization, as the minister just talked about, of affordable housing projects – private projects are often badly managed and eventually revert to market housing after only a few years – will the minister put these concerns to rest and commit today that every affordable housing project built with public money will remain publicly owned permanently?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. These NDP members should stop making and creating fear for vulnerable Albertans. All previous capital funding commitments are being honoured, which has included 2,700 new and regenerated units. Also, we will continue to work closely with other levels of government, housing providers, again, public organizations and private companies, to evaluate and improve the current housing system and find efficiencies and deliver quality affordable housing for Albertans in need.

Ms Sigurdson: Given, Mr. Speaker, that housing is a human right and given that homelessness and underhousing prevents Albertans from living in dignity and given that homelessness and underhousing creates significant new costs for taxpayers in health care, justice, and social services, why is this government giving a \$4.7 billion handout to profitable corporations but doesn't have a single new capital dollar to provide affordable housing for vulnerable Alberta families? Don't you see the crisis you're creating in this province, Minister?

Ms Pon: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the previous government and the big debt. We inherited a big deficit from this government. This previous NDP government, without making a plan, made \$1.2 billion in capital commitments and, therefore, put the province deeper into debt because of the empty promises and the reckless spending of the NDP. We have designed – and also are spending accordingly and controlling spending and making sure everybody has a . . .

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

Systemic Racism Prevention

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to Stats Canada Canadian police reported nearly 1,800 hate crimes in 2018. The NDP Premier then launched a broad consultation in response to this to combat systemic racism. More than 100 groups and 1,900 racialized people were consulted. They have highlighted the need for hate crime units, updated curriculums, and funding for racialized community support groups. To the Premier: how have your ministries utilized the research and consultations completed by the previous government? Are you making progress on any of

these initiatives we put forward? Please be specific about which ones.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not a hundred per cent sure that I understood the question, so perhaps the member could reiterate some of the important points that he's talking about. When we talk about antiracism specifically, I'd like to also talk about the motion that was passed last night in this House and the incredible work that was done on this side of the House, especially by our Premier, who put the motion together in order to make sure to illuminate the importance of this issue in our province and that racism will not be tolerated. One of the interesting things is that we've put together with the antiracism council some small subgroups. We're looking forward to hearing back from them.

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that multiple UCP MLAs have claimed that work to combat systemic racism should be nonpartisan and given that this government could actually do more than talk the talk and could plan to meet more frequently with the Anti-Racism Advisory Council, established by the former Premier, and take the recommendations in as a part of its efforts to combat systemic racism, to the Premier: are you ignoring the council because it was established by the NDP government? If not, can you be specific about what ideas of theirs you have adopted?

Mrs. Aheer: There's a little piece of information that I think this member probably doesn't know. When the end racism document came forward, one of the things Global News brought forward at that time was that the NDP had actually let this information go. In fact, I believe it was the Minister of Education at the time that said: oh, we don't know what happened; it kind of fell off the radar. And then all of a sudden a plan came forward. Very interesting. If you want actual action, you can talk to the Minister of Justice, who's opening the Police Act to look at various information across there. You can actually look at things like a declaration against FGM, child honour killings, and child marriage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, once again. Given that now is the time for government to reimagine and propose new transformative approaches to uphold human rights and public safety in Alberta and given that the Premier continues to stand behind his personal speech writer, Paul Bunner, who has denied the genocide of indigenous people, has claimed race is the defining factor of violence in North America, and has claimed that a murder victim brought it upon himself because he was gay, to the Premier. Perhaps Paul Bunner is part of the reason you aren't taking serious action to combat systemic racism. It certainly doesn't help.

Mrs. Aheer: One of the questions that was actually asked when the opposition was in government says: what is your timeline for future programs? It was interesting because the NDP actually couldn't come forward with any particular timelines on organizing around antiracism at that time. In fact, I would suggest that it was just lip service at that time. We're actually taking concrete action. If you look on this side: the motion that was put forward by the Premier, the work that is being done by the Minister of Justice in opening the Police Act, but also the various work with our minority communities,

who we flung these doors open to so that they can participate fully in our province.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Transportation Infrastructure Capital Funding

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The strategic transportation infrastructure program saw many areas across the province receive funding for important infrastructure projects that have been long awaited. It's nice to see that northeastern Alberta wasn't left out this time. These much-needed projects include bridges, water infrastructure, and road improvements. The program helps some of my communities' core municipal infrastructure but more importantly brought jobs to northern Alberta. To the Minister of Transportation: how is this program being received by other municipalities in the province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year our government announced \$50 million for STIP funding on top of the existing \$25 million in Budget 2020 and an additional \$150 million in water grant funding. These are all programs that are annually oversubscribed, sometimes by 10 or 20 years, so I would say to the hon. member that it's been well received. We've got a lot of work going on this year and next as a result, but I'm well aware that we're not finished yet. For example, Al Kemmere from the RMA called it a welcome announcement that goes a long way.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that I understand these infrastructure projects are a key part of the Alberta government's recovery plan because they benefit our communities and create jobs across the province and given that many communities have been waiting a very long time for support on these projects, to the same minister: how many jobs will these projects actually create across the province to progress Alberta's recovery plan and get rural Albertans back to work?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, as part of Alberta's recovery plan there's an additional \$200 million in municipal infrastructure supports. The 69 STIP projects will, by our count, add 480 jobs. The 55 water and waste-water projects will create at least 1,300 jobs, and that's before the spinoff jobs that will happen, because with that new infrastructure it will allow more homes, more jobs, more economic development.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Given that my riding was very pleased to find out we received money for numerous projects that were required such as the Cold Lake water treatment facility and the Ardmore and Fort Kent water reservoirs and given that there are many other shovel-ready projects within our municipalities and some have been given instructions to go ahead and start, to the same minister: does our government have plans to provide more funding for other infrastructure projects in the future to provide certainty to the municipalities before they invest our tax dollars?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member for having a bunch of jobs selected within his riding, but it's kind of a mixed blessing. I always say that if you got the work done, it means that your infrastructure was in the worst shape in Alberta, and if you didn't get the work done, probably your infrastructure was in some of the better shape in Alberta. I'm glad that the hon. member is getting some of his work done that obviously needs doing. I was, frankly, disappointed to hear the Member for Calgary-Buffalo characterize this \$2 million stimulus investment as a, quote, drop in the bucket. Nobody else in Alberta seems to feel that way. We'll build things whether they like it or not.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will return to the daily Routine.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices in accordance with section 4(2) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act I am pleased to table the following report: report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the 2019 provincial general election, volume 3, election finances.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 32 to be placed on the Order Paper in my name as follows:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the spring sitting of the Assembly be extended beyond July 23, 2020, until such time or when the Government House Leader . . .

That's me.

. . . advises the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded, and at such time the Assembly will stand adjourned.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's everyone's favourite time of the day. It is Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 30 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Dang moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 30, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 30, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment July 20: Mr. Sabir]

The Speaker: On amendment REF1 are there any other members wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has the call.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on this July afternoon in the Legislature to speak to the amendment to Bill

30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. I know that it's a significant piece of legislation, and the referral amendment that we're speaking to is intended to give us an opportunity as legislators to make sure that the bill be referred to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee to give an opportunity for proper review of a significant piece of legislation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I've got the major notes on the bill itself before me, and I tell you that it's not a little piece of legislation, Madam Speaker. It's an omnibus piece of legislation that changes nine pieces of legislation as a result of the bill being passed in the House, if indeed that does happen. As a result of that significance, we on this side of the House implore the government to accept our amendment and refer the piece of legislation for proper scrutiny to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee.

The omnibus legislation that I refer to here is, of course, a continuation of a pattern of major omnibus bills that the government has seen fit to bring forward in this House, of course many of which have statutes within them which would have been stand-alone pieces of legislation on their own and would have warranted full debate on their own in this House on an individual basis. However, the government has seen fit to bring forward a massive omnibus bill, compacting a number of issues together.

I think it's incumbent upon this House to seriously consider them properly by unpacking them and looking at them under the proper spotlight, that would be obtained by having the bill referred to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee and doing so in accordance with Standing Order 74.2. This committee would be able to execute its duties in a much more minute way than we quite often are able to do in the Legislature, Madam Speaker, and I believe that the referral amendment is one that this Legislature would be well served in adopting.

Now, the omnibus health legislation we're talking about, as I mentioned, changes nine – nine – pieces of legislation. The Health Quality Council of Alberta Act amendment: interestingly enough, Madam Speaker, we just had a member of the Health Quality Council resign yesterday, publicly doing so, and I'm sure that may be something that the committee might want to bring into its discussions in more detail should the amendment be adopted. We're seeing some rather significant developments happen in the health care field in Alberta, and this legislation touches on many aspects of the health care realm.

I mean, I just mentioned that the Health Quality Council of Alberta has lost a member, who resigned knowingly in advance of the legislation under consideration, Bill 30, being passed but also to ensure that he had an impact in making sure that the public was made aware of some of the difficulties that this government is creating for health care in this province and that he indeed didn't feel that he could continue in this role.

2:50

So this omnibus legislation, which, of course, touches upon changing a piece of the Health Quality Council of Alberta Act, will be very germane to discussions in committee should the referral be adopted, particularly around the Health Quality Council of Alberta Act amendment. I think that's a topic of discussion, Madam Speaker, that would take up a significant amount of the committee's time and certainly on its own and unto itself a whole lot more time than we would be able to spend on it as part of an omnibus bill here in the Legislature.

The Health Professions Act, Madam Speaker, is another one of the pieces of legislation that would be amended by this bill. The Alberta Health Care Insurance Act as well joins the fray. The

Regional Health Authorities Act, the Hospitals Act, the Public Health Act, the Health Governance Transition Act, and the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta Act total the nine pieces of legislation that this bill, Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, would amend. Therefore, we strongly believe that this bill, in total, should be dissected under the scrutiny of a committee which will have the time and opportunity to go into detail on each of the pieces of legislation that are affected by this omnibus bill.

We don't believe, as a matter of policy or a matter of practice on this side of the House, Madam Speaker, that omnibus bills are the best practice for a Legislature to follow. I know that federally the federal Conservatives under the Harper administration certainly liked them. They thought they could see fit to ram a number of things through under the cloud of an omnibus measure. It was a tactic, a strategy, a policy that they used quite frequently, and it seems as though this provincial administration in Alberta currently believes they saw some tactical advantage in doing that and have adopted the practice. It's not the first time nor, dare I say, will it probably be the last that we'll see omnibus legislation from this government here in the province.

Bill 30, Madam Speaker, is a big step in the UCP's rush to build failed, American-style health care in Alberta. They like to deride us for claiming that, yet in fact if you look at what the bill hopes to accomplish, that's exactly what they're aiming at. It's very unfortunate that the UCP government decides to march to its own drummer because they're certainly not following the lead of Albertans on the amendments to the health care statutes that they're making with this Bill 30.

The legislation itself is not patient centred or person centred. It's profit-centred care, Madam Speaker, and what it intends to do is chisel away at our time-honoured commitment in Canada to a publicly funded, publicly accessible, publicly delivered medicare system.

We've seen closely and clearly through this pandemic that the privately delivered long-term care prioritized profit at the expense of Alberta seniors and their families. We saw what happened in long-term care situations in this province, where we did have significant outbreaks and, unfortunately, lots of illness and death. They were primarily, Madam Speaker, located in long-term care centres which were privately operated. People suffered as a result. That's something we want to avoid in this province. We should be looking at delivering services in a public health care system, publicly delivering those services in a way that maximizes care to those individual residents.

I know I've worked in the past in this province as what was then called a nursing orderly. I worked with geriatric patients at the former Colonel Mewburn centre for veterans, where elderly veterans were residing. Even back then, when I was fairly young, it was a difficult situation to have enough time to properly serve the individual residents, who were living their last decade or so in the residence there. It was a public system facility, and it is not an easy thing to do, when people rely upon you for their personal care, to have enough time in the day.

But when you're cutting corners and trying to save a buck or two in a privately operated system, it makes it even that much more difficult to do because, indeed, the onus and the focus are not necessarily on providing the care as a priority. It's on providing the care within a certain budgetary dollar cost, that will end up making the patient subject to decisions that the long-term care operators, the private operators, are not able to make without consulting a flow chart. Once again, long-term care is one area that will suffer as a result of the Health Statutes Amendment Act, and we've seen that it's already happening through the pandemic.

That's one other reason, Madam Speaker, why we hope to have this legislation under the spotlight of a committee and have it referred to committee for a very detailed study so that it can be pieced apart and so that Albertans can have the benefit of a proper discussion about each section of this piece of legislation, which goes on to affect nine significant pieces of other legislation in the province.

This bill is on the wrong path for Albertans. It's another attack on the hard-working doctors in the province, who have put themselves in harm's way through the COVID-19 pandemic. It behooves me and my constituents to know why this government at this time would choose to overhaul the health care delivery system in this province at the same time that we're suffering a major pandemic and, in so doing, attack our very health care professionals, that we rely upon to get us through this pandemic and to treat our sick Albertans and ensure that the sickness doesn't spread. They gave away \$4.7 billion to corporate shareholders; now they want those shareholders to profit off injured and sick Albertans.

Albertans are really confounded as to what in the world the motivation of this government actually is, where they're coming up with an omnibus piece of legislation that makes massive changes to health care and really chips away, in a fundamental way, at the pillars of the financing of our public health care administration and at the major front-line participants who deliver that service and that health care to us. On one front it's the nursing professionals who are being told that they're heroes one day and the next day are being warned that they may be totally having the rug pulled out from underneath them and that they don't have the rights or power to resist. Their rights under labour legislation are being threatened by this government while they are being asked at the same time by Albertans to basically save them from a global pandemic.

We're seeing the heroic efforts of nursing professionals in places like the Misericordia hospital, Madam Speaker, in my constituency, where there are incredible efforts ongoing to stem an outbreak of COVID-19 that has afflicted dozens of patients and many health care professionals, and it still resists those professional attempts to really get a handle on it. It's alarming to know that in the middle of the situation we can have a significant, major hospital in the capital city of this province basically sidelined, put out of commission, and no longer able to accept any new admissions, emergency or otherwise, because of that outbreak, that our professionals are having a very, very difficult time trying to control. It shows the seriousness of the situation we're in from a health care, public health situation and how much risk our actual health care system is at right now.

One hospital in a matter of days, Madam Speaker, taken off the active list and sidelined, and who knows how long that will last? I mean, we all hope that the health care professionals, who are doing their level best to control this, get an upper hand on it, but it . . .

3:00

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: That was really informative. Every time the Member for Edmonton-McClung – riveting is a good word – speaks, I am quite riveted. He was actually just in the midst of talking a little bit more about his thoughts, his concerns on this bill ahead of us, Bill 30, so I would love for him to just continue his thoughts.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to continue with my thoughts, as I was just actually getting under way with many of the concerns that I have about the bill before us and the reasons why I believe that the referral to the committee must be made. The Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee will be given an opportunity by way of this referral to scrutinize all nine pieces of legislation that are being amended by this significant omnibus bill.

I once again refer to the situation that we're undertaking right now, and that is to be looking at an omnibus health care piece of legislation in the middle of a pandemic which is actually closing some of our hospitals or preventing one major hospital in Edmonton, our capital city, the Misericordia hospital, from being able to admit patients as a result of a pandemic that we can't get under control, notwithstanding the incredible efforts of our health care professionals, who I'm sure are working overtime and consulting globally to figure out exactly what measures need to be taken to control the virus within the hospital confines, figure out exactly what the sources are, stop the infections, and maintain public confidence in that institution so that we can reopen it again for admission of patients.

In that context, Madam Speaker, of a pandemic, we see this government bringing in an omnibus bill of this magnitude that many Albertans are shaking their heads about, wondering: why in the world would a government do this at this time and why, when we're not able to focus as a society, as a public on the details, would this government see fit to want to pass this right through the Legislature as quickly as possible without the ability to scrutinize in detail the major consequences of changes to nine different pieces of legislation.

That's one of the reasons we're looking to refer this piece of legislation, Madam Speaker, to the committee, so that it can receive proper study and adjudication and that the many nuances of amendments that will be made to nine different pieces of legislation, all fundamentally important to our health care system, can be properly brought to see the light of day and Albertans can pass judgment on them and also get ahold of us as legislators to let us know their thoughts and feelings about the measures that are being undertaken and contemplated by Bill 30.

In so doing, in trying to pass this legislation, Bill 30, the UCP are making changes to our world-class – our actually world-class – public health care system in the middle of a pandemic. It's deeply irresponsible, and my constituents feel bewildered, Madam Speaker, as to why that is being done. At a time when we need stability and we need confidence in our health care system, this government is seeing fit to go ahead and make massive changes to overhaul it. It's not something that I think Albertans appreciate. My constituents have written and let me know that they really think that this is not the time to be doing this.

Lives depend on our health care system and those who operate it being fully focused on what their mandate and their jobs are, and that's our nursing professionals, our ancillary professionals, and our doctors, who this government has seemingly seen fit to pick a total fight with and started off by basically tearing up their contract, something we believe is unconstitutional. There's a court battle ongoing to determine that. The public is certainly not swallowing this very well either, Madam Speaker. Doctors are seen as the stalwarts of our health care system. There's a significant amount of trust that Albertans have in our doctors, and we want to continue that.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we are on second reading of Bill 30, on a referral motion known as REF1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this amendment to Bill 30. I certainly support the amendment. I had an opportunity to speak earlier a little bit about some of my concerns, my many, many concerns, about Bill 30 and the construction within Bill 30 for an eventual step towards privatization of much of the health care in the province of Alberta, much to the detriment of the citizens of Alberta and to the profits of a few. I had an opportunity when I spoke earlier to address a few issues. Because it's been a little while I will take a minute just to cover some of those briefly again before I go into my second round of criticisms.

The first thing I want to remind people of is that Alberta's health care system actually is a very strong health care system as it exists now in the public system. We know, for example, that in the 2017 ranking of health care access and quality in 195 countries, Canada received an 88 out of 100 score, which put it in the top 10 per cent in the world. In fact, the only countries that did better than Canada, and not by much, by getting 89 or a 90, for the most part were countries in which they had a greater rate of public investment in health care systems. We know just by looking around the world that on average having solid, well-funded public health care systems has proven to be the best overall pattern of providing health care to citizens in the world.

We see the example, of course, in the United States, where they have failed to construct an appropriately funded public health care system, and they've had two outcomes. One is that they've had a significant number of individuals in the country being unable at all to access health care appropriately and depending completely on charitable organizations to provide them with that. At one time it was up to a third of the population of the country that was unable to receive appropriate health care because they didn't have the kind of health care plans through work that are available in some places. Of course, you know, that is very much a concern for us here.

The other thing that was a problem in the United States, for example, was that having the two parallel systems actually has resulted in the overall cost of their health care system to be dramatically higher than the Canadian health care system. It appears that the UCP are dead set on moving in the direction of a program of health care in which fewer people get appropriate coverage, and the costs to everyone, including the costs to government, are up.

Now, that doesn't make any sense at all to the observer, I know, because what they're not realizing is that there certainly are some beneficiaries in a system where you shift work to the private sector in the way that this government is choosing to do, and it certainly isn't you or me, the average citizen in the province. It is the small group, the 1 per cent of people who are able to own these corporations and who benefit greatly from this disastrous move toward an American style.

Now, I know that the government has made a couple of arguments, and I'll go back on my responses to those from last time before I move on, one of the arguments being that we already have some private clinics in Canada. We certainly do. We certainly have some private clinics in Alberta. We can talk a little bit about the differences between the existence of the presently occurring private clinics and the new type of private arrangements that'll be made possible under the UCP's horrendous bill. That is that at the present time the vast majority of private practice that is done here in the province of Alberta is done by people who are trained health professionals who merely have used a financial, administrative process of incorporation, that is the creation of a professional corporation, to handle their finances. But they are medical practitioners delivering medical work and are therefore part of regulatory bodies and codes of ethics and so on that ensure the focus

of the work is on the patient and, as a result, are providing health care as they were trained to do, often for 10 or 15 years, before they went into the system.

3:10

Under this new bill we are shifting in a new group of people, people who are not members of the health profession, people who are not delivering health care themselves but rather are merely financiers who are coming in to gain a profit from the health care and who are not focused on the health of the patient as the outcome but rather on the profit that is possible from the provision of services to the patient. As soon as you introduce that, then you start to see all the problems that come out of private health care. You see, for example, as we have seen in long-term care, the attempt to reduce the number of staff that are available in the procedure and following up from the procedure from what would normally exist in a public health care system.

What we actually have is some research that indicates that that is in itself problematic. If you reduce the number of staff, for example, the research indicates that the likelihood of death occurring increases, and as a result, in order to make a profit, you actually have to accept a higher rate of death of your patients. I think that if the UCP can look at that research and still accept that it's worth the dollars, then I think that that's problematic. Accepting a higher rate of death is very much a concern.

We also know that one of the things that happens in the private clinics is that in order to make a profit they have to take the dollars that are given to them by the provincial system, and they have to spread those dollars to a greater number of people because now they have shareholders and so on. And the primary way in which they do that is not only reducing staff, as I mentioned here, which is medically problematic, but also reducing the salaries that staff receive. So, essentially, what this bill does in significant part is actually just an attack on salaries of people who work in the health care field, that it will be a driver to reduce their overall compensation. That is of deep concern for me now at a time when we're in the middle of this huge COVID epidemic, and we are seeing that, in fact, health care workers are truly important to the well-being of our society. Many people refer to them as heroes. Others say that they are essential services and so on, yet here we have a bill whose main outcome is going to be to reduce the number of staff that are working to provide all that wonderful protection for us that we presently have and to reduce the salaries of the people who have been providing that protection, both of which seem to me to be terrible decisions on the part of the UCP government. So I'm very, very concerned about that.

Now, I know that the government is suggesting that, well, we'll still have a single taxpayer paying for all of these services, so we're not talking about privatization in the American sense of privatization, where it's completely independent from the system, but they also have failed to make sure that that distinction is maintained in this act. Previously, if you wished to perform surgeries in the private sphere, then you had to declare that you were going to work in the private sphere. Any doctor could stop receiving funds from the Alberta health system and move into the private system any time they want. They always could have done that, but you'll notice that almost no doctors have ever done that, and the reason why is because their primary interest is the health and well-being of patients. In this particular case, what's happening with these private clinics is that they are no longer requiring the administrators, the owners of these clinics to have that distinction. You're either in the public system or outside of the public system.

That means that they can actually use the money from the public system to build the resources that they will need to provide private

care, and then they can have people come in on private care. So essentially what you have is taxpayers of the province of Alberta building the infrastructure for private corporations using taxpayer dollars and then taking a hundred per cent of the profits for the benefit of themselves and their shareholders.

This is extremely problematic because what essentially is happening here, then, is that we are building hospitals and so on here in the province of Alberta – and I certainly hope that the UCP doesn't renege on some of the promises the NDP has committed to, building hospitals such as the Misericordia hospital and the new south Edmonton hospital. You're not only building those public facilities, but you are actually providing them monies to build the private facilities. That's where they're getting the money from. Then once they have built those private facilities, they will be able to use that facility for totally private interests. In fact, they could completely stop providing any care through the public system and provide total private care, and all of that would have been paid for by taxpayers' dollars.

Now, it seems to me that if the government is suggesting, "Look, we could have some clearance to do some particular pieces of work," then they certainly could have set those clinics up within the public system. They could have said: look, there are certain types of surgeries that are quick and easy, and we've advanced so much over the years that you don't even need to stay in hospital overnight. There's no reason why that type of clinic could not have been set up within the Alberta health care system. It could have completely been done. Anything that you are setting up right now in the private system could have existed in the public system, in public facilities with public staff. All of that's possible. So the only reason why you've been choosing to do that is because you're actually trying to reduce the number of public staff and you're trying to reduce the salaries of the members of the public staff. That's why you're doing it. You're not doing it because it actually improves any health care.

We know there's a second problem. Well, I think I'm on probably my fifth or sixth problem here now. There was another problem with shifting work to the private system, and that is that the private system tends to take the easiest, quickest kinds of surgeries that can be done. Now, we know that in ophthalmology, for example, they have now reached the point where, with the help of publicly funded university research, by the way, I might add, they have now developed mechanisms where they can see dozens and dozens of eye patients in a day and get them all done very quickly, all of which I support but believe could have been done within the public health care system. But now what they do is that they take all of the easiest possible cases because that's where the greatest profit is, people that are in and out in 10, 15 minutes and so on.

What they don't do is that they do not follow up responsibly, financially, and medically in the situations in which those patients have something go wrong. If you go into an eye clinic and something goes wrong and you need further surgeries, you go back to the public system, and all of the expensive work that now needs to be done to repair any damages or failings of what has happened in the private clinic is now being a hundred per cent borne by the public. So from the perspective of the private clinic it's all gain and no pain; from the perspective of the public system it's all pain and no gain.

We know that it doesn't actually decrease the wait times in the public system if you have more private surgeries. Now, we know that because there have been a number of attempts to do this; for example, Saskatchewan moved in the direction of providing MRIs and some other surgeries, orthopaedic surgeries and so on, in private clinics highly supported by public dollars. And the research that came out in 2017 indicates that the net result was that the wait times overall for MRIs went up, not down, particularly for people

with any complexity at all because, of course, the private clinics don't want that. So if you have a serious problem, your wait time is going to go up, and that's very problematic.

We also know from research in Britain that a very similar thing happened there, that the wait times overall for people to receive surgeries have not been decreased by the existence of private clinics. In fact, in many cases they have increased the wait times, particularly if there's any complexity at all in the system. There will be a few lucky people, a small minority of people, who will be able to jump the queue, get in quicker and get that service done, be in and out, and profits to the private system will flow quite readily. But should we set up a system where the vast majority of people will actually receive less productive services while a few receive better services? I certainly don't believe that that's a good example of the direction that we should go.

I think it's important that we spend time thinking a little bit about whether or not there is capacity in the public system to provide some improvements to the system as it is now. As I've already stated, we actually . . .

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would just ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to continue with his thoughts as he was midsentence.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think we need to spend a little bit of time talking about the nature of the benefits of having some private clinics versus some public clinics and ask ourselves the question about whether or not we actually have a net benefit to the citizens of the province of Alberta. I've already described that the research internationally does not demonstrate a significant improvement in issues like wait times and doesn't in fact demonstrate a decrease in dollars to the overall health budget of citizens of the province of Alberta. It means that they tend to be spending more money on the services that are there. I think that that's very problematic, and I think that before we jump into a program like this, we should have a much better idea about what it is that we're trying to achieve and whether or not this particular process will achieve those outcomes.

Now, I did have an opportunity earlier in the year to present a bill to this House, but it was referred to committee. In that bill we would have talked about the commitment to preserving the public health care system. This government axed the bill in committee, and it refused to even have a debate about it here in the House, so we know that their intention is not to preserve public health care. They refused to stand up and to suggest that they are in favour of public health care.

They could have stood up and said, "We are absolutely in favour of public health care, but we'd also like some private," but they didn't do that because they didn't want to actually make the statement that they wanted to preserve public health care. So we know their intention is to move in the direction of increased privatization, which is great for a small group of people, not for the vast majority of Albertans. I think that that is, you know, something that we should be very concerned about.

Now, the question is: if we do have some problems in our public health system – and of course there are. I mean, there are always improvements that need to be made. I think that's true of any system at all. The question is: was it impossible to actually fix those

problems in the public health system? The answer is, quite simply, no.

I noticed that some of the UCP online supporters have been talking about the fact that there are empty ORs in hospitals from time to time and that those ORs could be used for providing more surgeries. I absolutely, a hundred per cent agree. The simple answer would have been for the province to put more money into the public system to allow more doctors, more staff to be available and those ORs to be available to actually perform those surgeries and reduce wait times. But they chose not to do that. They had a straightforward answer. They had the facilities already in existence, they have the doctors willing to spend more time, they have the nurses and other operating room staff all available, they have the operating rooms sitting there in the hospitals, all of which could have been put to use, and they chose not to do any of that. It tells me again that what they're really interested in is profit and not patient care and patient outcome, and I think that that's very problematic.

The whole intent of this bill is to diminish the well-being of the majority of Albertans for the benefit of the select few in the province of Alberta, a very Americanized model, where a few very rich people, the one percenters of the world, receive a benefit that you would allow them to have, that you would be grateful for them to have if it didn't actually also demonstratively reduce the care for others. If it was just an addition – okay; maybe somebody gets to go get some private health care, and that's an extra or a top-up – you might be okay with that.

But the evidence I've been presenting here from both Britain and Saskatchewan is such that it actually reduces the quality of care available for the average citizen. So that's what you've chosen. You've chosen not to use the available resources in the system to improve health care. You've chosen not to be on the side of your average Albertan. In fact, it's more than just the average Albertan. That would imply sort of 50 per cent. You're actually reducing the benefits for probably closer to 80 per cent of the citizens of Alberta just so that you can do something for the . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we are on a referral motion, known as REF1, on second reading of Bill 30. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 30, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, and more specifically to speak to the referral motion that was brought by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South. As a reminder for those who might be following along – and I hope a number of Albertans are following along because this bill makes significant changes to our health care system, and all Albertans should be paying attention to what the government is doing to our health care system – the amendment was, of course, that the Member for Edmonton-South moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 30 be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 30, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee in accordance with Standing Order 74.2."

I read that because it's important to keep context about why we are here and what we're talking about. We're talking about a bill that proposes significant changes to our health care system, and the UCP government was not transparent with Albertans about what they were doing. I think that many Albertans will recall during the campaign watching the Premier stand up and sign a cardboard sign, which we know now was probably worth the paper that it was signed on, that made a strong commitment to our public health care system. Instead, what we see is that the government is introducing

legislation that undermines our public health care system. Now, at the time, Madam Speaker, I think many Albertans were rightfully concerned about the veracity of that claim and that commitment by the not then Premier but now Premier, and they were rightfully sort of mistrustful of that.

However, what I continually come back to in this House, which is really mind-boggling to me, is how the government has not learned anything from the global pandemic that has absolutely rocked not only our province but the country and globally. There have been no lessons learned, Madam Speaker, and that's really, really surprising. I remember, in the early days of the pandemic, when many of us in this House found out that, you know, our children's schools and our child care centres were closed. We were not in the Legislature sitting all the time, and I remember thinking: you know, this is really life changing; it's a really profound moment in our history, and I'm sure that there are going to be some really significant lessons learned through this pandemic. Of course, top of mind when we're talking about a pandemic is how much we need and value our health care system.

This is not to say, of course, Madam Speaker, that there are not always opportunities to improve our public health care system, but really the focus should be on that, actually improving our public health care system. But more than ever Albertans learned and watched and appreciated front-line health care workers going out every day, particularly in those early days when we did not know a lot of what was happening. We did not know what were the best protections and health measures and safety protection measures we could take to prevent the spread. They went out there every day. We know that there were troubles in those early days in making sure that our front-line health care workers had appropriate masks and the PPE they required to do their job, yet they kept going out there and doing that.

Of course, significant to that were our doctors, who were out there every day doing profound work to make sure Albertans were safe and healthy, putting their lives at risk, their families' lives, but doing it anyways because it was what they'd committed to do. So I remember thinking during that pandemic that there are going to be some really – I say that, but we are not through the pandemic. In fact, we are seeing those numbers creep up. It's so unfortunate, Madam Speaker, because I know that a lot of Albertans don't want to go back to school closures, don't want to go back to child care centre closures, don't want to go back to working from home full-time and home-schooling and doing all those things that we had to do. But we are seeing those numbers. We are not through it. In fact, it's sort of a second wave that's happening right now, that we need to be really careful about more than ever. Again, I really thought that there would be some lessons learned.

3:30

Instead, what we saw is that this government, well, even reluctantly paused some of the changes that they were making to doctors' billing, for example, but then proceeded to go forward with it at full speed. They put certain measures on hold after an enormous amount of resistance. They did put some things on hold, but then they continued through.

Now, what we've seen since we returned to this Legislature on a more regular schedule, Madam Speaker, is that the government has learned no lessons from the pandemic, and nowhere is that more clear than in their attacks on our health care system. I really, truly believe that even if there are portions, some small portions, of this Bill 30 which were potentially signalled within the UCP campaign, the world is a different place now. The world is a much different place for most Albertans. It's not a different place for the UCP, of course. They're still living in the 1950s, but they are certainly not

indicating – they don't have the same mandate that they did a year and a half ago. It's amazing, actually, how quickly they've lost that by not only breaking trust with Albertans on a number of fronts but also failing to factor into their ideological approach the realities of the world that we live in now.

This is why I support, Madam Speaker, that this bill should go back, should be referred to – in fact, now we have a Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee. Again, I'm starting to really question what the purpose of that committee is considering that the government has been amending the Public Health Act even while that act is subject to that committee, and here again we have further changes to the health care system that are not going through that committee. We're suggesting that even if there was some thought within the Premier's office that they had some kind of mandate to put forward some pieces of this bill – and there's a lot in this bill that was not signalled to Albertans in the campaign – they certainly have lost that mandate now, particularly with their failure to change course or shift course as a result of the pandemic.

Today, obviously, Madam Speaker, I've already spoken to Bill 30. I will probably be likely to speak to this bill a number of times in the coming days. There are a number of pieces to talk about. One of the pieces I'd like to talk about today specifically with Bill 30, that gives me significant pause and why I believe it should be referred to this committee is that there are changes. The minister actually called it streamlining or, quote, said that they were getting rid of needless administrative duplication to get private clinics approved, so really streamlining the process for the approval of private surgical clinics, primarily.

Now, even as recently as today we've heard members from the government stand up and say: "Oh, there's no change here. There are private surgical clinics already in Alberta. There were under the NDP. There were under previous Conservative governments. There's no change here." I understand. In fact, I think the more times that I hear the members stand up and make members' statements about Bill 30, the more I'm convinced that they're trying to convince themselves, because they have not yet convinced Albertans about this.

That's true, of course. There were private surgical clinics, but it's not true that what the government has done is simply continued on what was already happening, because if that was the case, there'd be no need to make legislative changes. They are making legislative changes, and they're not, despite what the minister would claim, just needless administrative duplication that they're eliminating, because there are some significant changes within Bill 30 that Albertans need to be aware of in terms of how private surgical clinics will be approved.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to draw attention to the actual wording of Bill 30 because I think it's important. The minister and the government are not going to talk about the details of the provisions because they've got their talking points, and that's what they want Albertans to believe is happening, but I think it's important to really look at the actual wording of the bill and see what changes were actually made. I guess Albertans can make their decision about whether or not they believe these are just needless administrative duplications.

For example, let's begin with the fact that Bill 30 proposes to amend the name of the Health Care Protection Act. It's now the health care facilities act. That, in and of itself, Madam Speaker, is a clear signal to Albertans that this act is no longer about protecting health care. I mean, that's actually been deliberately changed. The government is signalling clearly that Bill 30 is saying: "We don't feel that our priority is health care protection anymore. In fact, what we think our priority is is health care facilities." I think that's notable in and of itself.

But let's look at what the changes to the current Health Care Protection Act that are being proposed in Bill 30 are. The part that drew my attention – and I know that a number of my colleagues have probably already risen and spoken to this provision. I'm quite confident that the government members have not because I would imagine that they don't want Albertans to pay attention to this piece. Specifically, Bill 30 proposes to amend section 8 of the Health Care Protection Act, and that's the section, Madam Speaker, that sets out the process by which a minister approves agreements for the establishment of a private surgical clinic. It basically sets out the criteria that the minister must consider before approving the establishment of a private surgical clinic.

What's notable particularly about what's in Bill 30 is that specific subprovisions of section 8 of the Health Care Protection Act have been removed. Those provisions are ones that we should be very, very concerned about. Specifically, Bill 30 amends section 8 by repealing subsection (3) of the Health Care Protection Act and taking out pieces and keeping some smaller pieces. And here, Madam Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to read out the sections of the current Health Care Protection Act, section 8(3), that have been deleted. These are the provisions that no longer apply, meaning the Minister of Health no longer has to consider these factors when establishing or approving a private surgical clinical facility.

What has been deleted by Bill 30? Subsection (b), which says:

- (3) The Minister shall not approve a proposed agreement unless the Minister is satisfied . . .
 - (b) that there is a current need and that there will likely be an ongoing need in the geographical area to be served for the provision of insured surgical services as contemplated under the proposed agreement.

Madam Speaker, that means that no longer does the minister actually have to determine that there is a need in that area for the private surgical clinic.

That is interesting to me because one of the things that we consistently hear from members of the government, particularly those who represent rural areas, is: "My constituency, my riding, these rural areas need access to these kinds of surgeries. They don't have access, they have to travel long distances, and we need it in my community." I would say: why would the government support a removal of a provision where there's actually an assessment of need? It shouldn't be problematic. I think we all know that there are challenges in the rural health care system, exacerbated exponentially, of course, by the current government's approach to doctors and driving rural doctors out of the communities. But, certainly, need should be something that there should be no problem demonstrating. But that's no longer a factor, an element, that the minister should consider when approving a private surgical clinic, so it could be set up anywhere in Alberta, just not based on need.

Another part of section 8 of the Health Care Protection Act that's been deleted by Bill 30 is this.

- (3) The Minister shall not approve a proposed agreement unless the Minister is satisfied . . .
 - (c) that the provision of the insured surgical services as contemplated under the proposed agreement would not have an adverse impact on the publicly funded and publicly administered health system in Alberta.

This is important, Madam Speaker, again, because the current act is called the Health Care Protection Act. It's about protecting health care. We have a commitment and most Albertans strongly want to see their government demonstrate an ongoing commitment to our public health care system. I believe it's roughly 45 – currently we have around 43 private clinics, most in Edmonton and Calgary. Those clinics would have all satisfied a previous Minister of Health

that the clinic is not actually going to have an adverse impact on the public health care system.

It's interesting to me that the current government does not think that that's important. They're clearly signalling, by deleting this provision, by deleting the requirement that a private clinic has to establish that it's not going to hurt the public health care system, that they don't care about that anymore. The government is signalling that damage or adverse effect on the public health care system just is not a priority for this government. That's very interesting for a Premier that signed a big cardboard sign and a government that claims that they're committed to the principles of public health care because now they're saying: "We're not concerned about adverse impacts on our public health care system. Private clinics: even if they do have an adverse impact on the public health care system, we're going to happily approve them to establish anyways."

Another section, Madam Speaker, that has been deleted, under Bill 30, from section 8 of the Health Care Protection Act is subsection (3)(d). This one says:

- (3) The Minister shall not approve a proposed agreement unless the Minister is satisfied . . .
 - (d) that there is an expected public benefit in providing the insured surgical services as contemplated under the proposed agreement, considering factors such as
 - (i) access to such services,
 - (ii) quality of service,
 - (iii) flexibility,
 - (iv) the efficient use of existing capacity, and
 - (v) cost effectiveness and other economic considerations.

3:40

So it's interesting to me. Again, Madam Speaker, this has been deleted under Bill 30. This means that a private clinic that is seeking approval by the Minister of Health to establish itself as a private clinic no longer has to demonstrate that that clinic is going to provide a public benefit in providing the insured surgical services, and that public benefit does not have to include consideration of access to such services, quality of service, flexibility. None of these things matter anymore to this government. They are saying: that is not a criterion or an element that we need to consider when approving a private clinic.

There are other sections, Madam Speaker, that are also deleted.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise and do a 29(2)(a) on this though I guess I probably feel a little bit inadequate responding to a member because I'm not a lawyer, but in any event here it goes. I think it's really important to understand that this part of the bill has a lot to do with addressing a significant problem in our province, which is wait times – wait times – wait times for surgeries.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud likes to talk about rural Alberta as if she has a clue about what goes on out there. It's unfortunate because I can't imagine that that member has ever been out to rural Alberta and spent some time talking with some of the constituents, you know, some people in Cardston-Siksika, banging on some doors. [interjections] I hear them heckling. Again, I've got to give credit where credit is due. Nobody – nobody – heckles like the NDP because it's so filled with anger. They're just so mad. You know, heckle away. Heckle away. To the members opposite, through you, Madam Speaker, to them, take a compliment where you can get one. I mean, let's be honest here. Heckling: it's a talent.

It takes a lot of practice. I'll tell you that if they could actually come up with amendments and debate bills as well as they could heckle, they actually might get something passed in this Chamber. But in any event, that would also require them to show up for work and actually be involved and vote when they need to vote. But again I digress.

Madam Speaker, this bill is about wait times. It's about Albertans. Now, I had two constituents, two that I want to reference. One had an issue with his hip, and when I was knocking on doors during the nomination and then again through the campaign, this issue kept coming up to me, talking about this gentlemen's hip and the wait-list that he was on to get some surgery on that hip and the painkillers that this older gentleman was on to deal with the pain that he was going through as he waited for the surgery. He told me that he was on the cusp of making this decision as to whether or not to go down across the border to get this surgery done faster because: you know, can you really put a price on somebody's health?

It was unfortunate to me that he was considering shelling out tens of thousands of dollars for this surgery when we could have got it done here. Now, hip surgery is not something that I believe a chartered medical facility is going to be taking on, but the reality here is that increasing the number of these chartered health facilities . . . [interjections] Again I hear the members opposite heckling. It is absolutely comical. So angry, Madam Speaker. It's comical to listen to them. You know, again, if that's all they've got, then bring it on. It's unfortunate to see my constituents in that kind of pain.

The second thing was that one of my constituents had a shoulder injury, an older gentleman – and I got several phone calls from him, from his family – you know, a good, stalwart supporter. He just said: “Look, you know, like, I don't want to have to go down across the line, which isn't even an option anymore, to get this surgery. I don't want to have to go on these heavy drugs to cope with the pain. I just want to get the surgery done.” The consultation was months out, and the proposed surgery would be even a far longer wait time.

The point I'm trying to make here – again, you have to forgive me because I'm not a lawyer; I didn't go to law school, like the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud likes to frequently remind us that she did – is that it's unfortunate that they don't grasp the concept that health is actually important to this government. We signed a declaration that we would ensure, maintain, or increase the spending for public health care, which we are committed to doing and we continue to do. In fact, we're putting more money into health care, Madam Speaker.

I'm not sure who's writing the talking points on the side of the members opposite. I'm not sure where they're coming up with some of this nonsense. But, you know, we are debating this referral motion, which I definitely oppose. I think this is a great piece of legislation that actually addresses a significant problem in this province, and I wish the members opposite would recognize that problem and help us solve it, not just cast aspersions across the aisle as though they actually care about members and their constituents in places like rural Alberta, places that rejected them with record numbers. I mean, not to brag, but 73 per cent of my own constituents . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing . . .

Mr. Schow: . . . voted for me, so you're welcome.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Any members wishing to join debate on amendment REF1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's actually a tiny bit ironic that I'm rising at this moment. [interjection] Was that a point of order, or are you just . . . [interjection] No? Not so much? Okay. Sounds good. It's a tiny bit ironic, I think, that I should rise at this precise moment and rather hilarious, I think, after that little diatribe there from the hon. member.

I think I'd like to start by saying that this bill is problematic in a number of ways, and the first area I want to touch on actually has to do with the allowing in of corporations. Interestingly, much like the hon. member just did, the Premier had responded to me, talking about this bill, in a very similar way. Both of these gentlemen seem to think that their degrees in “man” make them more qualified to comment on the legal structure of a corporation than our degrees in law, which I think is interesting, to say the least.

Let us start out by talking about the entry of corporations into this space. Certainly, the members opposite have gone on at great length about how sometimes doctors, like many other professionals, operate as professional corporations and that because doctors sometimes operate as professional corporations, that's exactly the same thing as allowing for-profit health care into our province. Madam Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. There are words for this but not words that I'm allowed to use in this place.

[Mrs. Allard in the chair]

Let us begin by talking about that particular point. It is often the case that professionals – and this is the case with lawyers, too – will operate as professional corporations. A professional corporation is not the same as a corporation that is designed to generate profit. I will speak from my experience with the Law Society, actually, on exactly this matter, and then I will generalize to medical professions.

It is the case presently that many law firms are not, in fact, corporations in this province. They are limited liability partnerships, and often the partners that are engaged in that partnership are lawyers who themselves may operate as a professional corporation. What is the distinction between that and a corporation? Well, the Law Society has the legal ability to regulate members of the legal profession, whether they're operating as a professional corporation or not, and what that gives them are certain legal and ethical obligations that don't fall on other types of corporations.

That is an incredibly important distinction, because doctors, like lawyers, whether they are operating as professional corporations or not, are governed by ethics and by outside regulators that hold them to those ethics, that hold them to standards of practice, that hold them accountable for their behaviour in a whole series of ways that corporations are not held accountable for their behaviours. In fact, generally a for-profit corporation – it's right there in the name; a for-profit corporation – has the intention of generating profit.

3:50

Meanwhile a professional corporation, which, again, may be operated by a doctor, by a lawyer, by other sorts of professionals, because the individual at the centre of that corporation continues to be a regulated member of a regulated profession, has other obligations. In fact, in many cases the dispute that the government is currently undergoing with doctors is precisely about this matter. It's about who ought to be at the centre of health care decisions. Should those decisions be made on what is most profitable for a corporation, or should those decisions be made based on the ethics and values of a professional who is held to a series of professional standards?

That's a very big distinction, and I recognize that it is a philosophical distinction. But that philosophical distinction has considerable implications in the real world because when we're

talking about operating something on the basis of a profit motivation, it has potentially very, very different outcomes for individuals.

Now, sometimes these things align, say with something like preventative medicine. The theory is, or ought to be, at least, that this saves money, so it keeps people out of the emergency room, where the same procedure will cost more money than it would at a family doctor's office. These things can align, but the point is that they don't always align, and when push comes to shove, we don't want profit to be the central motivator for our health care decisions because that doesn't necessarily result in the best decisions for Albertans. I think that everyone in this Chamber can agree that if that were your child, you would be concerned. If it were your child, you would want the person making the decisions to be making those decisions based on their professional judgment and their professional ethics, not based on a series of policies and procedures written by a corporation intending to maximize profit.

We see throughout history the result of putting profit motivation where something else ought to have supremacy. Westray mines is one of the things, I think, that springs to mind. We actually have a protocol now in this province that allows investigations, instead of by occupational health and safety, by police on those matters because of the potential criminal liability. But the point is that when you look at what happened in that incident, the problem was that instead of occupational health being front and centre, instead of the lives of the employees being at the top of the pyramid, the main consideration, what was instead there was profit. That resulted in a series of bad decisions, not because anyone wanted those people to die – there was no intention. There was never a suggestion that there was an intention. The problem was that the motivations on the individual decision-makers were set up wrong. The decision matrix was set up wrong. When we're talking about lives, we need to be really careful where we're putting those decisions.

This, in my view, is just another attempt by this government to ensure that professionals and their ethics and their judgment are not at the centre of things. I think that that is a very bad idea. I think that in the long run the toll and the cost of this on the people of Alberta will be much higher.

Now, I recognize that what we're talking about here is, in fact, sort of in some ways a change in type but in other ways a change in degree. I don't think that that invalidates the argument. I don't think that the fact that there are private deliverers in a public system now means that the degree or amount of private delivery or the shift to focus on private delivery won't make any sort of a difference. I think that that is absolutely wrong-headed and that it is, in fact, untrue. I think that if this legislation is to pass, it will represent a step in a direction that will ultimately result in more entry of that for-profit motivation, and I think that that ultimately will not result in the best decisions for individual Albertans in this province.

You know, this government is famous currently for sort of being in a fairly epic battle with the Medical Association. Again, it's the same attempt. It's the attempt to discredit doctors, to push down their reputations, and to try to suggest that somehow these professionals, who, again, have professional ethics – I'm not saying by any means that they're all perfect, but I'm saying that there is a method to hold them accountable for the advice that they provide and for their medical opinions and, ultimately, for their ethical actions, which is certainly better than no such thing being in place. I think it's a step down that same path to try to ensure that these professionals, these doctors, are no longer at the centre of that medical decision-making process, and I think that that can result in very bad decisions.

Again, what we're talking about is designing a system, and primarily, when we design a system, what we ought to be concerned about is: where are we placing the incentives in that system, and

how are we incentivizing people to behave? Are we incentivizing them to behave in the best interests of the lives and health of our families and our children, or are we incentivizing them to behave in the best interests of profitable corporations? I think that we don't want to continue moving down in this direction.

I think this sort of statement from the government, like, "Just trust us" – I don't know why Albertans would have any reason to do that thus far. Their behaviour towards Albertans – towards students, towards doctors, towards teachers, towards pretty much any group of individuals – has not inspired a lot of trust. And I don't think that's me saying that; that's certainly something I get coming back from individuals out there.

To the member's comments as well that we don't know anyone in rural Alberta or that we don't know what rural Albertans are: I've had rural physicians in my office. Admittedly, I represent a Calgary riding, but, I mean, obviously, before the pandemic they could drive in in person, and subsequently we've been on Zoom. There have been plenty of them explaining in great detail what the impact of the changes this government has made is on their practice and why they believe that they're no longer in a position to practise in those jobs.

You know, not at this cabinet table, but I have sat around one, and I remember. I remember how difficult those conversations were about attracting physicians to work in rural areas. Those were challenging conversations, so having attracted those individuals – it's much like a business. It's much easier to keep the business you've already attracted. There's less effort in doing that than there is to attract new business, so it would be much better to keep the doctors that we already have in rural Alberta, who have made that their home, who are raising their families there, who want to continue to practise there. It's much easier to keep those doctors than it will be to attract new doctors to work in those areas.

I think we ought to talk, too, about the disruption that has for patients. Changing doctors can be difficult, especially if you're someone with a more complex medical history. It can be incredibly trying for people if you're someone who has chronic health conditions or who has challenges with mental health. Re-explaining that entire story to a new doctor is very, very challenging. I think that the steps that this government is taking on this file are wrong-headed, and I think it's worth sort of pointing out that this isn't necessary.

You know, the government keeps rising and saying: wow; this may not be perfect, but we have to do it. Well, I don't think we do have to do it. Certainly, Conservatives signed a deal with the AMA before we came in, and that deal had a significant escalator; I agree. We were able to sit down with them and have those conversations and save over half a billion dollars, working with physicians, who understand the need to make these changes. They just want to be involved. They want to be respected in the conversation, like any other party. I think, you know, that anyone who's been involved in business at all knows that stomping your feet and jumping up and down and yelling really loud is not usually a good strategy to come to a resolution with anyone, right? Sometimes parties have different interests, but they can still work together towards a common goal.

4:00

I think that these moves, the moves the government has made previously and the moves they are making currently in Bill 30, are not necessary. I think there are other ways to move this forward. I think there are ways to look at the long term and to invest in things like home care that will ultimately save us money.

I think as well that it's worth noting, you know, that a lot of people raise the example in this context of for-profit care providers, long-term care providers, and I think it's worth pointing out always

that we have some apples-to-oranges conversations going on because people say: well, it costs more in the public system. Right; that's because the public beds are dementia care beds. There's a much higher standard on dementia care beds. The staffing ratio is 1 to 1 or 2 to 1 whereas for lower level beds the staffing ratio may be 1 staff to 5 or 10 patients.

So I think this is a change and not a good one.

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I just quickly wanted to respond to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View and her characterization of the nature of professional corporations with respect to the medical profession and that of the legal profession. You know, listening to her, I'm not sure whether or not the Member for Calgary-Mountain View really understands the differences between the professional corporations in the medical field and the professional corporations within the legal profession.

I would start off by pointing out that government doesn't bill law firms. I think that is one of the key differences that I need to point out to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View because she was talking about the standard of the professional responsibility, discipline, ethics, and things like that. You know, government doesn't bill the law firms. Law firms, lawyers don't bill the government for their normal services. The ethics of the profession in both of those disciplines – and she's correct. With respect to the legal profession there is the Law Society. There is a very high bar when it comes to the professional conduct for lawyers.

There is also a very high bar for professional corporations and disciplines for the medical profession. The College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta will continue to be responsible for the professional conduct of medical professionals, and there's nothing in this bill – and I think this is one of the points that I want to make – that interferes with the ability of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta to be able to deal with disciplinary issues or professional conduct or the ethics of the profession. Listening to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, you would think, you know, that there is something in this particular bill that would ultimately change that arrangement. That is not true. Point number one.

Point number two is, again, as I said, with respect to the surgical facilities. What this bill intends to do is expand those facilities, which, by the way, were in existence during the time of the NDP government in Alberta between 2015 and 2019. What this bill is seeking to do is to expand the surgical facilities so that we can finally deal with the chronic issue of wait times. Now, the actual physical structure where those operations are going to be performed has nothing whatsoever to do with the conduct of the medical doctors that are going to work in those facilities. If there are issues with the conduct of those doctors in those facilities, the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta would continue to deal with those issues. Why the NDP doesn't want the government to deal with something that has been persistent for years, how on earth – we have folks who have been on waiting lists for surgery for, I think, two years. Why they are so opposed to the province finally being able to address those concerns really baffles my mind.

Madam Speaker, I just wanted to clarify those two points. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View seems to be conflating two things, the medical profession and the legal profession. Doctors in most cases bill the provincial government directly. Lawyers don't do that. The Law Society will continue to deal with the professional discipline with respect to lawyers. The College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta will continue to do that with respect to medical doctors, and there's nothing in this bill that prevents that from going forward.

The Acting Speaker: There are 16 seconds left if the hon. member would like to respond.

Ms Ganley: I think my point, Madam Speaker, was simply about the incentives in a system and whether they're based on profit or whether they're based on professional ethics. I think that creates a big difference.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are on amendment REF1. Are there any other members willing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to take this opportunity to express more on my support on Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. Firstly, I would like to applaud and thank the Minister of Health for these significant changes to the health care system in Alberta. Also, I would like to thank all the Albertans who have shared and provided their insight on Alberta's health care system. Our health care system has helped millions of Albertans who have sought care and assistance. As our population continues to grow in Alberta, there are steps and measures that Bill 30 outlines which will help the health care system run more effectively and efficiently.

Madam Speaker, amendments to the Health Professions Act will allow Albertans to be more involved in creating a strong voice for the health professions and health care providers that will create greater patient involvement to modernize the health care system in Alberta. Changes to this bill will allow more public members to be appointed to regulatory college councils, complaint review committees, hearing tribunals. On a panel of any of them the number of public members will increase from 25 per cent of each board's voting members to 50 per cent. Having more public members participating in these roles will create a more trusting and accountable health system focusing on patient-centred care. More public members will ensure that voices of patients are heard and considered in all respects of governance.

These amendments are a step towards a more patient-centred health system. Also, public members will ensure health professionals maintain high standards of checks and balances, safety, and ethics and provide Albertans with safe, high-quality care.

The Health Care Protection Act, now being introduced as the health facilities act, will support the commitment to strengthen public health care for patients to access high-quality patient-centred health services in a more sustainable and effective way, reducing barriers and administrative burden.

New chartered surgical facilities will provide publicly funded surgeries and help reduce surgical wait times. This is attainable through the changes contained in this bill by simplifying and reforming the process to create chartered surgical facilities, which in turn will provide safe, quality surgeries for Albertans.

The approval process for a new chartered surgery facility can take up to 24 months. That is two full years, which is a significant delay to providing new services. This bill will streamline these processes so we can provide patients with increased access to surgeries as quickly as possible. It will as well allow chartered surgical facilities to provide in-patient services for Albertans under the Workers' Compensation Act or other acts of parliament or in-patient services for individuals not eligible for publicly funded surgeries, and these services will continue to require ministerial designation.

4:10

This is not privatization of the health care system, Madam Speaker. As a matter of fact, government already funds chartered surgical facilities through contracts with AHS. The chartered surgical facilities, which provide publicly funded procedures, are

an extension of the publicly funded system and improve access for Albertans. This will save us money as chartered surgical facilities perform surgeries at a lower cost with the same level of quality that you can expect at a hospital. Moving less complicated outpatient surgeries safely to chartered surgical facilities will allow the public hospitals to focus on more complex surgeries where patients need to recover in a hospital setting.

This will strengthen Alberta's public health system, which helps in improving the lives and options of Albertans who need surgery now. Madam Speaker, changes to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act will enable government to enter into contracts with physicians who want to sign up to participate in alternative relationship plans, or ARP, requested by the Alberta Medical Association. The AMA and many individual physicians, communities in Alberta have requested to undergo contracts instead of the current approach of using ministerial orders, which will significantly speed up the process of enrolling in an ARP.

The changes will also allow government to contract with organizations to operate medical clinics so physicians can focus on providing patient care. Innovative models like the alternative relationship plan will allow more flexibility to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. Compared to the rest of Canada, in Alberta doctors' participation in the alternative compensation agreement is the lowest in Canada, which is just 13.2 per cent, while the national average is 28.7 per cent. The changes in the bill will allow for more diversity in the physician compensation programming and attract more physicians to alternative models. These changes will leave more options for doctors to choose to be paid in ways other than fee-for-service.

Madam Speaker, this option will create opportunities for physicians to allow other types of organizations to manage the administrative work of their businesses so that they can focus on spending more time with their patients. These changes will clarify Alberta Health Services' role in planning and providing health services across the province. Clarifying this role will help to strengthen AHS accountabilities in the health system.

Madam Speaker, amendments to the Public Health Act clarify that the COVID-19 quarantine requirements require all international travellers to quarantine for 14 days while the related orders from the chief medical officer of health are in effect. This is necessary to ensure that all international travellers are required to quarantine while the province continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will ensure that Albertans are protected and safe when entering back into the province. We will continue to ensure that all families, communities, and the vulnerable population are protected.

Bill 30 will also repeal the outdated Health Governance Transition Act and the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta Act. It is ongoing work to reduce red tape and transform the entire health system across Alberta, sustainable and effective. The Health Governance Transition Act helped AHS take over responsibility for cancer treatment, mental health, addictions services for the province when the Alberta Mental Health Board, Alberta Cancer Board, and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission were dissolved.

While the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta Act is no longer necessary since nine former regional health authorities, the Alberta Mental Health Board, and Alberta Cancer Board were disbanded in 2009 when AHS became the province's single health authority, provisions in the bill are included to ensure that the Alberta Cancer Foundation continues its important role in fundraising to support cancer care, prevention, and research across the province. We are committed to strengthen public health care as

Albertans can continue to have access to high-quality, person-centred health services in a more sustainable and efficient manner.

Madam Speaker, I encourage all members of this Chamber to support this bill and support all Albertans that are facing the challenges done by an outdated health care system. This will help our hard-working health care professionals and Albertans to receive the benefits they deserve. Again, I express my appreciation to the minister for these changes that will ensure the protection of Alberta and will ensure that our communities, families, and patients are being protected and supported while we modernize our system to be more effective.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have a few questions for the hon. member as a result of the comments that he's just made in the House. I can enumerate them. Perhaps he could respond in kind. I was wondering about comments the hon. member made with respect to more public members being an improvement on the health council, and he suggested that that would be a better system of oversight. I'm wondering what the hon. member would say to Albertans who thought it would just be simply a matter of the UCP stacking the board and giving political power to the board to sway and influence decisions being made by that board.

I'm wondering what his answer is as to public system improvements. It's always more private medicine. It's not necessarily the answer that all Albertans are looking to sway towards each time there's a change they want to make to the public system, saving money using lower cost private delivery of certain procedures, less complicated surgeries, as the hon. member indicated. Of course, when they get complicated, they are referred to the public system to fix the problems created at the surgical care facilities, which are looking at doing the most profitable, less complicated procedures.

I'm also wondering if the hon. member would comment, please, on the ability, as he indicated, of doctors to focus on medicine rather than administration while the government allows corporatization of and franchising of our medicine, where we have McMedicine franchises offering administration services and the ability to bill. Rather than just having physicians bill, this corporation bills for medical procedures. I'm wondering if that practice of treating medicine like fast-food restaurants by franchising, basically, serves Albertans in a way that he thinks Albertans are asking for.

I'm wondering if the member could please respond to some of these questions. I'd love to hear a couple of his answers.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak on 29(2)(a)? There are two minutes and 28 seconds remaining. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to quickly respond to the Member for Edmonton-McClung who, you know, asked the Member for Calgary-East to expand on his submission that expanding the public membership of the Health Quality Council of Alberta, what benefit that will have. I think that was his first point. His second point was the notion that by doing this and by, again, expanding the presence of surgical facilities in our province, for some reason that would amount to – I believe the word he used was the “corporatization” of medicine.

Madam Speaker, this is consistent with what we have heard from the members opposite. Any time they hear about the public being involved in government process and government life, they somehow take offence to that. You know, we are putting forward a

proposal to expand by 50 per cent the membership of the Health Quality Council so that there will be adequate public voice on an important committee that deals with patient care and the safety of patients and the standard of patient care. Their quarrel is that more public members, more Albertans, are going to have the opportunity to sit on that particular committee, and that's unfortunate.

Number two, you know, how on earth is expanding access to surgical facilities all of a sudden becoming the corporatization of medicine? This is a continuation of their fear and smear to cause anxiety out there, give people grief, cause people grief, whereas in actual fact there is nothing whatsoever in this particular bill that comes close.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

4:20

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are on amendment REF1 to Bill 30. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen to join debate.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. First, before beginning I just want to respond to the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West and his recent comments and just say that he's categorically wrong when he says that we have an issue with having members of the public actually sit on agencies, boards, and commissions. He knows very well that I've gotten up in this House and I've spoken specifically to this matter a number of times.

The issue that the Member for Edmonton-McClung stated in his comments was the fact that this government, when naming people to these agencies, boards, and commissions, often is naming Conservative insiders that have absolutely no experience in the actual issue or the board that they are actually being named to. I'm not saying in all cases, but I'm saying that the tendency is that this is what we have seen in the past year: Conservative insiders, people who were members of the newly created United Conservative Party, being named to these agencies, boards, and commissions with absolutely no experience in that particular topic at hand.

That's what the Member for Edmonton-McClung was highlighting, not that we have an issue with having members of the public participate in the agencies, boards, and commissions. The member knows very well that I've gotten up in this House and I've spoken to it at length, that we highly encourage this. In fact, during our government we made sure that there was gender parity on these agencies, boards, and commissions. We actually sought out – we made it an open competition.

You know, since the member wanted to open this door, I'm going to walk through it. We made them open competitions when the Alberta NDP was in government. We made it public knowledge that people could actually apply to these positions, and there were actually interview processes that took place. People had to go through an interview because we wanted to know what experience they had in this particular realm of interest and knowledge before naming them to these agencies, boards, and commissions.

Not only did we make sure that there was gender parity, Madam Speaker, but we also encouraged members of the public that were from diverse cultural communities to participate in these agencies, boards, and commissions because historically in this province people who were actually on these agencies, boards, and commissions did not accurately represent the diversity that is Alberta. This is the reality that we were faced with when we came in to government, when we wanted to correct what was actually happening with agencies, boards, and commissions, and since this United Conservative Party has taken over, they have actively rolled us back now again. Now there is no more gender parity, and the

tendency is that we are seeing United Conservative Party insiders being named to these agencies, boards, and commissions.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This is the reality that Alberta is faced with now under this United Conservative Party, so to the Member for Edmonton-South West: please stand corrected. We have absolutely no problem with members of the public being named to agencies, boards, and commissions.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, just a reminder that we are on the referral amendment. I hope we can stick to that. Please proceed.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, but with all due respect, if the member brings up an issue in regard to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we are on the referral amendment. Please speak to the referral amendment.

Member Loyola: Well, then I would hope that what's good for one side is also good for the other.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, the chair for the third time now has asked you to speak to the referral amendment, not make comments on how the Speaker has ruled. Please proceed.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I will do that.

One of the things that I wanted to bring up regarding this referral amendment is the fact that I don't believe that members from this cabinet have actually considered how this is going to affect the Alberta public because what we're seeing, again, is the tendency to implement ideology. I get it. There's nothing wrong with that. You represent a particular ideology, and it's good to bring those ideas and implement them. But I would hope that members of this cabinet, before blindly introducing their particular ideology into pieces of legislation, would actually do research and studies on how these particular ideological pieces of legislation have actually been implemented in other jurisdictions not only across Canada but in the United States and all over the world. It's only reasonable that you would actually look at other jurisdictions where these actual policies have been implemented and learn from them, that you would do that before you would propose it in legislation here in the province of Alberta and make this sweeping move to go in this direction.

People know, when they see what happens in other jurisdictions – and, you know, the beautiful part of Alberta is that we have such a wide diversity of people from so many different cultural backgrounds that now call Alberta home. They come from countries where these actual policies reign the day in their country, and they know how citizens of their country have actually been priced out of being able to access health care, good, quality health care.

You can see, Madam Speaker, that this is a slippery slope towards a two-tier health care system. This is what this United Conservative Party wants Alberta to move into, where people who can afford a particular amount of good, quality health care will be able to purchase that. But then what about the rest of Albertans? They'll say: okay; well, they can just engage in the public system. Then they're talking about incentives to actually have doctors want to work for these private corporations, and what we see in jurisdiction after jurisdiction after jurisdiction – no matter where you look in the world, you start seeing this two-tier health care system where you have doctors that, you know, get paid an exorbitant amount of dollars working in one system, the private system, and then you see others that are working in another system where the quality is just

not the same. It is not the same. This is what we see in jurisdiction after jurisdiction after jurisdiction.

I'm pretty sure that members from all across this province, all 87 ridings, are getting e-mails, phone calls, letters from their constituents actually concerned about this reality. The fact is that this UCP government wants to introduce this type of policy here in the province of Alberta.

I just want to take this opportunity to read a text message that I received from a constituent of mine who was actually concerned about this, in terms of the referral. He says: as-salaam alaikum, my name – for the benefit of the members here and, of course, because we want there to be English translation, “as-salaam alaikum” means “peace be upon you.”

4:30

I hope you're doing well. There has been a lot of talk recently about Bill 30 and how this means the privatization of certain aspects of our health care in Alberta.

This seems like a very unpopular move, whether for doctors or residents of this province. It also means that the government continues to tax its residents while providing fewer services. If the UCP really want to attract business and investment, they have got to ensure that Alberta is a viable place for a company to invest in and have its employees reside in, not create a situation in which all our institutions, although imperfect, are left to dry. A super majority government does not mean that they should repeal productive NDP legislation and roll out harmful legislation that I believe negatively impact our province.

We are often told to reach out to our representatives, so as a resident of Edmonton-Ellerslie I thought it may be good to let you know how I feel about not just Bill 30 but the UCP's destructive attitude towards this province and its institutions to attempt to balance the books after its \$4.7 billion corporate tax handout.

This is what a constituent . . . [interjections] You know, I hear members from the other side laughing. Well, okay; great. You're laughing at a constituent of mine for what they have said. Thank you very much. It demonstrates the respect that certain members from the other side will have for certain voices in our province. It may not be the same perspective that they share, but they should respect it, the same way that when constituents of mine who don't happen to share my ideology contact my office, I respect them. I don't belittle them, and I listen to them. I may not ideologically agree with these constituents, but that does not mean that I have the right to disrespect them in any way, Madam Speaker. [interjections] Again, you know, we hear members from the other side beaking off as usual.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, just a reminder that we're on the referral amendment. Please speak to the referral amendment.

Member Loyola: Madam Speaker, this omnibus health legislation actually changes nine pieces of legislation. It changes the Health Quality Council of Alberta Act, the Health Professions Act, the Health Care Protection Act, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, the Regional Health Authorities Act, the Hospitals Act, the Public Health Act, the Health Governance Transition Act, and the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta Act. Yet members opposite in this House have repeatedly gotten up and said: this is already happening; this is already happening. Well, if that was the case, then why all these changes in all nine pieces of legislation? If it's already happening and physicians can already provide these private surgeries, why do we need changes to nine pieces of legislation in this omnibus bill?

Now, what we're most concerned about is the fact that the UCP are making changes to our world-class public health care system in

the midst of a pandemic. I personally and many members have gotten up in this House to actually voice not only our own concern – I mean, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and I were just speaking with a couple of constituents, one from hers, one from mine, who actually visited the Legislature today, outside in front of the steps of this very House, and they were expressing this concern to us, that they find it deeply irresponsible that this government would take this time in particular to make the changes that they are proposing in this piece of legislation, in Bill 30, to our world-class public health care system. So it's not just members from this side.

You know, multiple members from the other side have gotten up and said that we're fearmongering. We're solely representing the voices that are even coming here, to this very Legislature, to hear the debate. Listen, we are solely expressing opposition to what you are doing. It's not just coming from us; it's coming from members of the public, and I'd ask that members respect that. This is debate. Don't criticize us and say that we're fearmongering. We're not the ones fearmongering. We're simply communicating the voices of Albertans, and that is our duty and our responsibility, Madam Speaker, as members of this House and representatives of constituents.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Official Opposition deputy House leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am happy to rise under 29(2)(a), and I wanted to get the member's perspective. I know that he was a former president of HSAA – not HSAA; pardon me – the former president of the nonacademic staff at the University of Alberta. Forgive me for that mistake. I'm curious to know, through his contacts through the nonacademic staff, if he's heard from any of his former colleagues and the people that he represented as far as their impressions of Bill 30. What are they saying now that the bill has been tabled and open to the public? I'm curious to hear comments, feedback from either doctors at the U of A or folks from the nonacademic staff that he once represented.

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

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Yes, I often reach out to members of the Non-Academic Staff Association because not only did I used to represent them when I used to have that position, but a few of them are actually constituents of mine in the riding that I represent. Of course, I represent Edmonton-Ellerslie, and people from all across Edmonton, actually, work at the University of Alberta.

When it comes, particularly, to Bill 30, they're expressing their concerns, as I've expressed by quoting one of my constituents already in terms of their concerns with Bill 30. I think that fundamentally people are concerned with the fact that this is going to be creating a two-tier health care system here in the province of Alberta. Everybody acknowledges that, you know, the current universal public health care system, yes, has its challenges. But when this UCP government is moving down this ideological path without even, well, in my humble perspective, in my humble opinion, considering the studies that are out there about other jurisdictions – like, okay; you want to implement this ideological move? Go ahead, but at least look at the research and the studies that have been done in other jurisdictions to make sure that you're going to do it in a more responsible way here in the province of Alberta.

If you were doing that, I mean, I still wouldn't vote for it, but at least I would understand. It wouldn't just be a blind ideological move to move us in this direction. Learn from what is happening in

other jurisdictions. Address the concerns that are happening in other jurisdictions before you blindly implement this piece of legislation the way you are doing now.

4:40

I was talking about how it's deeply irresponsible right now, and the reality is that moving in this particular direction right now is going to create instability. That is one of the things that is perhaps most concerning, the fact that lives literally depend on our system the way it is right now and that moving in this direction in the middle of a pandemic could create such instability, especially when we could be moving into a second wave of COVID-19 at this particular time. The government knows this because cases of COVID are up here in the province of Alberta, considerably up, as compared to when COVID hit initially. This government needs to ask itself: how will making these changes right now impact the actual health care system at this time if we were to move in this direction?

The other concern that we have is that this streamlines the chartering of private, for-profit clinics like surgery clinics. Don't just take my word for it, Madam Speaker. We have a U of C . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join debate on the referral amendment to Bill 30? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It, as always, is an honour and a privilege to rise in this House. Today I will be speaking to the referral amendment on Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. Before I get into that, I do just, as I like to do and particularly with this bill, want to give a shout-out to all the front-line workers out there and in particular the health care workers, who, we know, are working under extremely trying circumstances in the middle of a pandemic. Of course, the uptick in cases right now has left a lot of folks absolutely scrambling.

I also want to just address some of the comments made earlier in the House, the disparaging remarks to my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud around, you know, her being a lawyer. That was one, but the one I want to touch on is her lack of connection to rural Alberta and kind of implying that our side of the House can't speak for rural Alberta.

As I've said in this House many times, I actually spent more of my life than not in rural Alberta. I spent a good 26 years of my life in rural Alberta, and that's much more than half of my life in various communities across rural Alberta, having grown up in Barrhead, having my whole K to 12 education in Barrhead, Alberta, having taught in Bawlf and Forestburg, and having lived in Camrose and Forestburg as well. I still have a lot of connections and a lot of friends out in rural Alberta, who I am in touch with very regularly. I know I've talked about my Conservative dad in this House, and he's just one example of someone who may not agree with my politics but supports me.

Again, I just want to put it on the record that, you know, no one has a claim to any parts of Alberta, just like I wouldn't claim that somebody on that side from rural Alberta can't have connections to a riding in the core like mine, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. As one of my colleagues aptly stated, we're here to represent Albertans from all walks of life, and I just want to remind folks in this House that I don't think we should get into a rural versus urban conversation, because, again, we're here for everybody.

Even though we disagree on a lot of issues, we're here for our constituents, including those who maybe didn't vote for us or don't support us. We're still here for them, and we're still going to respond to them. As my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie talked

about, you know, he gets constituents who write him and who aren't supportive of him or his party, the NDP's policies, yet it's his duty to respond. Yeah, it's something that I actually really welcome in my job as an MLA, meeting with folks who reach out and are critical of something that the NDP supports. Those are some of the best conversations, to be honest, because you learn a lot. I think we're often guilty of being in our own bubbles, for sure.

Before the Deputy Speaker interrupts me or cautions me as she might, I will of course return to speaking to Bill 30 and why I believe this bill needs to be referred to committee.

You know, to make my case for referral, I want to outline some of my grave concerns with the bill as written. My fundamental concern with this bill is the approach that this government is taking to health care. We saw that the moment this government came into office, health care was going to be a target, and I've shared in this House multiple times just how important a strong, publicly funded health care system is to Albertans, right? We hear that all the time. I know my colleagues will agree with me on this, that we get a lot of correspondence, and I would say that the bulk of my correspondence from constituents – not the form letters, because, of course, those are different, but from constituents who actually take the time to write a letter, an e-mail – is often about social services. They're often about investments in public services, education and health care in particular.

I can tell you with certainty that I've received concerns from constituents of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Folks are concerned about the undermining of our public health care system. They see in Bill 30, just as we see and we've pointed out in this House a couple of times to date, that allowance for for-profit corporations to contract and this creeping privatization of our health care system as an attack on what many of us, Albertans and Canadians, value in our public health care system. I want to, you know, make the case that it's not just us saying that this is the wrong move, saying that we need to refer this to committee, saying that we need to delay this omnibus legislation. It's a number of stakeholder groups as well, it's physicians, and again it's a whole heck of a lot of our constituents. As an example, I'm going to talk about some of the folks who would support us in asking this government to delay this piece of legislation.

Why don't I start with physicians because, of course, physicians have felt disrespected, to put it lightly, by this government in many ways, right? I've spoken about this multiple times. You know, the message was sent with the tearing up of their contract, right? That was a message sent fairly immediately. Coming back to rural Alberta, we know that rural Alberta is being impacted gravely by doctors giving up services and by doctors leaving their practices. I've shared Westlock as an example. Westlock was the rivalling town of Barrhead, where I grew up. We know Westlock is losing a whole heck of a lot of doctors, a number of other communities as well. The list is getting quite lengthy. So I can say with a fair bit of certainty that there are a number of doctors who are concerned about this piece of legislation and who would support us in moving this to referral, particularly around the concerns of privatization.

We know that the AMA president, Christine Molnar, was quoted in a letter to members on July 7, just noting that she was concerned that they were not consulted about the bill. One doctor, Dr. Christopher Ewing, an Edmonton pediatrician, says that he's done a thorough analysis of Bill 30, just like many of us have in this House, hence why we're calling for the need for referral. He said: my first reaction is that this is the start of further privatization of the health care system, which we've been advocating against for many months now; the bill will make it easier, as we've talked about, for private surgery facilities to set up shop and to allow the ministry to

directly contract private medical clinics. That's one doctor, Dr. Ewing.

Dr. Kerri Johansson, a lung specialist with the University of Calgary, says that the bill seems to be the UCP's tool for privatizing health care services in Alberta. She goes on to note that what we as the medical and health care community are concerned about is that this will compromise the care of patients in Alberta. Any time you bring privatized services in, it places the emphasis on profit rather than patient care. She says that the privatization of health care will lead to multiple tiers in the quality of care available to patients and notes, to conclude, that this is not a pathway that we as Canadians value or want to go down.

4:50

Again, these are a few physicians – and I could quote others as well – who are clearly sounding the alarm bells on privatization of our system. They're the ones who work in it day in and day out. They see first-hand the value of a strong, publicly funded health care system. While this government might not trust them and might not have faith in our physicians, I sure do, so I want us to really acknowledge their words and their warnings.

We have physicians who are speaking out about their concerns on privatization. As I said, we've had constituents, multiple constituents, speak out. We've had folks who work in the health care sector in academia speak out. Dr. Lorian Hardcastle, a professor at the University of Calgary who specializes in health law and policy, notes that the shift towards increasing private delivery is concerning. She notes that wait times in the public system can tend to get longer because, of course, there are a finite number of doctors and a finite number of hours they have in the day. Of course, her concerns are extremely founded, her point about there being a finite number of doctors, given that we know that 42 per cent of doctors – and we would speculate that that's a growing number – are willing to leave this province because of the lack of support that they see from this government. She says: the concern is that these patients with less complex medical needs will be seen quickly in private facilities whereas others will end up waiting longer in the public system.

You know, this is one of my biggest concerns with privatization and with this move towards private systems. I mean, we've talked about this in other examples in the House. I've chatted about concerns of privatization when it comes to the education system. We know there are countless jurisdictions around the world – of course, my background is in education, so I have a bit of knowledge on this topic, this idea that when you move to greater privatization in the education system, resources are diverted from the public system. Parts of the United States are case studies in this, where you see public education systems suffering. So my worry – and it's a founded one as well in the health care system – is that those who have the most will get the best service and that, of course, vulnerable populations may be left behind. As somebody who represents a riding where we do have some of the highest levels of child poverty, where we have some of the highest numbers of folks experiencing homelessness on our streets, that worries me. That absolutely worries me.

And it worries a number of health advocate organizations as well. Friends of Medicare, for example, an organization that's been fighting for strong, publicly funded health care for decades, points out that Bill 30 is just another step in privatization. They point out, as I've pointed out multiple times in this House: why are we attacking our public health care system in the midst of a pandemic? In the middle of a pandemic – I know I've said it many times, and I'll say it again, and I'll keep saying it – is a time in which we should be examining our systems. It's a time in which we should

acknowledge that – you know what? – we need to strengthen our public services. We need to strengthen health care. We need to strengthen education. We know that our systems are inadequate, and that's not on one government. Absolutely not. It's a time to reassess and to recognize that, you know, if our systems are leaving people behind, let's focus on them, right? Let's focus on investing in people and not focus on profit and further privatization.

You might say, you know – and we hear it in the House a lot – that this is fearmongering, especially the concerns around privatization, but it's clear in this bill. Friends of Medicare goes on to point out that – you know what? – we're not going to see a modernized health care system. Instead, we're being fed the same tired old strategy of cutting and privatizing. They hearken back to the Klein days, the third way.

When this government talks about modernizing the health care system, you know, taking an Alberta approach, I would argue, Friends of Medicare would argue, and a lot of folks on this side of the House would argue that actually it's a tired old approach that we know hasn't been proven effective to support the broader population, that we know will leave many Albertans behind, again at a time when we should be strengthening our public health care system. How we could be modernizing is by truly investing in, is by in fact expanding our health care system, right?

Friends of Medicare points out: well, why not even think about areas like pharmacare, dental, vision care – right? – really ensuring that Albertans, especially at a time when folks are struggling economically, have the whole net of health care services around them? Instead, so-called modernization is being played out directly as privatization.

I want to talk a little bit more. Of course, like I said, privatization is one of my biggest concerns.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A pleasure to rise under 29(2)(a) to comment briefly on the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood's speech, that she just delivered, regarding the amendment to the health care act that the government has brought forward.

I know the theme of her comments revolved quite a bit around constituents' concerns, and I think all members would be able to agree with me that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is probably setting a pretty high standard when it comes to keeping close to her constituents and being able to communicate with constituents on a two-way street, because we see it on her social media channels on a daily basis. I can only hope to aspire to come within a small fraction of a percentage of the type of communication abilities that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood demonstrates every day. The amount of fidelity that her constituents have in their communication back to her and their willingness to share publicly on social media is a real tribute to how she's taken her role as an MLA seriously and how I think all of us in this House can only seek to emulate that.

I don't accept that it's simply a matter of intergenerational or generational abilities. There are many people of my age or older who are much better at social media than I, but I certainly take a lesson every day from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood about communication with her constituents. On this issue, with respect to health care and Bill 30 and the interchange that the member has had with her constituents, knowing how threatened they feel about this piece of legislation, it gives pause to any member, I think, to realize the gravity of the legislation we're considering and to see the wisdom in making a referral to

committee so that the seriousness of it can be properly respected and the committee can properly delve into the very large details and many components of this piece of legislation.

The member talked about how concerned her constituents were with the undermining of our public health care system, as they see it, in their communications to her by social media and by private communications. I think that it's an open book that the member has with her constituents, that on a regular basis demonstrates the concerns that she's brought to light here on their behalf in the Legislature, much to her credit. Many of those constituents of hers have expressed how shocked they were at how this government has decided to act in its relationship with Alberta's doctors and our health care workers as well, our nurses and other health care professionals.

Certainly, her constituents feel that the government has disrespected the doctors and that the physicians are therefore reacting in a very defensive way to tell the government that this is not the way that they expect to be treated. Many, of course, are deciding that they're going to leave the province, and many others are planning to leave if indeed these measures actually are enforced.

5:00

Health care workers, as I mentioned before, in my constituency are struggling at the Misericordia hospital along with executive members to really get a handle on an outbreak at the Mis. That is a serious health concern and demonstrates the whole fragility of our acute health care system given that the Misericordia in a matter of days had an infection that really ended up causing it to close its admissions even to an emergency ward, therefore showing how much of a threat other hospitals across the province could face if indeed the infection does take root in other hospitals. In a matter of days one major hospital is basically shut to admissions. Those concerns are being expressed to MLAs, including the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and, of course, to myself as the Misericordia hospital is located in the constituency of Edmonton-McClung.

I think the underlying concern that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and myself share, as well as our constituents, is that what we're seeing right now is an erosion, I would say, a decimation, or perhaps a complete loss of the public's trust of this government, not the public's trust in the health care system, Madam Speaker, but the public's trust in the government to manage the health care system on our behalf. We've seen it time and time again with the rise of the pandemic.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity this afternoon to get up actually for the first time here on Bill 30 and, of course, more specifically the amendment that's before us to refer this to committee, something I of course very wholeheartedly support. When you look at Bill 30 as a whole, there are some significant problems that arise in that. I should, if you wouldn't mind, take a moment to offer the many thanks to our first responders, our doctors, our nurses that are on the very front lines of the pandemic that Alberta and, of course, the entire world face right now.

I guess because of that, it's rather baffling to me why we would take this time right now to pick a fight with those health care professionals. I think by taking an opportunity today, right now, and referring this to committee, we will get the opportunity with which to consult with these front-line health care workers about the

challenges that are encompassed within Bill 30, which is funny, you know, because Bill 30 is yet another piece of omnibus legislation. I know that members of the government benches, members of the government caucus, that served in the 29th Legislature had significant problems with the previous government introducing a piece of legislation that they thought was omnibus in nature.

I would love, of course, then, to give this bill a chance to go to committee with the amendment to be able to even explore that a little bit further. Is it actually the case that those members still believe that omnibus legislation is bad, or did they actually really not believe it when they said it at the time? We would get that opportunity through the committee to be able to explore that.

You know, Madam Speaker, when I look at Bill 30, there are elements of it that very distinctly bring elements of the health care system that are in place south of the 49th parallel, or in other words, the United States, which is very odd because when I was in committee a few days ago reviewing another piece of legislation that will come back to this House here very soon, probably next week, one of the presenters that the government side members invited clearly said in that presentation that they need Canadian-style health care down in the U.S. I find it rather odd that one of their experts promotes that kind of thing clearly to the committee members, but we would then bring that up here to Canada.

Perhaps by taking the opportunity this afternoon and voting in favour of this referral motion to send this to committee, we would maybe get an opportunity. Maybe we could invite that specific presenter back again to find out some more about his experience down in the U.S. with U.S.-style health care, which we know, quite clearly, doesn't really help a lot of Americans down there. I guess the funny thing is that we don't even see them fighting with their doctors and nurses right now like we're doing up here in Alberta. I think our committee would have a great chance to be able to explore some of those things, you know, through questions and any kind of information that they could share with us, and be able to really dive deeply into Bill 30 and find out what the challenges will be, should we as an Assembly decide – I'd never presuppose that vote, of course – that Bill 30 would become law here in Alberta.

The amount of correspondence that I've received in my office, not only on several other pieces of legislation: it seems that for my constituents – and I'm even receiving correspondence from outside of my riding, Madam Speaker – Bill 30 is definitely, definitely up in probably the top three in terms of correspondence that we're seeing. It's not even sort of, you know, as all MLAs will be aware, that sometimes you'll see a letter-writing campaign, and the letters look absolutely the same as every other one with a different name. That's not the case here with Bill 30. To get that kind of correspondence in my office in that kind of volume tells me that this bill is seriously flawed.

It's very seriously flawed; hence why we take the opportunity to send this to committee. By accepting the referral motion that's before us right now, we will get the opportunity to ask for those responses from people and find out what it is that they are so concerned about. I have to say that in conversations that I've had online, on the phone with some, they're very, very concerned that should they need to access our health care system, especially in the event of an emergency, they're worried that before they get their pulse checked, they're going to have to get their credit checked to be able to do that. I think that poses a very, very significant challenge for people. Again, let's take that opportunity to consult with them through committee. But the only way we can do that is to accept the referral motion that is before us here this afternoon.

You know, I've heard other kinds of things, like: this is not patient-centred or person-centred; it's more profit-centred. I've noticed, especially through this pandemic, Madam Speaker, that we

have experienced some very significant challenges here in Alberta. Certainly, not as bad as we've seen in other jurisdictions around private, for-profit care centres for our seniors. We've seen some significant problems there, and I don't think we want to be expanding on that type of model. But, again, there is an opportunity for the Assembly to be able to review those kinds of things through the committee by accepting our referral motion that's presented here in front of us.

I've always said, Madam Speaker, to never, ever begrudge a business from making a profit. That's what they're there to do. I understand that. But you never want to be making decisions when it comes to people's health and, of course, a great many other things as well when the decision is based on that bottom line. That's when very, very poor decisions are made. So I would like the opportunity to see the Assembly place this Bill 30 before the committee to be able to talk about why that is not the best way to make decisions on behalf of Albertans. Like I said, the correspondence that I'm seeing within my office right now shows me that there are some serious concerns the way Bill 30 is presented as it is right now.

5:10

Perhaps we could solicit some feedback from – well, why don't we try getting feedback from our nurses? Why don't we try getting feedback from our doctors? Those are the ones that are on the front lines. Let's call in some of our first responders. Let's see what kind of challenges they might be facing as a consequence of this. Will potentially more things be downloaded onto them because people will start saying: "I can't afford to go to the hospital. Can't you just treat me right here, right now?" That in itself starts to pose some very significant concerns. Are we going to have to now start training our first responders more than what they currently get? What kind of funding is going to be available for that? I do find that that could be a challenge considering that I've seen this government deindex AISH, reduce funding for the fall alert system.

We're looking for all of these little savings here and there. Is this government really going to take a stand and say: well, you know, if we're going to start bringing in an American-style type of health care system, like what is proposed here in Bill 30, are we prepared to start funding more training for first responders? They may be responsible for more care because someone says: "I don't have enough room on my credit card. Please don't take me to the hospital. Please don't take me to a care centre."

[The Speaker in the chair]

This gives us the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to be able to study these kinds of things, study them in depth. Let's take the time that it requires. You know, just simply rushing because you think you're reducing some kind of red tape or something like that that exists within the province: it's not in the best interests of Albertans. As you can imagine, I certainly am looking forward and hoping that all members of the Assembly will be willing to accept this amendment to be able to study this further.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I seem to remember that back in the 29th Legislature it seemed that the government could never ever, no matter what, do enough consultation. It was never sending things to committee enough and looking at the details of what's contained in the legislation. If that's the type of position that you're going to take, then you need to be willing to follow through with it on the other side. So here we are on the other side, and I've certainly seen a lack of this kind of commitment.

Again, it goes back to some of my earlier comments around omnibus legislation. If we're going to criticize what was one piece of legislation being omnibus, and now we see that in many pieces of legislation that we've seen thus far, then let's send Bill 30 to

committee. Let's find out if indeed that is true. If this is the best method to go forward with our health care system, there should be no problem sending it to a committee. We can bring in all the stakeholders that we need to bring. You know, let's not limit it, like I know we've done in one of our committees. We need to get – due diligence, I believe it is, if I remember that right – 10 of your peers, at the very least, and find out where they lie in terms of this subject matter that you're talking about at the time. We shouldn't be afraid to call in stakeholders like our nurses, like our doctors, and find out what it is that they think. Would they be able to implement this legislation? That's really what it comes down to. At the end of the day we can come up with all kinds of interesting legislation that we think will work best for Alberta and for Albertans and it'll be the most cost effective and everything like that, but our hard-working nurses, our hard-working doctors might look at it and say: there's no way we can do it. I've always said that the people working on the front lines are the ones that know best how to do their job, and it's those opinions that are the most valuable in terms of being able to tap into.

We used to do that a lot, Mr. Speaker, through our health and safety committee back at my previous job, before I was elected to serve the residents of Edmonton-Decore. I always appreciated when, you know, managers would come to us, the workers, and say: "Here's what we're thinking about. Would you be able to do it?" and if we couldn't, then they were willing to amend or change directions in order to be able to accomplish it. But then that responsibility came to us to be able to give them the best information that we could that wouldn't sacrifice the work.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me. Before I make some comments on what was a fantastic speech from my friend from Edmonton-Decore, I just would like to say that I noticed that at your right-hand side you have a fan. Despite what sits on your right-hand side, Mr. Speaker, I want you to know that I will always be your biggest fan. I hope that in no way biases you in your future rulings on points of order that are bound to be raised against me.

I want to address, if I can, some of the issues that my friend from Edmonton-Decore raised in his speech, and that was looking at some of the potential unintended consequences that this bill may entail. He suggested that perhaps the government is rushing this legislation through without really understanding what the impacts will be to everyday Albertans. I would just like to offer a response to that and perhaps give my friend from Edmonton-Decore an opportunity to respond to that.

I suspect that the UCP has given a great deal of thought to this legislation. With \$20 billion spent annually on health care, we know that there have been private profiteers who look at that \$20 billion and want to get a significant piece of that to give to their own shareholders, and we know that the Conservatives have for a long time and in many different ways attempted to privatize health care systems so that corporate profiteers can put some of that \$20 billion into their own shareholders' pockets. I suspect that the UCP understands this and, in fact, intends that to be the case.

You know, because the Member for Edmonton-Decore made a number of comments about how this legislation will impact everyday Albertans, I would suggest to that member, Mr. Speaker, that it's not everyday Albertans that the UCP is concerned about; it is the potential corporations who stand to gain a lot of profits for their shareholders who they're primarily concerned about and that the impacts to everyday Albertans who will be shut out of the

private health care system that they're trying to set up because they can't afford it: that's a secondary thought if they think about those people whatsoever. That's one thing that I would like the member to, if he gets a chance, respond to.

5:20

The other thing was about the use of committees. As one of my friends raised in debate last night, we saw an endless stream of suggestions from the then opposition that every bill that we brought forward when we were government should be sent to committee for proper study and review. In fact, they pointed to the federal Parliament and their processes as the model for us to follow. So I was surprised, Mr. Speaker – and I'm sure my friend from Edmonton-Decore was as well – that when the Premier came into his position from Ottawa, he made a lot of changes here in the House to make the Alberta Legislature a lot more like his true home in Ottawa, where his heart is, yet he didn't really change any of the committee procedures to give committees a much broader scope of work, if you will, right?

I'm wondering if my friend from Edmonton-Decore could perhaps offer his comments on whether or not the committee structure is one where we think that this legislation could be improved.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I can assure the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that neither in the positive or negative is there anything that he can do to impact the Speaker's bias in this place.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you. I appreciate the questions from my friend from Edmonton-Gold Bar. You know, back in the 29th Legislature, where, of course, you served very, very well, Mr. Speaker, we always heard a lot about the unintended consequences and how those could be explored through the committee system.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Allard in the chair]

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

Bill 33 Alberta Investment Attraction Act

The Acting Chair: I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Madam Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity to stand up next to my colleagues today and talk to Bill 33, our Alberta Investment Attraction Act. Of course, in the last 14 months since government has changed, the atmosphere has changed, the feeling of getting Alberta going again, and I'm so pleased to be part of that.

Today, Madam Chair, on behalf of the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism I would like to bring forward an

amendment to Bill 33, the Alberta Investment Attraction Act. I happen to have the requisite copies here.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, we'll just need a minute to get that to the table here.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. You bet.

The Acting Chair: This amendment will be known as amendment A1.

If the member would read it into the record, please.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. Government amendment A1 to Bill 33, the Alberta Investment Attraction Act. This bill is amended as follows: (a) section 3(6) is struck out; (b) section 5(1) is amended by striking out "7 members" and substituting "11 members"; and (c) section 14 is amended by striking out clauses (e), (f), (g), and (h).

Madam Chair, as you are aware, the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism introduced Bill 33 in the Legislative Assembly on July 7. This was to enable the creation of an investment attraction agency called the invest Alberta corporation. If passed, the bill will establish the corporation's board of directors, and it will provide the legislative framework to enable the agency to deliver meaningful support to potential investors that would stimulate economic growth and job creation in Alberta.

Madam Chair, on behalf of the minister I am proposing to amend the bill to provide more flexibility as it relates to the board of directors, first of all, and then I am proposing to remove the ability for regulations that could potentially provide financial tools to the agency.

First, I am requesting to amend section 5(1) by striking out "7" and replacing this number to read "11". That will be the maximum number of individuals that could make up the board of directors. Madam Chair, this amendment is important because it will allow the government to attract potential board members from a larger, more diverse pool of talented Albertans from across the province and across our many diverse sectors. We need the right mix of people at the table who would bring their expertise, advice, and time to our government as well as help oversee the business and affairs of the agency. Since board rosters change over time, a larger board can also help manage succession planning more effectively.

The second amendment I am requesting is to remove section 3(6) as well as section 14(e), (f), (g), and (h). These are related. These provisions would have allowed government to provide the agency with financial tools such as loan guarantees or entering into joint ventures.

Madam Chair, in light of government finances, particularly the fiscal situation that this government inherited from the members opposite, we are going to amend the legislation now to reduce exposure to future financial burden. Our election 14 or 15 months ago, as much as anything, was about Alberta – Alberta free enterprise, Alberta families, Alberta businesses – wanting to have the opportunity to take risk, take and manage risk, create jobs, create profit, pay taxes, provide services, and share with all Albertans, share with all Canadians, not take on more financial risk. I heard time and time again about the concern about the interest costs that this government inherited, about the growth in bureaucracy in the government from 14 months ago, and a desire, instead, for our government to put in the tools to return the Alberta advantage. That's where this amendment comes from.

It's important that these amendments will result in the agency being highly focused on promoting and leveraging the fundamental economic advantages we have here in Alberta. Madam Chair,

thanks to our government that's the lowest corporate tax rate in Canada.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Barnes: Hear, hear.

Abundant highly skilled talent: Albertans are willing to take risk, willing to work hard, willing to create jobs, and willing to share. Madam Chair, that other Alberta advantage: our low cost of high-quality living, from our great activities to our great people to our great public servants and services.

5:30

In conclusion, Madam Chair, this legislation to create the invest Alberta corporation has been introduced at a time when Alberta businesses, Alberta's economy, Alberta job seekers, Alberta wealth creators need it the most. Now more than ever we need to attract job-creating private-sector investment from across Canada and around the world.

I am confident the amendment tabled here today will allow for the governance of the corporation to fully represent Alberta's businesses and industries and for the department, through this agency, to demonstrate continued fiscal responsibility and, Madam Chair, help our government restore the Alberta advantage and create opportunity for all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We have under consideration amendment A1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this amendment, which I find very, very curious as an amendment coming from the government. Now, I do appreciate that this amendment does address section 3(6), which, of course, we in the opposition had serious concerns about, the fact that through this legislation the invest Alberta corporation was able to make a loan, acquire an existing loan, issue loan guarantees, purchase shares, or enter into joint partnerships with absolutely no caps, no restrictions whatsoever.

In fact, I had a couple of amendments to make putting some collars around it. Actually, again, for a government that gets up and talks about, you know, blank cheques and costs and keeping them in line, the fact that this organization, until this amendment was presented, had a blank cheque – they could buy 90 per cent of a company, maybe a company that was going underwater, and suddenly taxpayers would be on the hook for a bad purchase that the government made.

Now, that's a positive side to this amendment, that it is striking out that section, but it begs the question: what is the purpose of this corporation other than now allowing 11 of your friends and insiders to be on the board when Invest Alberta was a division of economic development and trade? We created it in 2016 to do exactly what you folks have written a bill describing. You've basically given your minister a job description to go out and attract investment. The Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism: that's one of her jobs, but now you've taken that away from her and created a new entity with a new budget doing the same work as the minister. So I'm wondering. Now taxpayers are paying twice for something that should be done in the ministry. I have no idea how that is economically feasible or sensible and would love for one of the fiscal hawks on the other side to talk about how this duplication is not red tape, how this duplication is not wasting taxpayers' dollars.

If I've read the bill correctly, what is left that this corporation can do is make a grant or a contribution. Well, let me tell everyone in

this room as the former minister of economic development and trade that I had that authority as the minister of economic development and trade. We did not need to create a Crown corporation to be able to do the work of the minister. So I'm really confused.

Now, in addition to that, this amendment increases the members on the board from seven to 11. I can't wait to see who gets appointed to this board. Again, this bill is unnecessary, I think. I mean, the concept of attracting investment: one hundred per cent. That's why we created Invest Alberta. I agree one hundred per cent. Putting a collar around some of the potential tools for that corporation to use but giving them some tools to be able to attract investment into Alberta makes sense.

Now, I know that all of you are going to stand up and talk on and on about the corporate tax rate reduction. Again, I will be very clear on the fact that Alberta under the NDP government still had the lowest corporate tax rate in Canada. When you look at the tax rate, you have to factor in no PST in Alberta, no payroll tax, no health care premiums. Even with the carbon tax that we introduced, Alberta was the lowest taxed jurisdiction by \$11 billion to the next lowest, which is Saskatchewan. The fact that this government has created a race to the bottom in corporate taxes will not necessarily deliver the outcomes that you want. What it does is hollow out the government budget to be able to deliver on other commitments like – I don't know – maybe helping people during the COVID crisis, not picking fights with doctors, actually giving school boards dollars to be able to ensure our kids are safe. We'll talk about that another day.

The fact of the matter is that the bill itself is not creating a new tool. You're duplicating the work that should be done in the minister's department. You've now removed that, but now the minister's budget, to my knowledge, has not been cut or reduced. Now we have a new expenditure doing the same work as the ministry of economic development and trade, which I find completely baffling. Actually, I find it fiscally irresponsible, quite frankly.

Now, again, the corporate tax rate reduction, as members who have spoken to start-ups or if members have reached out to companies in Silicon Valley will know, is not the difference between landing a company, a big blue-chip company like an Amazon or a Facebook. It's not about the corporate tax rate. I can tell you that when they look at their different requirements or measurements on where to go, talent is number one, first and foremost, far and away.

Now, Canada had an advantage over the U.S. under the Trump administration because they put a restriction on H-1B visas, which all of the big tech companies – your Netflixes, your Googles, your Apples are looking for the best talent. That's what they want. That's how they're going to continue to grow, you know, and expand their market share. Taxes, honestly, in conversations I had with these companies, weren't even on their top-five list. Now, I'm not saying that they're not going to appreciate the ability to have less coming off their bottom line, but what's more important than that is, like I said, talent and quality of life.

That is where Alberta up until Bill 30 was a shining example, where our health care system alone, because it is publicly funded and publicly delivered, is a massive cost savings. These companies, in sitting down with them, outlined how expensive health care is that they have to pay for each and every one of their employees. We showed them the numbers of what they would save on health care, and that was extremely attractive to them. The distance between Alberta and Silicon Valley: of course, none of us here have anything to do with that, but it is a bonus and a benefit. Unfortunately, we've lost or I think we've lost – I don't know if we've lost all of our direct flights to the valley, but of course, I mean, our airline industry

has been ravaged by COVID-19, which is unfortunate because that will be a challenge to build those back.

In addition to health care, when they talk about quality of life, these companies care about their employees, and they know their employees want their kids to have the best possible quality of education. Once again, Alberta continually knocked it out of the park when it came to international standards. Our students, our education system is second to none. Or was. Laying off 30,000 teachers' assistants is not helping our students succeed. These are the investments that I find so frustrating that the government doesn't recognize as what makes Alberta attractive. It's not just the corporate tax rate. If we continue to move toward privatizing our health care system, making massive cuts to our education system, it is going to have an impact on the quality of education that our kids receive and hammer our postsecondaries, which, of course, is how we grow our own talent here in the province.

5:40

The former Minister of Advanced Education and I laid out a program, which wasn't a massive amount of money, but it created 3,000 new tech spaces, graduates. We actually put together a committee from the private sector, postsecondaries, others that came together, worked with every single one of our postsecondary institutions to say: "What can you do? What kind of program could you deliver?" We're not talking about rearranging chairs in a four-year degree program. No disrespect to the four-year degrees; they serve a purpose. But some people, especially many of our engineers, unfortunately, because of the collapse in the price of oil lost their jobs, needed a little bit of reschooling, a little bit of retooling. They could transition quite easily to a lot of the tech positions or programmer positions that many companies here in Alberta, our start-ups, are looking for.

I had a great meeting a little while ago with the CEO of MobSquad out of Calgary, who said: I have to keep going out of country because I can't find the talent I need here. He was a hundred per cent behind the 3,000 tech spaces. In fact, he said that it should be a lot more than that. I know that in our time as government that was, I would say, a pilot. We started off with the 3,000 tech spaces as an entry point. That's, of course, in addition to the talent that our postsecondaries were graduating.

I encourage members of the other side to go and look at, talk to Calgary Economic Development and ask them to show you Amazon's response to their HQ2 bid: 50,000 jobs, all well-paying jobs. That would have been the turnaround for Calgary. Calgary came together and put forward a very strong bid. I can tell you that the government of Alberta also put forward a strong bid. But you know why they didn't pick Alberta?

Mr. Nally: Taxes are too high?

Mr. Bilous: That's hilarious. Again, the minister wasn't listening. Alberta was the lowest tax jurisdiction. But you know what? Taxes had nothing to do with it. This is where the government keeps missing the boat. It was about talent. They said: "The talent pipeline isn't big enough. We can't move a massive headquarters and scale up," because they're not hiring 50,000 people in one year; they're doing it spread out over several years. "You don't have the talent for us to move here." That's why Calgary was cut off the short list.

But bill after bill continue to hammer all of the real Alberta advantage that we had in this province: investments in our education system, investments in our postsecondary system, a second to none health care system. Again, can it be improved? Of course it can. Are there efficiencies that we can find? Of course there are. But picking an all-out war with doctors at a time when

we're in a global pandemic is the most ludicrous thing. Honestly, this is where people write my office, scratching their heads, saying: do they realize that we're in the middle of a pandemic and we need these front-line health care workers to keep us safe?

These decisions that the government is making have an impact. These companies are constantly looking at what are the priorities, and you know what they're saying? The only priority of the current Alberta government is low corporate taxes, and they say: "Thanks. We'll go to another jurisdiction who actually understands that taxes are a tiny fraction of the equation. It's not the silver bullet."

The fact now that this amendment that the hon. member put forward, although it addresses the issue of – and I'm sorry; I don't trust the government with a blank cheque to either purchase, you know, 99 per cent of a company with no criteria whatsoever, done in the backrooms. We wanted a collar on this. Now, these tools, as far as possibly purchasing equity in a company: I think that's an innovative idea. I thought that was a good idea. Loan guarantees: we used that for our partial upgrading program, again that the government cut, and our infrastructure – or PFIP. Of course, I'm not going to remember the acronym now, but it was basically to go on existing pipelines to pull off gases to be able to upgrade them here in the province, and that was through a loan guarantee program. For some of the companies, that's all they needed, just a guarantee.

The tools that this corporation was almost given would have been tools to actually help them attract some of these companies. Now what we have is a new corporation that duplicates the work of the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism with no new tools but double the cost, double the bureaucracy, double the staff, and now we're also increasing the number of board members from seven to 11. Now, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat: I didn't recall if in his comments he spoke about the reason behind seven to 11. Maybe it was the argument of increasing the opportunity for Albertans to participate in this corporation, but I hope that at some point one of the members or the minister will address that as an issue.

You know, it's tough to watch programs and ideas that came from the private sector – this is another difference that I've tried to say: those tax credits weren't the NDP's tax credits. They came from the private sector when they said: here's a tool that will help industry. I know that the minister heard that from her task force. I know that for a fact. I also know that that was a conscious decision of the government to say: no, we're not going to do that. I appreciate that in the occupation that we have, God forbid you give credit to a previous government for something, for anything. But many of the entrepreneurs that I've spoken with are not partisan. They don't care which political party is government. They want good policy, so they were happy to see that there were some programs that were designed to support them, ones that actually put us on a level playing field. The province of British Columbia has had an investor tax credit since 1985, and – you know what? – it's been working. It helps their start-ups to scale and grow much faster. It helps to diversify their economy.

Kudos to them that the two political parties over there don't banter over whose idea it was or was it niche or boutique or not. I mean, that argument is so absurd. You can't say on the one hand: this tax credit is boutique; therefore, it's bad. But this tax credit that's boutique, that we introduced: that's not boutique. I'm talking about your film tax credit. You can't argue out of both sides of your mouth, like, two different positions, one when it's in your favour, and the next minute you're arguing against it.

An Hon. Member: Yeah, you can.

Mr. Bilous: Well, you guys do, and you did. It's just absurd. You can't have it both ways.

This bill is trying to address a very serious issue. We do need to focus on continuing to attract investment. In fact, that's why we also have boots on the ground – and I don't know how long it's going to last – in Silicon Valley and in the United Arab Emirates. That was an extension through the ministry, which was home to Invest Alberta, to augment the 12 international offices that Alberta has. That's one of the ways that we attract investment. And I know the minister knows this. We have incredibly talented men and women in our international offices that are working daily to promote Alberta businesses, promote our products, open up new trade channels, secure any supply chains, and attract companies back here to Alberta. Despite the fact that this government is trying to dismantle our health care system and our education system, I will argue that Alberta continues to be the best place on the planet to invest, to do business, to raise a family.

5:50

Although I am happy to see, on the one hand, again, an attempt to do more to attract investment back here to the province, this current amendment neuters this bill, this corporation. Now what we have is a Crown corporation duplicating the work of the ministry of economic development and trade. I'm excited to hear members, especially members on the other side who are supposedly the fiscal hawks of the UCP government, talk about how this isn't a duplication, how what they're tasked to do – I mean, this really is a job description for the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

With that, I must say that I'm not a hundred per cent sure yet if I'm going to support the amendment that the member put forward because I like the fact that it's putting a collar on these tools.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to stand and speak in support of this amendment. I think that when you look at the Alberta Investment Attraction Act, it's important to remember to always begin with the end in mind. In order to restore the economic prosperity for Alberta businesses and families, this government is focused on restoring Alberta as the most competitive jurisdiction in Canada to start and grow a business. The things that we do seek to leverage off that.

The former NDP socialist government didn't have that vision. You had no vision, and your results speak for themselves. Under the NDP government there were tens of thousands fewer private-sector jobs when they finished their term in governance than when they started. I've got to tell you that that is a profound failure. That is a profound failure founded on dysfunctional socialist policy. Why is that? Because socialism does not know how to compete and succeed in the real world. You chased away investment. The socialist NDP government chased away investment. This government is going to seek to attract it. That is in the public interest. That is why we're bringing forth Bill 33.

Now, I will just speak briefly to the amendments. We are not going to trust government bureaucrats or people like the NDP socialists to try to attract business. That is a recipe for profound failure. We do not want that. I must confess, Madam Chair, that I am so much happier, and I'm beginning to like the NDP more and more every day. Why is that? Because they're over there. They can't hurt Albertans and businesses anymore. They're there. They're harmless. They were sent into their corner. They can be angry – that's fine – but they can't hurt Alberta businesses and families.

We are going to focus on attracting investment to Alberta. The government is going to seek individuals who have competencies to do so. The proposed amendment seeks to expand that board of individuals who have competencies, who know how to compete and succeed in the real world. They are not going to be socialists. I would expect individuals who know how to compete and succeed in the real world. I support expanding this board from seven to 11. We want to have the very best people on that board.

Now, on to the other remaining amendments. As I mentioned, this government begins with the end in mind, and that is restoring Alberta as the most competitive jurisdiction to start and grow a business. That is how historically Alberta has been blessed, has been a land of opportunity not only for Alberta families and individuals here but throughout the country. We are going to restore that. We are going to set a good example.

The purpose of the Alberta Investment Attraction Act is to leverage off that reality, which we are restoring: the most competitive jurisdiction to start and grow a business. It also seeks to leverage off our natural competitive advantages, because in the real world in business that is what you seek to do to succeed. Now, I know the members opposite have no idea how to do that. In fact, our greatest natural competitive advantage is our natural resource sector. The members opposite, the socialist NDP, were not a true partner to our natural resource sector. They were not a trustworthy partner. They viewed them as a means to fund their socialist engineering goals and ends. The Alberta Investment Attraction Act seeks to leverage off our competitive advantages, including our natural resources.

It is not the purpose of the Alberta Investment Attraction Act to actually invest in private-sector businesses. That is not the role of government. I support the striking of section 3(6) on that basis.

The member opposite talked about wanting loan guarantees. That is foolish and irresponsible to long-suffering Alberta taxpayers. Why? Because the loan guarantee is premised on a lender not having confidence in the underlying commercial viability of the venture. A loan guarantee essentially passes off that risk, results in moral hazard, where a lender will loan to the business and subordinate their interest and would not have done that loan had not those commercial terms been available.

Madam Chair, just very briefly, I support these amendments. It is in the public interest. It makes this act better. It supports this government in its focus in serving the public interest and restoring Alberta as the most competitive jurisdiction to start and grow a business.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I recognize that I have very little time in which to respond to the Member for Red Deer-South, but I just wanted to make a comment on loan guarantees. It's interesting that the member is decrying loan guarantees. I'm sure that he should probably have a word, then, with the Premier, because either unbeknownst to him or perhaps there's something about the loan guarantee made to Keystone XL that's different from other loan guarantees that he just stood up and decried.

I'm curious, to the Member for Red Deer-South, why it's okay to give 6 and a half billion dollars in loan guarantees to the Keystone XL pipeline, which apparently is such a huge moral hazard in that member's view, but then he stands up and says that responsible government doesn't include loan guarantees. So I am very curious – I'd love to have been a fly on the wall in that caucus meeting to

hear what the Member for Red Deer-South had to say to the Premier and members of Executive Council on the day that they announced 6 and a half billion dollars in loan guarantees to Keystone XL. I'm certain that the member would be happy to join us in our call to the Premier and the members of Executive Council to finally come clean with the people of Alberta on the details of that investment, because we just heard the Member for Red Deer-South say quite

convincingly, in my view, that loan guarantees had no place in a fiscally conservative government.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the clock strikes 6. We will adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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