



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, July 28, 2020

Day 52

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, July 28, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and to her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power or desire to please or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interest 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 in the Speaker's gallery today. Perhaps the most important – and I think it's probably a tie. The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has a guest – his son Patrick is there – as well as the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration. His daughter has joined us. And there's some other guy named Gary Mar. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

All kidding aside, Mr. Mar, it's an absolute pleasure to see you here today.

Also joining us are guests of the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville today – the guests are Gary and Olive Kalynchuk – and a number of various interns from ministers' offices. I would never want to presuppose a decision of the Assembly, but on the off chance that we are heading to the end of session, they have joined us to observe question period in a very official manner. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Premier's Speech Writer's Remarks

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a little over a month since we learned the truth about this Premier's speech writer. Over the last two decades Paul Bunner has published some of the most vile, hateful, and racist things I have ever read. He called the shameful legacy of residential schools a "bogus genocide." He said race was the defining element in violence, and he talked about the Jamaican ghetto of Toronto. He attacked multiculturalism, women, indigenous survivors of the residential school system, and so much more disgusting hatred that I will not read into *Hansard*, but somehow this Premier and government are standing by him.

This Premier and government, after seeing the hurtful and hateful comments of Paul Bunner, defended his right to a \$150,000-a-year salary in the highest office in Alberta. It's shocking, it's shameful, but, sadly, it's not all that surprising when we look at this Premier's record, Mr. Speaker. He endorsed a barbaric cultural practice snitch line, he praised a refugee child for his perfect unaccented English, he asked defence minister Sajjan for an English-to-English translation: these sound like the sort of things that Paul Bunner would have written.

This Premier has never apologized for hurtful speech from his past. The Premier's steadfast defence of his racist speech writer speaks loud and clear to Albertans about how committed he really is to tackling systemic racism in Alberta. There can be only one reason why the Premier insists on defending Paul Bunner. If this Premier was serious about erasing the scourge of racism from Alberta, he would apologize for his hurtful past comments and actions and finally fire the racist who works feet away from his office. Albertans are watching.

Thank you.

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

Bill 30

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've listened with interest over the last couple of weeks to the opposition debate Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. I've listened as they've told Albertans that this bill is scary, that it's going to create Americanized health care, that it will be the end of universal health care and the beginning of profit before patients.

We've heard these scare tactics before. The legislation that introduced Alberta's system of publicly funded charter surgical suites was actually passed back in 2000, Bill 11, the Health Protection Act. That was 20 years ago. Back in 2000 it was the same cast of characters, like the so-called Friends of Medicare. Just like Chicken Little that group has been running around for 20 years claiming the sky is falling. Well, the sky hasn't fallen, and health care in Alberta today is no more Americanized than it was 20 years ago.

While the opposition focuses on their scare tactics, I'm here to talk about patients. These are the people who benefit from reduced wait times, like Russ from my constituency, who's now in a wheelchair as he waits for years for a hip replacement, or Lois, who's been active all her life but now who depends on painkillers because she's on a long wait-list for a knee. On several occasions I visited Montana and ran into folks I know from Calgary. They weren't there for a holiday, Mr. Speaker. They were there so their spouse could get a joint replaced.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve better. Bill 30 will ensure that Albertans have shorter wait times for life-improving procedures by opening charter surgical clinics that support patients now rather than later. We need to be patient-focused, and Bill 30 will do just that.

Thank you.

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

Human Trafficking

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. July 30 marks the world day against human trafficking. Everyone deserves to feel safe, free from exploitation and coercion. Human trafficking is often described as modern-day slavery. It robs its victims of their most basic human rights. It is impossible to know the full magnitude of this crime. It affects people of all ages, genders, and backgrounds. Human trafficking is a complex issue with a diverse range of circumstances that occurs not only on a global scale but here in our province, our communities, sometimes as close as the house next door or the business down the street. It primarily takes three forms: sexual exploitation, forced labour trafficking, and trafficking in human organs or tissues.

Alberta is taking action to be a leader in Canada's approach to protecting and empowering survivors. It is our duty to bring these violations to light, and by passing Bill 8, it's a first step on the path to protecting Albertans from human trafficking.

I want to recognize the important work of those who fight every day towards ending this violation of human rights around the world, from first responders to councillors, volunteers, and to the victims themselves.

If you are a victim and need help, the Canadian human trafficking hotline is available around the clock at 1.833.900.1010. It is a confidential, multilingual service that connects victims and survivors with local emergency transition and long-term supports and services across the country and connects callers to law enforcement where needed.

Human trafficking is one of the fastest growing crimes in the world. We can no longer let this issue be the one that is too uncomfortable to discuss. Our government is taking action, and we will continue to address this serious issue and work to protect vulnerable Albertans.

Disability Service Direct Operations

Ms Renaud: There are now under 60 days left before the UCP moves ahead with its plan to privatize disability supports delivered by Rosecrest, RSS in Edmonton, and GSS in Calgary. In government language it's called direct operations. Oddly enough, Michener Centre in Red Deer, Red Deer-North, to be specific, the Minister of Education's constituency and her old employer, which is also in direct operations, was left off the list.

So we're clear, Mr. Speaker, the children and adults who are cared for by government-delivered disability services are some of the most medically fragile disabled children in Alberta. Half of the kids who currently live full-time at Rosecrest are indigenous and come from rural remote communities in Alberta. The vast majority of these kids do not have private guardians like family but are children in care represented by government. If members of this House are concerned about indigenous children in care, then I suggest you pay attention to what is happening here.

I know the minister of social services knows this as she stopped by to visit Rosecrest recently, and that's great. The UCP is so focused on their goal of dismantling public service, in this case by privatizing services, that they're literally putting the lives and well-being of hundreds of children and adults and families at risk. They're doing this during a global pandemic and public health emergency. Our infection rates, hospital and ICU admissions are rising: the curve is no longer flat. Yes, this UCP government is hell bent on privatizing this tiny piece of service delivery, and for what? I'll tell you why. A grand total of about \$3 million a year. No calculation of the cost of risk, the cost of hospitalization in places like the Stollery or moves to long-term care.

1:40

We've seen the result of ideologically driven, sloppily managed transitions before. We saw it in 2014 when people died. People from Michener Centre died when they were moved to long-term care.

Again, we are asking this government to stop before it's too late. Stop and consult. Consult physicians. Consult families. Consult guardians. Consult allies. Consult professionals. Consult indigenous communities and the child and youth health advocate.

Thank you.

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

Economic Recovery and Diversification

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province has been dealt some hard knocks over the recent years. For several years, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic conditions were

already tough. Families in my riding and across Alberta were feeling the impacts of low oil prices and poor advocacy for our energy industry. Now the public health crisis has shown how crucial it is to diversify our economy for the future.

Last month our government announced Alberta's recovery plan. This bold plan considers long-term needs of our economy and focuses our attention on measures that will diversify our key industry.

Alberta has many strengths, and leveraging this potential is at the heart of the recovery plan strategy. We have some of the world's most valuable natural resources at our doorstep. We have the country's lowest taxes, made even lower by the accelerated job-creation tax cut. Perhaps most importantly, we have the youngest and most well-educated population in the country. This is a strong foundation to build on for our future.

Don't get me wrong, Mr. Speaker. There is a long road of recovery ahead, but on that road of recovery there are many opportunities to grow and improve. In each high-opportunity sector we are moving forward to attract investment and help create jobs. From the up-and-coming technology sector to our thriving arts and culture industry, each growing sector of the economy will have a specific strategy to help it mature and develop.

While there are many uncertainties these days, the resilient, entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans remains the same. Albertans have the talent, the drive, and the creativity to help diversify our economy. Our recovery plan will help get Albertans' ideas off the ground and working to help restore the Alberta advantage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Renter Concerns

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is still in the grip of a global pandemic. Our unemployment rate as of July 10 is 15.5 per cent. For renters, many of whom are still unemployed, this government has added insult to injury. Late fees are now being applied again, and after August 14 landlords can begin evicting renters for being in arrears through no fault of their own. Now, in keeping with the theme of this government, there is little or no help for regular, everyday Albertans.

As the MLA for Calgary-Buffalo with the most densely populated riding in the province with the highest percentage of renters, I believe government's inaction is completely unacceptable. We are talking about the lives and livelihoods of our friends, family, and neighbours, and the lack of leadership and compassion from this government simply reinforces the thing people in this province know to be true: this UCP government doesn't care about Albertans.

Let's be clear. There are simple solutions to address the concerns of renters. First, pass a residential tenancies protection act, and ban all residential evictions during this pandemic. Second, introduce formal directions and guides to support reasonable payment plans between landlords and renters. Third, provide funding assistance to make sure landlords can make ends meet and renters can pay their debts. These are reasonable demands that will remove the confusion and uncertainty about what happens to renters after August 14.

This government prevented landlords from evicting commercial tenants but have done the absolute minimum to give residential renters the same protections. Albertans who rent their homes need clear, unambiguous rules that protect them from arbitrary decisions, provide clarity, and provide substantive debt relief. Albertans have already endured so much during this pandemic. They shouldn't have to endure a useless government, too.

Bill 32 Provisions on Union Dues Utilization

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, Bill 32, the Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020, is an important piece of legislation that will help protect Alberta workers. There are many reasons this bill is needed, but the disrespect that extends from the Alberta Federation of Labour and certain unions as they actively fund political parties and activities that work against the interests of workers must stop.

There are many examples of this behaviour. For example, we all remember when Unifor launched a lawsuit against the Northern Gateway pipeline even though Unifor claims to represent our oil sands workers in North America. Or how about the Alberta Federation of Labour president and former NDP candidate Gil McGowan opposing pretty much every pipeline project being proposed: Keystone XL, Energy East, TMX, Northern Gateway, and the Alberta Clipper. Surely the union workers who rely on these projects would object to having their union dues go towards opposing them. It could easily be argued that some union members are currently unemployed because of the AFL activity against pipelines.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Bill 32 will require explicit opt-in approval from the workers. Unions will no longer be able to use worker union dues to fund activities counter to the individual worker's interest. Union dues were meant to cover the costs of bargaining, enforcing collective agreements, and campaigns that advance the interests of their members, but when unions participate in campaigns that work against the interests of their workers, members should not be forced to pay the bill. In addition to this major step, Bill 32 will also provide other benefits for workers such as allowing workers to still accumulate vacation time while on job-protected leave and protecting them from union discipline if they decide to take a significantly different job with a different employer.

All of these benefits will come a long way to balancing our workplace and supporting our economic recovery, and that is why I am proud to support Bill 32. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Police Services

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, in the Fair Deal Panel report it was recommended that Alberta explore having its own police force. It is imperative now more than ever, with the overreaching policies of Ottawa, that we have control over our law and order in our own province. This is a constitutional right that we have, and it should be exercised.

The costs to operate the RCMP increase at a higher rate than the provincially run police forces. Also, a study comparing these costs found that over the span of eight years the cost of operating RCMP detachments rose an average of \$44.50 per capita. The cost for the Ontario Provincial Police force rose only \$37 per capita on average. The same period, Mr. Speaker.

Also, we can cancel the contract with the federal government and the RCMP with two years' notice. Providing notice that will cancel the contract can take place as early as March 31, 2021. Mr. Speaker, this would allow Alberta to terminate the contract as of March 31, 2023, at no cost, and with this two-year gap we can work out the details such as settling accounts over buildings and equipment, which the current contract already provides a road map for.

As a province we even have a basic template in place that will make this much easier. The Alberta sheriffs perform many police duties in our province with 950 sworn members and 16 stations. We could simply look at expanding them into areas that the RCMP presently serves.

Other than enforcing the policies that come from Ottawa, the RCMP also has issues that make it difficult for them to be effective.

The RCMP has a high rotation rate, unfortunately. The constant in and out of members in communities nullifies the benefits that come with being familiar with an area, its residents, its towns, and its particular challenges.

Mr. Speaker, further to the concept of making sure that an Alberta police force remains Albertan and accountable, I urge that the Alberta police chief also be elected.

I look forward to work on this file, Mr. Speaker.

Economic Recovery Plan

Mr. Toor: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's recovery plan is a bold, ambitious, and long-term strategy to build, diversify, create tens of thousands of jobs in Alberta. Albertans have risked their livelihoods to flatten the curve, and now it is our turn to help Albertans.

One of the ways we are helping is by investing an additional \$175 million into the Alberta Enterprise Corporation to expand access to venture capital for early stage start-up companies. Start-ups are a massive untapped market for Alberta, and with this investment we hope we can make Alberta the Canadian Silicon Valley. Albertans are creative thinkers, and with this investment we can stimulate and capitalize on this creativity.

Alberta's recovery plan includes a plan to make our province a world-wide leader in attracting investment for start-ups and many other businesses in Canada and across the globe. Invest Alberta is a new provincial agency that will lead an aggressive world-wide campaign to attract businesses, expand international offices, roll out the red carpet for prospective investors, and enlighten others about Canada's extraordinary natural resource industry. I was excited when Alberta's government announced the intention to open international offices, especially one in Mumbai, India, and I only hope we can expand into more countries across the globe.

We know injecting support into the economy during tough times is prudent. We saw its success under the leadership of former Prime Minister Stephen Harper when he created the economic action plan. Canada weathered the recession in 2008 better than most countries on this bold economic investment plan. I believe Alberta's recovery plan will have similar success and restore the Alberta advantage.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

School Re-entry Plan Health Measures

Ms. Notley: The curve is no longer flat in Alberta. Dr. Hinshaw is clear. Our province is backsliding, with more than 300 new cases over the weekend. She's once again desperately urging people to keep practising physical distancing. Meanwhile the Premier is delivering mixed messages even within the same news conference. Now, we know that teens transmit this virus, so how can the Premier expect Albertans to, quote, knock it off when he's packing teenagers into classes with 40 other kids with no masks? Premier, pick a lane.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta and parents have picked a lane. They want the safe reopening of schools, which is why we consulted closely with school boards, superintendents, the chief medical officer of health, Alberta Health Services to develop a careful plan for reopening the schools, because we cannot live in a zero-risk environment as long as the pandemic exists. We have to manage risk, and the risk of keeping

750,000 children out of school for potentially an entire year would have massive mental health impacts and lifetime impacts on them. We must do this. We must do it safely and carefully. That's exactly what we will do.

Ms Notley: Parents do want the safe reopening. What they don't want is a cavalier reopening, and they don't want cavalier comments like "tidy up." Most people know that there's a bit more to it than that. The CDC guidelines for sanitizing classrooms say that everyone has to wear goggles, the rooms need to be ventilated, the chemicals can't be mixed with children in the room, every surface that is touched must be wiped down multiple times each day. Why doesn't the Premier understand that there's a difference between putting away crayons and the repeated floor-to-ceiling sanitization of a classroom that keeps our kids safe?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, what's cavalier is the way the NDP is seeking to politicize this and create fear. Apparently, she has not bothered to read the government's safe school guidelines, which include very careful instructions about sanitation of schools. It also includes \$120 million of additional operating funding, a quarter of a billion dollars for capital upgrades for schools, access to \$36 million in school board reserves to help pay for additional cleaning protocols. But what's most cavalier is the NDP's proposal to keep the schools closed, because they know perfectly well that we can't build 800 schools in the next month.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, now the Premier is being cavalier with the truth because he knows full well that that is absolutely not ever the thing that we said.

"Tidy up" has got to, however, be one of the most tone-deaf things I've ever heard in this House. About 70 per cent of teachers are women, and they have some thoughts on tidying up. Genevieve says: I tidy, but I don't sanitize, scrub, carefully clean surfaces that any students may have touched; there's a difference. April has a question for the Premier: I teach children with special needs; when will be an appropriate time for me to tidy up? Do you have an answer for her, Premier?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, once again, the government has provided very specific guidelines for the appropriate sanitation and janitorial work to be done in an enhanced way in the schools in addition to \$120 million. But let's be clear. The NDP has a plan to keep the schools closed for another year, because the notion of a 15-person cap on the size of these classrooms means 13,000 additional classrooms that do not exist, which would represent 800 schools that do not exist and training of 13,000 teachers that are not available. Their plan is to keep the schools closed. That's bad for Alberta kids.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has the call.

School Re-entry Plan

Ms Hoffman: Today the Member for Edmonton-City Centre and I were joined by pediatricians and school health specialists on a call that we had to call on this government to implement a safe back-to-school plan. "[The] UCP plan as it stands is essentially a large, human-scale experiment without safety nets to see what will happen to kids, their teachers and their respective families." That was Dr. Tehseen Ladha, a pediatrician with a master's in public health. To the Premier: do you agree that it's risky and cruel to conduct a school safety experiment that will put the health and safety of staff, students, and families at risk?

Mr. Kenney: No, I don't, and I reject the premise of the question, Mr. Speaker. We have a safe school reopening plan designed carefully with the chief medical officer of health, Alberta Health Services, Alberta Health, superintendents, school boards, and the Department of Education, with \$120 million of additional resources. What I find is appalling are the NDP's effort to seed fear and their plan to keep the schools closed because the impact of the NDP plan to keep the schools closed indefinitely will be devastating for the life chances of three-quarters of a million Alberta students.

Ms Hoffman: We want a safe reopening, Premier, and Dr. Ladha does, too. She says, "First and foremost, we must cap class sizes." She also stated, "Parents should not have to decide between school and safety." But that's exactly the choice that, Premier, you're forcing on Alberta families, three-quarters of a million of them. Premier, doctors are telling you that you must cap class sizes to keep kids safe. You have the money. You spent \$4.7 billion on corporations. You just haven't made it a priority. Will you finally cap class sizes, follow the doctor's advice?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we are following the doctors' advice, the doctors who are at the office of the chief medical officer, at Alberta Health, and the medical advice of the superintendents and school boards as well, that have consulted broadly to develop this plan. But let us be clear. The NDP's notion, their fake plan, a 15-child cap on classrooms, would require the opening... [interjections] She doesn't want to hear the truth. It would require the opening of 13,000 classrooms in the next month. That's building 800 schools. We will not let the NDP keep the schools closed.

Ms Hoffman: If the Premier stopped and read our plan instead of making up his own talking points and trying to discredit it, he'd know that one of the recommendations is consulting with municipalities on additional space that's available already: rec centres, libraries, community leagues. Or what about the universities, Premier, that are going online? All of those classroom spaces are available. You don't need to fear and smear in this place. You need to come up with a plan. Alberta families are counting on you. Will you roll up your sleeves – you've had since March – to actually take concrete steps to invest even a dime in increasing safety for students and making sure that the staff that work with them and the families they go home to at night won't get COVID-19, Premier?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, \$128 million in additional operating funds is a lot of dimes. A quarter of a billion dollars in additional capital investments in the schools is a lot of dimes. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. You might not like the answer, but the Speaker has the right to hear the answer.

Mr. Kenney: The \$36 million in released school board reserves is a lot of dimes. Mr. Speaker, let's be absolutely clear. Either we open the schools safely, which is in the best interests of three-quarters of a million children, or we listen to the NDP with their fake plan to keep the schools shut, which would have a negative impact on their long-term life prospects. That's irresponsible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre is the one with the call.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the pediatricians and school health specialists that joined myself and the Member for Edmonton-Glenora this morning to speak against

this UCP's severely lacking plan to reopen Alberta schools during a global pandemic.

Dr. Natalie Forbes, a Calgary pediatrician referenced by my colleague, noted that this government cut mental health supports and other services for students earlier this year. She said, "The cuts . . . were a problem prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and I believe that problem will [now] only get worse." To the Premier: are you really going to sit there and offer nothing to support student mental health during a global pandemic?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP's incompetence becomes more clear by the minute. The member opposite seems to have missed that this government has made the largest investments in mental health support in the history of Alberta, larger than any other government in Canada, \$140 million prior to the pandemic. Now we've surged an additional \$53 million in mental health support, more than all other provinces combined times two, specifically with an emphasis on children's and adolescent mental health, including through the kids' helpline. It would be nice to actually hear a word of gratitude to Alberta taxpayers for those investments from the NDP.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When this Premier quotes a number, you'd better check it twice.

Dr. Forbes had many other concerns, too, Mr. Speaker. Families are coming to her asking if it's really safe to send their kids to school given that this government has not funded a plan to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in classrooms. Dr. Forbes said: "Medically, I can't do anything. This is a very difficult situation for Alberta families and I think we need more supports in place for school reopening and more clarity for parents, teachers and school staff before we can reopen." To the Premier: are you really going to dismiss the real concerns of Dr. Forbes and the families that go to her for answers? Is that really all you have?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: What I'm going to do, Mr. Speaker, is to completely dismiss the grossly misleading attacks of the NDP. I just enumerated . . . [interjections] I know the NDP leader continues to heckle every answer because she doesn't want to respect this institution, but . . . [interjection]

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting a Member

The Speaker: Order. The hon. the Leader of the Opposition has had ample opportunity to ask questions. If she would like to ask some more, there are at least a dozen more to come today. I would encourage her to use her opportunity to ask the questions when she has the call, not interrupt the Premier.

School Re-entry Plan (continued)

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government has provided more COVID mental health support than all nine other Canadian provinces combined times two, with a specific emphasis on children's and adolescent mental health. I just received a letter today from the children's helpline thanking us for this remarkable leadership. It's unfortunate that the NDP is so unaware of it.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton pediatrician Dr. Christopher Ewing joined us today because he's concerned about misinformation that children are somehow largely safe from COVID-19. Even the Premier's director of issues management mused about this on social media. Well, news flash: children can get COVID and become very sick. Dr. Ewing also noted that his own kids are often cared for by their grandparents, and he worries that students attending schools will become infectors for community spread. To the Premier: are seniors really expected to have to stay away from their grandkids simply because they're going to school? Is that how little you value Alberta families?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the premise of the member's question is that we should keep the schools shut indefinitely until the end of the pandemic, and that reconfirms the NDP's strategy, because they know that it is a complete fantasy. It's like a sci-fi novel when they proposed that we're going to build 800 schools, train up 13,000 teachers, create 13,000 classrooms in the next month. Hundreds of pediatricians around the world have said that it's important to get kids safely back into school. That's exactly what Alberta will do.

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

Keystone XL Pipeline Provincial Equity

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, when asked about the actual completion of the Keystone XL pipeline, the Suncor CEO, Mark Little, laughed and said, I quote: I don't know. No one seems to have confidence that Keystone XL can get built. Joe Biden has already promised that he would scrap the pipeline should he become President. This was the reason the private sector was hesitant to invest in the project, but unlike the private sector, the UCP was willing to gamble \$7.5 billion of Albertans' money on this project. To the Premier: do you know something that the Suncor CEO, Mark Little, doesn't?

Mr. Kenney: I certainly know this. The NDP has always been opposed to the Keystone XL pipeline, just as they were opposed to the Northern Gateway pipeline, just as they were opposed to the Energy East pipeline, just as they have been – Mr. Speaker, they actually asked our representative in Washington in 2015, upon arriving in power, to down tools in fighting for Keystone XL. This government was elected on a mandate to do everything possible to move forward with pipeline construction, and that's exactly what we're doing with Keystone XL, that would represent a real future for Alberta's energy industry.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, the government just scrapped the ability to make loan guarantees from the Alberta investment corporation because, according to the Member for Red Deer-South, they are foolish, and according to the government loan guarantees of \$1.5 billion spread over several diversification projects were just too risky. Can anyone on the other side explain why all loan guarantees are bad except the \$6 billion Keystone guarantee, which has, unfortunately, the highest risk of failure?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we've always been clear that on issues that relate to our vital economic and strategic interests, there may be a need for the government of Alberta to act, if the option is a total failure. We know the NDP wants total failure for the Alberta energy industry. That's why they asked Justin Trudeau to kill Northern Gateway. It's why they opposed Keystone XL. It's why they had members attending a rally with Greta Thunberg outside

the Legislature chanting: no more pipelines. But you know what Albertans chanted in the last election? Get those pipelines built.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, the Premier still refuses to help victims of the northeast Calgary hailstorm but brags about his economic strategy that includes \$7.5 billion to Keystone XL, \$4.7 billion to profitable corporations, and a \$120 million war room shambles, all of which has not created a single job to date. Premier, your economic strategy is a joke, which has resulted in cuts to education, social services, health care, and parks. Why won't you reconsider?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's preferred equity investment in the Keystone XL pipeline has helped to create 7,500 good-paying jobs. I invite that member to get in his Prius and to go out to east-central Alberta, go out to Oyen, and I can introduce him to the pipeline workers who are filling up the hotels and the restaurants, building that pipe right now. I know he wouldn't feel very comfortable in Oyen, but I know the member for that constituency, and I would be happy to introduce him to people who are able to put food on the table for their families now because of this investment.

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

Physician Services Agreement

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Medical Association and the NDP consistently attack our government for what they say are unfair claims and tactics towards the province's physicians. They say that our physicians are actually not the highest paid in Canada, they say that the decision to end the AMA agreement is unheard of, and they say that legislating changes in the physician compensation framework is unheard of. Most of all, they say that we've changed direction from the previous government. To the Minister of Health: can you please explain how our approach is, in fact, different from that of the previous government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to read from a letter from government to the AMA. Alberta "physicians remain the most highly compensated in Canada." We require "cost certainty regarding physician expenditures," which may rule out third-party dispute resolution. And, finally: "If necessary, the [government] will enact legislation . . . which will affect the current form of arbitration." That's from the government of Alberta in 2017, under the NDP. It's the same as our position with one key difference: they raised physician spending by \$1 billion per year, and that's something we won't do.

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

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the NDP claim that their government saved taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars by working constructively with the AMA and given that they say that if we just took their approach, we could secure the same huge savings – yet under the NDP government physician spending actually saw large increases – and given that physician spending currently accounts for 10 per cent of the Alberta government's overall budget, can the Minister of Health comment on our government's goals for negotiating with physicians and whether the NDP approach produced any better results?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not the NDP's understanding because it's complete nonsense. The NDP raised spending on physicians by \$1 billion annually, and they made up a fairy tale that they saved taxpayers half a billion dollars. The NDP acknowledged that our physicians are the highest paid in the country. We all know it, and we're not looking to change it. Our goal is simply to hold spending at the current level, the highest per capita in Canada. It's a reasonable goal, but the AMA has rejected it from the start. They're choosing to play games with surveys and newspaper ads, and I think they're doing a disservice to their members.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that the AMA and the NDP now say that the issue isn't actually about money, that it's about respect for physicians, and given that the AMA is holding a so-called vote of confidence and they say that it has nothing to do with money, can the Minister of Health please comment on the relevance of the current vote for negotiations?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a survey. It's not a vote. There was a real election last year. It's why we're over here and they're over there, but I'm afraid that the NDP are encouraging physicians to think that it's some kind of alternate election. As I said, over a million Albertans voted for us last year to provide this government with a mandate. Look, there's a serious point here. None of this is about respect for physicians. We have the highest respect for our doctors, but we campaigned on holding spending at the current level, and we think that's reasonable. We're moving forward on a new funding framework for physicians, and now it's up to the AMA to decide how they're going to be involved.

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

2:10 Energy Company Linear Property Assessment

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has already raised premiums, fees, and property taxes on Albertans in order to pay for their \$4.7 billion handout to profitable corporations, and it is now apparent that the UCP government is looking at changing the property taxes of oil and gas companies through the changes to the assessment model. These changes would only put a further strain on municipal budgets, leading to cuts to services, further increases to ratepayers' taxes, or a combination of both. Why is this government downloading even more cost to rural Albertans at a time when unemployment is at historic levels?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It is true that this government is reviewing their assessment model for linear taxes. The last time this was reviewed was in 2005. Since then we have had devastation in our oil and gas industry. We have seen companies go bankrupt. The whole essence of this review is to strike the right balance between the viability of our municipalities and the viability of our companies.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you. To the minister: given that Camrose county has said that these changes could lead to a 56 per cent increase to their mill rate and given that RMA states that "politically-motivated changes to taxation levels for certain property types should not occur through modifications to the

assessment system” and arbitrarily reducing assessments to support specific property owners is not only unfair but may have unintended consequences such as reducing services, will the minister listen to the 67 counties and MDs directly affected and immediately stop these changes that will dramatically increase property taxes . . .

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. The only group of individuals that interferes with politics when it comes to objective assessment of issues is the members opposite. Both the RMA, the AUMA, and the industry and experts and consultants have been working on this particular file for the last nine months. They have been duly consulted, and we continue to consult them with a view to coming up with a solution that strikes the right balance, once again, between the viability of our municipalities and our industry. I will ask the members opposite to not play politics with this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much. Given that RMA has said that rural municipalities are already facing an unpaid property tax burden of approximately \$173 million from the oil and gas sector and given that further changes to the oil and gas assessment model will only leave bigger holes in municipal budgets across rural Alberta and given that the reeve of Camrose county said that these changes will negatively impact every single rural municipality and lead to the dissolution of some municipalities, why is this government still considering these changes that will literally destroy some rural municipalities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, my first act as the Minister of Municipal Affairs was to inject \$30 million in order to save some of those companies that provide jobs and taxes in our rural municipalities. We cannot afford to let the largest subsector of our economy go bankrupt. At the end of the day, if that becomes the case, it is not good for municipalities. Guess what would happen? Zero taxes. We have a responsibility, you know, to maintain our municipalities and keep our industry going.

Homeless Shelter Capacity in Edmonton

Ms Renaud: The Expo Centre in Edmonton has provided wraparound services for people experiencing homelessness during COVID. It has been providing isolation space for those who are sick, meals, tax support, housing, employment services, mental health, day shelter, showers, recreation, cultural supports, many other services. The Expo Centre is closing at the end of the month. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: what is your plan to ensure that people can continue to access these services?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you for that question. Mr. Speaker, the Expo Centre was never meant to be a permanent site. It was always meant to be temporary in nature to deal with surge capacity during the heights of the pandemic. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the homeless shelters across the province and the homeless-serving agencies as well for their exemplary work in taking care of homeless individuals during this crisis.

Ms Renaud: Given that agencies cannot operate at full capacity in their own locations because they're expected to follow distancing guidelines – for example, Boyle Street drop-in capacity is down to 50 people; Bissell is at 30 people – and given that there are more active cases of COVID now in Edmonton and in Alberta than there

were for most of the time that the Expo Centre was open and that the chief medical officer has just said that the curve is no longer flat, to the minister: is it not the time to be looking at more ways to use facilities like the Expo Centre to keep Albertans safe? If you could explain to me what the transition is going to be.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I can assure everyone in this House and Albertans and Edmontonians that we are working very closely with the homeless shelters and the serving agencies to come up with a very concise plan that will make sure that we are taking care of vulnerable Albertans. We're also working very closely with the chief medical officer of health to ensure that we're in full compliance with all of the social distancing requirements.

Ms Renaud: Given that the UCP government has cut funding from affordable housing, in part to invest in shelters, and given that the solution to homelessness is, of course, housing – but in times of immediate need we agree that there is a pressing need for shelters – and given that during a global pandemic people with COVID are expected to self-isolate and therefore need somewhere where they can self-isolate, not just for safety but for all of us, why is the minister allowing this particular centre to be closed when it's clear that now is the time that it's needed most? Will you commit to keeping it open or keeping something similar to prevent the spread?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, we do have plans in place to take care of these vulnerable Albertans, and they will be released soon. Right now shelters do have capacity to take care of these vulnerable Albertans until these plans are in place. Alberta Health Services does have isolation facilities in place, and that will be announced soon. Once again, I do want to take this opportunity to thank everybody, all the homeless shelters across the province, for actually housing many Albertans during this pandemic.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Physician Compensation Disclosure

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night the Minister of Health introduced an amendment to allow the public disclosure of physician compensation, something the NDP promised but failed to do in 2015. Instead of supporting this measure to increase public transparency in Alberta, the NDP not only spoke against this amendment but actually voted against it and the transparency it would provide to Albertans. To the Minister of Health: can you please explain to the House why you will do what the NDP failed to do and publicly disclose physician compensation?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health has the call.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to see this House pass an amendment that will increase transparency and accountability in Alberta. Alberta spends nearly 25 per cent more per capita on physician services than comparable provinces. For example, a doctor in Alberta earns roughly \$90,000 more than a physician in Ontario, and it's important for Albertans to have the facts on expenditure, an expenditure that accounts for 10 per cent of the province's operational spending. Our government is going to be doing just that.

The Speaker: The Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that the majority of other provinces like B.C., Ontario, Manitoba, and New Brunswick currently disclose physician compensation, making it hard to believe this isn't already done here in Alberta, and

given that in 2015 the Member for Calgary-Mountain View was quoted as saying, "I don't think there will be a lot of contentiousness around this issue," to the Minister of Health: can you please explain to the House the importance of maintaining transparency on physician compensation, which amounts to 10 per cent of the entire provincial budget?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Other than my love of the word "contentiousness" – seriously, the physician compensation disclosure, as the member points out, is not new in Canada. Most of the provinces already publish payments, like she said, to practitioners. Under the NDP physician compensation increased by, as I said previously today, 23 per cent, and they refuse to tell Albertans why. Our intention is to create the most comprehensive disclosure in Canada to add to Albertans' understanding of the important work that physicians do and how we support our publicly funded health care system. Physicians are well paid in Alberta, and we're committed to keeping them that way, but we must also be accountable to taxpayers.

Mrs. Allard: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP said that they were going to publicly disclose physician compensation but once again failed to act and given that in 2019 the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said that doctor compensation comprised 20 per cent of the provincial budget and the people of Alberta have a right to know how that money is spent and further given that the same member went on to say, "It's complicated" and the NDP never followed through during their time in government, to the Minister of Health: can you please explain why \$5.4 billion in provincial money should not be hidden away like the NDP permitted?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP introduced, as you know, legislation to publicly disclose the salary of thousands of public-sector workers and mused about including doctors. As the member said, the former NDP Justice minister is even quoted as saying, quote: the NDP government is committed to helping ensure Albertans know how public money is spent. End quote. Once again, they were all talk, and that's why the NDP are on that side of the House and we're over here on this side. As Minister of Health I'm not content with an increasingly expensive health care system that doesn't produce better results and better services for Albertans. The bottom line is that health care is one of our government's largest expenses, and Albertans deserve to know how these dollars are being used.

2:20

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that this government rushed to hand over \$4.7 billion to corporations and that it had to cut funding across the board in order to pay for it. This includes postsecondary institutions who have had to hike tuition in order to pay for the UCP cuts to overall funding. Many have indicated that they are raising tuition by the maximum amount this fall. Surely, the Minister of Advanced Education is watching this closely, so can he please share with the House what the average tuition increase will be for students heading back to school this fall?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, let's clarify the total inaccuracy. There's no \$4.7 billion giveaway, but apart from that, let's stick to the facts, and let's discuss the facts. Under the plan that we put forward, over the course of the next few years the number of dollars that government provides to postsecondary institutions will shift. We need our postsecondary institutions to look at generating revenue from other sources, and we've made changes to tuition policy. At the end of the day, Alberta will move to being on par with the national average when it comes to tuition policy to ensure that tuition and postsecondary education remain affordable.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that that is not the answer – I'm very concerned that the minister has no clue of the financial hardship that he is creating for students – and given as well that students now pay thousands of dollars more in tuition over the course of their schooling so this government could pay the \$4.7 billion to CEOs and shareholders and given that the debt and bankruptcy due to student loans are already on the rise and youth unemployment reached historic highs in this government before the pandemic even, making it hard to pay for tuition, can the minister please provide a figure for how much more debt students will be taking under his government?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, let's clarify. It is the right answer. He just doesn't like the answer, Mr. Speaker, but it is the right answer. Again, he might not like the other answer.

But I do have to agree with the member opposite. He's right when he points to the fact that we are in a period where we're experiencing the highest youth unemployment rate in decades, largely because of the policies of those members sitting there, which is one of the reasons why they're sitting over there, Mr. Speaker. We have developed a robust skills for jobs agenda that is refocusing our postsecondary system to help ensure that we are setting our students up for success so that they have the skills and knowledge that they need to find rewarding careers.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this government has been in power for more than a year and a half and they have to start taking responsibility for figures such as high student unemployment and given that the government has projections on how many staff are going to be laid off and these projections have been way off at our universities and colleges, can the minister maybe try this one: how many more staff have been laid off than originally projected? What is the updated projection for total postsecondary layoffs?

Mr. Nicolaides: I guess the member opposite wants to talk about stats today, so I'm happy to do so. Again, under their watch, Mr. Speaker, despite increases in funding we saw no changes to the postsecondary participation rate. What we saw was rampant spending even toward institutions whose enrolment was decreasing. There was no accountability. We are being thoughtful and diligent about how taxpayer dollars are being used. We are in a very challenging fiscal and financial environment, but we can be prudent and strategic with that investment. That is why, again, we are being very precise to ensure that we are investing in a way to set our students up for success.

Natural Gas Challenge

Mr. Loewen: The Alberta government is committed to balancing the environment and the economy. We know that the province has incredible depth and breadth of knowledge in terms of innovation and emissions reduction in the natural gas industry. When the NDP was in power, they tried to reduce methane emissions by forcing

industry to reduce by detailing how and where to find reductions, and that plan would have seen the loss of thousands of jobs. We all know that industry just needed to get the target and they would be able to attain it and save jobs. Can the minister of environment tell the Chamber about recent initiatives Alberta's government is taking in terms of showing the world just how innovative Alberta is?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government made \$58 million available just recently with Emissions Reduction Alberta for the Natural Gas Challenge and together with private investment took it to \$155 million invested in 20 projects that are creating jobs in the natural gas industry at the same time as lowering emissions and capitalizing on the innovation that we have right here in our largest industry, a sharp contrast to the NDP, of course, who focused on a carbon tax, which was all economic pain and no environmental gain. Our focus is working with our industry, innovating our way through that problem, and we've got economic gain and environmental gain.

Mr. Loewen: Given that this project will create hundreds of jobs and attract investment to the province and given that innovation in the areas of hydrogen and natural gas represent exciting opportunities to diversify our economy and grow new markets in the province using resources that we have readily available, can the same minister highlight some of the types of work the Natural Gas Challenge is going to support?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, this project covers industries from upstream oil and gas to agriculture and forestry to transportation. It will result in emission reductions by 2030 equivalent of about 750,000 cars coming off the road inside the province. At the same time, it's creating jobs in our largest industry, again showing the Alberta government's approach of focusing on supporting our industry and making sure that our innovators can come up with solutions for modern environmental problems that work inside our province, a sharp contrast from the NDP, who wanted to tax hockey moms and hockey dads. We instead are focusing on balance going forward.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the province's largest emitters represent about 60 per cent of Alberta's overall emissions and that the first thing that this government did was repeal the infamous NDP job-killing consumer carbon tax and given that these projects that we're discussing today will be supported by the TIER fund, which is financed by industry, and the industry is supportive of these initiatives, can the minister of environment tell me why Alberta's government has chosen to take this particular approach to emissions reduction?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we campaigned on working with our industry to innovate through the climate change problem that our world faces. Again, the NDP thought they could get through this problem by taxing hockey moms and hockey dads and everyday Albertans. Instead, we've worked with our largest industry, who produce 60 per cent of our emissions inside this province, and challenged them to come up with innovative solutions. It's working well. It's creating jobs, and we're coming up with innovative solutions that will benefit our industry right here at home but will also benefit the world, showing yet again that Alberta has the best oil and gas industry in the world, period.

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

COVID-19 and Workplace Safety

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, workplace safety is of paramount importance. Employers and employees alike have a shared duty to ensure that every work site is kept as safe as possible. Employers must ensure the health and safety and welfare of their workers. Employees must protect their own and others' safety. During the current pandemic the definition of what exactly constitutes a safe workplace is shifting as we all try to incorporate new information about best practices on a regular basis. My question is to the Minister of Labour and Immigration. Can you please update this House as to the number of unsafe-work refusals your department has documented during the pandemic and what trends, if any, you might be noticing?

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

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Our government is focused on the health and safety of workers, in fact all Albertans, as we move through this pandemic. I first want to take my hat off to Alberta workers and employers who have worked very hard together to ensure that we keep workplaces safe in the tens of thousands of workplaces we have in this province. Since COVID-19 we've had 18 work refusals to date. I'm pleased that of the 18, the vast majority, 16 of them, have been resolved without a decision, have been resolved with the help of occupational health and safety officers working with the parties to solve the issue.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that when asked yesterday about the lack of specific supports for schools to safely reopen during the pandemic, the Premier stated that teachers will be asked to help tidy up and given that many other jurisdictions have established having a maximum class size as part of their safe working environment for teachers during this pandemic, to the minister: how will your ministry ensure that schools are safe work sites for teachers and support staff, some of whom are older or have pre-existing conditions that make them vulnerable to COVID-19? What specific processes have you put in place to address safety concerns from teachers as they arise?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As noted by my colleague the Minister of Education and also noted by the Premier, we have a safe school reopening plan designed with input from the chief medical officer of health, superintendents, school boards, and the Alberta Teachers' Association. If there are concerns, as with any workplace, by particular employees, we urge employees to work with employers through the joint health and safety committees to raise these concerns so they can work through that. We have a robust plan, and our focus is going to be ensuring that that plan is safe for both students and for workers.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, given that this government and this minister announced last year that Alberta workplaces don't need joint work-site health and safety committees at every work site anymore and given that the minister specifically used school boards as an example scenario and said that having committees at every school with workers trained to identify and mitigate hazards was, quote, administrative burdens and given – fast-forward a year to today – that it sure would be nice to have that in place, Minister, when we are talking about going back to school and the many

unique issues and differences at every school, don't you agree it would have been helpful to have that system still in place?

2:30

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, that system still is in place. Health and safety committees exist for each employer. They have representatives from the worker side or the unions where unions are in place, and they have representatives from the employers. They're still in place. They're still involved. My understanding is that this was involved in regard to developing this plan, with the direction of the chief medical officer of health, with the schools. Again, we urge all employees who have concerns to talk to their employers. It is a joint responsibility, as noted by the hon. member opposite, and workers and employers have done a marvellous job to date. We ask them to continue to do that work.

School Re-entry Plan and Education Funding

Ms Phillips: Yesterday I quoted Lethbridge parents worried about the resources in our schools this fall, and the Premier dismissed concerned parents, saying that investing in safe schools was living in "cloud-cuckoo-land." Well, first of all, the Premier is advised not to talk down to Lethbridge moms worried about their kids' safety in school, but my question is for the Finance minister. How does the minister justify cutting \$128 million from Education, replacing \$120 million, calling that a funding increase when the overall budget isn't funding all the new kids in the school system even absent a pandemic?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that Education is fully funded in this province, and in fact we've accelerated \$250 million in our capital maintenance and renewal program. That funding will be spent all over the province, improving schools and particularly earmarking \$15 million to prepare for COVID.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that in Lethbridge the UCP cuts before the pandemic resulted in the elimination of 41 support staff and four full-time teaching positions for a public board that is seeing growing enrolment, how is it that this Finance minister has had six months to develop a plan that puts parents' minds at ease and when asked to be accountable for his abdication of his moral responsibility to find the money to keep our children safe, he just laughed yesterday? Why has this Finance minister now made laughing at concerned parents a matter of government policy?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I have complete confidence in the plan developed by our Minister of Education and our public health authorities. Our minister has consulted broadly with health experts, our minister is working with school boards, and our school boards are adequately funded. I'm confident in the re-entry plan.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that the Finance minister is responsible for the capital plan and operational budgets and given that all of the school safety arrangements take time to develop, will the Finance minister table, for the benefit of all Lethbridge parents, his costing scenarios for smaller class sizes, capital improvements, portable procurement, extra staffing, PPE for southern Alberta schools? Will the Finance minister show his work and what he was doing for the past six months? Did he do his job, or did he just think laughing at worried moms would be a good enough public policy?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, one thing we will not do is adopt the NDP's fantasy plan for going back to school, that calls for 13,000 additional teachers, 13,000 additional classrooms, would come at the cost of billions of dollars, and would have to be implemented in a month. That is no plan. Our Education minister has a plan, and I'm confident that it will be successful.

Tourism Industry Support

Ms Goehring: Folks in the hospitality sector have been hardest hit during this pandemic, with lost jobs and wages, and they are hoping for a strong tourism season, but this minister of tourism is asleep at the switch. In our parks we're seeing trash cans overflowing, and government officials were cited by Global News as saying that garbage collection needs to be ramped up. To the minister of tourism: what are you doing right now to get our key tourist locations cleaned up so that they continue to be a destination of choice and provide good jobs for Albertans?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has done much to support our tourism industry, from abating the tourism levy from March to December of this year to leaving an additional \$16 million to \$27 million in the hands of accommodation and hotel providers, to additional supports through Travel Alberta, through additional marketing campaigns Travel Alberta is promoting to get Albertans to visit our own backyard. We are doing much to support our tourism industry and bringing livelihood back to those operators.

Ms Goehring: Given that we need our tourism sector to be firing on all cylinders to create jobs for people in the hospitality sector, that have been hardest hit during this pandemic, and given that local municipal mask policies are creating confusion, with tourists not knowing the rules and tourists getting concerned about what they can and should be doing, and given that uncertainty in a pandemic can drive tourism activity to zero in a moment's notice, to the minister of trade and tourism: why is there absolutely no information on local mask policies on the Travel Alberta website, and why aren't you making it easier for tourists to spend their dollars here in Alberta?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We encourage businesses and travellers and tourist operators and Albertans to go to the Biz Connect website, which provides all sorts of information on safety guidelines for individuals travelling in and around our beautiful province this summer. We're also providing all sorts of support and help to our tourist industry, for example, many of whom are small and medium businesses that have applied for our small- and medium-enterprise grant, that is paying out millions of dollars to support our tourists and our tourism industry. We also encourage Albertans to take advantage of our free mask program that the Ministry of Health introduced.

Ms Goehring: Given that Alberta needs good jobs and that the tourism sector is a place that can employ folks immediately and given that there were overflowing garbage cans across our key tourist destinations, with pictures going viral, and given that this government is taking no proactive action to help tourists navigate local COVID-19 restrictions and given that the minister has no answers and is clearly asleep at the switch, to the minister of trade

and tourism: when will you acknowledge your failure of leadership, take some responsibility, and, most importantly, take action to solve the problems that you've created?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Problems that we created: that's rich coming from the members opposite. We've done so much to support our tourism industry, again, many of whom are small businesses. To date 10,861 submitted applications have been received for our small- and medium-enterprise business grant, which has resulted in over \$39.9 million in payouts for small businesses, again, many of whom are tourism operators. One small business even contacted our government to say: "The \$5,000 grant availability came at a moment in time more critical than you can understand. It has enabled us as a business to restart!"

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Physical and Social Distancing

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The phrase "social distancing" is sometimes used to refer to the practice of physical distancing from others. The phrase "physical distancing" is better when referring to this practice. Physical distancing protects the physical health of ourselves and others. However, it is vital to our emotional and spiritual health to stay socially close to family and friends. To the minister: at this challenging time how important is it to nurture close social relationships while applying recommended health and safety practices?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I'm just a layperson. The extent to which it's important: I don't think that I can speak to that, but I would agree that it is important. I think that's why throughout our response to the pandemic this government has been tracking non COVID-related health data as well so that we can make sure that we're also looking at that other information, and we can weigh that other information with the restrictions that we've put in place throughout the pandemic. It will be important information for us to consider throughout our response.

Mr. Stephan: Given that government never creates freedom – it only protects it or takes it away – and given that the right way forward at this time for a free and prosperous people is for responsible adults to be trusted to apply principles of safety and govern themselves in the activities of daily living, to the minister: what key health and safety practices are recommended as adults apply principles of safety and govern themselves in the activities of daily living?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suppose it's the principles of infection prevention and control as well as following the advice of the chief medical officer of health, Dr. Hinshaw, making sure that we're practising good personal hygiene, making sure that we're continuing to wash our hands, making sure that we are practising physical distancing when it's appropriate and wearing a mask when it's not an option for us.

Mr. Stephan: Given that a happy and purposeful life never was and never will be free of risk and given that our children inspire in us

hope and optimism for better days ahead and given that our children must be allowed to transition towards self-reliance and adulthood, allowing them to obtain an intentional education, interacting with and learning from others, to the minister: how can Alberta parents and adults set good examples for our children by practising recommended health and safety practices such as physical distancing?

Mr. Shandro: Well, it's by doing that, Mr. Speaker, being a good example by continuing to follow the advice of the chief medical officer of health, practising good hygiene, and continuing to practise physical distancing where appropriate, wearing a mask when it's not an option for us as Albertans.

2:40 Aviation and Aerospace Industry Development

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, the aerospace industry has a track record of employing over 10,000 Albertans and contributing up to \$1.6 billion to Alberta's GDP. It's a major driver of employment, economic growth, and diversification and has the potential to help us kick-start our economic recovery as this government moves boldly forward past COVID-19. To the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism: can you outline our government's plan and commitment to encourage and support growth in this all-important sector?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Aviation and aerospace is a key sector in our investment and growth strategy and will be one of the target sectors for increased investment by the invest Alberta corporation. We are going to be working to increase airline traffic and services, including airline expansion, expanding and growing remotely piloted aircraft systems, and promoting Alberta as a growing hub for logistics. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek also recently passed Bill 201, the Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act, which will be providing us with advice on growing the sector.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you to the minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that postsecondary education is key to creating a capable and skilled workforce and given that in the aviation industry we have seen a global shortage of trained pilots and maintenance personnel, not to mention skilled operational managers, limiting the sector's potential for expansion and growth as many baby boomers move towards retirement, to the Minister of Advanced Education: what is this government's plan to partner with postsecondary institutions to help fill this shortage and make Alberta a global leader in the aviation sector?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. First, let me just recognize the member for his incredible work and advocacy in this important area. The member is bang on. You know, there are a number of professions, including in aviation, where we're seeing significant shortages, and that's why it's essential that we take a very close look at our postsecondary system. Through the lens of employment opportunities we're doing precisely that. We've convened our Skills Task Force, which is looking at the future industry and labour demands. As well, we'll be aligning other postsecondary programming of that nature.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Alberta has a rich history of leadership and pioneering spirit in the aviation industry and is the birthplace of our much-beloved flag carrier WestJet and given that when innovation is prioritized and encouraged, investment increases, a sectoral ecosystem is developed, and more companies will want to come to Alberta, to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism: what is this government doing to encourage connectivity, innovation, and investment in the aviation and aerospace sectors to bring more airlines to Alberta, creating more jobs for Albertans?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Pre-COVID we already saw increased flights into Alberta, including WestJet direct flights from Calgary to Dublin, Rome, and Paris. We're going to be continuing to work with the sector to cut red tape that will encourage expansion of airline traffic and services, including growth by WestJet, Swoop, and Flair, which all have established presences in Alberta today. We will also be working with the strategic aviation advisory council, established by the member's bill, to expand our aviation offerings.

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

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my first time presenting an actual petition. Do I have permission to read it? Or what is the normal practice? Just summarize?

The Speaker: Hon. member, you can read the prayer. It's essentially the top part of the petition.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to present this petition on behalf of Asiah Grey, a young black woman who collected 82 signatures asking the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, as undersigned residents petitioning the province, "to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce a bill to repeal [Bill 1,] the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act", 2020, believing that it indeed contravenes many sections of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and creates unfair blockades for environmentalists, workers, indigenous peoples, and others who wish to express their voice.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there tablings? The Minister of Health has risen.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table – and I have the requisite number of copies – correspondence from government to the Alberta Medical Association dated December 15, 2017, in which the NDP government advised the AMA that first, physicians in Alberta are the highest paid in Canada; second, that our province requires cost certainty with what we pay doctors; and third, that the NDP threatened to terminate the master agreement through legislation.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually am tabling a petition, but it's short notice. I didn't make the appropriate arrangements, so I'll just table it. There are 4,200 signatures, all against privatizing direct operations.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Shandro, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College and Association of Opticians annual report 2019, College of Alberta Denturists annual report 2019, College of Dental Technologists of Alberta 2018 annual report, College of Dietitians of Alberta annual report 2019, College of Naturopathic Doctors of Alberta annual report 2019, College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta annual report 2019.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Special Sitting of the Legislative Assembly

37. **Mr. Jason Nixon moved:**
Be it resolved that a special sitting of the Assembly be held on Thursday, August 27, 2020, for the purpose of receiving and holding a debate on the government of Alberta's 2020-21 first-quarter fiscal and economic update and that on that day
 - (a) despite Standing Order 7 there is no daily Routine;
 - (b) despite Standing Order 8 and 29 the only business for consideration under Orders of the Day is a special debate on the 2020-21 first-quarter fiscal and economic update, during which the order of debate and the time limits on speaking are as follows:
 - (i) the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance may table the 2020-21 first-quarter fiscal and economic update and make the first statement not exceeding 30 minutes;
 - (ii) immediately following the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance's statement, a member of the Official Opposition may make a statement not exceeding 10 minutes;
 - (iii) immediately following the statement by a member of the Official Opposition under subclause (ii) and for a period not exceeding 60 minutes
 - (A) members of the Official Opposition may ask questions on matters relevant to the 2020-21 first-quarter fiscal and economic update and the statement made by the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, and
 - (B) the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance or any other member of the Executive Council may respond to those questions;
 - (iv) immediately following the expiry of the 60-minute period referred to in subclause (iii) and for a period not exceeding 20 minutes

- (A) private members of the government caucus may ask questions on matters relevant to the 2020-21 first-quarter fiscal and economic update and the statement made by the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, and
- (B) the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance or any other member of the Executive Council may respond to those questions;
- (v) a member who asks a question or a member of the Executive Council who responds in accordance with subclause (iii) or (iv) is limited to a period of two minutes at one time to ask that question or make a response;
- (c) officials of the government may be seated in the Assembly during the debate to assist members of the Executive Council;
- (d) despite Standing Order 3(1) and 4 the Assembly commences its sitting at 10 a.m., and the sitting concludes immediately after all statements and related periods for questions and responses have concluded, at which time
 - (i) the debate is considered concluded without decision, and
 - (ii) subject to Standing Order 3(8) the Assembly stands adjourned until the commencement of the 2020 fall sitting.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a fulfillment of the commitment of the hon. the Premier and the hon. the Finance minister to bring a fiscal update to this House this summer. This will be an opportunity for all members of the Chamber to hear the current status of what is taking place fiscally in our province given the economic situation in regard to the crisis in the oil and gas industry as well as to the COVID-19 situation.

It will provide an opportunity for the hon. minister to update all members of this Chamber and will provide an opportunity for members to ask questions to provide clarity. At the same time, through this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, it will provide the hon. Finance minister an opportunity to provide an update to Albertans as a whole on what has taken place fiscally here in August.

The motion other than that, I think, speaks for itself, and I do hope that all members will support it.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Government Motion 37 as proposed by the hon. the Government House Leader. This is a debatable motion according to Standing Order 18(1)(a). Is there anyone wishing to debate? The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the government for bringing this motion forward. Of course, it's incredibly important that we have this opportunity. However, it does seem unconventional, the way that this government has decided that they wanted to present this fiscal report to the Assembly and dictating so – I don't even know how to put it. It's so prescribed, the ways that we can actually ask the government any questions. For this reason I don't even know whether we can be for or against this. But you know what? It's very interesting, so I want to thank the government for bringing this forward, for giving us this opportunity.

With that, I'll finish my statement there. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak? The hon. the Official Opposition Deputy House Leader has the call.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to enter into the debate on Government Motion 37, which is a very long government motion. I would like to say that I think it's a really positive thing, that the government is looking for ways to give Albertans a good understanding of the province's finances after this unprecedented downturn. I think that what we're seeing is some of the concerns and the media coverage and the reports coming out about the impact of COVID-19 but also just the state of the economy, a lot of the concerns we expressed about the budget in the spring, that had to be passed in a very expedited manner, being quite valid. The current motion does not give us a lot of time to review, and it will be a very different situation from the budget in the spring to what is being presented.

At this point I would like to introduce an amendment to Government Motion 37 and then speak to that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you can pass it to the page, and she'll get me a copy for the table, and then I'll ask you to proceed. In fact – yeah. I'll ask you to proceed at that point.

Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A1. If you would like a copy of the amendment, please indicate by raising your hand, and we will have one delivered. If not, there will be additional copies in the tabling box.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll read my amendment. I move that Government Motion 37 be amended (a) in clause (b)(i) by adding the following immediately after subclause (iv):

- (iv.1) immediately following the expiry of the 20-minute period referred to in subclause (iv), the periods outlined in subclause (iii) and (iv) repeat in sequence until such time when no Members wish to speak;

And then (ii) in subclause (v) by striking out "subclause (iii) or (iv)" and substituting "subclause (iii), (iv), or (iv.1)"; finally, (b) in clause (d) by striking out "10 a.m." and substituting "1:30 p.m."

I know, Mr. Speaker, that without having the amendment and the original motion in front of you, that just sounds very confusing. But the reason for this amendment – even in the spring the Finance minister was quoted as saying that he could feel Rome burning behind him. We are really hoping that this new plan will have much more confidence and information. What the amendment is doing is just making sure that there's adequate time to ask all the questions that might arise. Our suggestion is to do that by repeating rotations when they are done but only until there are no more questions. There's not going to be a lot of time to get through all of this, and it's, essentially, almost a new budget. A new budget would get an estimates process, which will obviously not now happen for some time, but the ability to ask more questions would be incredibly helpful. It would also be really good for Albertans to learn more about the financial update and how it will impact them.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

In this amendment, which I really hope that the government will consider and accept, we essentially say: following the expiry of the 20-minute periods and those periods outlined, continue to repeat until such time as there are no members wishing to speak anymore. It's very similar to how things work in Committee of the Whole, although also different in that we should be able to continue to ask questions and to fully explore what's happening with this update,

that will be happening on August 27 should Government Motion 37 be passed.

With those brief comments I have introduced and described the amendment. I think it is of great merit, and I hope that all members of this House will support the amendment that I have introduced.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for five minutes of brief questions or comments.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I can respond to the amendment, or are we on 29(2)(a)?

The Acting Speaker: We are on 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, are there any members looking to join debate on the amendment? I believe the Government House Leader has caught my eye.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of quick things in looking at the hon. deputy House leader of the opposition's amendment. First, I'd like to provide some clarification for the Chamber. This is not a budget. It will be far from a budget. This is a fiscal update. The hon. member does certainly know the difference between a budget and a fiscal update, significant as far as content that will have to be gone over. When the hon. the Finance minister brings forward his next budget, we will, of course, go through estimates and that detailed process, which provides significant time to go through it with each member of Executive Council and their budget. [interjections] I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora heckling on a government motion to do a fiscal update. What's new with the NDP? They're even mad about a fiscal update motion to be able to figure out what everybody can debate. But that's the NDP: Team Angry.

Back to this issue so that the House fully understands procedurally what is taking place here, Mr. Speaker. This will be a fiscal update to the Chamber and through the Chamber to Albertans. The reality is that the government is under no obligation, which the Deputy Opposition House Leader did point out, to bring this to this Chamber; however, Alberta's government thinks it is appropriate given the extraordinary circumstances that this province and indeed the world is facing right now, both on an energy crisis side and on the COVID side, that we update this Chamber, and that's a commitment that we made to the Chamber.

But the hon. members are now asking for unlimited time on a fiscal update. The reality is that if they were doing estimates with the hon. the Finance minister for his portion of the budget – it would depend on whether they asked for two or for four hours. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition has an opportunity to identify a couple of departments that can have extra hours over the normal number of hours, but only a few. In that, they would have had upwards of – it depends how it would have gone, because we have considerably more members. I don't want to brag about the number, but we have considerably more members than the Official Opposition, and our members would have an opportunity to participate in the estimates, as they should. But the reality is that with the Minister of Finance they probably would have had, tops, between two and a half hours and three hours to talk about an entire budget.

The reality also is that we are providing within this motion a period of time that is longer than any question period that we would have inside this Chamber, so over 60 minutes for the Official Opposition and 20 minutes for private members even though there are more government private members than the Official Opposition. I have to brag a little bit. Even if you remove all of Executive Council, we still

have more private members than the entire Official Opposition. But the reality is that it is a more than adequate amount of time.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we have offered to the Official Opposition – and if they had brought forward a reasonable amendment along that line of asking for increased time, we probably would have provided that, but asking for unlimited time is not fair to the officials that need to participate in this, who also have a province to run. It makes it very problematic to schedule things for the Legislature as well as, and of the least importance, for the members of the Legislature who have to make travel arrangements to come back or go home from the capital on that day, because that will be the end of the sitting.

Again, I would encourage all of our members to vote down this amendment. Actually, I just want to back up. I'm just getting confirmation. They would normally get two hours total question time with the Minister of Finance during a budget, two hours. On a fiscal update they're getting over – add an hour, plus a chance to be able to make opening comments for about 10 minutes. That is entirely reasonable, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

Again I just want to thank the hon. Finance minister and the Premier for following through on that commitment to Albertans and to this Assembly, showing yet again their commitment to democracy to make sure this Assembly is updated on what's taking place. I would ask the NDP to start being reasonable in their approach instead of asking for unlimited time.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on amendment A1?

Seeing none – oh. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is actually available first if anybody would like to make quick five-minute questions, comments on the previous member's speech. Okay.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: Moving back to Government Motion 37, are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on it?

The hon. Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Waived.

[Government Motion 37 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 32

Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered at this time? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you. It is a pleasure for me to rise and speak to this bill. Mr. Chair, just for my own confirmation, we are speaking to the main bill, and we are not considering any amendments at this time. Is that correct? Okay. Great. Thank you very much.

You know, it has been discouraging for me to listen to some of the interventions that have been made during debate. I know yesterday we were here presenting a rather reasonable amendment from my

colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods to hold the minister accountable, to write the legislation so that the legislation would actually meet the intent that the minister has time and again stated was his intent with the legislation, and this was in legislating timelines for termination pay that's owed to employees when they've been terminated.

I think one of the things that concerns us about this particular clause of the bill, as many of my friends here on the Official Opposition have stated, is the fact that people need to get their termination pay, the money that's owed to them up until the day that they were fired from their job or let go from their job. They need that money as quickly as possible.

You know, I reminded the House yesterday and I know that my friend the Leader of the Official Opposition also went into great length about the dire financial circumstances that Albertans find themselves in during this pandemic. Even prior to the pandemic almost half of Albertans had less than \$400 in the bank that they could use to cover any emergency expenses that could possibly come up. Mr. Chair, I think it's fair to say that \$400 doesn't go very far when it comes to covering emergency expenses. I know I just had to take my car in to get fixed earlier today, a minor repair, not really a big deal, but now, you know, the transportation that I need is much more reliable. That cost me almost \$300, and that's a very minor repair.

I could think of any number of expenses, emergency vet expenses, for example, that could come up that could cost way more than \$400, emergency home repairs. You know, earlier, when the pandemic first started, Mr. Chair, my washing machine went on the fritz. It began leaking water all over the laundry room floor. To have somebody come in and do a rather simple fix on my washing machine was almost \$400.

So even in just the last two or three months I faced a couple of circumstances where I had emergency expenses that, thankfully, I'm able to cover. You know, it's no secret that we here in the Chamber are on the upper end of the income spectrum in the province of Alberta. I couldn't help but wonder what I would have done if I hadn't been able to cover that expense. Can you imagine, Mr. Chair, what it's like to not have a washing machine for a family of four, like I have, during the middle of a pandemic, when all the laundromats are closed? I couldn't imagine. I think it would be – you know, I've got two teenagers and a 10-year-old boy at home, and after a week of no laundry I could imagine what the smell would be like, probably a worse smell than . . .

Ms Hoffman: You can stop right there.

Mr. Schmidt: We can stop right there.

But, Mr. Chair, your mind can well imagine the barnyardlike nature of the smell that will quickly develop in a household of four that doesn't have access to a laundry machine during the middle of a pandemic.

To think that more than 2 million Albertans are in a position where they wouldn't be able to cover those expenses if they lost their jobs today is incredibly disheartening. And the fact that over the last year or so Albertans have become more economically precarious, not less, since this UCP government was elected makes it much more important that we have employment law that gets money into the hands of the people who've been let go from their jobs, for whatever reason, as quickly as possible. We can't control the timing of those emergency expenses that Albertans would be forced to create.

You know, I listened intently to the minister's response to the amendment that we brought forward, and let's just say that I didn't find his arguments credible. I think one of the fundamental

arguments that he made with respect to the amendment and that he continues to make with respect to the legislative changes that we're considering in this bill around termination pay are that employers need time to calculate how much they owe an employee once they've been let go. Now, he's never really specified how much time it is that employers need to make that calculation, but certainly the way the legislation is written, he's strongly implying that they need at least 31 days to make that calculation. Well, Mr. Chair, I would submit to you and to all of my colleagues here in the House that if an employer struggles mightily to calculate how much they owe a terminated employee, if they struggle so much that it takes them 31 days to complete that simple exercise, that employer has some issues that go way deeper than simple legislative changes to the Employment Standards Code that could be made.

3:10

Now, I've conferred with experts in the field of payroll, and they've all told me that any organization of almost any size knows instantly, like up to the minute, how much money they owe an employee at any given time. When they hear the minister get up and repeatedly make this claim that employers need 31 days to calculate how much they owe their terminated employees, those arguments don't hold water for them. In fact, there's a term that many of these payroll experts who I've consulted, who have provided advice to me on the matter, have used for the argument that the minister has made, but unfortunately those aren't parliamentary terms.

It's needless to say that people who are looking at the legislation who actually work in payroll don't believe the arguments that the minister is putting forward with respect to how long it takes them to assess how much money they owe their terminated employees. I asked these payroll experts, who are providing invaluable advice to me on this matter, you know, why it was that employers would be asking for this kind of legislative change. What benefit is it to them? They responded to me that they get to hold on to that money for at least 31 more days.

I can't understand, Mr. Chair, when we are experiencing the worst economic circumstances that this province has faced since the 1930s – people are losing their jobs in the hundreds of thousands and are desperate for any kind of financial support – this government is prioritizing employers, who will benefit so marginally as to be immaterial from an amount of money, that they will benefit from keeping that money an extra 31 days instead of making sure that it goes into the pockets of people who need it urgently. I think that that speaks to the priorities that we've seen time and again from this UCP government, that everyday Albertans are left to fend for themselves while this government works overtime to make sure that its friends and its corporate donors are well looked after.

You know, Mr. Chair, I think the people of Alberta were willing to take a chance on it a year ago in the hopes that perhaps the economic arguments that they were making would result in jobs and in an improved economy, but here we are almost 18 months later. There was no economic recovery in sight prior to COVID hitting the province. Now things are as bad as they've ever been, and this government continues to apply its failed economic policies that hurt everyday Albertans and provide every known financial benefit to the wealthiest corporations in this province no matter how small.

This withholding clause here in this legislation, this allowing employers to hang on to that little bit of money that they owe their employees for an extra 31 days: it's cruel. It's symbolic of – it epitomizes the extent to which this UCP government favours employers over employees and seeks to give every possible financial benefit to the wealthiest here in the province and lets every other Albertan off the hook – to fend for themselves, rather. Not off

the hook. Not off. They're definitely on the hook when it comes to making sure that the wealthiest corporations continue to profit.

The other thing that I wanted to address in this legislation is the issue of secondary picketing. One of the things that I think needs to be stressed when it comes to secondary picketing is how obviously scared the UCP is of organized labour in this province. As my colleagues here on the opposition side have mentioned many times, we have the lowest union membership rates of any province in the country, yet even knowing that organized labour is the weakest here in the country, that's still not enough. The members of the UCP need to make sure that they have no possible organized opposition whatsoever, and that includes this issue of secondary picketing.

I think it's instructive to look at the example of the secondary picket that was set up at a Co-op gas station in Carseland early in February. Members of organized labour set up an information picket at a Co-op gas station in February in solidarity with workers who were on strike at the Co-op refinery in Regina, Mr. Chair. What was at issue there, as far as I understand the issue, at the Co-op strike in Regina were some changes that the employer was set to make to the employees' pension plan. I don't know the details inside and out – forgive me – but it seems to me that the members of the Unifor local there, who represent the workers in the Co-op refinery in Regina, were engaged in job action because the employer was proposing to give new employees a pension plan that was worse than the existing employees were entitled to.

You know, in an expression of solidarity other Unifor members, I believe, staged an information picket at a Co-op gas station in Carseland here in Alberta just to let people know what was going on and let people who were buying their gasoline from Co-op fuel distributors understand the labour dispute that was happening in Regina and what their support of the employer meant to the employees at that time.

What did we see? We saw the Premier and members of Executive Council vilify those secondary picketers. They certainly encouraged people to break the picket line, all while maintaining so-called staunch support for oil field workers. It's absolutely mind-boggling, Mr. Chair, that the members opposite love to say, "I love oil and gas," and they wear the T-shirts here into the Chamber, which is fine, but what they really mean is that they love oil and gas employers, and when it comes to the employees, as long as they stay in their place and accept whatever crumbs the employer is happy to offer them from their table, then everything is fine with the universe.

As soon as those employees try to fight for better working conditions, better pay, the respect and dignity that is owed to them because of the jobs that they do, well, this government has nothing but derogatory things to say, and they're actively working against those people's interests. It's interesting to me, Mr. Chair, and I think the people of Alberta need to see who this government truly speaks for.

3:20

Like I said, they love to drape themselves, wear the mantle of supporting oil and gas workers, but when they were actually given the chance to show their support for oil and gas workers by demonstrating or at least expressing some kind of sympathy or solidarity with the striking workers at the Regina Co-op refinery, not only did they not have anything to say; they actively worked to break that secondary picket. They were sending a strong message to the people of Alberta that you should know your place, and if you don't...

Member Loyola: Don't bite the hand that feeds you.

Mr. Schmidt: Yes. Exactly. As my friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie says: don't bite the hand that feeds you. You have no right to organize yourselves to earn better wages and working conditions.

Let me be clear, Mr. Chair, because the members opposite like to paint the trade union movement here in Alberta and across the country as being anti oil and gas. Those members of Unifor couldn't be anything further from anti oil and gas folks. They make their living refining petroleum. They don't want to see the oil and gas industry go under. In fact, they want it to be successful. All they were asking for is a little bit bigger piece of the pie, and that was unacceptable to these members of this UCP caucus.

That's why I can't support this legislation, because it destroys workers' ability – it severely damages workers' ability to organize and fight for themselves to improve their own working conditions, and that includes the oil and gas workers that this government is supposedly working in favour of every day.

You know, Mr. Chair, there is a lot more here in this legislation that is extremely concerning to me and my constituents here in Edmonton-Gold Bar, but I think the issues that I've highlighted here, the cruel and petty pieces around termination pay that the government has put into this legislation and the cruel and heartless attacks on workers, even oil and gas workers and their ability to organize themselves and fight for better working conditions, mean that if this legislation were to pass, we're going to shift... [Mr. Schmidt's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for Red Deer-South has risen.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to stand for a few minutes and make a few comments about Bill 32, restoring balance in Alberta's workplaces. I listened to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and I've listened to the Leader of the Opposition make some comments about their opposition to Bill 32. You know, unfortunately, they've decided in some of their speeches to say some mean things about us. I hope they don't really believe those things, but if they do, then they do, unfortunately, demonstrate a bit of a lack of judgment in others' characters.

I'm going to try and just speak to the merits of Bill 32 for a few minutes, why it's in the public interest. One of the things that was said is that Bill 32 represented, in their words, a profound attack on working people. I'm going to be honest. I'm really not sure what is a more profound attack on workers than actually destroying their jobs. Unfortunately, I noted during the last election, knocking on doors in Red Deer-South, that there were many individuals, unfortunately, whose jobs were destroyed. In part that was informed or, you know, with good intentions but, unfortunately, aided and abetted sometimes by bad government policy of the prior government.

I'll be honest with you. Before I became an MLA, I worked as a tax lawyer, and I had the opportunity to serve many wonderful businesses and owners throughout central Alberta. I can honestly say that I never did meet one employer who thought that the NDP was doing a good job on the economy. I think that if you're a good government, both employees and employers would feel that you're doing a good job.

I don't really like hearing the phrases, somewhat in a derogatory way, about referring to employers in a, you know, kind of a pejorative way as wealthy corporations and kind of almost vilifying them. Successful businesses are founded on employers and employees working together for the common interest to succeed and prosper. Now, you kind of contrast that recipe for success, which I saw with many of the successful business clients that I was

able to serve and work with – but sometimes, rather than focusing on growing the pie, unfortunately, unions focus on pitting employees against employers, and that's not in the public interest. It's not a recipe for economic prosperity for Albertans.

I'm going to give you a real-life personal example. As a university student I was in an airport, and I needed to rent a car. I had an online reservation with a car rental company. As I approached the desk, I was accosted by a striking union. They were seeking to discourage me from renting the car from their employer. Now, as a young university student, you know, I was working hard to obtain skills and knowledge to obtain a job, and I was grateful for the prospect of an employer hiring me, taking a chance on me, and investing in me, and giving me the skills and knowledge to be self-reliant as a young adult. I must admit that I did not like observing employees seeking to undermine the business their employer worked to establish and who provided them with a livelihood, working together.

Now, I really appreciate the initiative in Bill 32. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar spoke about secondary picketing. Bill 32 doesn't prohibit secondary picketing, but it does impose some internal controls on that, that it's not unfettered. You know, when you think about unrelated third parties, perhaps innocent suppliers or customers of an employer, they could otherwise be subject to secondary picketing.

I met Gil McGowan for the first time a couple of weeks ago in Public Accounts. He attended the Legislature committee to speak about a private member's bill. He held himself out as having expertise on pensions. He didn't like my questions that I asked him, so he decided to call me names on Twitter and twist and distort my comments. I think it's in the public interest to protect Alberta businesses from that type of bullying behaviour. Bill 32 does legislate some internal controls on secondary picketing. It's intended to protect innocent, long-suffering Alberta businesses from bullying actions seeking to punish a business for merely sustaining itself by doing business with perhaps the primary employer. I think that's reasonable. I think Albertans – individuals and families – during these challenging times would agree. I don't think it's in the public interest to leave these businesses vulnerable to unfettered tactics of individuals like Gil McGowan.

Now, the NDP in their prior mandate also took away the secret ballot for employees in respect of the union, leaving workers vulnerable to bullying tactics of a union, you know, and individuals like Gil McGowan, and we fixed that in Bill 2.

3:30

We're making union leaders accountable to their members. Members get to decide on the causes where unions will spend their money. Bill 32 does that. Bill 32 makes Gil McGowan accountable to union members that he has the stewardship to serve, you know, and maybe not take actions like opposing all of the pipelines that were in the public interest for Alberta.

Now, I did meet individuals and families, workers who had no rights because they had no jobs. During the NDP term in government they shrunk private-sector employment by tens of thousands of individuals, and when you think about that, there was a real human cost to that. The time that they started in office as government, the four years that they were in government, to the time that they were asked to leave by Albertans in the election: private-sector employment shrunk by tens of thousands of individuals. That is a human tragedy, and in that respect they did not represent workers well.

In tandem with establishing Alberta as the most attractive jurisdiction to start and grow a business, we need to erase disincentives for employment. We need to reward and not penalize

employers for hiring Alberta families and individuals. I for one and, I know, many members in my caucus, my friends refuse to repeat the failures of the NDP. We simply cannot do that. We need to serve the public interest. Bill 32 helps eradicate some of those failures. It is in the public interest for both Alberta businesses and workers.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I rise to move an amendment. I will wait and let that reach you.

The Deputy Chair: Sure. If you could please read it into the record.

For the benefit of all those members, this will be referred to as amendment A3.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. On behalf of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods I move that Bill 32, Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020, be amended in section 1(12) of the proposed section 24.1 by striking out "over the number of days worked by the employee in the period" and substituting "over the number of days the employee was paid earnings in the period."

Mr. Chair, this doesn't sound like a big change, but what this is actually doing – Bill 32 makes a lot of changes that have not been exceptionally well communicated to the public by the government. One of the changes that it makes is that your statutory holiday pay is calculated over a period, but they are basically moving to exclude vacation pay. So if you took a vacation day or if you happen to have taken your vacation in that prior period, earnings are excluded. Essentially, you are penalized in terms of your holiday pay for having taken your vacation at that time. As we all know, holidays are spread out fairly evenly over the course of the year, so it's unlikely that someone would get through an entire year in the absence of having taken a holiday in the four weeks immediately prior to a holiday.

What this does is that it changes it to allow – sorry. Yes. The previous situation was that it was the average daily wage of the past four weeks. That meant it included vacation pay, but the changes in Bill 32 make it so that the average wages are determined by the number of days worked and specifically no longer include vacation pay. Because of this choice between the two four-week periods, the employer can go back to a period the worker last received general holiday pay to pay them less the next time around. So there are two changes there. Obviously, the concern with respect to the change that Bill 32 makes, the change which we are presently trying to amend, is that it's a little bit unfair to workers.

These laws are quite complicated. I remember that I worked at a restaurant for a number of years, a chain restaurant, and I can remember . . .

Ms Hoffman: Which one?

Ms Ganley: It was Red Lobster. I worked at Red Lobster for seven years.

It was actually a really good job, to be honest, to get. It was evenings and weekends. It allowed me to go to school, and they had benefits, which was uncommon for restaurant employers, so I was pretty happy to have that job. But I can remember everyone sort of struggling to figure out the kind of complicated formula by which one's vacation pay was calculated and whether or not you'd get paid for that stat based on whether you've worked five out of the last nine. That was the rule at that time, obviously, not at this time.

This is a complicated thing for people to figure out. This sort of change that will negatively impact workers but which is difficult for them to understand, which the government is choosing not to explain to them, is, I think, a little bit insidious because it sort of chips away at what they would otherwise receive without them knowing it, which is, honestly, a thing that I would say we have seen in a lot of bills this session. I think that that is a big concern.

Again, I think it's worth saying that some employers will still choose to do it differently. I'm not saying that all employers will take advantage of every opportunity provided to them although, you know, when you are a corporation, when you are accountable to shareholders, there are incentives in the system as it currently exists to do that, to try to save as much as you can on wages, take as much as you can from workers and provide it to shareholders. I'm certainly not saying that all employers will do that. Again, rules don't exist because we anticipate that everyone will behave badly. Rules exist so everyone behaves the same. Rules exist to create a level playing field.

The point of changing this is that some employers will take advantage of it, and that means that some workers will lose out on pay for holidays. We are trying to change it back so that you don't have to be a benevolent employer, so that being a benevolent employer doesn't in some way disadvantage you for paying someone their full wage for a holiday when you're not legally obligated to because these changes no longer legally obligate you to do that. I think this is a good change, is a change that will put more money back in the pockets of workers, and I think putting more money back in the pockets of workers is a big deal.

You know, we talk a lot in this place about who's being mean to who and who's being nice to who and who's privileging whom. When I look at changes like this, I think of the people I worked with when I worked at Red Lobster. For me, that was a temporary job that I had while I went to school, but that wasn't the case for everyone. Lots of people worked there and would continue to work there for the rest of their lives. There was nothing wrong with that job. It was a perfectly decent job. Well, at the time it paid a living wage. I suspect that now, given the sort of relative increase of cost of living versus other things, it might not as much, but it was a decent job.

But I try to think of the individuals there and the fact that, you know, that could make a big difference to them. If they took a two-week vacation in a four-week period and now their holiday pay is based on the number of days they worked instead of what they would have worked were they not on holiday, that's, like, half the amount of pay. Maybe that's not a big deal for some people. Maybe a half-day's pay isn't a big deal for some people at some places in their lives, but for other people it is a big deal.

And I think it's important. If there's one thing that I can do when I come here to this place, it's stand up for those people, those people for whom that half-day's wage really is very important because they deserve to be represented here, too. They deserve for their voices to carry here, too. They deserve for their circumstances and their situations to be considered in the policy that we make when we are in this place. I think that this is a very important amendment. I anticipate that some of my colleagues across the way will say that this is a small thing and it's no big deal, but for some people it is a very big deal.

3:40

I would like to remind all of my colleagues about that because at the end of the day the conversations we have in this place may be about specific bills, but what they are really about is power and who has it and who the law protects in what circumstances. We are

legislators, we are writing laws, and that is certainly the conversation we ought to be having. But what this bill does fundamentally is that it shifts that balance of power. It shifts it in favour of employers. And I'm not suggesting that's a bad thing because I think employers are evil; I'm suggesting that's a bad thing because I think that those individuals who work jobs where they are not highly paid are not currently flush with power. Those aren't the people that have an enormous amount of power in society right now.

You know, this rhetoric that I hear coming from across the way about how workers are thugs and workers are bad people and they take advantage of their employers and they come together collectively to advocate for their rights and, oh, no, isn't that terrible: I think that's incredibly problematic because it's not just a difference of opinion. Like, the UCP believes that employers have been disadvantaged and low-wage workers have been advantaged and we ought to switch that back to give employers some power, and the NDP believes the opposite. We think that workers, especially lower wage workers or workers who maybe don't have professional degrees, are in a position where they are disadvantaged towards employers. Now, I mean, that is a debate. That is what we come here to debate.

But I don't think it's just that because the law actually recognizes that in most instances employers have greater powers than employees. So it's not just that that's what we think and the UCP thinks differently; the law has recognized that. There are several principles in law that stem from the fact that workers are considered to be in a disadvantaged position when arguing or when setting up an employment contract, and that's why a lot of these changes are so insidious in this bill. A lot of the changes that are made with – you know, say, for instance, being able to impose averaging agreements: well, if the worker doesn't like it, they can just leave. Except the worker doesn't have the same level of power that the employer has.

That's actually the reason that unions exist, to try to create that balance, to try to allow workers collectively to come together so that they can use their power together instead of individually so that they can try to get not on equal footing with the employer but at least, you know, within arguing distance, right? That is the entire purpose of unions, to allow workers to collectively advocate for safer workplaces, to allow workers to collectively advocate for higher wages. You know, we hear “workers and higher wages,” and we automatically think: bad thing. But I don't think that's true. I actually think there's a significant amount of evidence that when we put more money and more spending power in the hands of those in the middle class and at the bottom, that actually is significantly better for the economy than what the UCP wants to do, which is to say: put more money in the power of those at the top.

This is admittedly a small change although for some people a significant change, but this small change is, I think, representative of the overall challenge that this bill poses, which is to say that it aims to give more power to a group who already have superior bargaining power. And that, again, isn't to say that all employers take advantage of that. I know some employers who are excellent employers, who do a very good job. But we don't write the law against murder because we think that everyone is a murderer; we write it because a few people are not going to do the right thing, left to their own devices. When you're a corporation, even if you want to do the right thing, again, the incentive structure, the legal incentive structure, is that you owe a duty to your shareholders, and that duty is a duty to maximize your profits. You maximize your profits by, essentially, giving as little of that as you can away in costs, and that includes labour costs.

I think that this small change will make a difference in the lives of workers, but I think, more than that, this small change gives a little bit of power back to those who have a little bit less power, and it rebalances the scales in a slightly better way to ensure that those workers are able to move forward.

I mean, one of the other insidious things about this bill is that it also tries to shift the power in terms of who is able to speak to the public. Corporations can speak endlessly – and they often do – with a great deal of money and a great deal of power behind them to the public to advocate for the things that they want, to tell them that if we pay people a living wage, it will destroy the country. And some of them do, not all of them but some of them. Meanwhile on the other side we have groups of workers, which we'd normally call a union or sometimes an association, and these groups of workers advocate for the opposite. They have very good arguments – they have very good arguments – for why the world is made better by putting more money and more power in the hands of those who don't have as much.

But this bill aims to take the ability to send that message to the public away from those workers, away from those groups of workers, and I think that's a pretty big problem because ultimately today if we are faced with one problem, with one crisis that affects the way we govern ourselves, it is a crisis where we have so much information at our fingertips, but so much of it is complete garbage. It's just shocking.

Allowing one side to have the power to create studies and to run studies in ways designed to have specific outcomes and then sell that information to the public as though it is, you know, just the truth, that it's just the fact of the matter when clearly there are flaws in the premises, there are flaws in the experimental methodology, there are flaws in the way the entire experiment was designed, and to tell the other side, "Well, you're not permitted to do that" or "We're going to significantly hamstring your ability to do that" is, I think, very, very problematic.

Ultimately, we live in a democracy, and a democracy in a lot of ways is meant to be sort of a marketplace of ideas, if you will, right? The ideas are sort of meant to fight it out on the basis of rational argument. The problem is that money significantly impacts this marketplace of ideas. Putting money behind an idea, selling it in certain ways, coming up with catchphrases and slogans and, you know, phrasing things in a certain way has an impact. Being able to hire professionals who you know have a certain perspective to run you a study that has a certain perspective and, unsurprisingly, gets the outcome it set out to achieve is hugely problematic, particularly when you're saying that one side can do whatever they want and that for the other side, we're going to try to take away their ability to do that.

Now, certainly, I think we've heard at length: well, people can opt in. But, again, you're talking about these same people, the same people that this amendment is trying to protect, for whom a half-day's wages on their stat holiday is a really big deal. You know, I think they want and I believe they want to get the right information out there into the hands of the public to contribute and to do that work, but when faced with that or a grocery bill, which is the situation in which people find themselves, people I know, people out there around us every day, it's a bit of an unfair choice, and it's clearly – clearly – designed to advantage certain people over other people.

3:50

I think that this amendment is important. It may not be the biggest change in the world, but, again, it's a change that impacts certain people, people who work hard, who have families to support. I

mean, a lot of times when we talk about these sorts of things, about, like, the minimum wage, about, you know, holiday pay for people who don't work sort of regular business hours, we sort of get this rhetoric coming back that this is all kids – right? – and that they don't need the money, so it doesn't matter. Except that hasn't been my experience.

Having worked a number of years in a minimum wage job, I met lots of parents. I certainly met lots of individuals, some of whom were kids, one of whom was a 16-year-old who had moved out from his parents and was supporting his 12-year-old brother and was trying to go to school at the same time and was trying to save for university. There were, obviously, a lot of significant problems at home. For that young man – I mean, maybe he was a kid, but he needed the money just as much as any adult and, in my view, arguably, potentially more because he did have a dependant, his brother, to take care of. He did have school and the future to think of, and he didn't have any parents to take care of him. And it wasn't just one person. I have met a fair number of people in these circumstances.

I think the suggestion that all low-wage workers are in this position is just, frankly, wrong, and I think consideration needs to be given to what this means to their lives, to what it means to their grocery bill to get lower pay for a stat holiday, to what it means in terms of buying new boots for their kid. As someone who has a toddler currently, the speed with which they cycle through clothing is positively dizzying. One seems to have unexpected costs at nearly every corner when it comes to clothing a toddler. You know, one minute the boots fit fine, and the next day they don't go on, and you don't really know why.

I think this will make a big difference to the lives of a lot of people. I think we have a lot of amendments coming forward that we're going to be discussing, and I expect that we will continue . . . [Ms Ganley's speaking time expired] Oh, I guess that's my 20 minutes.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe the hon. member who caught my eye was the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was listening intently to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View as she explained the rationale behind the amendment concerning the average general holiday pay and the average daily wage. I wanted to speak to that. I think there's some misunderstanding in terms of what is in Bill 32. I also wanted to speak more broadly to some of the comments made by the members opposite, particularly in regard to balance.

In regard to this particular amendment, I believe there is a misconception, Mr. Chair. We are going back to the rules that were in place prior to Bill 17, where we're looking at average days worked. Now, it seems to be that there's a misconception that, for example, if you work two weeks and then you're on vacation for two weeks and we do the average day's work, we take all four weeks, divide the earnings in the two-week period, and now your average daily wage will be 50 per cent of what your normal wage would be, what your daily wage would be.

Mr. Chair, that simply isn't the case as we're applying this very same language and approach that we had prior to Bill 17, that would actually look at the actual days worked, divide the earnings over the actual days worked, and then come up with the average wage. In fact, if we applied this language as proposed by the hon. member, particularly for those individuals who work on a part-time basis, this could actually have the impact of decreasing the average daily wage.

For that reason, Mr. Chair, I would suggest that, first of all, the problem being suggested by the members opposite doesn't exist,

number one, and, number two, this amendment doesn't address that problem. For those reasons I would recommend that the House reject this amendment.

Also, I wanted to speak a little bit about balance. We've heard from the members opposite, particularly the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, saying that this legislation, Bill 32, is out of balance and actually even suggesting, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, that the changes we're making in regard to termination pay are a load, challenges on the backs of workers and: really, these are very small, minuscule costs for employers, so why are you doing it? This goes back to balance. Under the previous government they passed Bill 17. Bill 17 was a very large bill that added costs to employers, added restrictions to employers. Quite frankly, as noted by my colleague from Red Deer-South, it cost Albertans jobs. That is the worst thing that can happen to someone, to lose their job. We saw tens of thousands of jobs lost under the previous government.

When we did a review of the labour laws and we took a look at what changes we can make, on the one hand, reducing costs for employers and reducing red tape while at the same time maintaining the benefit for employees and a simple change to when termination benefits get paid out came to the top of the list. The Canadian Payroll Association indicated it would save employers \$100 million a year. Now, I recognize that, you know, perhaps to the NDP \$100 million isn't a large amount, but, Mr. Chair, dollars that we can save the employers through a reduction in red tape that they can reinvest in their business to keep running, particularly in these times, this is the solution that we want. But the members opposite say: no, that's not balance, and these are just small amounts, so why are you even bothering doing it? We're doing it because we care about Albertans. We want to get Albertans back to work, and we want to keep them working.

With that, Bill 32 restores the balance. You know, the previous government, with Bill 17, took the balance out of whack. They catered to their union friends, and they also didn't understand – and there may be no ill will on their part – that by layering on red tape and costs, it actually cost the jobs of the people who they purport to want to protect. Mr. Chair, we are going to protect those people. What we are doing with Bill 32 is making a number of changes to bring it back into balance, to reduce the costs for job creators to get Albertans back to work.

With that, although I understand the intent behind what the members opposite are trying to do with this particular amendment, there isn't an issue, as stated before. The issue that they're raising: that isn't a problem in the way it's calculated. Based on the wording, if you compare the wording that we're putting in now versus prior to 2017, in fact what they're suggesting may even hurt those on a temporary basis.

Again, I would urge the Legislature not to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to address this amendment and, if time allows, to address some of the comments of some of the government speakers on the bill and this amendment.

I think that, first, we really want to start with the fact that, again, just as with yesterday's amendment that we brought forward in the House, which, unfortunately, was rejected by the government, we are in this case really offering a friendly amendment. The friendly amendment is that we want to be clear that unless the government is actually intending to reduce monies available to employees, which perhaps is their intent, then they need to be very clear in the wording

of their legislation that they are not prescribing a situation where it is likely that employees will be in the position of losing dollars.

We are very concerned that in this particular situation there is a shift from a description of how the calculation will be done to a second method of calculation. They can't deny that. Although the minister says that, you know, he doesn't agree with our interpretation of the legislation, it is clear that they are making a change. Now, he is suggesting that that change is going back to an earlier state of affairs, prior to Bill 17, as previously introduced by our government when we were in power. But it's very clear that he is making a shift, so he must understand that that shift has some consequences. He can't be pretending that they went through all the bother of designing a new bill that takes away a description of practices for no purpose at all.

4:00

So, clearly, there is a purpose, and the only purpose that could possibly be there is that it shifts the ability of the employer to make decisions over the wages – in this case, holiday pay – for the employee. That's clearly what's happening here, which is why we're having a lot of discussions about the nature of balance. I certainly will address that as I move along. In this particular case, the employer is being given a chance to make a determination as to what period of four weeks will be used to calculate holiday pay.

Now, if the government were wanting to have an equal balance of power between the employee and the employer, they would clearly specify when that four-week period would exist so that there was no opportunity for employers to undermine the employee's best interests. If that was the government intent, why would they provide a choice that only the employer could possibly use? The employee can't use it. It's certainly giving some power, some discretion, some ability to decide to one party in an action and not the other. It's that simple.

Now, in this case, we're very concerned that the nature of the calculation is such that employees who have taken holiday time will have their hours of work calculated differently than employees who have not taken some holiday time. I think this is an important issue because what you're essentially telling employees, then, is: if you take holiday time, you may be jeopardizing your future pay. That's a very dangerous message to be giving in all of this.

I think it's very important that we recognize that holiday pay is actually part of an employee's pay. It's not skipping work. It's not not doing your job. It is fully and completely part of what it is you're contracted for when you sign an employment agreement. That agreement is that you will work X number of days over a year, and you will also get X number of days' holiday, some of them stat holidays, some of them your-choice holidays. When we say that an employee is away for a period of time on vacation, we're not saying that they are not fulfilling their obligations for work. What we're saying is that they are indeed fulfilling the contract that they signed. That includes not only the days on which they work but the days on which they will take holiday and receive holiday pay.

With that distinction, I think it's pretty clear that this government has chosen to provide an opportunity for employers to diminish the rightfully earned wages of employees. No matter what the minister says, he is absolutely and clearly telling us that he's making a change, and the consequence of that change was that some employees in some situations will receive less money than they would have otherwise. Otherwise, there would be no purpose of even putting this section into the bill. If it doesn't do that, then it doesn't do anything, so clearly they understand the consequence of this. While he can stand up and deny the consequence of this, it's very apparent to us that he is well aware of the consequence of this, and I think that that's really unacceptable.

I think that we also need to be concerned because for a number of the vacation days throughout the year and in some industries altogether, when you take your vacations is often not within your own power to decide. As such, the employee doesn't even have any control over the situation that will result in his reduced employment wages. Sometimes vacations are set by government, stat holidays. Sometimes vacations are set by industry. When they know that there's going to be uptime and downtime, they require all of their employees to take vacations at a particular time that's convenient for the industry.

This brings us back to the very point that we've all been discussing here today. That is the point that there is a shift in power throughout this bill from the most vulnerable, that is wage-based employees, to the most powerful, that is businesses and corporations that do the hiring. Now, I know that that is something that the government has been resisting in terms of our analysis, but I want to make it really clear that I think that there has been lots of discussion and assessment of this fact over time that demonstrates that all the way up to the Supreme Court of Canada recognizes that there is a differential of power just by the nature of circumstances. That in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing. We're not saying that somebody has taken power where they didn't have a right to have power. What we're saying is that they naturally have differences in power, and I think we need to understand that, because if you fail to understand that relationships often are dictated by the nature of the power in the relationship between the two parties, then you'll fail to understand the concerns and the objections that we have to this bill overall.

Now, I know there's been a lot of research done into the nature of power in relationships. In the NDP case, we really believe that it's requisite upon government to try to bring people to an even place so that when employers and employees sit at the bargaining table, they're at least coming from something of a balance. We know that intrinsically the structural realities are that employers start with a greater amount of power because the only power an employee tends to have is the power of either contributing or not contributing their labour. They have no other power at all whereas the employer has the power to define work situations, possible promotions, possible raises, actual incomes, whether or not you're being hired or being fired, and a variety of other factors that put them in a greater position of power.

You know, it's like a road race. What the NDP want is for everybody to be at the starting line at the same time so that when they actually race, it is truly a competition between two people over an equal period or equal distance. But what the Conservatives want to have happen is that they want to shoot the starting gun, and wherever you happen to be standing at the time, whether one person is 10 feet in front of the other or 30 feet back from the starting line, then somehow they're supposed to have an equal race when the beginning or the starting place was not equal. That's very problematic.

We know it's hard for people with power sometimes to recognize that they have power. There was a very interesting study done about this some years ago where they had people play the game of Monopoly. In that particular situation, they decided that of the four people playing, one of them would be given an advantage of having a greater amount of starting money. Then they played the game as normal with one person having I believe it was twice as much money as the other three players. Inevitably, on average, the person with the greater amount of money actually won the Monopoly game. On average; not always. Not a hundred per cent of the time, I grant, but that was clearly statistically significant.

What was really interesting about that research study was the conversation they subsequently had with the people who won the

Monopoly game. When they asked them, "Why did you win this game?" almost none of the people cited the fact that they started with more power. What they did is that they talked about the clever moves that they made throughout the game that gave them advantage, the great deals they made when they traded away one property for another or property for cash, and so on. It was very interesting to see that people don't recognize their own power and privilege and the advantage that that gives them.

4:10

What we're saying here is that it's not that employers are somehow negative or nasty people. They are in a position of having structural supremacy in terms of power. It's just the nature. They started off the game with more money. They started off the race in front of the starting line instead of behind it. As a result, the courts in Canada have decided that we need to make sure our legislation reflects that reality, that we can't say that we're going to shoot the starting gun off when people are not in an equal place.

What we are concerned about with Bill 32 is that that is what the Conservatives are choosing to do. They're choosing to go back to a place where the employers have increasing amounts of power, in this particular case with this amendment, but this is just one example of hundreds of situations throughout the bill where the employer gets to make a decision that previously they didn't get to make. All decisions have power innately, so if you're giving them constantly new pieces of power, then in aggregate this bill will shift from a group of people who have the most vulnerable of circumstances, the most precarious of work, as wage employees tend to, to organizations that are often multinational organizations with extreme amounts of power, including even the power to leave jurisdictions altogether if they choose to do that. That's a heck of a lot of power. I think that we fail to understand that. If we fail to understand the nature of the relationship that we are intruding upon and fail to understand the importance of bringing some kind of perspective and balance to that, that is contrary to the structural imbalance, then we are not doing justice to the citizens of this province.

I'm very concerned that the minister of labour keeps telling us that things will be in balance, yet we find the wording within his legislation is exactly the opposite. This justification for doing this is also very dubious. For example, moments ago he talked about the fact that payroll people told him that there was a saving of approximately a hundred million dollars a year for employees in making these kinds of changes that he's been introducing. I really think that that is a very serious concern here because what you're saying, then, is that major corporations that are earning billions of dollars a year will be able to increase their profits by an amount that's only a small percentage of their actual profits, but who are they taking that money away from? A hundred million dollars to your average working person is significantly more important than it is to a large corporation who is pocketing billions of dollars a year in profits. Sometimes you may have to do that, but you'd better have some pretty good justifications as to why you're doing that, why you're saying that the lowest paid people in a situation should be transferring some of their wealth to the highest paid people, so transferring from the worker who's working for a minimum wage to the CEO who is in the top 1 per cent. That's essentially what's happening here.

You can say that it's only a small, little piece, you can say that it only makes a small difference per individual employee, but what the minister has admitted to us is that this is a net transfer from the poorest to the richest of a hundred million dollars a year. Even that

is really questionable as to, you know, where that number comes from, if it is justifiable or not. I think he still needs to explain why the most precarious workers, the poorest workers should be supporting the lifestyles of the rich and famous. I think that's quite a legitimate question.

I'm also concerned that he took a mild but, I think, a direct shot at some of the NDP policies and suggested that the policies of the NDP actually reduced the number of jobs for employees in this province. Again, I'd like to remind the members opposite that they actually have never once presented proof of that in this House. I listened very carefully, and I can tell you that all they do is report correlations, which are not proof of anything. Anybody with a first-year-level understanding of statistics will tell you that that is not proof.

I want to point out, however, just to show you why correlations can be quite nasty, some of the things that are being said about this government's economic policy out there right now. I am admitting that these are correlations, but I want to point out that RBC Economics, for example, said that while Canada's GDP has contracted this year by 4.9 per cent, Alberta's has contracted by 8.2 per cent. Given your standard of measurement clearly you're saying that your government has failed to a degree that's almost twice as bad as any other government in the country of Canada. Using your correlational standard, that's what you're saying.

I know that Stats Canada, for example, has also said that Alberta's economic activity declined in March 30.1 per cent – sorry; somewhere between 30.1 per cent and 68.7 per cent in March. Sorry. I want to get that clear. Compare that to, let's say, Saskatchewan, whose decline is only 8.2 per cent to 46.7 per cent. Much less than Alberta's; therefore, Alberta must be doing a terrible job. The UCP must have absolutely and fundamentally failed compared to the Saskatchewan government using that correlational measure.

How about comparing it to another province such as Ontario? Whereas we went from 30 to 68 per cent reduction, Ontario only went from 8.5 to 38 per cent reduction, again a massive failure on the part of the province of Alberta and their government.

One more example. How about Quebec? This government loves to talk about Quebec all the time, so let's compare the two. While this government has seen a decline between 30 and 68 per cent, Quebec only saw a decline between 5.5 and 26.8 per cent. That's Stats Canada.

See? I can do the same thing that you do. I can bring out all kinds of stats, and if you allow me to use your standard of measure as to successes of finances of the government, you are the biggest failure in the history of the province of Alberta.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen to debate on amendment A3.

Ms Hoffman: Yes. Thank you very much to my colleague for his impassioned articulation. Every now and then I imagine what it would be like to be a student in one of his graduate classes, and in times like this I think we get a little taste of it, so thank you so much to the member for that summary.

I want to thank my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing forward this amendment. For everyone's awareness, I'll sort of paraphrase it here, that this act we're currently debating, which is Bill 32, be amended in section 1(12), in the proposed section 24.1, by striking out the words "over the number of days worked by the employee in the period" and substituting "over the number of days the employee was paid earnings in the period."

Why I think this is so important really flows from – it was moved on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I believe – that exact piece around not the number of days worked but the number of days the employee was paid. I think that's incredibly important for us to have that clarifying language, and I think that this is a very specific area where we could potentially see some support from both sides of the House to make sure that we get this change in the legislation. Again, the days that you're paid don't necessarily align with the days that you worked, unfortunately.

4:20

I think the example that my colleague gave about her experiences working in restaurants: that's definitely one of the areas I went to in my own reflection on this matter. It was a while ago – I'll give you that, Mr. Chair – but it is for those very examples of people who are working jobs where the hours change significantly from schedule to schedule. Sometimes I'd be working only four-hour chunks, but it was during hockey games or football games. Of course, a four-hour chunk during that time: your wage that you receive is only for four hours, but your earnings when you're working something that's so busy typically would be greater per hour when you factored in other components. But I was only working a four-hour shift on those days whereas many other days I'd work an eight-hour shift or even a 12-hour shift.

Ensuring that you have the consistency in terms of the averaging of your pay for that pay period, I think, is so fundamental for folks that are – definitely at that time I was working paycheque to paycheque while going to school, and I was very grateful to have the job I had, but I also shouldn't have to count on the generosity of my employer to pay me fairly for the work that I'd done when it comes to vacation pay, in particular.

Vacation pay, I want to say, isn't something that your employer gives you from the kindness of their heart. Vacation pay is deferred wages, essentially. It's something that we have determined is an entitlement as a society and that specifically through legislation people are entitled to have some vacation. Of course, to have vacation pay or holiday pay, which I think differ in terms of stat holidays versus deferred wages through vacation pay – I think it's important that we calculate that consistently and that we make sure that all employees have the opportunity to receive their deferred wages through compensation in a fair and consistent manner, not to have the subjectivity of somebody being able to read into the legislation: which of these scenarios do I want, and which ways am I going to be able to adjust the earnings of my employees?

Actually, upon reflection, maybe that's one of the reasons why the minister thinks it'll take 31 days to figure out what people are owed. If you're playing with the legislation and trying to find ways to average in a way that can maximize for the employer, maybe it would take more than the simple couple of minutes that it should take somebody who's working payroll to be able to determine how much an employee receives. That's definitely something that this section, I think, relates back to.

You know, this is, I'd say, consistent with some of the attacks we've seen on the most vulnerable over the last year and a half, since this government was elected. One of the first labour changes was of course taking toonies away from teenagers in terms of adjusting the minimum wage – adjusting the minimum wage? – cutting the minimum wage for those workers. It was done in a way that most employers didn't even tell their employees, because, of course, they were following the law; they don't have to tell their employees. But the number of teenagers who approached me afterwards and said: "You know, I was hired at \$15 an hour. I thought my employer would at least tell me that they were cutting

my wage, but I guess the government gave them the ability to cut it, and therefore they just did it and didn't even let me know." These are the kinds of changes that definitely influence, I'd say, young people who are impacted by those types of changes.

But now here we're looking at the pay as it's calculated as it relates to vacation or stat holiday pay, and I think that we need to have fair and consistent and reliable rules that ensure that people are appropriately paid and consistently paid their deferred wages.

I think that this is another example of continually chipping away at the money that ordinary folks have in their pockets. I know that in the election the government did a lot of talk around making life more affordable by getting rid of one emissions levy that was in place, and that definitely was a key talking point. The justification that was often given for removing that levy was because it was going to put more money back in people's pockets. But what the government has protest to do on one hand, over and over and over again – and regularly it relates to labour as well as to taxation authorities – we see the government taking, taking, taking.

Some examples, of course, included the increase to education property tax. Then the Minister of Finance said, "You know, we're putting all this money back in people's pockets" because they deferred it this year because of COVID. Definitely not a lot of people I know felt like that was a big gift, to not increase their taxes in the midst of a pandemic when it comes to education property taxes. The government is finding other ways, I think, to take off the top, or out of the deferred wages from employees. This is one area.

Another example I want to tie back into this amendment that we're here debating at this time is the piece that relates back to labour. Carving dues into two buckets so that there's one set of dues for grievances and bargaining and another set of dues for everything else – organizing, education, lobbying, advocacy, charitable work – I think is definitely something that we haven't asked employers to do. For example, if I'm a customer at a restaurant, I don't get an itemized bill for: this is what I'm going to spend the money you're paying in my restaurant on. We don't get an itemized bill that says: we're going to put this much towards paying salaries of employees; we're going to put this much towards profit margins; we're going to put this much towards advocating for, you know, reduced minimum wage, or other things that might be lobbied for. We don't get a breakdown of how those are going to be used.

When I suggest that we are creating an unbalanced playing field through this legislation, some of the things the Premier, you know, sort of pushed back or mocked with were, "Well, you can choose not to go to that restaurant," which is true, but what we're doing in this legislation is not saying: well, you can choose to unionize or not unionize. We're saying: "Well, you can choose to unionize, but you can also say that I only want my money to be used in direct relation to bargaining and grievances. I don't want the dues that I pay to have the ability to support things like building a playground at the Glenrose hospital for kids who are there recovering and needing help with rehabilitation." That's what's in bucket B under this new proposed legislation.

You know, some of the attacks that have been made around the automatic card cert process: those were put in place because it was very clear through an interjurisdictional comparison that when there was a large, large, majority, not a small majority – I believe we made it greater than two-thirds – that there was a significant margin to account for the fact that not everyone may send their card the same way that they might vote. But what the government has done by not just taking away the automatic card cert process is that they've actually delayed the process for organizations to have their collective rights heard and to be able to organize, because there is that long period of time between expressing interest and when you actually vote on actually organizing.

The government says that this is about balance, but very clearly the interjurisdictional comparators, in this regard especially, don't show that this is something that we are restoring balance to, in terms of our role and relation to the rest of the country, at least. If it's not about balancing the laws with the rest of the country, what is it that we're talking about balancing? What I think is happening here – and maybe it's about balancing, because we did come a long way in the last four years. I will give the minister that. He and I certainly agree that there were a number of changes made in the four years that the NDP was in government. I would say that that was done to catch us up to where we were so far behind in terms of labour equality and the right for working people to have a voice and fair process in their employment.

Maybe it's about balance from where we were four years earlier and where we were at the end of four years, but what we did in those four years is make up for about 30 years of labour law. If we're talking about balance, are we talking about balance to being only 15 years behind the rest of Canada? In my opinion, that is certainly not balance. I don't want to have workers in Alberta have fewer rights and less protection than our neighbours in other provinces. I don't think that that is an advantage at all.

4:30

Also, I have to say, too, some of our colleagues – Red Deer-South spoke not very long ago about this, you know, how grateful he was to his employer for giving him the opportunity to work. I agree. Every opportunity that I've had to work, I've been grateful, too, but that doesn't mean that you give up all of your rights and all of your voice and all of your autonomy. It certainly shouldn't mean that.

I know that some will say: "Now isn't the time to have labour laws that create the kind of balance that we've been fighting for for so many years. Now isn't the time. Do it later." What I want to say is that when I reflect on what society decided was unsafe labour practice at a time when children were working in coal mines, people were saying: "It's not the time to take kids out of coal mines. It's going to be really tough on the economy. It's going to be really tough for us to be able to balance the needs of energy with the rights of young people." But as a society we said, you know, enough is enough, and it was working people that helped stand up and push forward on the rights of the child, saying that that wasn't appropriate or safe work.

I know that sometimes doing what we feel is just feels like it just isn't the right time: maybe let's just wait another six months, or maybe let's just wait another four years until we're through the downturn on the price of oil and the impacts of COVID. That's why I imagine the proposals to roll back protections and rights around things, including the pay that employees earn, have been brought here today. I hear in this place: we need to create all of the opportunities possible for employers to have really strong positions because naturally if they have bigger margins, they'll create more jobs.

First of all, I want to say that I don't buy that argument. I think you hire employees to do the job that you set out to do. I don't think it has to do with how big your margins are, typically, whether or not you're going to put somebody else in. Let's use the example of a restaurant. You put enough people on the floor to make sure that everyone gets served in a timely fashion so they don't leave and take their business elsewhere. If you are making greater margins, you don't put more people on the floor to cut into your profits. That doesn't make sense. That isn't economically feasible for the owner of the business or for the people who are working there.

I know that often I would say: "You know, I think we can probably handle this shift with only four of us. I don't know that we need five or six of us." That was because I wanted to make more

money – let's be very clear about that – but that doesn't mean that it was about ensuring that these kinds of decisions that employers are making – if employers make more in terms of their profit margin, they're magically going to create more jobs and give away their profits to more workers. That just doesn't pass the nod test for most folks when they imagine what the needs are of a workplace, and it's because it doesn't make sense.

In terms of this amendment, I think it's very fair. I think it's very reasonable. I thank my colleagues for Edmonton-Mill Woods as well as Calgary-Mountain View for bringing it forward here for us today, and I do think that this should be about making sure that people have the ability to receive fair and consistent compensation. I don't think that your pay on a stat holiday should vary from paycheque to paycheque. I think that that isn't much of a holiday if you are at risk of losing your income based on some nebulous formula that we're here considering. I think that it's fair and reasonable for us to pass this, make the language consistent, and make sure that employees don't have to sit down and stress out with their calculator or just have blind trust that they're going to be treated fairly and equally. I think having this amendment does strengthen the legislation, and for that reason, I'm proud to support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join debate?

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Moving back to Bill 32, I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you. I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 32.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 30 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions to be offered with respect to amendment A3? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise again to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. Can I confirm that you said we're on A3? Is that correct?

The Deputy Chair: Amendment A3. Yes. That's on the floor.

Ms Pancholi: Okay. Thank you. Well, I've had the opportunity, Mr. Chair, to speak a number of times to Bill 30, and now I will continue to have an opportunity to do so. Last night I had the opportunity to speak to a number of amendments that were actually proposed – well, one particular amendment – by the government. I was quite shocked, as were most Albertans, that in the middle of the night the government chose to introduce an amendment, a significant amendment, under the guise of transparency even though this is a bill – and they introduced an amendment to basically apply the sunshine list to physician compensation or, actually, to be more clear, billings, which was quite shocking.

[Mrs. Allard in the chair]

First of all, to have this amendment introduced in the middle of the night after this bill was introduced weeks and weeks ago by this government made it very clear that the intention behind the

government amendment that was proposed last night, which ultimately passed, was not actually about transparency but was about bullying, essentially, Madam Chair, the physicians in this province, who have served us so well on the front lines during the pandemic, the pandemic which we continue to be living in the realities of, despite that, I have to say, it feels that the government is not taking seriously the realities of that pandemic right now as it rushes to put 750,000 students back to school with no supports in place.

We've heard the government repeatedly talk about, you know, new funding that was made available, but all Albertans, who have been very clear in looking at what was actually brought forward in terms of support, financial support, know that this is just reinstating funding that they'd actually cut earlier on in the year and that they actually were not providing any new funding and that the funding that was reinstated was actually about what school boards used to actually operate schools and to run schools and was not actually to address the very real health and safety concerns and the additional requirements and supports that are needed to do that effectively.

You know, it seems like the government right now does not really understand what we're doing with respect to the pandemic. They're not taking it seriously, and further evidence of that is their continued attack on doctors during the pandemic.

So here we are. You know, we actually stood up a number of times on this side of the House and talked about how increased transparency is very important but that we did not think that the amendment that was brought forward last night, that was passed by the government, actually achieved that goal because it did not provide any clarification with respect to the differences between what physicians bill and what they actually take home for pay. The government seemed not bothered at all by that because, of course, that's likely the intention. They're not trying to at all bring forward transparency. It's not about transparency. We see that very clearly. It's actually about a negotiating tactic rather than doing that properly at the negotiating table with physicians as they're supposed to do.

You know, I'm concerned that we've now seen this bill, which was already problematic and was already brought forward, and we believe in this House that it is designed to open the door to American-style, privatized health care. The government members have repeatedly stood up and said in this House that private surgical clinics have existed for over 20 years in this province since former Premier Ralph Klein brought in the infamous Bill 11, which many, many thousands of Albertans were outraged by and protested on the steps of the Legislature. As I indicated in my comments last night, I was one of those Albertans who protested on the steps of the Legislature with Bill 11, and it was actually the beginning of my, I guess, political activism, one can say. The government members said: "No big deal. No big deal. We're just doing exactly what's been going on for 20 years." Of course, that begs the question again, and we've seen this repeatedly: why are we changing legislation if we're just doing what we were doing before? The point is, Madam Chair, that what we saw was that Bill 30 actually makes a substantive change with respect to protection for public health care.

4:40

We are very concerned that this – you know, like, we brought forward an amendment last night to offer the government members an opportunity to actually speak to the protection of public health care, which is what's so important right now. That's what Albertans want to hear, that the government wants to provide assurances that they are not trying to increase privatization within health care. They had the opportunity last night to recommit to protecting public health care and commit to make sure that any agreement

establishing private surgical clinics will continue to address and consider the impact of that surgical clinic on the public health care system and that it won't adversely affect that.

They did not. The government chose not to actually pass that amendment. In fact, they stood up and said: "Don't worry about it. It's no big deal. Trust us. We still care about public health care. Sure, we're taking out the legislative provisions that actually explicitly protect the public health care system, but, you know, that doesn't mean anything. It's not meaningful at all." I think Albertans can see right through that because if they're making specific legislative amendments to withdraw and take out the protections over the public health care system when establishing private surgical clinics and we're just supposed to trust them – Albertans are just supposed to trust that they'll still care about the public health care system – then they would not be removing it from the legislation.

Trust is a common theme, Madam Chair, I believe that we've raised a number of times. I've noted, as many of my colleagues have, we've all sat through – in the last few weeks in particular there's been a sort of renewed enthusiasm by the government members to thump their drum about how they won the election and we were fired, which is ironic because if I was fired, I don't know what I'm doing here. I'd obviously not have a right to stand here and the privilege to speak on behalf of my constituents, but I'm here. Yet what I find remarkable about that is that it's really the same language that they used very quickly after the election. I appreciate that it's only been about 14, 15 months since the election, but, wow, has a lot happened in Alberta and, wow, has a lot happened to us that was not within our control: the pandemic, the epic drop in oil prices. But a lot has happened in Alberta with respect to Albertans seeing clearly who this government is and who they're actually looking out for.

In fact, it's not a surprise that we now see, for example, that this government has been called the most secretive government in Canada. We saw very unprecedented action such as firing the Election Commissioner, breaking the contract with doctors, moving pensions without any consultation, so I'm not surprised that already the government members are harkening back with great nostalgia to the days only a mere 15 months ago, before Albertans saw who they really were and saw what their agenda really was, when, yes, they did win a sizable majority but not a complete majority because here we are, too, the strongest opposition that this province has ever seen.

We also know, this government: Albertans don't see them that way anymore. Perhaps they did at the beginning. Of course, this government promised three things – jobs, economy, pipelines – and haven't been able to deliver at all on any of those three items to date and, in fact, even before the pandemic lost 50,000 jobs. So, of course, I'm not surprised. For the government it's important to think back to April 16, April 17, 2019, and pretend that we're still there, but Albertans are not still living in April 16, 2019. Albertans are living right now in a very different reality, a reality in which not only has this government failed to deliver on their key promises but they're breaking promises. They're breaking promises and they're breaking trust and they're breaking faith with Albertans. That's why we have to be very careful whenever we see this government bringing in legislation that is actually determined, seems to be determined, to undermine transparency and accountability. That's what we're speaking about here.

Bill 30 has a number of challenging provisions in it, and I've spoken to a few of them already, specifically the amendment that's been brought forward, amendment A3, an amendment to basically – well, this addresses one aspect of Bill 30 that has been problematic, that is the changes the government is making to the –

I'm a bit muddled, Madam Chair; I've been operating on very little sleep – Health Quality Council of Alberta. There we go. The changes that have been made in Bill 30 are really undermining the legitimacy and autonomy of that council, and in fact one of the members of the current council has literally said that the legislation that's been brought forward by the government, Bill 30, would decimate their important and nonpartisan work.

I think, again, that a year and a half ago perhaps Albertans didn't maybe believe that the government members would take the actions that they've taken, but right now the Albertans who are living today, on this date, and have been watching this government for the past little while know that they don't make any appointments to boards or councils without partisan factors being the primary determinant as to why they're making appointments, whether it's to reward their donors, failed candidates, people that they've promised things to. They've demonstrated over and over again that they don't have a commitment to true, quality, evidence-based decision-making. They don't have a commitment to representation on these boards. They seem to have a commitment to further their partisan interests and to reward their friends.

That's why we are concerned when once again they're trying to undermine an independent and important nonpartisan council that has been a national leader when it comes to improving patient safety and the quality of health care. This is really a council that we should all be proud of in this province. It's been a global leader in terms of protecting patient safety and quality of care, yet now this government wants to remove the reporting relationship or change the reporting relationship for this council to actually make it so that unlike right now, prior to Bill 30 passing, if it should pass, of course, when the Health Quality Council of Alberta reports to the Legislature, reports to all of us, the changes that the government has made in Bill 30 are to make that council report directly to the Minister of Health.

Let's be clear. The Minister of Health does not have a great relationship and a great reputation thus far with respect to how he exercises his authority and how he develops trust and great working relationships either, whether it be with physicians, whether it be with the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, certainly breaking faith and tearing up a contract and refusing to go back to arbitration and negotiation with the doctors in our province.

We've seen how dismissively this government treats many public-sector workers, telling teachers that, you know, providing and implementing proper health and safety protocols for the safe reopening of schools, which is what all parents want, is just simply, quote, tidying up. The government has been very good at standing up and saying, "Oh, thank you so much" to our front-line health care workers, but they've been slow to do anything to actually reward them for that work. We certainly know that the government has a disrespectful relationship when it comes to our health care professions.

We know that this government takes a heavy hand with respect to how it appoints individuals to boards but also how it tries to direct those boards to do that, so the amendment that's before us today, Madam Chair, put forward by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, is to actually protect the independence and autonomy of the Health Quality Council of Alberta and prevent the minister from making the changes that have been put forward in Bill 30. It is very important that if we have any means by which to preserve those evidence-based, independent organizations that guide us in our work, because that is how we should be making decisions – based on evidence, based on the experts and listening to them – we should be preserving that autonomy. It should not be subject to political influence or pressure from ministers, and it's important that we do that.

In fact, the Health Quality Council, as I mentioned, has been a global leader, and I've yet to hear any rationale from the Minister of Health or government members as to why we need to make the changes that have been put forward in Bill 30. It suggests that the Minister of Health is not actually looking at this with a perspective of improving or strengthening or supporting the Health Quality Council of Alberta but actually trying to undermine their nonpartisan work and the important work that they're doing.

4:50

It seems that that's probably important, I would imagine, because at the same time as they're trying to create this reporting relationship directly to the minister, they're also trying to push forward the further privatization and Americanization of our health care system. We've seen that. We're seeing that right now. We're seeing that by the removal of the requirements that private surgical clinics have to demonstrate a commitment to public health care, demonstrate that they're not going to, in some way, undermine our public health care system or have an adverse effect on the public health care system. That's not a priority for this government. We saw that loud and clear last night. We saw it in Bill 30. We saw it when we gave them an opportunity to correct their mistake by putting those provisions back into what will now be called the health care facilities act, to actually ensure that the highest standard and factor when determining whether or not to open a private clinic is whether or not there will be an adverse impact on our public health care system.

The government did not take that opportunity. They chose, instead, to pursue going ahead with scrapping those provisions that have been a hallmark, I would argue, of our health care system for some time. While, you know, people like myself might have not agreed with the decision 20 years ago under Bill 11, through Premier Klein, to even introduce the idea of private surgical clinics, the only way we had to protect, I guess, our public health care system in light of the introduction of private clinics was to really focus on making sure that that analysis was done, that that evaluation was done every time a private clinic was established to make sure that there would be no negative impact on the public health care system.

This just seems, Madam Chair, like one more step. By undermining the autonomy of the Health Quality Council of Alberta, it's one more step to remove an entity that's evidence-based, that's been a global leader in looking out for patients from being able to speak up about the impacts of what they're doing with the rest of Bill 30. It's to silence. It seems like it's intended to make sure that those organizations that have the evidence, the research, the expertise to be able to actually report in a nonpartisan way, in an objective way about the impact, say, for example, of increased privatization in our health care system, on the impact of our public health care system. Since the Minister of Health no longer thinks he needs to do that analysis, organizations and groups such as the Health Quality Council of Alberta become more important. So it seems that the intent here by the Minister of Health is to further muzzle that kind of knowledge-based, evidence-based research, and I think Albertans should all be concerned about that.

It's, again, a consistent way that they have taken even with trying to, on the professional college's board – again, increasing public members is a good thing if it wasn't for the fact that Albertans would be suspicious and have a right to be suspicious about who this government appoints to boards because they don't appoint individuals based on expertise or knowledge. If they did, they wouldn't have appointed the former executive director of their party to be the Health Advocate, Seniors Advocate, and mental health

advocate, having no experience or expertise in those areas at all because that's not why that individual was appointed to the board. The individual was appointed to the board because a favour was owed by the government to this person as a reward for their hard work and partisan activities.

Again we're seeing that that same approach will be taken in the colleges of our health professions, and again it seems like with respect to the Health Quality Council of Alberta the same approach is being taken by this government. Increased transparency and accountability is something that all Albertans are supportive of, but they are rightfully mistrustful of a government that continues to espouse those principles and claim that that's what they're doing when they're really giving themselves complete control and power to reward their friends, to reward their donors by appointing them to cushy positions and to provide them with the answers and analysis that they're looking for to legitimize, basically, their ideological agenda. That's really what we're seeing here.

A common theme in my comments to date, Madam Chair, has been that I am utterly shocked by how this government has failed to in any way reflect upon the lessons learned through the pandemic, the lessons learned through the epic drop in oil prices. No lessons seem to have been learned. Everything that's here was probably determined long before the pandemic hit. There's been no reflection on how well our public health care system has served Albertans and continues across this country to serve Canadians during this time. Despite that, despite the heroic efforts of our front-line health care workers, despite the absolutely admirable job that our public health care system has done to meet the needs of Albertans during this very difficult time, the government is pursuing an agenda to increase privatization.

That's not what anybody voted for. Many Albertans saw the Premier sign his cardboard commitment to public health care, and it turns out that that's exactly the value that the Premier assigned to it. It was worth just cardboard to him, because with the first step he could, he started to undermine, this government started to undermine our relationship with our physicians during a pandemic, and now we see them pushing forward with an agenda to increase not just the number of private surgical clinics – despite the fact that there's legitimate evidence to challenge whether or not increasing private clinics will actually reduce wait times and will not just be a further drain on the public system, will not actually end up costing more as we've seen that a number of surgical procedures operated at private clinics do cost more.

I have concerns, Madam Chair, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I would like to recognize the hon. Minister of Health to rise on debate.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm not sure how much of that had to do with amendment A3, but I want to correct the record on a couple of things. The first one is about some of the comments that were related to our appointment processes with this government. I notice that the hon. member said that Alberta's government doesn't appoint people with expertise. Holy. The insult the hon. member just gave to a former NDP cabinet minister that we've appointed to one of our boards and agencies . . .

Mr. Williams: Who ran against our member.

Mr. Shandro: Sorry?

Mr. Williams: Who even ran against one of our members.

Mr. Shandro: ... who even ran against one of the members in government caucus. We've appointed a former NDP cabinet minister. So here we have the NDP obviously not having a lot of faith in their former Minister of Energy, Madam Chair. It's a little bit shameful for the NDP to be digging on their former colleagues this way.

The hon. member also, in particular, took aim at our appointments to our colleges, which I found quite interesting because as it happens, Madam Chair, one of the folks that was appointed to one of our college councils was someone who ran against me in Calgary-Acadia. Imagine the NDP – but, again, they live in a fantasyland. Up is down, cats are dogs, winter is summer for the NDP, and people that we ran against in the last election are hyperpartisan Conservatives that owe us a favour. We owe them a favour. No. We want Albertans who are talented, who are standing up and want to serve their community. Unlike the NDP, who throughout their appointment processes wanted to focus on appointing people who shared, as they said, their world view, we want people with diverse backgrounds.

The problem with the NDP is that they think that anyone who's Conservative should be prohibited from serving their community, and that's a shame, Madam Chair. We don't share that, as they called it, world view. We don't have that world view. We think that people from all different types of backgrounds, whether they are Conservative or not, whether they are NDP or not ... [interjections] Edmonton-Gold Bar is incredibly angry with me right now for having these falsehoods pointed out to him. The ridiculous up and down that the NDP ...

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, I'd just like to remind all members that the hon. Minister of Health has the floor right now.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is certainly difficult to speak over Edmonton-Gold Bar because he gets so angry at having these falsehoods pointed out to him. He gets so angry because it's difficult for them to be confronted with the truth that Alberta's government is focused on appointing people who are talented, who want to serve their community, whether their background is Conservative or not. We're going to do that as well with our appointment processes with the colleges, as we have done throughout all of our appointment processes for our ABCs, our agencies, boards, and commissions.

Now, another concerning thing that came from the hon. member was about her concern about the privatization of our health care system that is occurring in Bill 30. Madam Chair, she had the great concern that we are increasing the number of private clinics, as she called them. The 10,800 physicians that provide patient services are vendors. When we go into our family physician's office, it is a private clinic if we're using the same definition that the NDP are using. When we get a referral to a specialist and we go to our ear, nose, and throat doctor for our kids to get a consultation on whether they need tubes in their ears, that's a private clinic, according to the NDP. They have no problem being disingenuous when they go to those physicians and those offices, and they're called private clinics.

The difficulty for the NDP is that everybody else who is an independent provider is scary for them. That's really because the NDP's goal is not to show up in this Chamber and represent patients. They're not fighting to protect publicly funded health care. They're here to serve one interest group. They're here to fight against nonunionized workplaces, and that's their opposition to Bill 30. You know, there's a word for this, Madam Chair. It's called floccinaucinihilipilification. This, of course, is the word that describes the act of estimating something as worthless. It's a word

– again, floccinaucinihilipilification – that I know my colleague the Member for Peace River is going to be familiar with.

5:00

An Hon. Member: A pretty strong word.

Mr. Shandro: It is.

Look, Madam Chair, that's exactly what the NDP do every day when they fight against our independent providers in the health care system. They estimate them as worthless because they are not fighting for those professionals. They are not fighting for expanded care in the system. They are not fighting for patients. They are fighting to stop non-unionized workplaces in the health system. We, however, see a place for both unionized and non-unionized workplaces. Our goal is to represent patients, to represent the professionals who want to provide that care and make sure that patients are getting the care in the quickest way that they can and the best way that they can.

Madam Chair, that's our goal with Bill 30, making sure that the processes for chartered surgical facilities are not as ridiculous and cumbersome as they had been under previous governments. That's the focus here in Bill 30. It's unfortunate that the NDP are going to continue to fight against these non-unionized workplaces and continue, when they show up in this Chamber, to represent one interest group, one stakeholder – the unions – and not patients.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am pleased to rise and add my voice to the debate. Today we're talking specifically about amendment A3, which is to restore the autonomy of the Health Quality Council of Alberta.

Of course, Bill 30 does take away the independence, really, of the Health Quality Council of Alberta. Currently, before this legislation came through – and it's not passed yet, so it's the current state – it would report directly to the Legislative Assembly so that all members of this House could receive their reports, listen to their concerns all at the same time. But now the legislation in Bill 30 is proposing that it only be reported to the minister. You know, any student at all of politics knows that that means the minister has control over the council, and that's not going to serve Albertans. That's going to actually take away from the very vital, important, key work that this quality council does.

Of course, I'm sure many of the hon. members have already heard that certainly one of the members stepped down because of this egregious move by this government to actually take away the autonomy of the council, really impeding it from doing its proper work. It's like an overseer. It's meant to help our health system improve so that patients are well cared for, the different dimensions of the health system are supported. For some reason this government is deciding that that's no longer necessary.

We know that a healthy democracy has checks and balances, and this takes away a check and balance. Certainly, we have other committees and we have advocates, those folks who hold sort of a role where they oversee and look at some of the policies of government. We have an Auditor General that does that, looks at the finances of the government. We have a Child and Youth Advocate, who reports directly to the Legislature. These are good processes, Madam Chair, that are important. This erosion, really, of a vital aspect of our democracy is, quite frankly, disturbing. There's not really any clear understanding from this government on why they're doing this. All I can surmise from what I'm hearing is that

they just want to have control. They don't want those checks and balances. They don't want this council to have that independence so that they can properly oversee and speak publicly about those concerns. The minister wants to vet that report first and only allow what he thinks is okay.

That's kind of a typical method of this government, because they've done it time and time again, and my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud just spoke about that in her comments. I'll just reiterate, you know, that this government abolished the Seniors Advocate. They said: "Oh, yes. No problem. The Health Advocate will take care of that role." But we know that the Health Advocate doesn't. Only 30 per cent of the cases that came to the Seniors Advocate had anything to do with health. They don't talk about housing. They don't address 60 per cent of the concerns, financial issues that seniors have, none of that. Now no one is an advocate for seniors in our province regarding 60 per cent of their concerns.

You know, it's also extremely egregious – and, again, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud spoke about this – that it was a complete partisan appointment of Janice Harrington to that position, who is not qualified at all, has no experience. She's just connected with the UCP government, and she was the CEO for the UCP before being appointed to that.

You know, when we did the recruitment for the Seniors Advocate – we created that independent office while we were in government, something that I'm very proud of – we did an extensive search for that person, and we hired someone who was an expert in the area, Dr. Sheree Kwong See. She had a PhD in sociology, was a prof at the University of Alberta, with extensive research in the area of seniors. She brought tremendous understanding, expertise to that. This government doesn't care about that. They just want to keep things quiet, evidenced by them having the Health Quality Council of Alberta report directly to the minister and not to the Assembly as a whole.

An Hon. Member: That's not true.

Ms Sigurdson: That's what the legislation says.

This amendment will go to keeping the status quo, that actually the reporting will be to the Legislature as a whole. Again, as we know, that's a good principle in democracy, that there are checks and balances in our system and that all members of this Assembly should be able to have access to the reporting of the Health Quality Council of Alberta. They should be able to do their work in an arm's-length way, as it is now. I would encourage all the members of this Assembly to support this amendment as it's going to make a big difference to the efficacy, really, of the Health Quality Council of Alberta.

You know, there are other extremely egregious examples of this kind of thing, where the government certainly puts partisan appointments in and sort of silences people who might speak about fairness or equality or justice. It's something that hasn't actually come to the Legislature yet but is part of some consultations they're doing over the summer, in the heat of the summer, over a very short period of time, so really not a fair, robust consultation process, and that's with the professional colleges that are in the Health Professions Act. I'm a member of the Alberta College of Social Workers, so I know very well that one of the things that they're asking the ACSW is what they think about separating sort of a regulatory body and an association. They're planning something very similar to what they're doing in Bill 32 in silencing the unions, sort of the opting-out or opting-in clause regarding any political activity. Even professional associations, professional colleges may be split. This is the suggestion in the consultation process.

Of course, I worked at the Alberta College of Social Workers for 10 years previous to being elected to this position, and they did tremendous advocacy and hard work making sure that vulnerable Albertans were supported, making sure that social workers had the supports they needed to be able to serve vulnerable Albertans, and that advocacy arm of the association was very key to that. It seems now that this government is suggesting that that should be gone. Of course, you know, the College of Social Workers isn't very large, so if they carve off the association, that's the death knell for that area. So, hey, another whole swath of people speaking publicly about equality, fairness, and justice are shut up. Silence for those people again.

Then the government can just say: you know, well, we didn't hear from anybody. They're sort of taking away many of the opportunities for professional colleges to speak up, for unions to speak up. It's only the voices of the Conservatives. They say that we don't respect their voices. We certainly do respect the voices of Conservatives. But – you know what? – we don't only respect them; we respect the voices of progressives also, of diverse populations, of people all over Alberta. It's not just the Conservatives.

5:10

What we have seen very clearly – and this is just one more example – is that this government is going to sort of make sure that for all the detractors, anyone who might challenge their political view, their political agenda, we're going to keep those people quiet.

Certainly, this Health Quality Council of Alberta has served Albertans tremendously well. It's a global leader. You know, we're very proud of the work they've done. Now they're sort of cutting off their legs. They're making them a weaker entity. Even someone who sits on that council is so disheartened, so upset by the lack of authority, power for them to do what they need to do that he has resigned. That's a huge loss for us as Albertans, and we should be concerned about that. This government's decision to make them report directly to the minister as opposed to the Legislature is a huge mistake. This amendment absolutely addresses that and actually restores it to a more fair and democratic way, that this Health Quality Council of Alberta should report to this Legislature.

The bill in general, of course – I mean, this would help the bill. I really, again, do ask my colleagues to consider that this is an amendment to continue to keep the Health Quality Council of Alberta strong. But we know that the bill in general is to create American-style health care in our province. We already have a model of that. You know, we already have a model of that. We have that in our continuing care system. We know what has happened during COVID-19. We knew there were problems previous in this private system, but they're exacerbated much more by COVID-19. It's a huge tragedy that about 75 per cent of the COVID-19 deaths in our province were people living in the continuing care system. We know that these are preventable deaths and that this is a private system that is prioritizing profit over the care for seniors. This is American-style health care. We don't have to even go to the States to see that here in Canada. If you want to look at where there's trouble, this is it. This is it right here in our own province.

I just want you to know that I receive many phone calls and e-mails and, you know, people reaching out to me on social media to tell me some pretty challenging stories about that private system here in Alberta, about people feeling that their loved ones are not being cared for.

A big issue in this area is, of course, the staffing model. The staffing model, you know, has oftentimes part-time workers because the private system is, as I said, prioritizing profit over care. People aren't given full-time jobs, they don't get benefits, and they therefore need to have other jobs so that they can cobble together

full-time work and be able to care for their families and themselves. You know what? That created huge issues with COVID-19 because – guess what? – they transmitted the virus to seniors quite rapidly until, of course, people became aware of that, and then the restriction was made to a single site, which is so important. This is just a very clear example of some of the challenges with the private system.

You know, we see that quality of care may suffer in corporate facilities as there are incentives to cut corners to maximize shareholder profits. It puts greater demand on the public system as the most difficult cases are left to the public system. It also skims off sometimes when you're having a private/public system like that. Oftentimes the public system is paying more. This two-tiered health system will make it so that some people who are waiting in the public system have to wait longer. I mean, obviously, we stand in the Official Opposition in opposition to Bill 30. It will not improve the health care system in Alberta, and it is devastating. Certainly, the people who we are most grateful for actually are those workers: the doctors, the nurses, the people who are supporting Albertans at this time.

You know, honestly, this is my second term as an MLA, and I've never met with so many doctors in my life as in this last while. So many have reached out to me. So many are upset about the changes that this government has proposed, just how it's making it impossible for them to do their work properly and also just the extreme disrespect toward the profession regarding the tearing up of their contract, unilaterally refusing to do arbitration, sort of mistruths about what they are doing, saying that they never put any proposals forward, when, of course, they did. I mean, this government is just attacking the physicians who are helping us during a pandemic. It doesn't make any sense. It's ludicrous. We should be thanking them and supporting them as much as we can instead of attacking them.

We know, too, from the AMA that they just did some recent surveys of their members, and 42 per cent of them are considering leaving our province. That would be devastating for Alberta. We know that in rural Alberta, where some doctors have already left, they've said: well, I'm not going to put up with this anymore. They've left our province or are planning to shortly. I mean, we should not be doing this kind of thing. If anything, we need to be doing the opposite. We need to be making sure that we're working fairly with the doctors in good faith and not just sort of arbitrarily dictating what we want.

But, of course, this is a general pattern of this government, that they are happy to just sort of silence people who don't agree with them or, you know, call them names. We in the opposition are maligned continuously by them. We speak up about things, and we're told we're this, we're that. It's ridiculous. It's sort of revisionist history. I get up and speak, and then someone tells me what I said, which is completely not what I said. But it doesn't really matter. It's just the spin. There's not any kind of integrity or authenticity or kind of any vision that's healthy. It's mostly just about attacking everyone. It's just pushing back.

I mean, governments can be visionaries. They can, you know, have a view, and they can hear from everyone. I don't know; this government seems to have a little bit of sensitivity. They can't hear from everyone. They have to malign them. They have to denigrate them. They have to make sure certain people are in certain positions so that they're yes-women, yes-men for them. I mean, they won't have an open discourse about this.

This reminds me of the Klein era, you know, where he would call people left-wing nuts if you say anything detracting from him. I remember at a conference of social workers way back in the '90s we all just happily wore – we put pins on our jackets that said that

we were left-wing nuts. We proudly said that we were because it was so ridiculous. Our voices couldn't be heard? Of course they can. We live in an open, fair, democratic country. There's freedom of speech. I don't like everything you say, you might not like everything I say, but we can all talk about it.

I guess the transparency of sharing, the Health Quality Council of Alberta sharing their reports openly with everyone in the Legislature, not just reporting to the minister, who then vets it to make sure it says what he wants it to, is just another example of making sure that people can, you know, have the authentic truth of what's going on instead of sort of this filtered information. I would think that would be so important. I certainly wanted that in my Seniors Advocate, and that's why we chose someone who was an expert. She challenged us and she pushed us and she said: you guys need to do more about this, and you've got to think about that. It wasn't always comfortable, and that was okay. That was actually healthy, and that's how people are able to grow and understand.

5:20

But this government doesn't want any of that. They just want, as I said, people who are going to sort of do their bidding, and they continually appoint or take away powers so that people are, yeah, doing exactly that. Albertans are poorer for it because they're not getting the full story. They're not understanding it. Madam Chair, I just find that deeply disturbing, and I think Bill 30 certainly is not going to move Alberta forward. It's continuing to bring in American-style health care in our province. It's taking away the important independent powers of the Health Quality Council of Alberta, and this amendment would absolutely bring that autonomy back to the council. I think it's an important amendment that all members in this Legislature should support because it would keep the status quo as we have it, so I encourage everyone to be in support of this amendment.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to rise in debate on amendment A3? I see the hon. Her Majesty's Leader of the Official Opposition has risen.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak to amendment – which one is it?

The Acting Chair: Amendment A3.

Ms Notley: Amendment A3, which in effect seeks to eliminate section 5 of Bill 30, a section which includes a number of changes, all of which are geared towards restructuring the role and the work of the Health Quality Council, making them far more accountable to and under the control of the deputy minister and, through the deputy minister, of course, the Minister of Health. There are a number of things that are done in order to achieve that goal.

I want to start by talking about why we think this is bad, why we think this removal of independence, why we think the undermining of transparency, why we think the growth of the opportunity for political and cabinet interference, why those things, all of which are the outcome of the successful passage of Bill 30 without section 5 being removed, are bad. It took me a while to get to it because I had to do a little bit of hunting, and it's been a while since I've had to do my own research, which I have to say is a good thing. Nonetheless, periodically when you've got a bit of time, that's what you do.

I managed to go back to November 2011 and 2011 as a whole to do a little bit of history because I did remember, of course, that the Health Quality Council of Alberta was very much at the centre of another Conservative health care scandal. As a result of that,

because it was drawn into this Conservative health care scandal, there were, in fact, changes made to it legislatively, and it was introduced on November 21, 2011, by then Premier Redford as part of her attempt to calm down the scandal which had been raging for the previous six or seven months as a result of a great deal of political interference within the health care system.

Now, whether that worked or not – I’m pretty sure it didn’t. But just to remind people, it was a scandal. Well, there were many, many things going on in the health care system. It was a bit of a dumpster fire, really. The wait-lists were skyrocketing. There were allegations of misappropriation of health care resources by senior physicians with connections to the Conservative Party that resulted in potentially hundreds of people not getting the surgical care they required and dying, literally dying, while on the wait-list. There were allegations of – this was all wrapped up, again, in the attempt by the preceding Premier to make some progress with respect to the privatization of health care funding, and that was something that had been disclosed as a result of leaked caucus and cabinet documents wherein there was evidence that they had been talking about those issues. Anyway, it was quite the dumpster fire. Every time you turned around, there was yet another scandal addressing the issues of health care and mismanagement of our health care system by the former Conservative government.

One of the other issues that was going on – and I haven’t had a chance to do the reading for it, so I’m not a hundred per cent sure. I think that this was right around the same time as the issue of the queue-jumping, around access to vaccinations when we had H1N1 as well as queue-jumping that was taking place within some of these private surgical suites that this Minister of Health is so keen to accelerate the growth of.

Anyway, all that being said, one of the issue management strategies that the folks who were then part of the Conservative government decided to avail themselves of was to try to refer it off to the Health Quality Council. So off they went. They referred it off to the Health Quality Council, but Albertans would have none of it because at the time the Health Quality Council of Alberta was essentially an extension of the minister, an extension of the deputy minister, and they were very much connected to each other. There was a very robust debate both in the Legislature and during the leadership race for who would become the Premier around how you engage with the Health Quality Council of Alberta and how you make it sufficiently independent so that it would earn the trust of Albertans, both in terms of playing a role in trying to sort through this mess of scandal that the Conservatives had subjected Albertans to at that point and also how Albertans could trust the reporting of the Health Quality Council of Alberta when it came to things that Albertans really cared a great deal about like, for instance, wait times in ERs and wait times for certain procedures.

All of this scandal and corruption and allegations of misappropriation of funds and all that kind of stuff really had stemmed out of the growing intensity of fears of Albertans over the fact that they simply couldn’t get access to care. There were wait times that were getting out of control and access to various procedures, and there was a great deal of public concern about that. The government of the day tended to try to, you know, pat people on the head by saying: “Oh, no. There’s no problem. Look, the Health Quality Council of Alberta says that we’re doing the best job ever, and there isn’t a problem.” That was sort of amongst the various and sundry things that were happening with the Health Quality Council of Alberta.

Interestingly, what happened was that in November 2011 the government of the day decided that they were going to give the Health Quality Council of Alberta an overhaul so that (a) they could issue manage their way out of this unending pit of scandal, (b) use

the Health Quality Council of Alberta as a vehicle to pull themselves out of the pit of scandal by having the Health Quality Council of Alberta take over some of the reviews and the investigations of the many criss-crossing allegations that were happening at the time, and (c) arguably actually create a credible organization that would measure the performance of Alberta’s health care system. They changed the legislation so that it could do that.

5:30

They talk very specifically about, “We are going to untangle the relationship between the Health Quality Council of Alberta and the Minister of Health and the Department of Health, and we are going to make it an independent body that does not answer to the deputy minister, does not answer to the Health minister and does table its report directly to the Legislature and is made up of people who have definitive independence from the Ministry of Health and also that has a mandate to do things like independently measure the kinds of things that Albertans care about,” which, to be clear, notwithstanding, you know, the watching-a-car-crash sort of interest that Albertans had in terms of reading about the scandals that the Conservatives were generating, really, Albertans were most focused on the performance of their health care system and what was happening with respect to emergency wait times and other wait times.

It’s certainly quite an interesting read to go back through some of the points that were made by indeed the government itself around why it was so valuable to make those changes to the Health Quality Council of Alberta, but I will say that we see, for instance, at one point the Premier of the day saying that it was

wonderful... to be able to have the legislation tabled with respect to the Health Quality Council. It’s going to strengthen their ability to do exactly what [we] would like them to do. You know, what’s great... is that they’re going to do it independently, they’re going to do it in public, they’re going to be able to compel witnesses, protect witnesses, and... [it’s going to be] transparent, and... I’m very proud of that.

That’s what the Premier at the time said when the Health Quality Council legislation was brought in November of 2011.

Now, I know Conservatives of today love nothing more than to attack their former Conservative leader and former Premier Alison Redford, but I’m just saying that at the time all of you voted for her, and you voted for this principle of independence and transparency and getting the minister and the minister’s deputy and the Minister of Health out of the business of the Health Quality Council of Alberta, and that’s what you all voted for.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Now what we’re doing is we’re coming in and through section 5 in Bill 30 we are undoing all of that because we’ve decided: meh, independence is a pesky thing; we’d rather not have independence; we’d rather not have the Health Quality Council of Alberta measuring the performance of the health care system in Alberta. You know, we can only speculate why that is.

I said before in question period whether, you know, the decision of this government through Bill 32 to gag public-sector unions was, you know, akin to cutting the phone lines before breaking into the house. Well, certainly, this is another part of that. Cutting the independence and limiting the mandate of the Health Quality Council of Alberta when you are on the eve of heralding in an unprecedented amount of corporatization of the health care system is also akin to cutting the phone line right before you break in. That is clearly what happens through section 5 as it exists in Bill 30 right now. Is it section 5 that’s eliminating – no. It’s whatever section that’s eliminating all of section 5. No. We are trying to get rid of

section 5 – that’s it – which rewrites the Health Quality Council’s mandate. Sorry. It’s been a while since I’ve done this.

Anyway, so that’s what’s going on here, and I just really think that Albertans need to be reminded of the historical context here. This was a quasi-sincere effort on the part of former Conservatives to create an independent body that would hold them to account with respect to the operations and activities of Alberta’s health care system and that was also going to be able to look into and investigate, in theory, a number of the crossallegations of scandal that occurred between Conservatives and former Conservatives pretty much every day of the week in that particular sitting of the Legislature, and it was done in order to convince Albertans that they could trust this organization because it would be independent. That’s what they said: Albertans could trust it because it’s independent. Now they’re saying – I don’t know what they’re saying. Apparently trusting this organization is no longer a primary objective.

What is troubling, though, as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview has clearly outlined, is that there are members of this quality council who have taken their job very, very seriously, who believe very deeply that their job is to do whatever they can to improve the quality of care received by patients. You know, the Health minister came in and kind of did his little thing and went poke, poke, poke and made a bunch of spurious allegations, most of which were not actually grounded in fact in any way, shape, or form, and suggested that, you know, over here we don’t care about patients. That is quite ridiculous. Of course, we are the party that introduced public health care, medicare to this country. To be clear, the millions of lives that have been saved since that happened are entirely attributable to the fact that people didn’t have to wait until they could get access to their line of credit before they could get health care. So to suggest somehow that we aren’t concerned about patients is an utterly ridiculous statement but, you know, kind of to be expected from a minister who debates and engages with truth the way this one does.

Nonetheless, the point being is that we do care about patients, and there are a number of different ways that one does the job of improving the experience of patients, improving the experience and the quality of life of not only patients but their family members. There are number of different ways that you do that. You do that by having, you know, patient advocates. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview, again, very aptly pointed out that, contrary to the comments made by the Minister of Health, appointing the former executive director of the UCP does utterly nothing to secure the rights of patients. It secures the paycheck of that particular person, but it does nothing to secure the rights and the experiences of patients because presumably if you were interested in doing that, you would appoint somebody with some experience in the health care system or the delivery of health care or in the care of people who are suffering from health challenges. They didn’t do that, so presumably there was a different objective behind the appointment of that particular person into that role, but without question it was absolutely one of the most overt and astonishing partisan appointments into a system that most Albertans care deeply about, including members of this caucus.

Anyway, I digress a bit. I just mention that because it is one of a number of different ways in which you ensure that the best interests of patients in Alberta, people who have illnesses or suffer from accidents or suffer from chronic disease – what is the best interest of those people? What is the best interest of their loved ones and the people who love them? What is their best interest, and how do we ensure that? Well, first thing, you make sure you maintain public delivery of health care because every single solitary bit of peer-reviewed evidence tells you that that is the way to do it the best. The second thing you do is that you make sure you have enough nurses and doctors and care aides and physiotherapists and radiologists and radiation therapists around to get the job done. You don’t create two parallel systems, where you steal half of the people

that are required to care for those patients and set them aside for a little extra special group of wealthy people. That’s not how you take care of patients. No, it’s not.

Another thing that you don’t do is that you don’t tell those people who provide health care, whether it be doctors, nurses, care aides, custodial staff, who work to keep the hospitals and the long-term care centres clean and sanitized and safe, that they don’t matter. You don’t tell them that they’re union bosses. You don’t denigrate their desire to stand up for a fair workplace and safety and the safety of their patients. No. You listen to them, and you invite them to the table. That’s something that this government has absolutely rejected as a principle, not even as a casual, sloppy practice, like: oh, we’re so used to being entitled; oh, I guess we never thought to talk to those workers. No, no. Their principle is actually: no, thou shalt not talk to the people who provide the care. But if one were to do that, that is how you would actually take care of patients.

5:40

Then the other thing that you would do is that you would ensure that you have independent, evidence-based information that was provided by professionals who were there because of their expertise, who were not inhibited in the research and the work and the reporting that they did by a relationship with a deputy minister and a Minister of Health that is too close. That kind of independent expert evidence is exactly how you make sure that patients are cared for in the best possible way. It’s exactly how you do it: you believe in science, you research science, you follow science. I know those are all nifty ideas. There’s a little bit of discomfort over there with those, but science is a thing. Then you respect the people who are the purveyors of that, and you give them the independence to do their job. What’s happening here is that this government is attacking all of that, so yet another mechanism through which you protect patients is being destroyed if you don’t follow our amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on amendment A3? Seeing none.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:42 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Feehan	Loyola	Schmidt
Ganley	Notley	Sigurdson, L.
Hoffman	Pancholi	

Against the motion:

Allard	Loewen	Singh
Copping	Neudorf	Stephan
Ellis	Nicolaides	Toews
Glubish	Nixon, Jeremy	Toor
Goodridge	Panda	van Dijken
Gotfried	Pon	Williams
Guthrie	Rutherford	Yao
Issik	Savage	Yaseen
Jones	Shandro	

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 26
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[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you. I rise to move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 32. I believe Bill 30 was earlier.

The Deputy Chair: For progress.

Mrs. Savage: Yes, for progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress

on the following bills: Bill 30, Bill 32. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

Seeing the time – it is 6 o'clock – the Assembly stands adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca