



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, October 20, 2020

Day 54

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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

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Allard, Hon. Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UCP)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UCP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UCP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee

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Dach
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Sabir
Singh
Smith
Yaseen

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 20, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, good afternoon and welcome.

We will be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. In observation of the COVID-19 public health guidelines outlined by Dr. Hinshaw, please refrain from singing in the language of your choice.

Ms Elhard:

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, please remain standing.

It is our custom that we take a moment to pay tribute to three former members who've passed away since our spring sitting. More detailed tributes will be read when the families are able to join us in person at a later sitting.

Mr. Robert Arnold Fischer
June 9, 1937, to August 9, 2020

The Speaker: Robert A. "Butch" Fischer served six terms as the Progressive Conservative Member for Wainwright, from 1992 to 2001. Mr. Fischer came to the Legislature as an owner of a farming business in the Irma area. In 1994 he was named the legislative secretary to the Premier responsible for tourism. He subsequently was appointed to cabinet as minister of public works, supply, and services from 1994 to 1996 and as minister of transportation and utilities from 1996 to 1997. Mr. Fischer passed away on August 9, 2020, at the age of 83.

Hon. Nicholas William Taylor
November 17, 1927, to October 3, 2020

The Speaker: The Hon. Nicholas W. Taylor served three terms as the Alberta Liberal Member for Westlock-Sturgeon from 1986 to 1993 and for Redwater from 1993 to 1996. In 1996 he was appointed to the Senate, where he served until 2002. Mr. Taylor passed away on October 3, 2020, at the age of 92.

Mr. Stanley Stanford Schumacher, QC
June 12, 1933, to October 10, 2020

The Speaker: Stanley S. Schumacher served three terms as the Progressive Conservative Member for Drumheller from 1986 to 1997. Mr. Schumacher served as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees from 1989 to 1993 and then as Alberta's ninth Speaker from 1993 to 1997. Mr. Schumacher passed away on October 10, 2020, at the age of 87.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember Mr. Fischer, Mr. Taylor, and Speaker Schumacher, each as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Member's Fifth Anniversary of Election

The Speaker: Hon. members, my sincere apology. Before moving to Members' Statements, I would like to make a special acknowledgement today of the fifth anniversary of the election of a member to this Assembly. I'd ask the Minister of Infrastructure to please come forward. Many of you will know that the hon. the Minister of Infrastructure was elected in a by-election, and as such, his fifth anniversary is slightly different to the many members who had their fifth anniversary not that long ago.

It's my sincere pleasure to offer you this five-year service pin. Many congratulations to you.

Members' Statements

Economic Development

Mr. Bilous: The evidence is clear. We need a new economic strategy, and we need it now. The current government is out of ideas, Mr. Speaker. The Premier campaigned on jobs, the economy, and pipelines. He's delivered nothing. Under his watch Alberta lost 50,000 jobs prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and many more since. The only response from this Premier is to double down on his failed \$4.7 billion giveaway despite not being able to produce a shred of evidence that it's working. News flash: it hasn't worked at all, and now Albertans are being called on to pay for it. The tech industry is paying for it, Alberta taxpayers are paying for it, our schools, our hospitals – I could go on and on.

Albertans deserve better than this Premier. He's simply not the right leader for the historic challenges we face. The Alberta NDP believes the greatest resource we have in this province is our people, especially their ideas. That's why we've launched a new initiative at www.albertasfuture.ca. We are engaging with Albertans to build a new path forward, and we're inviting all Albertans to come together, regardless of their political differences, to be part of this conversation. The challenges we face require us to unite, Mr. Speaker. What I've observed is a UCP government that seeks to divide us.

We cannot keep going on like this, and our economic proposals will show a different way. We will propose strategic investments to grow new sectors and create new opportunities for Albertans. In the coming weeks we'll be presenting Albertans with ideas to start conversations about AI and tech, energy, agriculture, forestry, tourism, high-speed Internet, and the role of our postsecondary institutions as economic drivers. I encourage all Albertans to get involved in this critical work to build albertasfuture.ca.

Alberta Federation of Labour Boycott

Mr. Loewen: Last week the NDP leader began rolling out some economic policies that she says will, quote, grow the economy. This took me by surprise. When the NDP were in power, they cost Albertans 175,000 jobs and drove away tens of billions of dollars of investment, directly due to their policies. It's hard to take seriously economic advice from someone with that poor of a record.

Now, the NDP leader not once but twice refused to condemn an Alberta Federation of Labour campaign from her good friend Gil McGowan to harass and intimidate and bankrupt Alberta businesses that consider themselves Conservative. Yes, this is the same McGowan that called parents of schoolchildren nutbars, compared democracy to Nazism, and on his Twitter profile says, "My job is to stand up for working Albertans." I guess what he and the Leader

of the Opposition failed to admit is that the only workers they really care about are NDP workers.

Now, we know the NDP is legally and constitutionally affiliated with the AFL. We also know the NDP leader works hand in glove with Mr. McGowan on these disgusting political stunts. You don't see the UCP trying to boycott businesses whose employees pay union dues to unions that use those dues to campaign against the UCP. In fact, we freed union workers to choose if their dues are used for campaign purposes. Albertans deserve better from the NDP opposition.

Intentionally seeking to destroy Alberta businesses and jobs in the middle of a global pandemic is low, even for them, especially considering that 54 businesses on this political hit list are in NDP ridings. Twenty-seven of these businesses are in the Member for Calgary-Buffalo's riding, but he, too, refuses to condemn this campaign of political intimidation. Nine of these businesses are in the Member for Edmonton-West Henday's riding, but not a peep from him. Four are in Edmonton-City Centre, but that NDP member is too busy spreading misinformation about doctors to stand up for small businesses.

1:40

Let's call this AFL-NDP campaign what it is: disgusting, disrespectful, and dangerous. [interjections] But this is what Albertans have come to expect from the radical socialist Alberta NDP, and that's why they fired them last year. Thankfully, we now have a government that's not controlled by bitter union bosses like McGowan, who are making unprecedented investments to help all Alberta families and businesses weather the COVID-19 storm and come out on the other side stronger than ever. That's what Albertans expect, and it's what we're going to deliver, whether the AFL or the NDP like it or not.

Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting Members' Statements

The Speaker: I'll just remind both sides of the House because certainly I heard members from each side perhaps providing some comment during a member's statement. Of course, you know, it's the first day back, but maybe a reminder that there's a long-standing tradition in this Assembly that during Members' Statements the member can speak uninterrupted, just like the Member for Highwood now will.

Economic Recovery Plan

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, this government's Alberta recovery plan is a bold and ambitious plan to revive the Alberta economy in the wake of an economic downturn caused in part by a global pandemic, a Saudi-Russia price war on oil, and general economic mismanagement of the previous government. This recovery plan looked at implementing specific recovery plans for eight different sectors, including agriculture, energy, forestry, technology and innovation, tourism, culture, aviation, finance and fintech, pharmaceutical and life sciences. Technology and innovation, however, is not just a single sector; rather, it grows all sectors. There is no industry in today's world not impacted and benefited by this advancement. Sectors like energy, agriculture, and manufacturing are prime examples of this.

My riding of Highwood is incredibly diverse and benefits from this strength. This week is Small Business Week, and I feel it's important to point out that small businesses make up a large portion of the industry in my riding and across the province. As of this June small businesses make up 32 per cent of private-sector jobs. Within

small businesses is the flourishing technology sector, that is growing in new and exciting ways despite COVID-19. Companies like CGen have recently announced plans to bring a new Alberta-designed, -manufactured, -engineered technology, a micromodular data centre, to my riding. This new innovation exemplifies the innovative Alberta spirit, and examples like this innovation are why our government has introduced the Alberta recovery plan. Now more than ever we need to support growth in the economy. Initiatives like the innovation employment grant will make Alberta the best place to invest in research and development. We also recapitalized the Alberta Enterprise Corporation so that technology start-ups can get the capital they need to develop and grow.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta recovery plan is an undertaking that looks to build jobs and get Albertans back to work. With incentives and grants such as these, we will put Alberta at the forefront of new ideas, new technologies, and . . .

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

Provincial Parks

Mr. Schmidt: Although summer has come to an abrupt and early end, Albertans made the most of the warm weather and visited our beautiful provincial parks in record numbers this year. Albertans from every walk of life and from every corner of the province spent their summer camping at their favourite campsite, hiking on their favourite trails, and fishing in their favourite creeks or lakes. Unfortunately, many Albertans had disappointing park experiences – campgrounds full, trails deteriorated, and garbage bins overflowing – because this UCP government has fired the people we need to look after our parks and continues to refuse to make the investments necessary to make sure that parks meet Albertans' expectations.

But letting our parks fall to pieces isn't enough for this UCP government. They've targeted almost 200 parks and recreation areas to be shut down or sold off. If they go through with their plan, future generations of Albertans won't get the chance to discover that special campsite with their families or go hiking with their friends to that special lookout.

This proposal has angered Albertans, and they've made their voices heard by writing e-mails, making phone calls, putting up lawn signs, and signing our petition at dontgobreakingmyparks.ca, which now has over 22,000 names. Any normal government would have reacted by reversing course and doing what the people are telling them to do – save our parks – but this UCP government is an anomaly and has ignored the voices of Albertans. It's covered up its plans by quietly pulling the list of parks to be sold or closed down from the Alberta Parks website. It's created fictions by implying that by removing legal protections, somehow Albertans will still be able to enjoy these areas without the threat of encroaching industrial development. It's spun conspiracy theories about radical green leftists making up a plot against this government.

Albertans will not put up with being ignored and deceived. If this continues, Albertans will vote them out in the next election. So the choice for the UCP is clear: either lose the plan to close parks or lose your seats.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has a statement to make.

Oil Sands Workforce

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our federal government is such a strong advocate against global warming and cares about exposing us to COVID. Canadians can rest easy knowing the Prime Minister is working tirelessly from his lakeside cottage. But he can do more,

and he can get his friends from Leadnow and We to help in this endeavour. They can help us stop the scourge of commuting.

Did you know that, including the turnaround workforce, there are almost 10,000 oil sands workers travelling to Alberta from other parts of the nation? Not only do these people needlessly apply from other provinces and territories, filling entire 747 jet planes, burning carbon into the atmosphere to work in the oil sands but they're travelling to communities across the nation, possibly contributing to the spread of COVID-19. This must stop now if this Prime Minister truly cares about the health and well-being of all Canadians and the environment of the world. He needs to get his friends out to Pearson and Trudeau international airports and tell these oil workers to stop commuting now, gently, of course.

Fortunately, there's a very feasible option for all these commuters: they can move to Alberta. Alberta is abundant with thriving communities and a pioneering spirit that inspires entrepreneurship and self-resiliency. With landmarks such as the largest national park in Canada, Wood Buffalo; or the Rocky Mountains around Banff or Jasper; or the hoodoos in south-central Alberta, there are so many destinations to choose from. They can live in the fastest growing city in the nation in Airdrie or choose the scenic views of Medicine Hat, Cypress Hills, or even tranquil Cardston. Maybe they'll choose to live near the northern lakes around Lac La Biche or the dynamic Grande Prairie along the highway to Alaska. Better yet, just move to Fort McMurray and be my neighbour, and together we'll continue to battle for a cleaner environment by eliminating this unnecessary, carbon-intensive travel.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Renaud: Wanda lives in Red Deer county. She tells me that she was the first woman to manage a maintenance crew for a 2,000-person work camp in Fort McMurray. Wanda worked hard, raised her family, invested her money, lived her life. On her 50th birthday she was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer and only given months to live. She continued to work at Suncor, even putting in shifts after chemo treatments, but it became too much.

From 50 to 54 Wanda focused on surviving. She used up all of her savings, including her critical illness insurance. Thanks in part to a clinical trial and a strong public health care system she's still here. She received biweekly injections of new medication for a year, and it cost approximately \$60,000 a month. After four years she was left with nothing, unable to support herself and still battling a deadly illness.

Wanda is now on AISH. She tries to support herself on \$1,685 a month. She had excellent credit before her illness, so she relies on lines of credit and her credit card when she falls short every month. This is not abnormal for AISH recipients. I've heard from many who've had to augment with credit, dangerously high interest short-term loans, or loans from family and friends. She can't afford to live on her own, so she has two roommates. She has to depend on friends and family to get to the hospital for treatment 45 minutes away. She can't afford a healthy diet to help her fight cancer. I think Wanda phrased it perfectly when she told me it was mathematically impossible to take care of herself properly on AISH.

An annual cost-of-living increase would have helped Wanda meet the rising food costs, electricity, and housing, but that was cut by this Premier, this out-of-touch, entitled Premier, who said that it wouldn't be too onerous for disabled Albertans. It is more than onerous; it is crushing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Support for Agriculture

Mr. van Dijken: Good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and welcome back. Last week Albertans were able to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday. Thanksgiving Day provided each of us an opportunity to reflect on the many blessings we are able to enjoy in this great province.

For many of the people in my constituency Thanksgiving is a time to reflect on this year's harvest of agricultural crops and livestock. Harvest is both a rewarding and a stressful time for farm families. For producers their harvest is more than just money to pay the bills and support their families; it is the reward for all the risks and hard work they have put in to being good stewards of the land.

Contrary to popular belief, farm life does not pause in the winter and neither do farmers. During the months ahead they will continue caring for their livestock, repairing equipment and buildings, delivering their commodities to market, and preparing detailed plans to do it all over again next year. While this is all part of the job for farm families, this work is balanced with work in the community: volunteering on sports teams, community foundations, various charities, boards, and committees that would enrich their local communities.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, while Alberta as a whole is projecting a record crop, this growing season has not been an easy one for farms in my constituency. As a result of excessive moisture this spring many acres were left unseeded while many fields that were seeded suffered extensive damage and were drowned out. As a farmer myself I am well aware of the financial and mental toll this takes on farm families and their communities. Our government continues to support producers financially with AgriInsurance, AgriStability, AgriInvest, and AgriRecovery programs. I also encourage those who may be struggling or need additional support to check out the Do More Agriculture Foundation's website for a list of mental health and well-being resources.

With the support of our government, their communities, and their families Alberta farmers will be able to continue producing world-class food for all of us to enjoy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is now 1:50.

Oral Question Period

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

COVID-19 Modelling

Ms Notley: Welcome back to everybody, Mr. Speaker. You know, there's not a single Albertan who isn't shaken by yesterday's COVID numbers. In less than a month our active cases have tripled to the highest count since the pandemic started, and new cases are not levelling off. Now, let me be clear. We agree that there are very negative economic consequences to more restrictions. It's a very fine balance, and we have to thread the needle, but Albertans need to be part of this conversation. To the Premier: will you please release updated modelling so all Albertans can understand the nature of the challenges that we are facing?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you I'd like, as well, to welcome all members back to the Assembly to do the

people's business. With that I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for the important and thoughtful question. No, we do not have updated models. I'm not aware of a single modelling of COVID outcomes anywhere in the world, certainly not here in Canada, that has come remotely close to reality. Here in Alberta the models that we released in mid-April turned out to be off by a factor of 95 per cent. What we did through that modelling is estimate the worst case scenario to increase the capacity of our health system to meet that. We did so very successfully. That has helped, but now we have eight months of experience and data to learn from, and that is what is informing our public health response.

Ms Notley: Now, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has the third-highest number of cases in Canada and more cases per capita than Ontario and B.C. We have more serious outbreaks in schools and hospitals, and the numbers in long-term care are utterly alarming. Governments in B.C., Ontario, and, in fact, Canada, are releasing modelling to show people what the consequences are of not following orders. Again to the Premier. We've had more time to improve our modelling. Now is not the time for secrecy. Why will he not release that information to Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, there simply is no secrecy. The phenomenal people at AHS have been doing a remarkable job over the past eight months. Their focus right now is on delivering on, for example, continuing to increase our testing capacity. That is the single most urgent priority of the chief medical officer which we seek to implement. We have achieved our stretch target of 20,000 tests on some days, but we need to do more. We need to do better consistently. I'll be speaking to all of the issues that the Leader of the Opposition has raised at length tomorrow. Let me assure her that she's right to be concerned about the continued increase . . .

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always struck me that if B.C. and Ontario can do something, so should Alberta be able to do it. Meanwhile, Edmonton's case rate is leading the country. At least four hospitals have outbreaks. Three hundred schools have had reported cases, or more, and they are officially declared outbreaks in 97 of them. We have to get a hold of this. In B.C. they closed nightclubs and banquet halls. Ontario closed gyms and movie theatres. At the outset of this pandemic the Premier said that he was in charge. He needs to take responsibility. When will he do that? When will he take action to flatten the curve?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reality is this: that taking action to flatten the curve is in the hands of 4.4 million Albertans and the actions that they take as individuals. We call upon those Albertans to exercise personal responsibility, to follow the advice of the chief medical officer here in Edmonton. She issued recent voluntary recommendations to reduce cohort sizes. I agree that we should be concerned about the increase of cases, particularly because we don't want to end up setting aside hospital and ICU beds away from their normal purposes. That's something that I'll be addressing.

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

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans have personal responsibility. The Premier has leadership responsibility, and he should demonstrate it.

Job Creation and Government Policies

Ms Notley: Now, meanwhile, Alberta is facing a jobs crisis, and the Premier's great big \$4.7 billion corporate handout is failing. Before the pandemic the plan doubled the deficit, shrunk the economy, and cost 50,000 jobs. Just this month we saw massive layoffs at both TC Energy and Suncor. There are now 300,000 Albertans looking for work, trying desperately to make ends meet. Mr. Speaker, the plan isn't working. Why is the Premier hitting the gas instead of the brakes?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP's deliberate campaign and misrepresentation about the job-creation tax cut has become even more ridiculous in the context of this global recession. She talks about \$4.7 billion. The latest estimate I have from the Department of Treasury Board and Finance is that the revenue expenditure this year – the full implementation of the job-creation tax cut in this fiscal year is in the range of \$250 million, a tiny fraction of the \$4.7 billion. But what it does is to send a message to investors around the world as they make their plans for a post-COVID economy that Alberta is the place to invest and to create jobs. There is no better time to accelerate that tax cut than when corporate profits will be at record lows.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, no jobs have been created, and he's asking every Albertan to pay for his failed plan. Now it looks like they're going to accelerate the costs. Not only do we have no jobs from this, Albertans are paying higher school fees, higher tuition, higher car insurance, and, yup, higher taxes. Worse, he's threatening the most vulnerable. He's throwing folks off the seniors' drug plan, threatening to kick disabled Albertans off AISH, cutting in-class supports for kids with autism. Why is this Premier making the most vulnerable Albertans pay for his no-jobs corporate handout?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what a wonderfully rich fantasy world the NDP inhabits. Back on planet Earth within the world of reality here's the reality. We are part, we are facing the consequences of the largest contraction in the world economy since the beginning of the Second World War, since the Great Depression. This has resulted in a one-quarter evaporation of Alberta's revenues and a \$24 billion projected deficit this year. The revenue shortfall from the accelerated job-creation tax cut represents about 1 per cent of that. The NDP has no clue what it's talking about.

Ms Notley: Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? The Premier is right. The economy is hurting everywhere. But you know what's not happening everywhere? Twenty thousand educational assistants fired, 4,000 postsecondary people fired, 11,000 front-line health care workers fired. All of this just so his big corporate CEOs can pad their bonuses, reward their foreign shareholders, and then pack up their bags and invest elsewhere. The Premier said that companies would be irresponsible not to move to Alberta. Well, guess what? How many jobs does this province have to lose before this Premier admits he's the one being irresponsible?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, in the face of the largest contraction in the world economy in nearly a century what is the NDP's proposed response? To increase – to increase – by one-third taxes on job creators, but it won't generate anything because they're not making profits this year. It's to increase personal income taxes. We're dealing with a \$24 billion deficit, and what did the Finance critic of the NDP say? "Oh, we can deal with that with a tiny, tiny increase in personal income taxes." It would require about a thousand per cent increase in personal income taxes to deal with it.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition for a third set of questions.

Health Care Funding

Ms Notley: Speaking of layoffs, the truth is that this Premier's plan for health care is in utter chaos. His big plan to help Albertans get through the pandemic: close rural ERs, chase doctors out of the province, and fire more than 11,000 front-line health care workers, 11,000. There's your job crisis, Mr. Speaker, right over there. To the Premier: why when COVID-19 continues to get worse, when ICU admissions are rising, do you think now is the best time to be forcing through massive upheaval in health care? How on earth could this possibly be perceived as a good idea?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the \$24 billion deficit is not a fiction. It is a reality. It is part of the consequence of an evaporation of one-quarter of our revenues emanating from the largest global economic contraction in 90 years and the largest decline in energy prices in history. We have to take some reasonable action on the expenditure side, but we need to have an honest debate about this. No rural emergency wards have been closed, and moving from 70 to 100 per cent private contracting of laundry does not throw the health care system into chaos. It just delivers a few services more efficiently.

2:00

Ms Notley: What it doesn't do is save any money, and their own documents say that. Anyone who's spent time with a loved one in hospital knows that the people who clean rooms, who change soiled bedding, who prepare food are front-line workers. We've always depended on those hard-working Albertans to keep our hospitals safe, but we've never depended on them more than when our hospitals are facing a deadly pandemic. Premier, are you really telling Albertans that the 11,000 people who clean up vomit, blood, and urine in hospitals are not front-line workers? Seriously, is that what you're saying?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying is that this government today is spending substantially more on health care than any government in the history of the province, more than the NDP, more per capita than any province in Canada, so we are doing what is necessary to save both lives and livelihoods during this pandemic and global economic catastrophe. But, at the same time, we must learn to operate more efficiently, and if that means that we have greater competitive contracting for ancillary services in the health care system, then that's what Albertans expect us to do.

Ms Notley: This government is providing one thing and one thing only, more chaos than any other province. They can't be trusted. The Member for Calgary-Acadia said that he would not fire nurses in the middle of the pandemic, but, Mr. Speaker, on the very same day Alberta Health Services sent a letter to the UNA informing them of layoffs for almost 700 nurses. Premier, help me get this straight. Who is not telling the truth, AHS or the Member for Calgary-Acadia?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows – look, maybe I should point this out as well. The workforce rebalancing that started in AHS actually started under the NDP.

Ms Renaud: So who lied, you or AHS? Which was it?

Mr. Shandro: They started the program of rebalancing the workforce in AHS, but when we do it, they say that it's an attack on workers. They also contracted out to surgical clinics, continuing care, housekeeping services, but when we say that we want to do the same thing as the NDP, they scream and they scare patients. That's what we have learned to expect from the NDP, that they are hypocrites screaming empty slogans at us.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert will know that she can't say unparliamentary things on the record or off the record.

Ms Notley: The member's statements are deeply and intentionally inaccurate, Mr. Speaker.

UCP Convention Resolution on Health Care

Ms Notley: Now, just when Albertans hear about the Premier's plans to privatize, outsource, and fire 11,000 health care workers, his party takes it one step further. At the UCP AGM his party voted in favour of a resolution to bring in a "privately-funded... healthcare system." Your party voted to bring in privately funded, American-style health care. To the Premier: will you stand up today and clearly tell the UCP members they will not get what they want when it comes to privatizing Alberta's health care?

Mr. Kenney: What UCP members want, as expressed in our founding convention in the merger agreement that created our party, is a publicly insured, universally accessible health care system. Now, I know this may be shocking to the leader of the NDP, but most of those health services are delivered by private corporations. You know what? They're doctors, Mr. Speaker. Every province in Canada has always maintained universally accessible, publicly insured service with a blend of private and public provision of those services. That's the reality. That will continue to be the reality in Alberta.

Ms Notley: Apparently not.

At the same AGM one of your MLAs, the Minister of Service Alberta, argued against the resolution. What a hero, except here's what he said: please, if you approve this policy, it's going to cause a ton of grief for our MLAs. What a passionate defence of our public health care, Mr. Speaker: please don't privatize because then I'll have to answer mean e-mails from people we broke our promises to. Stop dodging. Stop evading. Will you or will you not tell your UCP members that privately funded health care is off the table? Yes or no?

The Speaker: I would encourage the Leader of the Opposition to tie her question to government policy as opposed to policy that may be made by either political party, but if the Premier wants to answer, he's welcome to do so.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government ran on a commitment to maintain the universally accessible and publicly insured health care system. We will keep that promise. We have kept that promise. You know, the NDP is running their classic medi-scare campaign. It must be a day ending in Y. It's all they ever do. It's all they've ever done. It's great, I know, for fund raising for NDP members, but it's simply not true.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has a question to ask.

Correction. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for her second supplemental in her fourth set of questions.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, privatization is not now, nor has it ever been, the answer. In fact, we are dealing with the consequences of it during this pandemic. The deaths in long-term care have been tragic right across the country. Dr. Amit Arya, a prominent palliative care physician, said this about privatized long-term care, quote: what happens is that extra money in the system is not reinvested into the care of people; it is profit over people. End quote. Premier, why, when every province in this country is moving away from privatized care, are you running towards it at the expense and the health of regular Alberta citizens?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, in fact, every other province in Canada has more choices and options than Alberta does on health care and how health care is delivered. This government, like all of the other provinces, will maintain universally accessible and publicly insured medicare, but I think most Albertans believe that they deserve at least as much choice and as many options as Quebecers or British Columbians have.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has a question.

Economic Recovery Plan

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta was one of the first provinces in Canada to introduce an economic recovery plan to get people back to work since being hit by COVID-19. We introduced a comprehensive plan to build, diversify, and create jobs. Part of our drive to diversify Alberta's economy included a series of sector strategies targeting a variety of sectors for growth and investment attraction. Given that many of these sectors are part of the economy in Lethbridge, what can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell the House about the progress of these sector strategies?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for that question. Implementing this recovery plan: this is critical to the future path of the province as we work together to move forward out of this pandemic. You're starting to see details come out on a weekly basis on our recovery plan. Earlier this month we announced our plastics strategy, our hydrogen strategy, recyclables strategy, so many different elements from agriculture to energy. We're coming to a detailed plan here to make sure Albertans have confidence today and that tomorrow they have a bright future here in the province of Alberta.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that our economy has been facing a double and triple hit in this crisis through COVID-19 and the fall of oil prices and global economic contraction and given that Alberta was faced with the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs during the pandemic and that numbers have been unprecedented since the Great Depression and given that we were already coming out of five years of an economic downturn, to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: could you tell this House how many jobs have been recovered in Alberta following the job losses in the spring?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for the question. Over 230,000 Albertans have gotten their jobs back. We're almost 65 per cent of the way there in getting

Albertans back to work, but we can't let our foot off the gas. We still have to make sure we maintain that intensity to get them back to work. One thing, though, that came out just today that's really encouraging: over 7,400 new businesses have opened or reopened since the pandemic. That's 400 more businesses than when we started. Entrepreneurs in this province are speaking. They have confidence in the future of Alberta.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that we have seen that many different areas of the economy have been impacted in the pandemic in new and unprecedented ways and given that many small businesses in my riding of Lethbridge-East and across the province have faced issues of keeping their doors open, let alone growing and expanding during these troubled times, to the same minister: could you tell this House how you have been supporting small businesses throughout this pandemic as a part of Alberta's recovery plan?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had our relaunch grant. We've had over 17,000 small businesses take part in that. It's just a true credit to their entrepreneurial spirit, though, and the efforts that they've taken to keep their businesses functioning. We've seen the efforts at the local front. We've seen all Albertans being responsible in their day-to-day lives. That's what's keeping our society open. That's what's keeping our jobs and economy going. I want to thank that member and thank all the small-business owners that are out there. We know it's tough. We're with you. We want to make sure you're successful going forward. We'll keep making sure we put in place the right policies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is rising with a question.

2:10

School Re-entry Plan

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's COVID-19 cases are higher than ever before. We know that rising numbers of COVID cases in communities drive numbers in classrooms up as well. The UCP Minister of Education has failed to provide schools with the resources that they need to spread out, to staff up, and to maintain two metres of separation. All we've gotten from the minister so far are excuses. How high do the case numbers need to go before the minister will admit that she made a mistake?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that we do have a very robust plan and that it has been rolled out over the last number of months. I'm very appreciative of all the school divisions and all of the parents and all of the education partners who are really, really working hard to ensure that our students and our staff are safe. I'm happy to say that right now there is .06 per cent overall of staff and students who have tested positive for COVID.

Ms Hoffman: Given that Coventry Hills school in Calgary closed yesterday due to what the CBE calls staffing capacity issues, throwing hundreds of families into chaos, and given that the boards say that the school had to close because they need time for operational planning and to arrange for substitute teachers, was the minister aware of the huge disruption that she was causing by

failing to fund education properly, or did she intentionally underfund schools, causing students, staff, and families anxiety and chaos? They're feeling it, Minister.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is right in the fact that it is clearly a staffing capacity issue, not a funding issue. In fact, there are numerous school divisions, including the CBE, hiring substitute teachers right now as we speak. The reality is that we have a finite number of teachers, and our school authorities are doing an excellent job of managing the situation. I'm happy to tell the member opposite that all students in that particular school, in Coventry Hills, have returned to school today.

Ms Hoffman: Given that schools could hire more staff if they had more funding and given that the rise in community COVID numbers is going to continue to put severe pressures on staffing and supplies in Alberta schools and given that Alberta's economic recovery is completely dependent, Mr. Speaker, on being able to keep our schools safely open, will the minister announce new resources to keep students, staff, and families safe, or is she content to be a spectator to this escalating crisis? If she refuses to act, will she look in the camera and explain to parents why she is doing so?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. As the hon. member knows, staffing is managed by school authorities, not by the province. The unfortunate reality is that there is only a finite number of certificated teachers in the province, and if schools do need to hire more teachers due to isolation requirements, there is a temporary transition to online learning that may have to occur during that time period. But since the beginning of school in this particular year, only three schools out of 2,415 have actually had to take that measure.

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

Canadian Energy Centre

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are still waiting for this government to put forward a plan to address the economic crisis facing our province. Thus far the Energy minister has put forward a plan to create a plan for hydrogen in three years. Their only immediate action seems to be to fall back on reviving the war room, whose only achievement so far is to attract international laughter. Does the Energy minister really think that Twitter bots are part of a credible plan to build the economy and the future of Alberta and create jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Congratulations on your new portfolio as Energy critic. I am very proud that we have the Canadian Energy Centre because Canada is well positioned, Alberta is well positioned to supply future and growing demands for energy in the world-wide global demand. That will include oil and gas. That will also include new and growing emerging energy like hydrogen, geothermal. We have to defend our energy sector, and that's what the Canadian Energy Centre is doing.

Ms Ganley: Given that the activities of the war room have not yet generated a single investment or created a single job and given that the war room's accomplishments thus far include plagiarizing logos, overpaying its director, impersonating journalists, and bullying school divisions, to the minister. Albertans know the war

room is a laughingstock. Do you genuinely believe it has been effective?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous NDP, the NDP across the aisle, we will defend our energy sector. For four years under their government we lost pipeline after pipeline. We had more production than we had capacity to move it. Our energy sector suffered. Nobody was defending it. The Canadian Energy Centre has been set up to defend our energy industry. It's needed now more than ever as world demand in energy is growing, and Canada needs to be positioned to supply it.

Ms Ganley: Given that while the minister wants to rush the war room back into operation so it can go back to slandering the *New York Times* and given that the minister's plan for hydrogen is a plan to make a plan to export hydrogen in 20 years, Minister: we need jobs today. Will you board up the war room once and for all and turn those resources to creating a real plan for jobs for Albertans?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, we all know that socialist fantasies make great bedtime stories but lousy government policy. Now, we saw the hydrogen strategy that they released – 10 days after ours, by the way – and they claim that they were going to offer an advanced hydrogen industry, both the production, the consumption as well as the complicated network of infrastructure to deliver it. You know what else? They claim to do it 10 years faster than the experts said that it could be done. You know what? I have no confidence in the caucus over there that wanted to put oil on trains to launch a hydrogen industry. We're going to continue proceeding with ours.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod is the one with the question.

Influenza Immunization and COVID-19

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For seven months now Alberta has been battling the worst pandemic in more than a century. Alberta and Albertans have been a model for the world. We took swift action to protect people's health and to limit the spread of COVID-19, and we have safely reopened our economy while keeping strong, proven protection in place. Albertans have all been doing our part by washing our hands, remaining physically distant, getting tested, and using hand sanitizer by the litre. Now, on top of this, we are facing another threat, the annual flu season. To the Minister of Health: can he please explain why this year it is more important than ever for Albertans to get their flu shot?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Getting immunized is more critical this year than ever before. It's the best way to protect not just your own health but the health of your loved ones. I'm thinking in particular of my extended family, the two newborn babies we have, and my parents as well. By keeping the number of influenza cases and outbreaks low, we can protect at-risk Albertans so that health care workers can focus on our response to the pandemic. I encourage all members of the House to book their flu shots today.

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

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year about a third of all Albertans got the flu shot. This was better than the previous year, but we still must do much better. Influenza is disruptive and sometimes lethal. Last year 41 Albertans lost their

lives to the flu, and hundreds more were hospitalized. People who are at a higher risk for severe illness due to COVID-19 are also at a higher risk for the flu. To the Minister of Health: what's being done to help protect Alberta's most vulnerable, and where can people get their flu shot safely?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, and thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. This year's flu season presents additional challenges as we respond to the COVID pandemic. Pharmacist and physician offices are now offering the vaccine to all Albertans five years of age and older. AHS is also offering flu shots through prebooked appointments for children who are under five as well as their family and household members. A high-dose vaccine will also be offered to residents who are 65 and older in provincially funded long-term care facilities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year's flu season presents additional challenges as Alberta continues to respond to COVID-19. The flu shot will help protect vulnerable Albertans and decrease flu-related tests, emergency room visits, and hospitalizations due to the pandemic. We don't want to add influenza to the work that health care staff and hospitals are already facing during these unprecedented times. Once again to the Minister of Health: what is being done to ensure that the health care system can cope with both influenza and COVID-19 this flu season?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've taken steps to make sure that the health system is ready to support Albertans with not just COVID-19 but influenza as well. We have ordered a record 1.96 million doses of vaccine to support the pandemic response and expected increase in Albertans who will want to be immunized this year. We have adapted our testing approach to accommodate the rising number of people with influenza who will need testing, and we've also been closely monitoring the availability of flu shots and the capacity of our health system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:20 Innovation and Technology Sectors

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, driven by political ideology, the Premier and his band of ministers cut \$1.2 billion in supports for the innovation sector after coming into office. What happened? Companies fled the province. Others that were planning to move here never did. Now Alberta companies in every sector are warning of a massive brain drain at a time when we can least afford it. To the minister: will you admit your terrible economic plan has cost jobs, not created them?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to terrible jobs plan, that NDP member just has to go look at the NDP record. I hope I don't have to resurrect a bus to take people on a legacy tour, but I will if I have to and take them down NDP legacy lane. We're proud of the fact that we've invested \$175 million in the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. Just yesterday this venture capital fund executed a new investment, \$5 million, in the accelerate fund. We also have the innovation employment grant coming. This is what we have to do to make sure we're competitive going forward. We're looking forward for more.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that they cut \$1.2 billion from innovation, given that the government is now pretending to reinvest in innovation and tech, but given that it's sprinkling a couple million dollars at a time and given that these investments pale in comparison to the devastation the UCP has caused to the innovation sector, which will take years to undo once this government is a thing of the past, to the minister. I know that you're new to the role and all. Isn't it a shame, though, that your predecessor was stuck with all the blame for your Premier's failed economic ideas?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, it is so exciting to go and talk to our innovation sector and technology companies. They are excited about the opportunities ahead. We are just scratching the surface on opportunities here in this province. But that member talked about a failed policy. Let's talk about an NDP failed policy. I sure hope that in developing their jobs plan over there, they don't bring back their plan of literally hiring people to come into your house to screw in light bulbs. I hope that that's not in their jobs plan because I know that that was a big failure. That doesn't even mention about shower heads and light bulbs. Let's hope that's not in their plan.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that the UCP claimed to have conducted an extensive six-month review of each of the programs our government introduced to support tech and innovation but given now that it's been a year and a half and the Alberta innovation employment grant is still not running and given that while this new minister likes to talk a big game, his actual investment in artificial intelligence and tech is one-tenth of what our NDP government committed, to the minister: do you think this all-hat-and-no-cattle approach is fooling anyone in Alberta or anywhere else in the world, for that matter?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about a lot of hats; 7,400 businesses have opened or reopened since the pandemic. That is 400 more businesses since the beginning of the pandemic. Entrepreneurs are speaking, and they have confidence in the future of Alberta. As well as this: the job-creation tax cut, an amazing thing, well received by the business community. We've done that and accelerated it. Red tape reduction: we've heard loud and clear from businesses that they want to know that speed is here. This government will move with the speed of business. We're not going to take lessons from the past and the NDP on this front.

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

Health Care Costs and Service Delivery

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, Alberta's daily COVID-19 numbers are higher than they've ever been. A sensible Health minister would know that this is the time to strengthen our public health care system, but the UCP's current Health minister is doing the opposite. He's spreading chaos and conflict in our hospitals and clinics. He's chasing doctors out of Alberta, laying off 11,000 front-line hospital workers and more than 600 nurses. Why is the current Health minister waging a war on public health care in the middle of a public health crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health has the call.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. For those playing along at home, yes, the NDP just said the word "chaos." Everyone can take a drink. Look, I point out that 68 per cent of laundry is contracted out right now, as it was under the NDP, and 70 per cent

of our labs in northern Alberta are contracted out, as it was under the NDP. The AHS review provided clear evidence and opportunities where our health system can do better in terms of costs and results. The pandemic has changed everything, and AHS has been directed to proceed carefully with a portion of their implementation plan, ensuring that patient care remains the top priority of AHS and this health care system.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that this minister is looking to fire nurses and is fighting with doctors, which did not occur under the NDP, and given that earlier this month the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka got an e-mail informing him that a doctor who was born and raised and trained in Alberta is moving to practise in Ontario instead of Ponoka because of, quote, the current political climate and given that the doctor who wrote the e-mail, Dr. Greg Sawisky, told Red Deer media, quote, this first-term, third-rate Health minister is doing more damage to the health system than Ralph Klein ever did, can the minister turn to his colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka and tell him that his community is not losing any doctors?

Mr. Shandro: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, to point out that there will be no job losses for nurses or other front-line clinical staff except as part of AHS's ongoing work, as was started under the NDP, to rebalance the workforce and not to reduce it so that they continue to be able to meet the needs of patients throughout the province. Now, for the first time in the history of the province, as the member is talking about the number of physicians in this province: the highest number of physicians we've ever seen in this province, 11,000 doctors, as determined by the College of Physicians & Surgeons, and we keep on seeing month over month, quarter over quarter, more physicians coming to this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this minister falls 50 per cent short of telling a half-truth and given that on Friday the members for Calgary-Glenmore and Calgary-West got an e-mail informing them that 1,400 of their constituents were losing their family doctor and given that Dr. Lee Bogel told his patients that he was leaving the Glenbrook medical clinic after 10 years because "the way in which the current government has attacked the core of family medicine has been irreversibly damaging," can the minister look his colleagues in the eye and tell them that these 1,400 constituents aren't losing their family doctor? If they do lose that doctor, will he finally resign because he clearly has no idea what he's doing?

Mr. Shandro: Clearly, the member, Mr. Speaker, is disappointed to learn that the College of Physicians & Surgeons has been able to provide reports on a quarterly basis to show that what he's been saying is untrue. Month over month, quarter over quarter, year over year we are seeing more physicians coming to this province to set up practice here, to serve patients here. Through the action plan that we announced in April, we can increase the ability for rural Albertans to have access to care and make sure that we can deal with retention or recruitment issues that have chronically been a problem, especially exacerbated under that previous government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East has a question to ask.

Addiction and Mental Health Services

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year has been difficult for many Albertans between the COVID-19 pandemic public health measures meant to stop the spread of COVID and the economic uncertainty that has accompanied all. Albertans are struggling, and undoubtedly we'll see increased isolation, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and drug use as a result of the pandemic. Mental wellness must be our priority. To the associate minister of mental health: what actions has Alberta's government taken to support Albertans during these challenging times?

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Yes, indeed, we are living in such challenging times. COVID-19 has produced an unprecedented impact on the lives of Albertans. That is precisely why in the beginning of this pandemic the Alberta government announced the most comprehensive mental health and addiction action plan in Canada. We have \$53 million committed for this plan. It increases drastically the online, in-person support for anybody who needs access to mental health and addiction. Along with that, we also increased community grants so that people . . .

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that the economic challenges we are facing today are going to leave a lasting mental health effect on Albertans and given that while we're investing heavily in our economic recovery, it is also essential that we invest in the mental health and wellness of Albertans to support the economic recovery, to the minister: what concrete action is Alberta's government taking to support the mental health of Albertans both during the pandemic and in the future?

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me carry on where I left. We supported \$25 million for community grants so Albertans can access help from each other and also localized supports. On top of that, you know, answering your further question, prior to the pandemic we drastically increased access to detox treatment and recovery in Alberta for our 4,000 spaces initiative. This represents a drastic, different change in how the government responds to the opioid crisis in Alberta.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that during the pandemic Albertans struggling with and recovering from addiction have not been able to access the treatment services they rely on and given that largely as a result of the pandemic public health measures and lack of access to treatment services during the pandemic we have seen a shocking rise in facilities due to addiction and overdose, to the minister: how will Alberta's government work on ensuring that Albertans have the support they need to recover from addiction?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member. You are correct. The COVID-19 impact actually, because of the health measures we had to implement to stop the spread of COVID, absolutely increased the difficulties for people to access services and connection. I'll just give you an example. For the ODP we used to have 900 people access it per month. During the pandemic only 49 people accessed the service. Because of that reason, we're going to accelerate our pace to open up the access for people who access the service through online virtual support services ...

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

UCP Convention Resolution on Labour Relations

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend members of the United Conservative Party voted at their AGM to push for so-called right-to-work legislation. Let's be clear. This is really right to work for less. Such laws are about demoralizing workers, diminishing labour efforts, and decimating collective bargaining. When this government passed Bill 32, it already created right to work, lite edition. To the minister of labour: here and now, for the record, what is your government's position on right to work?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're focused on implementing what we campaigned on.

But I have a question for that member over there. When will the NDP finally – and I mean finally; they've had many opportunities to talk about Gil McGowan, good old Gil – condemn his most recent attack on small businesses and business here in the province of Alberta? Why would they let that person continue to attack and smear businesses? Right now, when we're in the middle of this pandemic, people have uncertainty around their lives. They want to know that their businesses are going to be there. They want to grow. They want to invest. They want to be optimistic about their future. Why won't they condemn Gil McGowan's attacks?

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta already has the lowest rate of unionization in Canada and given that this government has already passed legislation and policies that would undermine labour relations, it would seem that the UCP's vision for jobs and the economy is based on the 19th century: high rates of unemployment, weakened or removed workplace rights. To the same minister: in the middle of a pandemic, why are you making it harder for Albertans to have fairness in their workplaces?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, strike two over there. They won't condemn Mr. Gil McGowan. Why won't they condemn good old Gil? He's on their board. Maybe they've got him on speed-dial over there. They should probably find out what he's saying today, what he said yesterday. We don't know what's coming next, but this is about number four or five. It should be very easy to categorically say: "No, thank you, Mr. Gil McGowan. We don't want your support in our party anymore." They won't do it. They're going to continue to attack businesses. That is simply wrong at this point. We need to make sure we continue, like our government is doing, instilling confidence in the business community for jobs of the future.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, what is simply wrong is attacking health care, attacking pensions, attacking workers in the middle of a pandemic. Given that right-to-work legislation would contravene the landmark Supreme Court decision known as the Rand formula

and given that this government has already racked up a number of legal challenges due to their cavalier attitude towards the Canadian Constitution, to the same minister: will you commit to protecting workers, upholding already agreed upon Canadian law via the Rand formula? Don't waver, Minister. This is your chance to answer a legitimate question. Albertans are worried.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the irony of that question is not lost on this House. We are defending workers in this province. Why won't the NDP support union members' democratic right to choose what their union dues are going towards? They don't want their membership dues going towards Gil McGowan's attack on jobs. They want to work. This is the antithesis of what we stand for. We have to make sure Albertans know that we have their backs, that we have confidence in the future. The NDP are living in the past. They're living in a fantasyland. We support democracy. We support our workers.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Renaud: This government's cruelty was on full display this summer. During a pandemic the Premier and minister of social services talked proudly about their plan to strip supports away from some of our most vulnerable citizens, even talking about changing eligibility to throw people off AISH. In the midst of this this minister had the audacity to ask AISH recipients and their families to trust her. Can the minister guarantee right now that not a single eligibility requirement will be changed and not a single person removed from the AISH program? A simple yes or no.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, AISH benefits offer critical supports for people with permanent and severe disabilities to meet their needs and live as independently as possible. We're reviewing all of our support programs to ensure they're effectively providing support to the clients we serve. Budget 2020 allocated the highest budget for the AISH program in Alberta history at \$1.29 billion, and no changes have been made to the AISH program.

Ms Renaud: Given that since the Premier and his staff made the false and misleading claim that there are some people on AISH who don't deserve it, my colleagues and I are hearing from thousands of frightened AISH recipients. Given that the minister has been silent on this very serious issue, can the minister explain why she's been ignoring the fears of AISH recipients? Does she think it's good for their mental health, the mental health of people with disabilities, during a pandemic to threaten them, to strip away their benefits?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, once again, there have been no changes to the AISH program benefits. Eligible clients will continue to receive benefits based on current policy and eligibility requirements. Those benefits are the highest of all Canadian provinces for people on a program like this. We are making changes, changes like online access to AISH programming, transitioning seniors quicker off AISH on to seniors' benefits. The Auditor General's report highlighted a number of areas where we can do better, and we'll continue to work towards that.

Ms Renaud: Given that I need to sort through the spin, let me just go back. There have been no changes: incorrect. AISH was cut by deindexing. Payment dates were changed without consultation, causing chaos. That's a change. Supplementals are gone. Things are changing. The process is changing. Don't tell us nothing is changing. What is the plan for Albertans with disabilities? Be honest. Be clear. That's what they need. They're frightened.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, once again, this year's budget allocated the highest ever budget for the AISH program at \$1.29 billion. Eligible clients will continue to receive these benefits based on current policy and eligibility requirements. That is what the Minister of Community and Social Services has said a number of times over the last couple of months, and that continues to be the case.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Energy and Mining Industries

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada has always benefited from our oil and gas industry. Now that the sector is hurting, the federal government has done little to help our most important industry, that has been severely impacted by a pandemic-induced global recession and an unnecessary OPEC price war at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. To the Minister of Energy: what is the provincial government doing to ensure that those in my constituency who rely on good-paying jobs in our energy sector are supported and employed?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The global energy industry, including Alberta, faced an existential threat at the beginning of the outbreak of COVID as demand collapsed, price collapsed, storage was filling, oil hit negative prices. We don't know how long this low-price environment will last, but what we do know for sure is that every single credible forecast of world energy needs shows that oil and gas will continue to dominate the energy mix for decades. If that oil and gas doesn't come from Alberta, other countries like Russia, Saudi Arabia will increase their market share. That's why we're defending our oil and gas interests. That's why we want it to grow.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that diversifying our economy is a central tenet of Alberta's recovery plan, natural gas has shown to be a viable alternative that will help create good-paying jobs, provide investment, and diversify our economy. To the minister: how will the government ensure that the energy sector workforce will be utilized to ensure that Albertans get back to work to further the support of the government's diversification goals?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the thoughtful question. We're fortunate in Alberta in that we have a very specialized, skilled, and technical workforce thanks to our decades of experience in the oil and gas industry. Now, I am proud that a couple of weeks ago our department released the natural gas strategy and vision, which is part of the Alberta recovery plan to get Albertans back to work. It focused on: how do we advance an LNG industry, the hydrogen industry, develop petrochemicals, create industrial demand, and, of course, create a circular economy for plastics? The natural gas vision is about economic stimulus, it's about jobs, and it's about . . .

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Given that Alberta has immense mineral potential, to

help further developments in nonenergy mineral production such as lithium, uranium, and other rare-earth elements and further given that Alberta's mining industry is still an important economic driver in our province, it is imperative that we encourage investment in this sector. Again to the minister: what is the government doing to ensure that workers in the mining industry are included in Alberta's recovery plan?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you. While we know that oil and gas will continue to dominate the energy mix, we also recognize that new and emerging technologies and energies will grow. Investment patterns will bring on more renewables, new technologies, and that's why Alberta is aggressively pursuing our diversification strategy. That includes a mines-and-minerals strategy. We have vast amounts of minerals – lithium, cobalt, nickel, uranium – valuable minerals used for batteries and other consumer products. This is an industry that is growing. Companies like Calgary's E3 Metals are perfecting technologies to extract lithium right here in Alberta. It has huge potential, and it's right here, right now.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Vesta Energy Horizontal Well Site

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I toured a Vesta Energy new horizontal well site in the process of development through fracking. This company is doing it right and is a model for others.

New technologies learn through experience. In the early days fracking had challenges. Today Vesta does fracking differently. They work with the county and put their own graders and dust control on the public gravel roads. When they leave, the roads are as good as or better than before they came. They build massive sound-reduction walls around the site to control noise. The frack sand storage tower, called the Sahara, and the sand delivery system have dust collection vacuums to eliminate dust. They recycle and reuse all water that is recoverable from the well. They operate equipment on natural gas, not diesel, and use sensitive methane gas detection equipment to vastly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They place sensitive seismic monitoring stations around the well – they record the data, learning a lot – and now, before there is any seismic risk, they can shut down or reduce pressures to almost eliminate the risk of even small earthquakes. They have very strict health and safety protocols because when things are done right, they are more efficient and cost less. They also state that we have the best regulator in the world here in Alberta, and they support its requirements.

All of this extra effort, of course, costs money, yet the private investors support this. Vesta is succeeding where others have not. Since 2016 the oil industry has been in crisis mode; Vesta is not. In the last four years they've drilled 100 new wells in the east Duvernay field, much of it in my riding. Vesta partners with local service companies and employs many central Albertans. For their efforts they get a premium light sweet oil from a very tight shale that would not release its oil without fracking, and they are providing environmentally responsible, safe work-site jobs to

Albertans at a time when others are laying off people. This is the spirit of Alberta.

Thank you, Vesta team. Thank you for good news.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Camrose Constituency Recognition Event

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was my distinct honour and pleasure to host a recognition event in my constituency for a number of well-deserving individuals in my community. In order to prepare a robust list, I sent out a call for nominations to mayors, reeves, councillors, CAOs, and social service organizations in Camrose; actually, the entire constituency. I was thrilled with the robust list of suggestions that were provided to me.

Our community members were honoured for various accomplishments, including Mayor Norm Mayer for his dedication in serving our community through the numerous families whose lives he has positively influenced.

Ken Drever was also recognized for his dedication in serving our community and the numerous families whose lives he has also positively influenced. Jarad Collins was recognized for his exceptional volunteerism to the constituents of Camrose along with Corporal Trent Cleveland for his work with the Killam RCMP detachment, Lynne Jenkinson for her service with Flagstaff family and community services, Heather Wallace-Chevraux, Ian MacEachern, and Holly Bovencamp for their long-standing services as teachers at Central high school, Sedgewick public. I also recognized Marilyn Kuysters for her long-standing service to Killam public school.

Thank you to Tish Olsen, one of our downtown Camrose entrepreneurs, who helped me organize a very large group of our downtown Camrose businesses to add beauty and talent to the room that evening. This recognition event was a team effort, which we shared on Facebook Live and through the support of our local media. Thank you to everyone, including the Minister of Community and Social Services, whose surprise visit was a wonderful addition to the evening.

Mr. Speaker, my heart is still filled with such pride at this first slice of happiness pie that we were able to create in my Camrose constituency. Chapter 2 is under construction.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I will be moving a Standing Order 30. Would you like me to read it into the record now or wait? Pursuant to Standing Order 30

be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely (a) the critical rate of unemployment in Alberta and the consequential impact on Albertans' lives and livelihoods, including in respect of commercial and residential vacancy rates, mortgage deferrals, and low business confidence, and (b) the immediate need for the government to reconsider the economic plan to address the unemployment crisis that takes into account the prevailing economic realities facing Albertans.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 35

Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 35, the Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be back in the Chamber today representing Albertans. Alberta is facing significant challenges, and I'm honoured to be here with our colleagues in this Chamber to serve Albertans during these trying times. This bill will implement two important aspects of Alberta's recovery plan: the acceleration of the job-creation tax cut and the introduction of the innovation employment grant. These two measures complement one another and will serve to further position Alberta's economy for diversification, recovery, and growth. A competitive business environment will attract new business to Alberta and incentivize businesses to invest here. An increased business investment is fundamental to economic recovery and job creation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 35. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, as a reminder to my comments this morning, those of you who wish to have a copy of the bill delivered to your desk, please indicate by raising your hand, and the pages will deliver one. Otherwise, they will be available at the tabling table for you to retrieve on your own.

The hon. the Minister of Energy.

2:50

Bill 36

Geothermal Resource Development Act

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 36, the Geothermal Resource Development Act.

If passed, this act will attract new investment in clean geothermal energy, contributing to the government's efforts to build out and diversify Alberta's energy sector. This legislation will set the foundation for the development of this emerging resource by clarifying the rules and processes for industry, establishing the framework and legislative authority for land use and liability management, and protecting landowners and mineral rights owners. More specifically this legislation will provide the Alberta Energy Regulator with the authority to regulate geothermal projects that take place below the base of groundwater protection. The legislation will ensure that the right to access and use this resource rests with the owners of the mineral title from which the resource is extracted. Finally, the legislation will ensure that the province receives a direct economic benefit through future royalties along with other related indirect benefits such as job creation.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is uniquely positioned to attract investment in this emerging industry because of its geothermal resources, because of our leadership in drilling technology, and because of our extensive oil and gas experience. I firmly believe that this legislation will help us capitalize on an important and growing new industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and with that, I move first reading of Bill 36.

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a first time]

Request for Emergency Debate

The Speaker: Hon. members, at Notices of Motions the Official Opposition House Leader provided notice of a Standing Order 30 request for an emergency debate. I now call upon the hon. the Official Opposition House Leader to make some brief remarks with respect to the urgency of the emergency debate.

Unemployment and Economic Recovery

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This matter is the most pressing and urgent matter facing Albertans today. The economy and the significant job loss has created uncertainty for Albertans across the province. In fact, according to Stats Canada Alberta is the furthest behind in recovery than any of the major provinces. We know that both Calgary and Edmonton are tied for second for the highest unemployment in all of Canada. Right now there are more than 290,000 Albertans looking for work, trying desperately to make ends meet and put food on the table.

All of us in this House owe these Albertans a real plan to create jobs and grow the economy. This is urgent, Mr. Speaker. This is the top priority for all Albertans, and, in fact, the Premier himself admitted that the province was facing a jobs crisis. Albertans need to know that this government has a plan for the future. We need this government to acknowledge the stress that Albertans are facing and that when the Premier acknowledges that there is a job crisis, he has a plan to fix it.

This is urgent, Mr. Speaker. It is urgent that the government show the leadership that Albertans are expecting and debate this motion so Albertans can plan for their future.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader appears to have some comments to make.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief in my remarks addressing why this request to dismiss the business of the Assembly in order to debate a matter of urgent public importance should not be proceeded with in this instance.

I do agree though, Mr. Speaker, that the Chamber should spend some of its time addressing the economic situation facing Albertans as they and their government deal with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is why the government, at the direction of the hon. the Premier, put forward on the early Order Paper Government Motion 42. Now, I don't know if the Official Opposition is confused because they can't find the Order Paper with the new process or have not had an opportunity to read it, but I will just for the record read it. It says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly commend the tremendous efforts of Albertans to protect lives and livelihoods throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent global recession and urge the government to pursue prudent policies that protect the vulnerable while supporting the broader social, economic, mental, and physical health of Albertans.

I will refer you to *Beauchesne*, sixth edition, point 387 on page 113, Mr. Speaker, where it says an emergency debate "must deal with a matter within the administrative competence of the government, and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate."

Well, Mr. Speaker, given that Government Motion 42 is on the Order Paper, scheduled to be debated this afternoon, and I can assure you, through you to the Official Opposition, will be debated well into the evening tonight if it is called, that is certainly the same thing that the Official Opposition is asking for. They'll have ample opportunity to be able to make their points during that debate, and there's no need for this SO 30.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Official Opposition House Leader has made a request under Standing Order 30(1) for leave to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss the following: (a) the critical rate of unemployment in Alberta and the consequential impact on Albertans' lives and livelihoods, including in respect of commercial and residential vacancy rates, mortgage deferrals, and low business confidence, and (b) the immediate need for the government to reconsider its economic plan to address the unemployment crisis that takes into account the prevailing economic realities facing Albertans. Notice of the member's intentions was brought forward to my office at 11:15 a.m., and therefore the member has met the requirement to provide at least two hours of notice prior to the start of the afternoon sitting. I am prepared to rule on whether the request for leave is in order.

First, I'd like to remind members that requests for leave to discuss a matter of urgent public importance cannot be used as a means to debate a matter that comes before the Assembly in other ways. A reference, for those of you following along at home, of this principle can be found in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, page 700. I'd also like to note paragraph 387, as mentioned, in *Beauchesne's*, sixth edition, that for such a request as this to be in order "there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate" of the matter of the subject for the request to proceed.

I would like to note that earlier this break I received a letter from the Official Opposition House Leader that was also to the Government House Leader about the possibility of such a debate. That's why I was pleased to see Government Motion 42 on the early Order Paper, which deals with the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is currently on notice on the Order Paper and could be called for debate as early as this afternoon. As such, it is clear to the Speaker that there is, in fact, another means by which members will have the opportunity to debate this matter, which is of very serious public importance. Accordingly, the chair does not find the request for leave in order, and the question will not be put.

As such, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

COVID-19 Pandemic and Albertans

42. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly commend the tremendous efforts of Albertans to protect lives and livelihoods throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent global recession and urge the government to pursue prudent policies that protect the vulnerable while supporting the broader social, economic, mental, and physical health of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader on Government Motion 42.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and table Government Motion 42 for debate this afternoon. It's a motion that provides an opportunity for the Chamber to be able to discuss the government's work to create jobs and support economic recovery in our province in response to the pandemic and the other crises that are facing Alberta. I will start with moving Government Motion 42, which, of course, is on the Order Paper in my name.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, we've been hit hard in our province. We've been hit hard by a triple whammy. Right now we've been hit, of course, by COVID-19, as the Chamber knows. We've also

been hit by a global economic recession, and we've been hit by the oil price war. But we have, as a government and as Albertans, responded quickly. We've responded decisively. We protected lives, and we protected livelihoods. That continues to be the focus of Her Majesty's government in this province: focus on protecting lives and protecting livelihoods. We are very proud – very proud – of Albertans and the work that they have done. Together Albertans have met the challenge through collective sacrifice, personal responsibility, the challenge to flatten the curve.

We have relaunched Alberta's economy as well to get many businesses to reopen sooner than first predicted.

Back in June we announced Alberta's recovery plan, which is bold. It's ambitious. It's a long-term strategy to build and diversify as well as create thousands of jobs now and in the future. We are doing exactly what we promised Albertans. We're building schools. We're building roads and other core infrastructure to get communities back on track. We're focused on diversifying our economy and attracting investment with Canada's most competitive tax environment. We're putting Albertans on a path for generational growth.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is doing everything possible to get us through these challenging times. We are fast-tracking new ideas. We are focusing on innovative solutions to bolster the economy and employment. We are creating jobs in our province every single day. At my own Department of Alberta Environment and Parks we recently announced a \$750 million investment through the technology innovation and emission reductions program. That investment directly supports 3,400 jobs and goes up to 9,000 jobs when you take into account the partnership that we have with industry of \$1.9 billion, at the same time being invested in site emission-reduction technology to meet our environmental obligations while creating jobs in our largest industry at the very moment that it needs it.

Fifty-three million dollars, Mr. Speaker, from the industry-supported TIER fund will create jobs through flood mitigation projects, including infrastructure, watershed restoration, and a new program to help municipalities and indigenous communities adapt to future floods from severe weather events. In addition, we've directed \$9.7 million for the land stewardship fund for conservation projects that will create jobs now while being able to protect our environment. This includes restoring seismic lines in caribou management areas, culvert and bridge replacement, and water crossing that protects habitat.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In September Premier Kenney and I were also pleased to announce over \$130 million . . .

Mr. Bilous: Name.

Mr. Jason Nixon: You're right.

Madam Speaker – it's great to see you back in the chair – I did use a name. I withdraw and apologize. We're out of practice.

The hon. the Premier and I, though – I'm so excited to re-say it – announced \$130 million invested within our parks system, Madam Speaker, a sharp contrast to the former government, who continued to grow the parks system but not invest in it. There are many success stories like that all across this province in all of our departments. I am looking forward to hearing this afternoon and later this evening from my colleagues about the important work they are doing to help get Albertans back to work.

There is, of course, Madam Speaker, no use in sugar-coating it. We're facing grim circumstances, but supported by Alberta's

recovery plan, we are seeing improvements in job numbers. We know there is more work to be done, and Albertans can rest assured that our government is up to the challenge. All hands are on deck. We are facing the storm head-on, and we will come out the other side of this thing stronger than ever. Together we will help get Albertans back to work, put the province back on a path to economic stability, and create certainty for Alberta job creators and investors alike.

I look forward to a constructive debate this afternoon and hearing from all colleagues of the Chamber on the way forward for our province, hopefully constructive dialogue, being able to get information for the Chamber on what is taking place, Madam Speaker. I can assure you, though, that you will also hear from the government clarification about the misrepresentation of facts often from the Official Opposition, which I think you will see today.

One of the great examples of that, as I close my comments to open up this debate, will be the behaviour that you have seen from the Official Opposition, led by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who continues to misrepresent the facts when it comes to things like parks, Madam Speaker, which I often find, quite frankly, humorous to watch him do. But what is sad is what you have seen over time, using that to fund raise off people despite the fact that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has already acknowledged on the record that parks are not for sale but instead continues to focus on raising money off people with false statements.

It is very disappointing to see the NDP do that, and we will not tolerate that type of behaviour during debate, which is why we are so excited to be able to rise inside this Chamber in the coming hours to be able to dispute many of the things that the NDP and their party continue to say to Albertans. I assure you that we will continue to call them out for trying to fund raise off people during a pandemic, Madam Speaker – during a pandemic – for fund raising off false statements and misrepresenting facts.

Ms Sweet: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Relevance

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j), also relevancy. I appreciate that the Government House Leader is wanting to speak to Government Motion 42, which was intended, in my understanding, to speak about the economy, job creation, the struggles that Albertans are having, and the fact that they are unemployed and that they're looking for this government to actually stand up with a job-creation strategy that gets them back to work. Instead, we see a Government House Leader talking about the parks strategy and not about jobs. I would appreciate it if he would go back to the relevancy of this debate, which is about supporting Albertans around the economy and job creation and not about trying to target individuals within our caucus for the purpose of derailing the actual debate, which is about the economy.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Madam Speaker, could I speak to the point of order, please?

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Madam Speaker, this is clearly, first of all, a matter of debate. As I did say inside my speaking remarks, we are investing \$130 million inside the parks system over the course of this year to be able to create jobs. That is very much about jobs. Yes, pointing out the response inside this motion, which is also

about COVID and the response of government and the response of this Chamber and Albertans to COVID and pointing out the utterly disappointing behaviour of the Official Opposition to take advantage of people and to take advantage of Albertans by misrepresenting facts to those very people as they fight a pandemic in the greatest recession since the Great Depression in this province: that is very much worth pointing out inside this Chamber. Shame on the hon. members for continuing to do that to Albertans. We will call them on it each and every time.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, I can appreciate the start of this debate being already quite interesting. It did sound, very much so, that we were a little bit off topic on the debate from the hon. Government House Leader, who does still have 13, shy of 14 minutes remaining on his time, which I'm sure is focused on Government Motion 42 at hand.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Debate Continued

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yes, Madam Speaker. We are focused on the government motion at hand, which is to commend the tremendous efforts of Albertans to protect lives and livelihoods through the COVID-19 pandemic. I do commend them for their hard work on that.

I will continue to point out the investment that Alberta is putting in to help us through that situation, including inside the parks system. Through you, Madam Speaker, as we do that investment, I want to assure them that despite the fact that members of the Official Opposition continue to misrepresent facts when it comes to things like the parks system, that Alberta Environment and Parks is investing in, and say things like, "It will be sold," we are not in fact selling parks. In fact, we are investing inside our parks system, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has already admitted that on the record.

Or the latest version, which is to say that provincial parks are being deregulated and moved out of the system. I want to assure Albertans that during the recovery plan that we have brought forward with Albertans, with the investment inside parks we have dozens of regulatory designations that we can use to protect these landscapes. Alberta's government will continue to protect those landscapes going forward despite the fact that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and his caucus continue to fund raise on the backs of Albertans while misrepresenting facts.

Or another one: while we invest inside those parks to be able to help with COVID and the economic situation, Madam Speaker, the misrepresentation of facts by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and his caucus and his extreme environmental organizations that he supports – we will not be building coal mines or industrial places on top of these types of campgrounds. Let me assure you that most of these spots are only a couple of acres big. The hon. member knows that. He knows you can't build something like a coal mine on there, but unfortunately he and his party continue to fund raise off Albertans at the very time that we're seeing large unemployment inside our province.

Madam Speaker, at the very moment that Albertans are struggling, that's what the NDP have focused their time on, misrepresenting facts just to fund raise off them even though they know that it's not factual, what they're saying. Contrast that to what the government is going to do, which is to continue to invest to be able to make sure that Albertans go back to work. It's a direction that we will head, going forward. It's disappointing to see that taking place.

I also want to talk about the investment in the recovery plan that we use inside partnerships inside provincial parks, over \$43 million

in the last few months, some of that going to the friends of Fish Creek, a great nonprofit organization inside Calgary that helps manage the Fish Creek park. Unfortunately, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and his caucus, with their friends like the Tides Foundation and those in the extreme environmental left that are focusing on trying to shut down our energy industry, are trying to ask us not to fund the friends of Fish Creek and the Friends of the Eastern Slopes. Shame on them for that. Madam Speaker, I will assure you that during the economic recovery plan that Alberta is bringing forward, we will continue that investment inside our nonprofit partners all across our parks system because we value the work that they do.

3:10

Unfortunately, you see from the NDP, when it comes to working within our parks system, that the focus is on trying to shut Albertans from being able to help with their backyard. As you know, Madam Speaker, you saw that inside my constituency last time around. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and his colleagues spent a significant amount of time trying to shut all of our backyard in the eastern slopes west of Rocky Mountain House and Sundre, something that was condemned, universally condemned, by every county, town, and indigenous community that was in the area. That was their focus, not on creating jobs but trying to stop Albertans from being able to access that backyard, and they continue to do that as they call on the government not to fund park societies. Not to fund park societies. It's shocking.

I see the Leader of the Official Opposition, who is travelling around the province during this tough time, the largest recession that we've seen since the Great Depression. That hon. member, the Leader of the Official Opposition, travels around the province misrepresenting facts during this time in order to raise money off the backs of the unemployed inside this province, Madam Speaker. Shame on her for that.

You know what, Madam Speaker? We're still going to invest inside the parks system. We're not going to listen to the hon. member who's the Leader of the Opposition. We're not going to listen to her and shut down park societies. We're not going to listen to her and stop Albertans from being able to access their backyard. I'll tell you what we are going to do. We're going to continue with these investments to make sure that our parks system is invested in, that we are able to move forward conservation measures to protect these areas, to make sure that industrial activity can't take place on these special landscapes. We're going to continue to partner with Albertans like we have in this province since 1932, when the parks system opened, to be able to make sure that they have a role in being able to manage the parks system going forward.

With that, I'm looking forward to hearing the debate. I'm also looking forward to watching the NDP continue to misrepresent facts to try to fund raise off the backs of the unemployed and those facing a pandemic, Madam Speaker.

Ms Sweet: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Ms Sweet: We are under 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." This blows my mind. We're not even 20 minutes into the debate about – it's supposed to be job creation and the environment, and we've just heard from the Government House Leader, standing up, trying to talk about the Official Opposition fund raising off people who are unemployed. It is absolutely

despicable that they would impute any type of motivation of that yet spend zero time – I haven't actually heard any job-creation plan come out of the hon. House leader, anything to do where he's made a job or made any type of ability to create a job, yet he has spent the last 20 minutes trying to impute false motives to many members of this caucus, has named many members of this caucus within their constituencies. Again I would like to remind all members within this Chamber that we are here to debate the economy, and we are here to debate jobs, and at some point I would love to hear from the government when they're actually going to give us a proposal about what they plan to get Albertans back to work.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, I'm disappointed to see that the hon. member didn't listen to most of the remarks where we established very clear jobs that were being created. I also agree with the hon. Opposition House Leader that their behaviour is despicable when they do that type of fundraising activity at the NDP, Madam Speaker. It is shocking to see that take place. This side of the House agrees that it's despicable, disappointing to see it.

This is, though, relevant to the debate because it's an investment the government is making inside the parks system, and it's fair to point out the contrast between the government and the Official Opposition, who are spending their time focused on fundraising off Albertans by misrepresenting the facts to take advantage, from my perspective, of Albertans at the very moment they need government and the Official Opposition to stand up for them. You know what they're doing? During the greatest recession since the Great Depression they're making things up and they're fund raising off Albertans. This is a matter of debate.

The Deputy Speaker: I would tend to agree with the hon. Government House Leader on this matter.

However, his speaking time is also done. I will allow the Official Opposition to respond. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Debate Continued

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to be able to rise in this House to speak on this motion, which, I guess, very creatively can be characterized as touching on the matter of job creation and the desperate need for an economic strategy by the people of this province.

Let me just begin by clarifying that one of the reasons that our House leader proposed a motion under SO 30, the urgent motion that she did, was because that particular motion was focused specifically on calling on all members to talk very specifically about jobs, job losses, job creation, and strategies to do better for the people of this province, who are in very desperate straits right now.

One of the things we were trying to avoid, for instance, Madam Speaker, is what we just heard from the Government House Leader, where, you know, the conversation strayed into very wide-ranging areas that, quite honestly, did not focus on the very clear issue that is front and centre for the people of this province. So that is what the Member for Edmonton-Manning was trying to achieve through her motion.

I would just suggest – and I hope the Speaker, who made this ruling, will take into consideration the fact that where an extremely open and wide-ranging motion is allowed to replace a very specific, urgent conversation, where the language is so wide ranging that you could literally talk about, apparently, party fundraising under it, what happens is that it is used as a tool to negate the opposition's and other members' ability to bring specific matters that are truly urgent in front of this Legislature. I would argue that that's an unfortunate consequence of the ruling that we just saw and as

evidenced, and quite helpfully, by the Government House Leader and what we just heard.

That being said, I will certainly now try to take a good portion of our time to focus on the issue that we think is front and centre for Albertans, which is the tremendous level of uncertainty that they are experiencing with respect to the economic challenges that we are facing within this province and the many jobs which have been lost and the true uncertainty being felt in household after household after household across this province. We're getting close to the end of the month of October, and people are literally adding up their bills at the end of this month and trying to figure out if they will be able to pay all of them. Some people are actually getting into that horrible situation of the shell game, where they move money from one place to the next to the next in order to stay just one month ahead of whichever creditor and whichever pressure they are experiencing on their budget.

Of course, we know that that is the case in many, many households across this province. They're looking to their government to take leadership and to stand up for them and to have some empathy for what they are experiencing at their kitchen table, within their household, you know, looking around at their family members and checking off the ones who are supposed to be at school, the ones that used to have a part-time job, or mom or dad, that used to have a job that was actually helping to save for somebody else's postsecondary education, someone who's supposed to be paying the mortgage, paying the rent. All those people who are so worried right now are hoping to hear us talk about what our plans are to get this economy going in the future. Those folks understand, like I think the majority of people in this House understand, that this is a generational challenge, perhaps a multigenerational challenge, and throwing tired, old names at each other at the very beginning of this debate I think undermines the importance of this debate, the importance of this conversation, and, arguably, the importance of this House.

Nonetheless, I will begin my comments by talking a bit about an economic strategy, laying out the situation that we have in front of us, laying out what we've observed that the government has done so far, laying out what we are doing so far to offer an alternative. Obviously, as opposition we come to the table with about one one-thousandth, I guess, of the staff that are at the disposal of Executive Council members for the purposes of creating an economic strategy. Nonetheless, we are doing our very best to offer up an economic strategy to the people of Alberta and to give them an opportunity to engage themselves.

3:20

Once I've had an opportunity to consider and to speak to all those issues, I will of course also take the time to talk about commendation of the many Albertans who have actually been heroes in this province, supporting our health, our welfare, and our economy throughout the pandemic, and I will then talk about the issue of protecting the vulnerable. I will also talk about promoting our social, physical, and mental health. All of these are also worthwhile objectives, and I would argue that, unfortunately, over the past few months what we've seen is the exact opposite from this government in terms of the stated outcomes of the initiatives that they are pursuing. We're not seeing them focus on protecting the vulnerable. We're not seeing them focus on protecting mental health or physical health. We're not seeing them, frankly, commend the many, many Alberta heroes who are working day in and day out to keep us safe, but I'll get there.

Let's just talk for a moment about the state of the economy in our province. After Newfoundland we are the province that is facing the greatest significant slowdown in terms of the depth and breadth

of our economic recession and depression. We have, I think, about 295,000 Albertans who are currently looking for work. We have many, many, many more than that who have not officially started looking for work but who are not getting paid the way that they were. Interestingly, the members opposite don't talk about this too much, but on a per capita basis the people of Alberta have received more payments either through CERB or through the Canada wage subsidy – those two programs, of course, come from the federal government – than any other province in the country. Yet some of those benefits are coming to an end, and even for the ones that aren't coming to an end, we don't know the future of them past next spring, so the uncertainty continues. Regardless, what we know is that in many cases what we're looking at is \$2,000 a month. For many, many people who were used to earning considerably more than that, that puts them in tremendous economic crisis.

Before I move beyond that particular description of the state of play, I would like to note that the Conservative leadership federally argued that CERB and the Canadian wage subsidy should not actually be extended because it costs too much. I would like to, on behalf of those hundreds of thousands of families in Alberta who are receiving that money and who are relying on that money to feed their children and themselves and to keep a roof over their heads, extend our appreciation to the federal government for the extension of both of those programs.

I'd like to also offer up some appreciation to the NDP federal caucus for pushing the federal government to increase the amount that families are receiving from \$1,600 a month to the \$2,000 that had been in play before, because the plan had been to drop it by \$400 a month, or roughly 20 per cent. I don't know how many folks across the way have been talking to the people who are trying to make ends meet on \$2,000 a month, but I know that had they been dropped to \$1,600 a month, the level of crisis and pain and genuine suffering would have been significantly greater.

So to the extent that the NDP opposition federally was able to secure that greater amount of money, that is something that is meaningful to hundreds of thousands of Alberta families. I think that given that this provincial government has really failed to step up in terms of providing income support to the hundreds of thousands of Albertans who have lost their jobs, they too should join with us in offering their appreciation for the efforts of the federal NDP in that regard. To do otherwise would be to say that we would have preferred to see the hundreds of thousands of Alberta families who are about to receive the \$2,000 a month instead receive only \$1,600.

Nonetheless, where are we today? Alberta, as I'm sure you know, Madam Speaker, has the highest rate of families that are accessing the mortgage deferral program in the country. We also know that that mortgage deferral program is about to come to an end. One in 5 Alberta homeowners has accessed that mortgage deferral program, so what that could mean is that we could literally see three months from now 1 in 5 Albertans potentially go into foreclosure. Now, I hope that that's not true. I expect that at least a certain portion of those families were accessing that deferral, again, as part of that whole shell game: you know, pay what you have to, put off what you don't have to, but be ready to pay what you have to when you do have to. Hopefully, those families will be able to somehow pull together what they need in order to not go into foreclosure three months from the expiration of the mortgage deferral program, which happens, I believe, at the end of this month, or is it the end of September?

Mr. Bilous: It ended.

Ms Notley: It ended, so the end of September.

But, either way, even if it's not 1 in 5, even if it's 1 in 10, what we know is that that is very difficult news for Alberta families, and it will be a significant hit to Alberta's economy.

We also know, of course, that the unemployment rate across Alberta is higher than pretty much every other jurisdiction in the country. We know that businesses across this province are shedding employees or going under. We know that even the most healthy and still profitable companies like Suncor, like TC Energy, having received literally billions in support in some cases from this government, have in fact laid off thousands and thousands and thousands of employees. So this is, without question, a crisis.

We know that the price of oil is not as low, of course, as it was in 2016, when we were in the mid-\$20 per barrel, but it seems to be hovering around \$40, and we know that it is difficult for many marginal players within the oil and gas industry to be able to afford to invest when that's the price. More importantly, we know that demand world-wide has dropped considerably, and that is also a challenge.

It's also likely the case that as world demand increases, there's no question that our oil and gas industry will be viable and will continue to make money, but what we are hearing from experts in the field is that even as they do become more viable and they do make more money, they will not employ Albertans at the rate that they once did. The number of jobs per barrel of oil or however you want to measure it will go down.

So all of this underlines the desperate need – the desperate need – for government to take a leadership role in terms of stimulating the economy and finally creating a plan to diversify the economy. We deserve a plan. Albertans deserve a plan. That's all I've heard from people, yet where is the government so far? Well, we, of course, had the famed \$4.7 billion corporate handout, \$4.7 billion over the course of three and a half years as described by Finance officials on I can't remember the exact page of the budget documents. But much to the chagrin of the members opposite, it did in fact appear on their own budget documents, and for that reason, that's why we use the number.

Anyhoo, I suspect that that amount has been accelerated because, of course, that was premised on the idea of us getting to 8 per cent in two and a half years from now, not 8 per cent as of June this year. Of course, just to stand aside here for a moment, when the Premier tries to argue, "Oh, it's only \$200 million" or whatever ridiculous argument it was that he made today, most people who understand this understand that these corporations have the opportunity to time when they file their taxes. They have the opportunity to time when they take advantage of the corporate handout.

3:30

Let us be perfectly clear. They have booked how much they've saved, and they themselves are talking about numbers that are literally 10 to 20 times more than what the Premier talked about today, so to talk about it in a snapshot, annualized way is deeply misleading and/or demonstrative of someone who doesn't actually understand how this works.

In any event what we're looking at is at least \$4.7 billion. What has that gotten us? Well, we have a government here – and many people will remember that this government went so far as to bring in legislation to give itself permission to break the previous law that required that the previous year's financial records be presented to the people of Alberta no later than June 30. Now, had they presented that information to the people of Alberta, we would have been in the House and we would have had the opportunity to debate the first-year report card on this government's economic plan. Instead, they changed the legislation so that they could reveal that information

to the people of Alberta under cover of a completely different package of information at the very end of August, hardly the most transparent or forthcoming communications plan with the people of this province.

Nonetheless, what we saw from the first-year report card on this government's failed \$4.7 billion corporate handout is that in the first 11 and a half months – and I will grant you that the last two weeks of 2019-2020 were impacted by the pandemic, but, really, that's about it. So essentially prepandemic what did we get? We got a deficit that went from I believe it was about \$6.3 billion from our government, as affirmed and confirmed by the Auditor General, to over \$12 billion in this government's first year of operations. Prepandemic: \$6.3 billion to over \$12 billion. The deficit doubled before the pandemic. What else happened? Fifty thousand jobs were lost before the pandemic. What else happened? That shot of adrenaline into the economy that was going to grow the economy? The economy shrank.

Let me be clear. In the previous two or three years the economy had grown, in one case leading the country in economic growth, but the first year's report card under this government was a shrinking of the economy, the loss of jobs, and the doubling of the deficit. Then, of course, we get to the pandemic which, as we know, created a whole new next-level amount of pressure and damage to our economy and through it to the people of this province. Presumably what you would do is that you would look at what you'd done before, check and see if it was working, and roll up your sleeves and redouble your efforts to stand up for the regular working people of this province, who are desperate for leadership on the job front. What did this government do? The only thing so far that we have seen – well, no, not the only thing. There are a number of other things that are even more damaging. The only thing that they're even talking about as an economic strategy is the acceleration of this failed plan. That's what we've got, the acceleration of this failed plan, and the problem with that, of course, is that it's securing nothing. It's securing absolutely nothing.

What we do need, though, is a plan. Now, I've been interested to see that over the last several months this government and members of this government have started saying the word "diversification." That's lovely. I hope that they will accelerate their learning on this and move to actually acting on the topic and the objective of diversifying the economy. Albertans are desperate for a government to focus on diversifying the economy. Let me just say that it's not easy. It's a complex and complicated set of strategies, some of which are, you know, trial and error, and some of which are well-known and well-understood.

Our government had started to make tremendous progress on that front, whether it was through accelerating investment in renewable energy, whether it was through accelerating and attracting new high-tech investment through the digital tax credit and investment tax credit, whether it was through partnering with our postsecondary institutions in terms of promoting the commercialization of research or even promoting more raw research that ultimately comes to fruition like what we saw through the long, many years of the investment through AMII. Of course, credit goes to the government that preceded us, as well, in terms of initially commencing that project. All of those kinds of things are focused on diversifying the economy. Unfortunately, all of them were cancelled by this government, and now what we see is this strange spectre of them running around. Literally \$100 million – it's a random number; it's actually quite considerably more – is cut over here in postsecondary, and then they turn around and they announce a \$1 million grant back to postsecondary to promote diversification.

I have to say, you know, the member opposite screamed "misrepresent" at us about 20 times in the course of his brief

theoretical address on economic recovery, but what I would suggest is, in fact, misrepresentative and very intentionally manipulative is this practice which we have seen repeatedly demonstrated by members opposite, particularly their Executive Council members, where they cut hundreds of millions of dollars and then throw themselves a little media party, a little press party for putting a million dollars back, thinking that the people of Alberta aren't actually keeping track of this and that they can be that easily manipulated by that kind of strategy. I can say from experience that that is not true and that people see what's going on, and nobody is buying what's being sold.

Let me talk a little bit, then, about what a plan would look like. As many members on our side of the House are aware, and they across there may or may not know, last week we launched albertasfuture.ca. Again, I just want to go back to one of my initial points, which is that, you know, we have an incredibly hard-working staff in our caucus office of roughly 30. It's about one one-thousandth of the resources that the Executive Council has at their disposal. Nonetheless, I was very proud and am very proud of the work that our caucus members and our staff had done on the commencement of this propositional forum to engage Albertans in what needs to be this generational discussion about how we move forward on growing and diversifying our economy.

The way we started was by talking about, essentially, five principles. We said: let's get everybody to the table, including members of the caucus over there. They are welcome to participate. I would love for them to do that as well as members of their party, as well as all Albertans from across political lines. They would be very welcome to participate in this conversation. We're asking people to look at economic development through the lens as much as possible of our five principles, always, of course, understanding that we're happy to hear things that don't align with them, but, you know, it's good for people to have a sense of where we're coming from.

The five principles are pretty simple. First of all, unlike in every other case where you have recovery from profound economic failure in the absence of any kind of intentional action by government, where you as a result see the gap between the rich and the poor grow considerably, we believe that an economic recovery in Alberta needs to be equitable. It needs to include all Albertans, but it needs to ensure that it's not one of those things where more and more people are left in the trough and fewer and fewer people are up at the peak enjoying their recovery because in the long term that very issue of inappropriate distribution of resources within the economy becomes a drag on the economy. And lest members opposite think, "Oh, there she goes, singing her left-wing camp songs to herself," this is something that the governor of the Bank of Canada has identified as a critical issue that needs to be addressed, that we cannot allow economic inequality to take off as we come through the economic challenges that we're facing now and move towards recovery. Our framework, first, includes this notion of an equitable recovery.

3:40

The second principle is that it needs to be inclusive. We identify that because it's been very clear that women have been disproportionately negatively impacted by the economic slowdown, and if we don't take specific action to ensure that they can participate as the economy recovers, then they will be left out on a disproportionate basis. That would be bad for the economy as well as for our overall social health and community strength and resilience. Not only women, though, but also other Albertans. Obviously, First Nations Albertans must be part of the recovery. Racialized Albertans must be part of the recovery. Albertans

struggling with disabilities must be part of the recovery. We must focus on an inclusive recovery.

The third principle is that unlike this government, which sees the public sector as an evil to be eliminated, what we believe and what past practice and best practice has demonstrated to be true is that in certain circumstances the public sector can be the most effective partner and/or driver of diversification and economic-growth efforts, not always by any means. I mean, we believe in free enterprise. We believe in a healthy capitalist society, but we also know that there are jurisdictions where government involvement can do something which would not happen in the absence of government involvement.

Of course, one of the best examples of that is right here in Alberta, where we saw the government take the leadership role in developing the oil sands back in the late '60s and early '70s. That is why we were where we were up until relatively recently. So there is a role. This idea that instead you just rip it apart and see it as something to be torn apart, well, frankly, I think that goes counter to successful economic history as well as a lot of economic theory.

Other examples of that, for instance, are, of course, our postsecondary sector that plays such a key role in attracting and recruiting talent to our province and keeping it here. There are many, many other examples of that, but I'll leave it right there for now.

The third point of our – is that the third? No, I think I'm on my fourth. The fourth principle is that we cannot cut our way to prosperity. The idea that we shrink the economy by throwing more people out of work and making more people poor and making more people unhealthy and more people unable to access education is silly. That is not how you develop your economy, and cutting your way to prosperity is simply not a strategy. Yes, you can cut your way to immediately make more progress on eliminating your deficit. Yes, you can do that, I suppose, but in the long term it won't work. I think even the members opposite have been heard to say that we need to grow our economy out of our fiscal troubles. Quite honestly, we're not going to grow our economy if we throw people out of work and make them sick and uneducated and drive them out of the province.

Just today there was an interesting opinion piece about the brain drain in Alberta that we are at risk of engaging in, and we must stop that because I will say and I have said repeatedly over the last, well, throughout my career, actually, that as much as we all like to celebrate Alberta's advantages being the resources we have under the ground, Alberta's real advantage is the people who walk on top of it. But it won't be that way if we close off the opportunities for young people to get a good education that they can afford, to raise their families here, and be confident that they will get a modern education when they choose to have them stay here. So those things.

Then the final thing that I would say is that no economic strategy can be built on a race to the bottom. Now, we've already seen the members opposite embark upon and demonstrate an attraction to that model. We've seen them eliminate the very concept of a minimum wage in the agriculture sector. We've seen them push down wages for young workers. We've seen them pull away overtime for workers of all ages in all sectors. We've seen them reduce protections to keep our air and our land and our water safe and clean, including using this pandemic as cover to essentially allow oil sands operators a three-month free pass where we weren't tracking what was going on up there.

Let me say this. It is our view that if your economic recovery plan is premised on commencing and winning a race to the bottom, your economic recovery plan is effectively starting with a declaration of defeat and a plan to fail. We can do better in Alberta. We must do better in Alberta. If we can't have an economic recovery plan that

contemplates the ability of all citizens of this province to live a good life, to earn a good living, to go to work safe, to come home safe, to breathe clean air, to educate their children, if we can't contemplate that with all that we have, then, well, frankly, we should be ashamed of ourselves because if we can't do it here, it can't be done anywhere in the world. The idea that what we need to do is emulate jurisdictions where those things that I just outlined are not a given for all citizens is incredibly self-defeating. I know, again, that we don't have to do that. There are other strategies that will work. So those are our principles.

But beyond that we need to talk specifics. We need to lay out some plans. We need to talk about where the government can help, where the private sector can help, where the nonprofit sector can help. How can we bring together ideas? How can we be greater than the sum of our parts by, you know, not operating in silos but instead bringing everything together? That's what albertasfuture.ca is about.

Last week we rolled out our first discussion paper. To be clear, it's just a discussion paper, and I go back to my original point. We have 30 staff, some really good staff, and they did some incredible research and put out a great discussion paper, having conversed, along with, of course, our incredible MLAs, who have been conversing with industry leaders on these topics for the last eight or nine months – we have put together a discussion paper that has some good ideas. Maybe not every idea is perfect. Maybe someone with more expertise can come along and say, "Oh, you kind of got that wrong" or "You missed the point here." Absolutely. I'm happy to see that happen. The point is that we're putting it out there so people can get a sense of the scope and the opportunities, the scope of the cost and the different elements of the opportunities that exist, so that we can move to the next step.

When you look at that discussion paper and you compare it to what we saw put out by this government about two weeks earlier, it's kind of night and day because one was basically a pure rhetorical plan to make a plan and an opportunity to say the word "diversification" a few times whereas the other outlined a number of concrete strategies we as government, as the private sector, as the nonprofit, as academia could take to accelerate our position in terms of hydrogen development so that we could catch up with the other jurisdictions around the world that at this point are farther ahead of us. So practical solutions.

We'll be doing more of those, Madam Speaker. We will be putting out more of those papers, those discussion papers, and again I invite all Albertans to read them, to critique them, to offer up their own ideas, to offer up their own papers. Once again, I certainly invite members opposite to be part of that. There are no wrong answers. There's just a failure to even try to come up with answers.

So that is what we are focusing on. Some of the discussion papers that we will be coming forward with: of course, one is on child care. I've already spoken about the need to make sure that women can be part of the economic recovery. So as much as we often talk about child care as something that supports children and supports the rights of women to participate and generally enhances the quality of life that we enjoy throughout our communities, in fact, I would be willing to debate almost any economist about the relative multiplier effect and return on investment of child care compared to almost any other public-sector investment up to and certainly including a \$4.7 billion corporate handout as it relates to growing the economy and all the various elements that are a necessary part of that.

3:50

We, of course, will be rolling out, you know, pieces on geothermal, on tourism, on agribusiness, on supporting small

businesses, on IT, on artificial intelligence, on postsecondary, on how to work collaboratively with indigenous peoples, on – did I say tourism already? I think I did. There's a multiplicity. There are about 25 topic areas that we're working on right now. Again, we invite people to offer up those ones that we've not had a chance to talk about. Oh, of course, how to continue to diversify our nonrenewable sector in more ways, both in terms of the old PDP program, much of which these folks over here have kind of taken over except with less money, again kind of a common practice. But other elements of that as well.

Then, of course, promoting renewable energy because renewable energy is also, as we know, now outpacing nonrenewable energy as a destination for investment dollars, and we have so many natural resources in this province. It's a little bit harder to export renewable energy, so really what we will be needing to do is export expertise and technology and success in that area, something we were leading on before and, hopefully, will be able to lead on again in the future.

That's what Albertans deserve. They deserve a plan that is going to focus on job creation and diversification. Now, all these things are mid- to longer term plans. I would say mid-term plans. We still, of course, need to do some of the more immediate things. I give credit to the government for doing similar things to what we did when we were first in government in terms of accelerating capital investment to provide people jobs in construction. I would argue that it's not quite as ambitious as it should be, that there are more jobs that can be created there and, frankly, still tremendous pressure for the infrastructure that requires that investment. So those are a bit more short term.

In the immediate term what I would argue, Madam Speaker, is that what we should not do is add to the number of people who are unemployed by firing 20,000 of them, 25,000, 30,000. I'm not sure what the current count is, but it's an awfully large group of people that this government is looking at throwing out of work. At a time when immediate jobs and income support for at least one person in the family is what people are desperately holding on to to make ends meet, why would we decide to add 30,000 people to the unemployment line? I don't get it.

Let me move from that quickly to the other parts of the motion. Members opposite put forward a motion that also suggests that we should commend Albertans and commend their efforts who are working "to protect lives and livelihoods throughout the ... pandemic." My goodness. That's what we should do, but here's what this government is actually doing. I'm wondering if in the course of this debate they will introduce and embark upon a hairpin turn and reverse much of what they have done on many of these fronts in order to follow along with the wording of this motion.

At this point those folks who save lives and are protecting Albertans during the term of this pandemic – we've got a war with doctors. We are chasing them out of the province. We are chasing doctors out of rural Alberta. We are losing services in rural Alberta all because of the war with the doctors. We are planning on laying off roughly 700 nurses with more to come, no guarantee that we won't see more when the pandemic is over. We're talking about firing 11,000 front-line health care workers who are not nurses. We're talking about cutting their pay. We are gutting their overtime pay. We are almost demonizing teachers – it's quite ridiculous, actually – and they go into our schools each and every day. You know, I've talked to so many teachers. The level of stress that they are experiencing. But they are working so hard to keep our schools open, to keep our kids learning, and we have a government that is attacking them on multiple fronts.

These are the folks who are doing the things that this government is suggesting we should commend. We are breaching their rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and through that the

Constitution to organize collectively, to be part of unions, and we are talking about accelerating that. We are talking about undermining their rights should they become ill at work by changing a number of rules, or we may be. You know, we are talking about going after their pay. We are talking about going after their employment security. We are talking about going after their pensions.

We are actually suggesting that the people who literally come into the rooms of our loved ones and clean up after them if they've been sick – we're somehow saying that they are ancillary services. That's what the Premier said today: ancillary services, those people who do that work. Wow. I would suggest that folks here who know of anybody who is actually in hospital or in long-term care should ask them whether that's what they refer to the person who comes in and cleans up after them, their illnesses, whether they call them ancillary services or – I don't know. I'd call them a front-line health care worker.

I agree with this motion, that we should absolutely commend their work, but you don't commend their work by telling them that they're either going to be fired now or later, that they cost too much, that they are a drag on the economy. You don't – you don't – do that.

I'm just wondering: how am I doing for time?

The Deputy Speaker: Forty-seven minutes remaining.

Ms Notley: How much?

The Deputy Speaker: Forty-seven minutes remaining.

Ms Notley: Oh, 47. I thought it was, like, just seven. Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: That'll work too.

Ms Notley: Madam Speaker, are you suggesting you're not enjoying this?

The Deputy Speaker: Not at all. Not at all.

Ms Notley: My, my, my. We'll see. It's possible I can get it in under then.

I urge members to not only vote for this motion in terms of commending those Albertans who are working very, very hard to protect lives and livelihoods throughout this pandemic but, in fact, to then do it and to do it by way of your actions. The members opposite, through the Executive Council, actually have the capacity to do it in a meaningful way. They can do it in two ways: one, stop beating up on them and, two, maybe actually support them.

As I said before, I extend beyond health care workers here to everybody who's working in our education system, who is working each and every day to keep our classrooms clean, you know, extra time to keep our classrooms clean. I met one woman, one teacher, who described to me how – I think she has a grade 6 or 7 social studies class – they used to use atlases. Interestingly, because they don't have enough computers, they actually use atlases. Can you imagine using atlases? Apparently they still use atlases for their projects, but because they don't have enough atlases for everyone, you can't have kids going to flip through the atlas. She did spend her weekend laminating eight atlases so that the kids could flip through the atlas, and then every night she wipes down each page on the atlases to make sure that there's no infection. It's not one of those ancillary workers who's doing that, otherwise known as front-line education workers. Rather, it's the teacher that's doing that at the end of her day.

You know, there are just so many stories about what it's like. Another story I heard, which members opposite should really hear, is that for those teachers who've lost their EAs – I've met teacher

after teacher who describes: oh, yeah, my school used to have 12 EAs; now it's got two. I will say again that it's certainly not my job to cheerlead for other levels of government, but I will say that I did hear from some front-line education workers that when the federal education money came through, there was a brief relief because there were a little bit more resources put into the classroom about four weeks in. The problem is that it was mostly just backfilling the cuts that had been made as a result of the decisions taken by this government. It's not, unfortunately, a long-term solution.

Nonetheless, I talk about this because that came up while I was doing a Zoom meeting with – I don't know – 50 or 60 teachers who were teaching online. You know, many other teachers had told me about how they had lost their EAs.

4:00

I talked to one teacher who said: "You know, I'll be online with a class, a hub class. These are kids that are learning from home, and there will be maybe 40 of them on there. I'm teaching a class, and I know that these nine kids here, if we were in person, they'd have an educational assistant, but they don't. I can see them on the screen, and I can tell that they're not getting what I'm saying, that they're not keeping up, that I'm losing them." That's what this teacher is saying to me on her own Zoom call to me. Then at a certain point, you know, she becomes tearful because it is so stressful for her to try to teach these kids and watch kids being lost because there is no support for that child who needs extra learning. That's the real story about what's happening in our schools.

You know, if we're going to commend folks – to be clear, these folks are part of protecting our livelihood. We all know one of the reasons that everyone is so keen to keep everyone in school is to keep the economy going, so don't for one minute think that teachers and educational assistants and custodial workers and administrative people within our school system are not protecting the livelihoods of Albertans by going into those dangerous situations day in and day out.

What you could do is not only commend them through this resolution but (a) you could stop attacking them, in this case; (b) you could start supporting them; and the third thing with this group is that you could sit down and listen to their stories, not make fun of them but listen to them. I think there is so much going on across this province that people here are not aware of, and the only way you can do that is by connecting with the people who are really on the front line doing that work, so I would suggest that that's what we do to commend those folks.

Now, another group of people who are protecting our livelihood and keeping the economy going are small-business owners. We have met with many, many small-business owners over the last many months. These folks are also struggling. Now, in the early part of the pandemic, in April-May, our caucus proposed a number of different programs to support these small-business owners. One or two of them the government picked up on; most of them they ignored. There were mostly deferrals as opposed to financial and fiscal support. There was deferral of utility costs as opposed to actually supporting and waiving utility costs, for instance, for a period of time.

You know, we see now, of course, insurance costs going through the roof, and we had called for this government to step in and work with the insurance industry to help with the cost of liability insurance and the struggles that they were experiencing with liability insurance, particularly when they weren't able to run their businesses for periods of time or they were running them in a much more controlled fashion. Obviously, the risk to the property arising from the business was considerably lower, and we had asked for this government to work with the insurance industry to give some

relief to these small-business owners. They did not. We have since seen that, in fact, insurance rates are skyrocketing, profits for insurance companies are going up, and many people cannot keep up with their insurance payments. That's something that I think we could still work on.

Another thing, of course, is rent and eviction relief. We pushed hard for that. The government refused to move on it. Eventually the federal government moved on it, but unfortunately their program was flawed. The provincial government dialed in and was part of the federal government's program, but unfortunately because the federal program was administered through the landlords, those hard-working small-business owners who couldn't get their landlord to buy into the relief program were left on their own. That was a struggle. Now, I understand that the federal government has now reconsidered, so I hope that the provincial government will be continuing to tie in to the federal government with that because these folks really need our support, and we're not giving them, really, much provincial support at all except for a few deferrals. Again, as we talk about commending the efforts of Albertans to protect lives and livelihoods, I think we should also think about what opportunities we have to lead and to provide support.

Now, the next part of this motion, of course, talks about protecting the vulnerable. This one, I have to say, Madam Speaker, is rich. It is really, really, really rich coming from a government that has really separated itself quite notably from the rest of the country in terms of the depth, breadth, and multitude of inherently cruel attacks on the most vulnerable members of our society. It's really overwhelming. On one hand we're rushing \$4.7 billion out the doors as fast as we possibly can; on the other hand we are threatening to either reduce the rate of pay, the income received by people on AISH, or to throw a bunch of people off AISH. I am only quoting the spokespeople for the Executive Council when I say that because those are all the things they said on the record a mere month and a half ago.

We don't know where it's landed, but what we do know is that tough changes are coming, and nobody has said: "Don't worry. Everybody who is entitled to AISH now will continue to receive AISH." So because we haven't heard that, what we know in UCP speak is: "Get ready. You're not going to be getting AISH much more." What that will mean is that these vulnerable people, these disabled people will go from getting \$1,680 a month to getting, probably, income support under the unable-to-work category, which I believe is at about \$1,150 or \$1,200, something like that. So we're basically looking at about a 33 per cent clawback from the most vulnerable people we have in this province. We don't know how many yet, but clearly there are some.

We have a motion here that suggests we should protect the vulnerable. I just don't know what planet the members opposite were on when they thought that this was a motion that they could, with any level of integrity, introduce into this House if their plan is to suggest that that's what they've been doing thus far. Now, if their plan is to reverse course and apologize for the cruelty that we have seen displayed up until now, I will be your biggest cheerleader, and I will throw you a party, physically distanced, of course, but there will in fact be much celebration. But that's not what we're seeing or hearing from folks, unfortunately, right now.

But are AISH recipients the only vulnerable people that this government is attacking? Well, no. Just last week we heard, buried under the announcement of firing 11,000 front-line health care workers, most of whom are women, most of whom are people of colour, another announcement to raise the long-term care fees for low-income seniors across this province. So who's paying more? Corporations? Oh, no, no, no. They're paying \$4.7 billion less. But low-income seniors, well, they're going to pay more, the ones who

need support in long-term care. So the most vulnerable of the low-income seniors are going to pay more, plus they're going to pay for their drugs, plus they're going to pay for their crutches and their casts. Phew. Thank goodness we gave \$4.7 billion to all those big corporations. That, of course, is after we cut about 60,000 of them off their pharmaceutical benefits last spring. So, again, not supporting the vulnerable.

Who else are we going after? Well, I touched on it. Of course, within our education system there are about 700,000 kids who are in our K to 12 system now. I suspect it's probably fair to say that easily tens of thousands of severely disabled children within our education system, maybe more – we may be into six figures. I don't know exactly, but we'll say tens of thousands for the moment who rely on PUF funding, rely on the funding that supported speech pathologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and this government cut both of those programs while also firing educational assistants in the middle of a pandemic while they were at home, not learning. Wow. Kids who are disabled, that's who this government has come after. Let me remind you that that's at the same time as their first bill in this House is to accelerate a \$4.7 billion corporate handout to profitable corporations that are taking their investment and their jobs and their head offices to different jurisdictions.

4:10

So we are not protecting those people. We are not protecting people who struggle with addictions, we are not protecting people who struggle with mental health, and we are certainly not protecting former kids in care. In fact, we're cutting them off early.

Then this motion goes on, so I would suggest that we reverse course. Needless to say, and again I would say: (a) by all means pass this motion, (b) stop attacking the most vulnerable, (c) start supporting the most vulnerable. Simple formula there.

The next piece is this social, physical, and mental health. Again, I think that, you know, we've covered a lot of ground already in terms of how the government's actions so far do not amount to promoting social, physical, and mental health.

But the ones that I think I've not yet had a chance to cover, of course, are the hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars that have been cut from postsecondary. I talk about that because that is critical to our economic future but it's also critical to the social, physical, and mental health of young people both in high school and out of high school as well as adults needing to seek new education. To attack so directly our postsecondary sector, to demonstrate the level of hostility to advanced education that we have seen from this government – and to be fair, or to be clear; not so much fair, but to be clearer – is actually something that we saw demonstrated prior to COVID by a large degree. The tax on postsecondary was already well under way. Now, of course, what we're doing is that we risk losing people to other provinces, losing young people.

I think I've probably talked about this in the House before, but it bears repeating. I remember back in the day when I would every now and then go off to these Council of the Federation meetings and meet with other Premiers and talk about economic development. Of course, in preparation for it you'd get briefed on the state of play economically in each of the other jurisdictions, and you would look at what was going on. I remember being just quite struck by the challenges faced by certain other jurisdictions where the number of people retired was huge, the number of people participating in the workforce was low, and discovering that, of course, one of the things, again, that we're so privileged to be able to rely on in Alberta was this incredibly young, incredibly diverse – like, people think of Alberta, you know, in a certain way. In fact, we are one of the most diverse, ethnically diverse, provinces in the

country, incredibly well-educated people in this province. Understanding and being briefed by all the economists who would say: "Oh, yeah, yeah. No, this is why our economy is growing. It's these people. They just keep coming here. They start their families and they start businesses and they go to work and they do the things, and that grows the economy."

So what's happening now? What's happening now is that those young people are going: "Oh, man, I don't know. I don't know. I don't see myself in this government. I don't see my values reflected in this government. I don't see a future for my kids. I don't see anybody trying to convince me that there is a future for my kids, and I don't see an ability to afford going to postsecondary. I don't see space in this postsecondary, and I see costs going up, up, up for me and my family, so I'm looking at a different place to go." I'm hearing that from more and more and more people, and that worries me because there is a window. I mean, we are in a historic, generational period now where the decisions that we take today will define what this province looks like 20 years from now. What's critically important is that we keep those folks here. There is a window within which we can convince them to stay, and then after that they will go and the window will close, and we will be struggling to grow the economy without the single most important advantage that this province enjoys right now, which is those young, well-educated, diverse Albertans. We will lose them if we don't find a way to convince them that they should stay, and that's not what we're doing right now. We need to be looking at practical things like affordable housing, like accessible postsecondary.

I'd like to take just a moment as well, even though this is a little bit off topic. It also, however, relates to people being heard. I just want to talk briefly about the state of play of the, you know, tens of thousands of families in northeast Calgary right now whose houses were destroyed in the single most expensive and damaging natural disaster outside of the Fort McMurray fire, I think, in Canadian history. I might be off by one, but I certainly know it was more than the flood, even, in downtown Calgary. Many of those folks are now watching the snow fall, and their houses have not yet been repaired.

The MLA for Calgary-McCall and I and others wrote to the Premier asking for some particular efforts on the part of the Premier to sit down with the insurance industry, to create an insurance advocacy office, much like happened after the floods in Calgary, and a number of other strategies to help support these families before it got to the point that, you know, they were stuck in the middle of the winter. The siding was ripped off their houses, and now we're in a situation where we're looking at rot and cold and all those kinds of things.

That's a community that really feels like they haven't been heard, and that is reflective of the overall message that we need to be delivering to people, that we're a province where we work together, and when people are struggling as a result of something like that, we respond and we are pragmatic and we reach out and we try to help each other. We don't ignore them. This particular group and area has been ignored.

I want to talk just a little bit about the issue of prudence because, you know, today the Premier talked a lot, a lot, a lot about the deficit. Now, I will grant you that the deficit is big, and it is a problem. I will say, though, to be clear, that the deficit was \$12 billion before the pandemic, and that is on this government. That is on this Executive Council. That is on this Premier; \$12 billion before the pandemic. But at the end of the day if that is the only number we look at, if we don't look at the jobs number, if we don't look at the number of people who graduate from high school, if we don't look at the number of people who get into postsecondary institutions, if we don't look at the number of small businesses that we're able to keep open, if we don't look at the number of ways in

which we can diversify: there are so many numbers that we need to look at.

I get it. It's hard. Government is not about easy choices. It's not like: "Oh, I'm going to pick this lovely tart or this wonderful chocolate mousse. It's great. Every day is a choice between two awesome things." That's not government, because those choices are obvious. It's the hard things. So, yeah, you have a fiscal challenge right now, you have a revenue challenge, you have an economic challenge, and you have people who need their government more than ever. This comes down to values, Madam Speaker.

When we've got a Premier who can simply recite one number over and over and over and fails to understand the real-life experience of families who are worried about their jobs, of families who are worried about the quality of education their kids are receiving in their schools right now, who are worried about the mental health of their teenagers, who are worried about the future of their young adults and their ability to get good education, who are worried about the safety of their parents in long-term care, who are worried about the health of everybody in terms of their ability to breathe the air and drink the water and walk on the land that we all share not only now but 20 years from now, we need a government that listens to all those people, that doesn't just recite one number like a mantra and think that is the answer to everything. If that's what you do, that's not leadership. That's going back to the easy answers. The only problem is that they might be easy for this government, but they are horrible for the people of this province.

The people of this province need a government that is there for them, not one that is constantly telling them that they don't deserve to be supported, they don't deserve to be part of the conversation, they don't deserve to be asked for advice, they don't deserve to have information shared with them, and they don't deserve a government that is, first and foremost, committed to the long-term employment security that they want to see.

4:20

I think that were we to support this motion in a meaningful way and put actions behind the words, we would have a different conversation with Albertans and we would understand that there are a lot of moving parts, but we have a window. If all this Premier does is turtle and hide himself under his shell, whispering the words "24 billion" to himself over and over and over while he's hiding in his shell and meanwhile throws everyone off the raft, two or three years from now he'll peek his head out of his shell. There'll be no one on the raft, and there'll be no one swimming around it anymore. That's not what Albertans need from their government right now. They need a government that's listening to them, that understands their experiences, understands their concerns, understands their worries, and is going to work with them the way we have done in the past in this province to get through it together. That's how you put this motion into action.

I would argue, therefore, that prudence involves not only looking at our fiscal situation, which, of course, we must do. There's no question about that. We must be very conscious of it. That's why we were able to bring our deficit from a little over \$10 billion down to \$6.3 billion, and we were on track to balance. Obviously, be conscious with these things, but there's also, you know, penny-wise, pound-foolish, and let us not be a government that can't look beyond the pennies and can't look beyond today's trip to the store and thus fails to think about the future and how long that window stays open and how effectively we're able to truly grow the economy and develop an economic strategy with Albertans that focuses on their jobs, focuses on their participation in the economy, focuses on economic security now and into the future.

That is, more or less, Madam Speaker, my contribution to this motion. I would suggest overall that members throughout this House should vote in favour of it. Members opposite should reverse about 90 per cent of the decisions they have taken so far. They should stop attacking Albertans. They should start supporting Albertans, and therefore the vote on this motion would actually be a meaningful thing as opposed to a rhetorical device. I think Albertans need more than a rhetorical device, and I urge this government to provide them with that.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. That was quite a performance we just saw, and not much of it made much sense. In fact, I haven't got as much time as the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition does, so I'll just cover some of the things, but I'm going to start near the end because people, even if they just got here, will be able to remember that. Can't look past today's trip to the store: if anything describes the NDP's time in government, it's that phrase. These are the same people – I heard the Leader of the Opposition complaining about the size of the deficit, but even now, every time, every day in question period, every day in the media they say: spend more, spend more, spend more, spend more. They can't think past the next trip to the store even when we're broke, even when we're more broke than Alberta has been. What does the NDP say every day? Spend more, spend more, spend more.

I mean, the examples that the leader used about teachers: if anybody here trusts teachers to do a good job, it's people on this side of the House. The Leader of the Opposition says: spend more, spend more, spend more. They don't have confidence that teachers can do the job. We do. Our Education minister has put a great plan in place for schools to operate. We have confidence that teachers can do a great job, and no matter how much confidence we have, the Leader of the Official Opposition says: spend more, spend more, spend more. Now, who does that indicate has more confidence in teachers? I would submit to you that it's people on this side of the House, not the Leader of the Official Opposition.

I love the fact that they talk about who's protecting who. In fact, we have been looking after seniors as well as they've ever been looked after, with spending that is at a high level.

Talk about going to the store. No matter what we do, they say: spend more, spend more, spend more. The problem is that under the NDP's plan, where you always spend more, at some point the money runs out. They are not interested in protecting the future of the education system because they're going to spend beyond the ability to keep spending. They're not protecting the future of being able to look after seniors because they're going to spend beyond what's spending. They're not looking after the future of the health care system because they want to spend beyond what can be spent and at rates of increase that cannot be sustained. They do this and they try to sound virtuous while essentially destroying the future by asking a government that's already severely in deficit to spend more, spend more, spend more and in so doing, essentially, destroy the future of being able to look after these important services for Albertans. That comes right down to the basics of health care, social services, services for the disabled, AISH, all the things that matter to Albertans.

The Official Opposition say that we're bad because we're trying to control expenditures, but, in fact, we're actually protecting the future of being able to provide those services by trying to make sure that those services can be sustained not for one, not for five, but for 20 or 30 years. Our kids and our grandkids, we don't know what's going to happen to them. Some of them are going to grow up and

be completely self-sufficient. Good for them. We hope that's everybody, but we know that a certain number are not, and those services are going to be required for them: the health care, the social services, the education, the senior services, the services for those with addictions or mental health concerns. The Leader of the Opposition ignores that fact constantly. She loves to stand up and say that the government doesn't care about these people, but the fact is that we care more than the opposition does. We don't want to provide those services for a day, a week, a month, or a year; we want to provide those services forever.

Under the NDP's plan it's always spend more, spend more, spend more till the money runs out, till the banks won't lend you any more money, and then the services go away. They'll be long gone, and they'll say: well, they were nice while they were there. We don't have that luxury on this side of the House. We have the responsibility to make sure that the services are provided in a high-quality way today and that they last for decades to come. What you just heard in that diatribe is a pitch from the Leader of the Official Opposition to spend your brains out and cripple the government's ability to provide those services on a continual basis for decades on end, which is what we need to do. Yet she, like all of us, won't be here decades from now to take responsibility for the irresponsible attitude you just heard for about 90 minutes in a row just now.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few comments in response to the Minister of Transportation's rather angry response to what the Leader of the Official Opposition had to say. I do want to start my comments by addressing one of the things that the minister said about the apparent faith and confidence that the government has in the work the teachers are doing. I can tell you that I have not talked to a single teacher – and I have talked to many over the last few months – who believes that this government is doing anything to support them in the work that they're doing. In fact, all they're doing is piling on to them more responsibility and hardship when their jobs are already hardest. It is really reprehensible for that member to stand up here in this House and claim that his government has the backs of teachers when, in fact, they are doing nothing but undermining the good work that teachers are struggling to do in the classrooms, with no help coming in the near future.

Every teacher that I've talked to tells me that they are what they call "June tired." That means that they are as tired now as they normally are at the end of a regular school year. They not only have to act as the primary educators; they also have to be public health officials now, making sure that kids, you know, adhere to the COVID protocols that are in place in schools, making sure that they're cleaning up every day after classes are done, and they cannot do the job that this government expects them to do without more help, Madam Speaker.

We've already seen in my own children's schools a record number of teachers taking stress leave or sick leave because they can't handle the responsibilities that that minister and the rest of his colleagues on Executive Council have unfairly put on teachers and the other workers in the educational system.

And it's not just teachers who are suffering as a result of that, Madam Speaker. All of our students are suffering, too, because they go into class every day and see the toll and the stress that this pandemic and this government's refusal to support our school system has taken on the people who are tasked with providing education to our children. They know that they're not getting the

quality of education that they got just a year ago or two years ago, when we were in charge.

4:30

That's your average, everyday student, not to mention all of the students who need extra help. The Leader of the Official Opposition talked about the students who had their PUF funding ripped away. I've talked to thousands of students and parents in my constituency who've had their child's educational assistants ripped away. What kind of future are these kids going to have?

The Minister of Transportation says that we have faith in the job the teachers are doing. Well, Madam Speaker, I can tell you that this supposed faith is not being felt in any of the hallways of any of the schools in my constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I'm sure that the schools in my constituency aren't outliers. You know, while the Minister of Transportation is shouting "poor" on one hand – we couldn't possibly hire an extra educational assistant to help out kids during the worst pandemic that this province has ever seen, during a unique and singular public health crisis – he's happily giving \$4.7 billion away to his corporate friends and then wonders why we can't afford to pay any teachers or educational assistants and why we expect them to be public health officials on top of their regular duties. I really would urge the Minister of Transportation and all of his Executive Council colleagues to at least tone it down a bit.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege and honour to rise today and speak to this motion. I have quite a few thoughts that I would like to share. I do want to begin with how we got here.

Now, the Government House Leader admitted that they saw that the Official Opposition House Leader put forward the idea of wanting a robust debate on the economy the first day that we came back because the state of the economy is in dire straits due to the COVID impacts and also, of course, the global price of oil, and international trade as well with certain countries is tenuous right now.

What's interesting, though, is that instead of just accepting that the Official Opposition wants to talk exclusively about the economy, the Government House Leader ran out and crafted a motion which has the word "economic" in it. It doesn't talk about jobs, doesn't talk about the state of the economy, doesn't talk about failed initiatives that the government has currently put forward, which I'll talk to at length, including ideas of initiatives that will actually help to diversify the economy. Instead, we are now debating a motion, like I said, that's watered down. It is not completely focusing on the economy.

Now, what's interesting is that when the Minister of Transportation jumped up to respond to the Leader of the Official Opposition, not once did he talk about initiatives the government is doing or not doing to address this economic crisis. Instead, he decided to attack the Leader of the Official Opposition but also talk about the cupboard and the NDP wanting to constantly increase the debt and deficit. I will remind the hon. minister: last year, in 2019, Alberta's deficit under this government was twice as much as what the government claimed it would be. It was \$12.5 billion pre-COVID. Do you also know, Madam Speaker, that that's a larger deficit than any year that the NDP was in government and brought forward a budget?

You know what constituents are asking me? Where did the money go? What did we get for 12 and a half billion dollars? I'll

tell you this much, Madam Speaker: it sure as heck wasn't jobs. Four point seven billion dollars for a corporate race to the bottom, and the ministers, the front bench, still cannot point to a single job that it's created to date.

Now, at some point will it have an impact to help corporations? Yes. Well, it did actually have an impact to help corporations, of course. I mean, they just took the savings from paying less in taxes and invested them in other provinces. So their plan is how Alberta can subsidize jobs in other provinces. That's what you should call your plan.

Ms Sweet: Or other countries.

Mr. Bilous: Or other countries. Very valid. We have numerous examples.

Now, I'm not critical of the companies. They're going to make the decision that's in their best interests. But when Albertans were promised that the Premier and this government had a silver bullet to help the economy, that was patently false. In fact, it hasn't created jobs.

Now, to the minister's comments, before I get into this motion, we're not calling for an increase in spending. What we're calling for is to spend the money more wisely. There are choices that this government made: again, \$4.7 billion for a corporate tax reduction. Now, we all know, Madam Speaker, that the government can play with semantics. Alberta had the overall lowest taxes in the country. Alberta has had that for decades. Under the NDP Alberta continued to have that. We have no PST. We have no payroll tax. We have no health care premiums.

Now, what is fascinating is that the very political party, the very government that claims to be, you know, the ones that are going to reduce taxes actually turned around and increased personal income taxes and then denied it. Everyone will see that it's no longer indexed, so you are paying more every year. That's a fact. At the same time this government has increased fees in a number of different areas, meaning that Albertans are paying more. So they can talk about their narrative, but it doesn't change the facts.

Now, back to my point on spending wisely, you've got a \$30 million war room that is the laughingstock of the world. I can't believe your CEO is still there. Like, he plagiarized two logos, and they've attacked credible institutions, yet somehow they're doing a service to Alberta? They're actually not. That \$30 million would be better invested – quite frankly, to the point that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was saying, that money would be better spent investing in supports for our classrooms.

Echoing comments that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar made, I am a teacher, and I have a lot of colleagues and friends that are teachers. Schools are getting leave requests, mental health leave requests, three to four daily, that they are denying, because teachers are so overwhelmed. So don't sit there and say: oh, we stand with teachers. Your actions speak way louder than your words. I have not found a single teacher that says: I stand behind what this government has done to help support us, to help students return.

There's also a record number of students who are learning from home. Why are their parents choosing to keep them home? Because they don't trust this government that they've actually put measures in place. You know, I never thought I would say this, but here I am applauding some of the actions of Premier Doug Ford in Ontario because they at least invested and allocated new dollars to help ensure their schools would be safe. The point that I think the Leader of the Official Opposition made is: hey, folks, please don't let it escape you that if parents, many of them, want to return back to work, if we want to get the economy going, we need our schools to

be open. This is about educating our young people, but also a piece of it is about helping the economy to get going again.

4:40

The other thing that's interesting, you know, is the fact that this government – and it probably won't want to talk about it – in one year has had five credit downgrades. Three different agencies have put Alberta on the watch list. Of course, we know that when they put a state or a province on the watch list, that means that they are the next step away from getting another credit downgrade. So for those over there that had been constantly criticizing the NDs when we were in government, the shoe is on the other foot.

Now, when it comes to this motion, Madam Speaker, what's interesting is that I honestly think that this government is trying to run away from their track record, which, of course, is that the policies that they put in place have not actually been helping employers, helping workers, helping Alberta businesses to grow and thrive. In one breath this government will make massive cuts – cuts to postsecondary, cuts to the technology space, to tech, cuts to start-ups, to the very delivery vehicles that help support these companies – and then turn around and give them back a pittance, a fraction of what they've taken, and say: hey, look at us; we are so great; we are investing in this space.

To my earlier point during question period, Madam Speaker, under the NDP government we committed a hundred million dollars for artificial intelligence and technology to really plant a stake in the ground, a flag in the ground, so that the world would get the message that Alberta, which was currently ranked third in the world for machine learning – we're now fourth and sliding. It would send a signal that this government, the NDP government, believes in the opportunities that we have, building on our strengths. One of the first things that this government did was that they cut that. They eliminated it immediately, and there are articles after articles that talk about how money that was going to come to Alberta decided to go elsewhere. Talent decided to go elsewhere.

One of the reasons that Alberta is a global leader when it comes to artificial intelligence and machine learning is because of AMII, the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute. Okay? I will give credit where credit is due. The government of 2004 initially started investing \$2 million a year to AMII. That \$2 million a year was continued under our government and increased to \$4 million a year. We did that in the recognition that that funding to AMII is what attracted some of the top minds when it comes to artificial intelligence. But the only way we're going to continue to attract researchers, grad students, and others is to invest, not to cut.

Cutting the U of A's budget and the U of C's budget significantly and then giving back a couple of million dollars – and I'm talking significantly, over a hundred million dollars cut from our postsecondaries – and saying, "Here's a couple of million," that doesn't make up for it. That doesn't send a signal to the world that we want to attract and retain talent here. As we've said, it's not just about landing the big fish; it's about supporting our start-ups. It's supporting our companies that can scale and grow here in the province. It's about retaining our grads when they graduate because you know what they do? They go where the companies are. You know where the companies are? A lot of them are in other provinces, where governments recognize that there is a role to play, that government can level the playing field. So right now, when it comes to the digital media space, Alberta has a disadvantage. Maybe you folks are proud to have created the Alberta disadvantage, because we are not on the same level playing field as B.C. and Ontario and Quebec. They have tax credits and tools that ensure that companies can be competitive.

Now, I appreciate that my colleagues across the way will point to the brilliant corporate tax reduction. Well, that's wonderful, but for tech start-ups that does nothing. You could put the corporate tax at zero, and you still are not helping them. They're not paying corporate taxes because they're not pulling out their earnings. They're pumping every penny back into their company trying to grow. So what we need are strategic investments.

To the Minister of Infrastructure's comments earlier: we're not talking about increasing funding and spending. We're talking about spending more wisely: strategic investments in targeted programs, leveraging our world-class universities and postsecondary institutions in the areas of health and life sciences. We are global leaders, but there's more that we can do in helping to commercialize the incredible research that takes place in our postsecondaries, leveraging the incredible work that our technical colleges and trades colleges and trades universities do.

But I'll tell you this much. When we're trying to retain talent and keep companies here, unfortunately, the government, Madam Speaker, is a one-trick pony. All that they think about is that it's all about taxes. I really encourage you to go out and talk to some of these companies because, again, taxes for most companies ranks fourth or fifth on their priority list. Again, it goes back to talent, leveraging those postsecondaries.

It goes back to quality of life. Alberta had, until this government came, one of the best health care systems in the world, an envy of people all over the planet, including a magnet for these companies. Down in the U.S. these companies have significant costs in paying the employers' share of health care plans. They look at Alberta and say: "Holy cow. Your health care system. Not only is it incredible and it takes care of people; it's also a competitive advantage that you have in the province." Alberta is in a unique position, Madam Speaker, because we are the only jurisdiction in Canada that has a single health care delivery model, the only one in Canada. Why aren't we using that to continue to invest, attract talent, to grow solutions and develop them here in Alberta to benefit Albertans and then look at exporting these technologies, devices to the world?

Instead, we have a government that is so busy picking fights with doctors and then denying it, it's actually laughable. I mean, you're losing credibility with Albertans when your Health minister says that no doctors are leaving, and doctors are standing up saying: "Hey. I'm a doctor in rural Alberta. I'm leaving." I hope that they are calling all MLAs to say: because of these policies, you're now going to wait longer. I know that there are several doctors in the Government House Leader's riding of Sundre that have said: "We are leaving. This government is making it untenable." The solution is: we're going to bring in legislation to force them to stay.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for . . .

Mr. Feehan: Edmonton-Rutherford.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity. I'm just quite caught up with what the member is saying about this government's record of failure, both on the economic measures and particularly in understanding the complex nature of the environment in which businesses want to establish themselves. I noticed that the member was taking some time to talk about the fact that not only are we talking about the fact that Alberta already has low taxes for corporations, but we used to have most of the other things that corporations are looking for, in fact, the priorities that corporations indicate when they talk about what it is that they're seeking to have.

We know, for example, that most businesses could not simply be very successful unless they had a constant input of research and support from academics in world-class institutions, like the University of Alberta was under the previous government. It's slowly becoming less so under the current government. Companies come here because they know that as they begin to develop things, they can go to the universities and they can sit down with these excellent professors that have been brought in from around the world, even by previous Conservative governments. So you're really not only breaking the goodness that has been created under the NDP government, but you're really breaking 40 years of Conservative governments' work to establish excellent universities in this province.

I guess I would love to hear this member speak a little bit more about the way in which there is a very dynamic relationship between universities and NAIT and SAIT and other institutions of advanced knowledge and business success in this province. I'd love to hear a little bit more about that.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I'll thank the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for that question. You know what? It's fascinating to look at the number of partnerships that exist between the 26 – I believe it was 26 – postsecondaries around Alberta, partnerships that involve not just our postsecondaries but also the private sector, partnerships that we have with other institutions world-wide but as well with companies. I think, you know, it's important that not only are we adequately funding our postsecondaries but working to ensure that our students are graduating with the right talent and credentials that are needed for future jobs, jobs that don't exist today but will exist in the future.

But in order to ensure that our postsecondary institutions remain competitive, we have to invest in them. We have to fund them. Cuts to our postsecondaries are actually a detraction or a disadvantage for some of these global players that are looking to come here. Education is critical. The development of talent and ensuring that we have a big enough talent pipeline – there's a pipeline that you folks could work on, the talent pipeline, that right now is very, very small, but with strategic investment and partnerships we can grow it substantially. That's something that we were doing under the NDP government.

Now, I do want to close my comments by saying a couple of things. In 2018 under the NDP government Alberta led Canada in GDP growth, at over 4 per cent. We led the country. That was with a number of our policies that were working to diversify our economy – and that was despite the fact that in 2015 there was a global collapse in the world price of oil, going from its high of about \$128 a barrel down to about \$24 a barrel – but what it took was critical investments.

I'm going to say this, Madam Speaker. There were a number of things that I talked about today, but we have launched an initiative to engage with Albertans around the province, to hear their ideas on how we can grow and diversify the economy. I want to encourage all members of this Assembly and all Albertans, regardless of who they voted for or what their political stripe is, to visit www.albertasfuture.ca and take part in a conversation on what we can do to really build on Alberta's strengths to diversify within our critical sectors, like oil and gas and agriculture and forestry and tourism, and what more we could do.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise today on this motion to speak to Children's Services, our response to the COVID-19 pandemic over the last number of months but also our very important role, I believe, in the economic recovery of our province. It is truly hard to believe that it's been more than six months since the pandemic changed so much, almost every aspect of our daily lives, a trifecta of an oil price crash, pandemic, and the biggest recession we've seen in a century. This pandemic has made things difficult for all of us, but for vulnerable families across Alberta the isolation and financial insecurity can be especially tough and has been.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The burdens of these tough times are not only economic. They have social, mental, and physical impacts. Isolation has taken an additional toll on the mental health of children, youth, and families throughout this province but, as I said, especially so for at-risk or more vulnerable children, youth, and families. I do want to speak a little bit today about some of the supports we've provided to families and how these supports were adapted throughout the last number of months.

In child intervention, Mr. Speaker, staff moved incredibly quickly to ensure that the most vulnerable kids and their caregivers were protected from COVID-19. We changed policy and practice to allow virtual visits and meetings, and Children's Services staff were provided with a consistent high-quality supply of PPE. The ministry also reached out and connected with our community partners who offer a number of services on behalf of the Ministry of Children's Services to ensure that they had PPE as well. Our priority was making sure that kids are safe, kids are healthy, and kids are kept connected to their families, so we had to do that in a way that maintained their safety.

The ministry continues to look into cases of suspected abuse or mistreatment while taking precautions surrounding COVID-19. We do know the usual networks were not quite there in terms of community organizations, play groups. As we know, in-person classes were cancelled for a few months this spring, but we have seen that caring community members have come together and continued to keep an eye out and support kids and families.

I do, Mr. Speaker, want to thank our front-line caseworkers. It's also foster and kinship care month here in Alberta, and I want to thank caregivers, who provide supports to some of our most vulnerable children, who continue to work throughout the pandemic and use virtual tools to make sure kids and families aren't falling through the cracks.

If we want to speak to numbers, Mr. Speaker, I do want to speak a little bit about statistics around COVID-19, just to really identify how we have done this work and how our front-line caseworkers have worked to keep kids and families safe. When we look at the number of children and youth receiving services across our province, that number is nearly 11,000. Total cumulative cases to date – and these numbers are as of today – 16. For children and youth in care – that's foster or kinship care – including 6,600 children, total cumulative cases: 17. When we look at caregivers, guardians across the province, 4,200, only 41 confirmed cumulative cases. This really does speak to how seriously people are taking this and how hard both our community partners, caregivers, and front-line staff are working to ensure that vulnerable kids and families remain safe.

We have, in terms of prevention and early intervention, our family resource networks. They have been taking huge strides to alleviate stress felt by children and families. This new model transitioned April 1, and I will say that I am the first to admit that

April 1 was not an ideal time for a transition in what was, really, the height of the pandemic this spring, and to those community organizations I just want to say once again – I've said it to many of you in person – thank you so much for working so hard to make that transition go smoothly. By using technology like Zoom and FaceTime, families are staying connected and keeping that relationship with workers. That is really significant for not only their safety but also their growth and development.

Over the last couple of weeks while visiting family resource networks across the province, both hubs and spokes, I have heard incredible stories about the adaptations and resiliency that they have shown. We have heard virtual classes and programs being added to websites so that youth can stay engaged from home. We heard of another who started outdoor gardens, who set up outdoor picnics and park visits so that they could bring families together in a truly safe and physically distant way. We saw virtual cooking classes being done on Facebook, where families can connect and tune in from home so that they can learn new skills and really connect with each other and build stronger connections but also reduce some of the stress that they'd be feeling when some of those health restrictions were in place.

One of our community partners actually said that they had seen more innovation in the last six to seven months than they'd seen in the last number of years, and part of that is really the positives that we are seeing in COVID and hope to continue as we move into the future. I really want to thank our community members and our community partners for stepping up to support kids and families at this time.

Of course, today, Mr. Speaker, we're here to talk about the economic recovery, and getting parents back to work is a priority of this government. Child care plays a hugely important part in that. The reopening of child care centres has been a very smooth transition. I do want to say that day homes never did close. They stayed open to support families the entire time, even when we weren't really sure what the future would hold in terms of COVID-19 and what we were about to see in the coming months. Then, within a short amount of time, some centres chose to open up to support essential service and front-line workers, and they now continue to support those families. I want to thank those centre operators and those day homes for opening up or staying open to support families.

We saw preschools, and, Mr. Speaker, they lobbied me hard. We have had seven town halls virtually for the child care sector, and preschools really wanted to open. They said that at a time like this, when a lot of parents are working from home, they wanted to open with child care centres as opposed to day camps or summer camps. So we worked with Dr. Hinshaw to address that request, that came from a number of preschools across the province, to enable those preschools to open in a way that adhered to the guidelines set out by the chief medical officer of health.

5:00

I want to say again, Mr. Speaker, that we have to respect parent choice. We know that this is an uncertain time. Obviously, preschools or part-time child care are very important given that parents are working in a variety of different ways, whether it's part-time or working from home. So this was really important. This flexibility was really important for parents. I am grateful to all of the preschool operators who stood up on those calls and said: "You know what? Hey, we think we can do this. We think we can do it safely, and we really want to do this to support families." I really want to thank preschools as well for stepping up to meet those needs of parents. I applaud their efforts, and I really just wanted to say thank you.

I am a working parent, so I am the first to admit that this is a very uncertain time for parents and families. That's why, when it came to affordability and accessibility, we redesigned our new subsidy program. What this meant was an increase in subsidy for 28,000 low- to middle-income families right across this province. We have among the highest subsidy levels in the entire country. We also have among the highest wage top-ups or the highest wage top-ups for our child care workers here in Alberta. I am incredibly proud of that fact, Mr. Speaker. In fact, now under our new subsidy model many families are paying as low as \$13 a day for child care. I think the best part of that is that they can access that \$13-a-day child care in the centre or day home of their choice. Just a few weeks ago I visited Somerset Child Care in my riding back in Calgary-Shaw, where both the owner and the centre director did share with us that parents are really happy with this enhanced child care subsidy model. We heard that again today from a number of day home providers.

Mr. Speaker, centres did ask for additional supports on those calls, on the tele town halls that we hosted, some of which had over 1,600 or 1,700 child care providers calling in both to hear information, ask their questions, and share, really, their thoughts on how things were going throughout the months of the pandemic. We continue to host them. We hosted, I believe, our seventh one last week or the week before. But as I said, centres did ask for additional supports. In one of the first tele town halls they had asked us to redirect child care funding that wasn't being invested at that time while centres were closed. Obviously, when centres are closed, we are not investing in subsidy or wage top-ups for our child care workers. We were absolutely happy to redirect that \$18 million in funding because that's exactly what we were asked for from these child care operators. We then went to these operators to say: okay; how best can we distribute these funds? One of the things we heard was to distribute it over time to ensure some predictability throughout the summer and to adapt to the different stages and as more and more child care, out of school, preschool, and day homes continued to open.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that we truly did work side by side with child care, out of school, preschool, day home operators throughout the province, and then we adapted to respond to their requests. You can ask operators themselves. Staci Wilson, with the School Age Care Directors Association of Alberta, said that it's "very encouraging to work in collaboration with the Minister of Children's Services to provide support to owners and operators during this trying time." That was really important for us, to really, truly listen and be able to address the needs that they had.

Since the beginning of COVID our provincial government has also worked with the federal government. We provided in total \$87 million in funding, and that includes, just a couple of weeks back, the safe restart program. That was also in addition to our investments through the recovery plan. This funding was provided, again, for child care centres, preschools, family day homes, out of school care centres. It's played an important role in Alberta's economic relaunch, and it will continue to be used really, truly to help child care centres operate and day homes and preschools at this difficult time to purchase cleaning supplies, PPE, masks, but to make sure that they can stay open to support the needs of working families.

Mr. Speaker, I will say that at a difficult time like this, this isn't the time for divisive politics. That's not productive. I very much disagree with a number of the things that the federal government has done or have a different approach to a number of issues, but one thing we absolutely agree on is the importance of child care in getting Alberta parents back to work. We really, truly did work together so that I could bring the voices of Alberta child care, preschool, and day home operators and to get that flexibility from

the federal government in how we could meet the Alberta operators' needs. I was really pleased. As Albertans have long contributed more than their fair share to Confederation, I was really pleased that we could see some of those dollars come back, and that's in addition to the small and medium-sized business grants that our government provided: CERB, the renewed bilateral agreement, the Canada recovery caregiving benefit.

We also have been, which I'm very excited about this session, consulting for the first time in over a decade on the Child Care Licensing Act, again, trying to reduce red tape, reduce barriers for operators so that they can open up and they can spend more of their time supporting children and families and less time on red tape and paperwork while, of course, maintaining the importance of high-quality and safe child care that really, truly adds to the well-being and development of children.

I do want to say, Mr. Speaker, that stepping up to help parents through this very difficult time – I want to thank child care operators, preschool operators, out of school care providers, day home providers for stepping up to support Alberta families throughout the last seven months. To parents I always want to say: please know that we are going to continue to support this area because we know that it matters. From one working parent to another, I can tell you that child care is an important part of getting Alberta parents back to work. Child care has a huge part to play in Alberta's economic recovery, and our government will continue to collaborate with community caregivers, child care operators, and our expert child care working group to ensure that we're providing families with high-quality and affordable options for child care.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion today.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has risen and would like to provide a brief question or comment for the minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have done an exceptional job flattening the curve, and our government was able to push ahead with our economic recovery plan. Yet now we have new and ongoing challenges to face. Given that this means that Albertans are beginning to return to a sense of normalcy in having their children return to child care facilities so that they can safely go back to work and have confidence that the adjustments that have been made ensure the safety of all parents, children, child care operators, and educators, I thank the Minister of Children's Services for all the measures that have been taken for child care centres as a result of answering those needs to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is a very important issue for Lethbridge. There are many people that take advantage of these services. We have a disproportionately high number of parents that seek this service, so I just wonder if the minister could go on a little further and speak about what further initiatives the ministry has taken to make Alberta a leader within Canada in terms of these services. How do you expect this to increasingly benefit particularly women and children in the days and months ahead?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services has approximately three minutes and 45 seconds remaining.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Lethbridge-East for the question. Child care centres have done – and I also want to say that when I speak about child care centres, I often am also including out of school care centres, preschools, and day homes, as we know that parents across Alberta do make a variety of choices when it comes to child care. I really

do want to say that these operators and these front-line early childhood educators have really stepped up to adhere to the rules and the guidelines put forward by our chief medical officer of health. They have provided feedback to myself along the way, and we've had great discussions with Dr. Hinshaw about how we can make sure that these centres can open to serve the needs of parents but also, again, keeping kids safe. That was really where that first \$18 million that we reinvested of Children's Services' unspent dollars – it was just: get it out the door fast. We provided a per-space amount and then a specific set amount to help with recruitment and retention of families, recruitment and retention of staff but also cleaning, sanitation supplies, PPE.

5:10

Then we did continue to hear that, obviously, the longer that we were open – it is expensive to adhere to some of these guidelines. One example could be that for a centre that was licensed for a large number of children, they had difficulties with the cohort sizes being set at 30. When we worked with our child care working group, we got their feedback on: how can we use these federal dollars that are being reinvested here in Alberta? How can we use them to meet the needs of the Alberta child care system and Alberta families? That's really where we went with an approach to support a per-space and a per-centre amount so that they could use those dollars. There was equity in the way that was rolled out: government not picking winners and losers or favouring one type of child care over the other but really, truly supporting them across the board to adhere to those guidelines set forth by the chief medical officer of health. Keep kids safe, but make sure that parents can get back to work. So far that has been incredibly well received. As I said, it's not a time for divisive politics, and the federal minister and I worked really hard on making sure that that agreement could meet the needs of parents and families in Alberta.

We often do talk about women getting back to work. This is a hugely important part of that. But I would also say that we heard a lot at the beginning just from shift workers saying: look, I am a shift worker, and with child care centres being closed, you know, we're having a really difficult time finding child care. Again, I'm truly grateful for the day homes that stayed open the whole time but also for the centres who stepped up at the beginning, for all of those. Right now we're at 94 per cent in terms of our licensed facilities being open to support parents right across Alberta. That is an excellent number, and now we just need to continue to follow those guidelines, continue to keep kids and families safe but make sure that parents can stay working.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are just a few moments remaining in 29(2)(a).

You're looking to speak to the main motion? On the main motion, Government Motion 42, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has the call.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to be back in the House and speaking to the issues that are important to the citizens of Alberta. It's always interesting to hear the government sort of ignore their own record and use sort of a stream of fakery and fudged data to argue that somehow they're headed in the right direction at a time of great distress for the province of Alberta and many of its citizens.

I do appreciate the fact that we have an opportunity to talk about something that's as important as the jobs crisis here in the province of Alberta, and I really would like to take some time to talk about some important facts in here. I know that this government ran

during the election on a promise of creating jobs, and we know from the record, the analysis of the data over the last 18 months since they've been government, that in fact they have dramatically failed in their mission. In fact, they've achieved record levels of unemployment. Both Edmonton and Calgary are at extremely high levels of unemployment compared to almost anywhere else in the country. They have experienced at least five credit downgrades and are on the watch list for three agencies for further credit downgrades.

We know that they have already spent their time laying off significant numbers of people. We know, for example, that they laid off some thousands, some 26,000 approximately, teachers' aides during the middle of the crisis. We know that they are planning now to lay off thousands of front-line health care workers, including cleaning staff and other support front-line health care workers. We know that they have been closing down a number of agencies.

I was fascinated to hear the Minister of Children's Services just talking now about what she feels is, like, a good record with child care agencies and so on. I know that she reports numbers – you know, they have \$87 million that they reinvested and so on – but let's be really clear about what she's not actually telling you. She's not telling you about the money that had been taken away from services, only the amount of money that's been put back in. She indicated that it was only actually redirected money that was already there, and I noticed that it was only redirecting money to child care agencies and not to the front-line workers at all. Money that was supposed to be used for child care worker subsidies was then subsequently given to the agencies, which actually I've got to admit I support because I certainly want those agencies around. But I noticed that when it came to the actual workers, she admitted in her speech that they really totally relied on federal dollars that came and merely allocated dollars that came from their good, close personal friend Justin Trudeau.

I think that given this record this government really needs to take some time to look at their record and to realign themselves because they have really, truly failed to accomplish any of the goals they set out for. Now, we weren't surprised about that on our side of the House because when they started talking about giving away \$4.7 billion to major corporations and, in fact, now are in the process of trying to speed that up, we provided plenty of evidence from jurisdictions around North America that have used this crazy notion of trickle-down economics to try to increase jobs and that demonstrated that the analysis that has been done on those attempts has continually shown that trickle-down economics does not work.

In fact, I even went to the American Congressional Budget Office and looked at their evaluation of it, and they explicitly said – and I reported this in the House before they passed their bill – that the reduction of corporate taxes does not lead to increased jobs because what happens is that corporations tend to improve their bottom line by buying back their own shares and increasing executive compensation, and that is exactly what happened here in the province of Alberta. We know that the very companies that benefited most from the tax deduction that this government has put forward did exactly that. The record is that they did what the American Congressional Budget Office told you they would do: they bought back their shares, and they increased their government compensation. We even had one company, an oil company, EnCana, close down their Alberta shop and use the money to move their corporate headquarters out of Alberta into an American jurisdiction.

Now, we told you this was going to happen, but you didn't listen to us because you think we're left wing and therefore we don't know what we're talking about. So we go to non left-wing sources like the American Congressional Budget Office and show you that the analyses of all responsible economists in North America are that reducing corporate taxes does not increase jobs, and you didn't

listen to them either. You can go and look at the examples that occurred in the United States such as Kansas and look to see whether or not their extreme austerity, extreme tax reduction program was successful, and you can see that it was not. The evidence was there. The evidence was presented, and you ignored all of the evidence.

I'm glad that we're talking about jobs because I can tell you that I'm very tired of this process of moral graft that I see going on in this government, of shovelling money away from the most vulnerable people in society and the majority of people in the middle class to corporate entities that simply do not use that money to improve the lives of Albertans. In fact, we know that a significant number of them have taken the money out of this jurisdiction and, at the same time, laid off Albertans with the money that you gave them. That's what I'm concerned about. That's why I'm glad that we are here talking about jobs.

5:20

I know that this government continuously likes to talk about employers as job creators – and it's something I agree with, of course – but what they neglect to tell you is that employers can never be job creators in their own right. They can only be job creators when there are four aspects of society working together to ensure the jobs are created. No employer has ever created a job unless they believed there were the consumers to buy the products that they intended to produce, whether they be products or services. If you're talking about employers as job creators, you are immediately leaving out half of the people that are responsible for jobs being created, and that's what's happened here. This government has totally failed to look at this issue in a robust, whole manner, instead has taken a very narrow sliver of their close personal friends and has tried to provide them with the resources that should have been broadly distributed to Albertans, and we know what they did with those resources. They used them for their own personal benefit and the benefit of other jurisdictions. I'm very concerned about that.

But it's not only businesses and consumers that create jobs, both of which are equally important in the process, but also employees. Unless you have well-trained, well-supported employees who are given every opportunity to be successful in that job setting, they are never going to be able to create more jobs, because you won't have the people to fill those jobs. I think the member who spoke earlier from the NDP has indicated that employers understand that fact, that they have been looking significantly for jurisdictions in which they can ensure that they have employees with the right kind of training but also jurisdictions in which their employees would like to live, would like to raise their families.

And what do employees tell them that they want? Employees tell them that they want good universities for their children and postsecondary institutions like NAIT and Olds College and other places like that. Employees tell their employers that they want communities that have a sense of vibrancy and provide them with the opportunities to live the kind of lifestyle that would give them pleasure and give their family a sense of joy and security. This government has actively been working to destroy all of that, to take that away, to undermine the fabric of the society that provides goodness for employees. They've also been attacking the very institutions that provide the knowledge that those employees will use. So we see this government attacking rather than building jobs in this province.

The fourth area that they completely continue to neglect is the area of government intervention in the creation of jobs when we know that the evidence is very clear that the government has a distinct role in creating jobs. Now, traditionally that's been done through mechanisms like infrastructure investment, and we know

that Canada was largely built on that kind of government intervention. Anybody who studies the world wars and the return of the Armed Forces personnel to Canada will know that many of them, as a result of their service, were given opportunities for very inexpensive land. Many of them were given the opportunity for even free education, all on government's dime. The greatest growth we've seen in jobs in this country and in this province has been in those times after the wars, when the government started to use government resources to intervene.

Businesses also understand that government has a very important role, something that this government doesn't seem to understand about its own role, because they require the work that government does in order to be successful. Now, we've seen in the province of Alberta the start of some companies like drivers' services companies. One started in Calgary and is now all through North America that provides call-up services for driving. I can tell you that their whole model of providing services in this province is completely dependent on government interventions because without the Internet, without GPS, without the investment in all of that technology by governments around the world, they would never have been able to design a program that they have right now to provide services for driving or for food services, delivery services. All of that was government intervention. It was not created by businesses; it was created by universities and arms of the government, particularly in the States, of course, through their military wing in the development of the Internet. That's just an example of the roles that government plays.

We have examples here in Alberta as well. We know, for example, that Suncor would never have been able to start the work in the oil sands if the Premier of the day, Premier Lougheed, had not taken a 10 per cent investment in Suncor itself in order to provide them with the resources to be able to build. History is filled with models of that exact kind of experience, that we need to pay attention to. There is a role for government, and it needs to be one in which we understand what is happening in the society around us and help to move into our future.

That's what our whole website, albertasfuture.ca, is all about. It's about looking at our future. Whether you like it or not, the Alberta economy is in a time of transition. I'd like to thank all of the oil workers and all of the companies who helped us to benefit for 40 years from the development of our oil sands. Thank you very much. I hope you're still part of our economy as we move forward. But I am not so foolish to think that we are ever going back to the 1970s or '80s, that we are ever going to be able to say that oil and gas is going to be able to provide what it once provided to us, not without a transition. So we put forward in our albertasfuture.ca program the first of many policies that look at: how do we actually work with industry to help them with the transition, not wait for the transition to happen and then try to recover after the fact?

We put together, in a small opposition, a very much more complex and comprehensive plan on hydrogen than the whole government services were able to. You know, their plan is essentially to make a plan. They could have written that on the back of a napkin and brought it in. But we're asking Albertans to help us build a comprehensive plan, and you'll see a lot more of those coming forward over time because we are in a time of transition. Your role as government is to try to understand that transition and to move forward.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. the Minister of Transportation has risen to provide a brief question or comment.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Well, thank you. I was contemplating what we just heard from the hon. member, and a few things there kind of

struck me as interesting. I agree with the hon. member that back in Peter Lougheed's time the government made a substantial bet, if you will, or an investment in the oil sands, which has really helped get that industry and that transition or that development of that resource on the rails. I would say that most people that look back on the sum total of all that would say that that was a very positive thing that still pays dividends to Albertans today.

But I also heard the hon. member emphasize severely how many jobs government can create and de-emphasize how many jobs private enterprise can create. We know statistically that most of the new jobs in the economy – and it doesn't matter who's in government at the time – come from small business, private endeavours, mom-and-pops, if you will. Not every small business prefers to be called a mom or a pop. But smaller businesses: a lot of those are the coffee shops, the restaurants, the flower shops, the hairdressers, the nail salons, the gas stations, whatever it happens to be. I found it interesting when the member was talking about this and trying to sound earnest. In fact, during the four years of an NDP government they pretty much did everything in their power to destroy all of that.

5:30

I was particularly entertained to hear him talk about how he wishes the oil sands well. Well, I wish they had wished the oil sands well before they drove north of \$40 billion out of the province when they were in government by making sure that everybody in the energy business knew that the government of Alberta was their enemy and not their friend after decades of knowing that the government was their friend and not their enemy. They changed that. They fundamentally drove investment out of this province by the tens of billions of dollars, which, interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, is probably one of the biggest challenges to not just the energy industry but to all industries and business right now, to get investment back into Alberta. Boy, it sure would have been nice to have that 40-plus billion dollars that the NDP drove out of the province during their time. That would have been really handy right now, yet they did that.

Then I wonder about when the hon. member talks about that, too. They go to great lengths complaining about our government doing things for corporations. Of course, corporations: they go from the largest companies, the oil sands and stuff, down to those coffee shops, those flower shops, those nail salons. Yet the NDP, when they were in government, increased taxes on those very corporations, big and small, by 20 per cent, and since we've reduced those taxes, they would like to increase them by a full third, which, again, would do anything except create new business and new jobs at this time in Alberta's history, when that investment and those jobs are so badly needed by Albertans.

I wonder if the hon. member contemplates the harm, the long-term damage that they did to this province, to the jobs and the employment and the opportunities for Albertans when he thinks back to their time not that long ago, when, heck, they had members of their party protesting against the energy industry, for goodness' sake, despite the fact that literally hundreds of thousands of jobs that have disintegrated were hanging in the balance, yet they don't seem to see any – I wonder if the hon. member sees any inconsistency between having members of your party protesting, essentially, one day on the steps of the Legislature against the province's biggest industry and then now, today, trying to claim to be the champion of that industry. I wonder if he sees any inconsistency between complaining about the government encouraging corporations to be here and make profit and pay taxes here rather than them driving corporations out by increasing their taxes by 20 per cent. I wonder if the complete inconsistency even dawns on the hon. member that just finished talking. I don't imagine it does, but I do wonder.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes Standing Order 29(2)(a).

We are back to the government side. The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure has risen.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Government Motion 42. At the outset, first let me acknowledge Albertans who have made tremendous efforts to help protect lives and livelihoods. As Minister of Infrastructure it is my honour to speak about the progress Alberta Infrastructure continues to make toward furthering the province's economic recovery and creating jobs for Albertans. I know the previous speaker from the opposition talked about government's failure on creating jobs. He was saying: nothing, there are no jobs, nothing created. That's why I'm here to present the facts with solid numbers and also the projects that Alberta Infrastructure is building, to just disprove the previous speaker's misleading comment that this government is not building jobs, not helping economic recovery.

I'm going to present clear facts here, Mr. Speaker. The \$10 billion Alberta recovery plan is an ambitious strategy, in fact, to create jobs, build and diversify our economy. It's an unprecedented investment in Alberta's infrastructure with an eye to creating jobs now – we all know these jobs are very much needed right now – and to building the vital infrastructure Albertans need and rely upon.

I would first like to pay tribute to the people who actually build these projects, the hard-working men and women. Despite challenges brought on by a global pandemic, I'm pleased to report that the business of building Alberta continues. Thousands of tradespeople and professionals are working tirelessly to keep projects already under way on schedule and on budget, and we ensure that new projects also begin on time. Their commitment to taking every precaution required to keep their work sites safe deserves high praise from all members of this House, Mr. Speaker. This government is building and repairing schools, health facilities, and government buildings on schedule and on budget, and these are all part of the \$10 billion Alberta recovery plan.

Let me give you some numbers, Mr. Speaker. These numbers could be boring, but these are the facts. I'm going to probably – there will be repetition, but I need to present this so Albertans know what we are building. There are a total of 73 school projects under way right now across the province, and out of 73, 21 are Catholic because we respect choice in education. Also, there are 52 public schools. There is a total budget of more than \$1.8 billion for these school projects, and that is almost 10,000 jobs, real jobs. This is not the pie in the sky. It's real jobs.

Since we formed government, about \$320 million has been spent building new schools just in the last 16 months or 18 months I was the minister. Those school projects are creating 1,800 jobs. These jobs in construction, architecture, engineering, and trades put food on the tables of Albertans.

Indeed, women are part of the infrastructure aspect of our economic recovery, Mr. Speaker, despite what the NDP says. Women are part of this economic recovery we are implementing. Alberta's government has partnered with Women Building Futures, which gets women in the skilled trades. Let me tell you, every construction site I visit has skilled tradeswomen hard at work. I know within my own department there are countless female project managers, female procurement experts, female accountants, female analysts, and female directors. Women are a part of our economic recovery, and it's truly disconcerting to see the NDP continue to propagate their false narrative.

As we return to this House, I would like to talk a bit about what I did on my summer vacation, Mr. Speaker. Touring around the province this summer, I was pleased to announce 3,700 new jobs.

People in our neighbourhoods will be hard at work upgrading flood berms and water and waste-water treatment facilities and building or upgrading community halls, recreation centres, colleges, and universities. Over the summer I had the pleasure of meeting with the residents of Lethbridge, Taber, Brooks, Drayton Valley, Fort McMurray, Provost, Consort, Lloydminster, Raymond, Grande Prairie, Chestermere, Fort McLeod, Stand Off, Fort Chipewyan, Whitecourt, Lacombe, Vegreville, Lamont, Two Hills, Vermilion, Lac La Biche, Athabasca, Hardisty, Camrose, Acadia Valley, Medicine Hat, Cypress county, Cayley, Fort Saskatchewan, Devon, Wainwright, and on and on. I was there to share some good news about creating jobs and sparking economic growth. It only takes a spark of hope to light a fire of endless possibility.

5:40

Many of these communities will be home to the 76 infrastructure projects in 30 cities and towns that were approved by our continued efforts to get funding through the federal government's investing in Canada infrastructure program, or we call it ICIP, Mr. Speaker. It's a cost-sharing program. Those 30 MLAs representing those constituencies, both from government and opposition: I would like to thank them for their advocacy to get those projects in their ridings and also the federal government for their contribution. Mr. Speaker, the total spending on ICIP will be about \$8.8 billion. It's not small change. We are talking \$8.8 billion between federal, provincial, and municipal proponents with their project contributions.

And while we know that there's only one taxpayer, I'll continue to fight to ensure that Alberta gets its fair share of infrastructure funding from Ottawa. We know that Alberta gives far more than it gets back from that relationship. We will continue to fight for what the people of this great province deserve, particularly during these tough times.

Alberta Infrastructure, through ICIP funding, has created 3,734 jobs in just a matter of months. My ministry is committed to generating even more jobs as part of the Alberta recovery plan. Albertans are working today on a number of vital infrastructure projects, including – I'll give you some details, Mr. Speaker – \$43 million that creates more than 240 construction-related jobs in Taber, Raymond, Brooks, and Acadia Valley upgrading or replacing waste-water treatment systems, an emergency spillway, a wetlands area, and a community hall. These are real projects. The men and women, Albertans, are working on these projects. These are real people, real jobs.

More than \$170 million gets a thousand people to work in Fort McMurray building a new Métis cultural centre, Mr. Speaker, at MacDonald Island Park and a lower townsite flood mitigation project, too, and \$49 million means 275 people will get hammers swinging on eight infrastructure projects, including construction of a new outdoor pool facility, a swimming pool, and replacement or upgrades to water systems and lagoons in the towns of Bashaw, Consort, Wainwright, Provost, Ryley, and Vermilion River. Almost \$53 million is getting 300 people to work building projects in southern Alberta, in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Stand Off, and Calgary, my hometown. And \$235 million for 20 projects in the communities across southern Alberta means that 1,320 people have a job during a global recession.

We are far from done, Mr. Speaker. Before the month is over, Infrastructure will share more good news. I expect to hear about another \$100 million that will get another 600 people to work. Let's be clear. Every single one of these jobs matters. Outside of the ICIP program about 1,600 construction and skilled tradespeople are working on repairs and upgrades to boilers, safety and security systems, and leaking roofs and windows on government-owned properties, courthouses, provincial buildings, and cultural facilities

in Athabasca, Barrhead, and Lac La Biche, Ponoka, Airdrie, and Drumheller. Dozens of communities are being improved. These shovel-ready projects are part of the government's capital maintenance and renewal funding, funding that this government doubled. From \$937 million, Mr. Speaker, we doubled it to \$1.9 billion. We accelerated the spending of another billion dollars on capital maintenance and renewal projects.

My ministry also has a number of multiyear projects on the go. This includes construction or modernization of 23 health facilities. These projects, along with the school projects I mentioned earlier, represent an injection of billions of dollars into communities and thousands of short-term and long-term jobs and economic benefits. Towns across this province will have access to the new, upgraded facilities they need to attract more businesses to set up shop. My ministry continues to support Albertans by ensuring that we make the best use of their tax dollars when we build and renew schools, hospitals, and government buildings.

We are not afraid to change the way we pay to get things built, Mr. Speaker. We're driven to get the best deal for Albertans. This includes using alternate financing methods such as P3s and harnessing industry investment innovation. For example, a P3 procurement to deliver a bundle of five high schools in Blackfalds, Edmonton, Langdon, and Leduc: these are under way, and having recently closed the request for qualifications for those five projects at this stage, we are working to shortlist proponents, and I expect to invite them to participate in the request for proposal stage next month.

But, unfortunately, the opposition – they just oppose it for the sake of their blind ideology, but let's be clear: they would have no way to pay for these projects apart from hiking taxes or driving the province even farther into debt. Yet their blind ideological opposition to anything from the private sector means that Albertans would see less infrastructure if, heaven forbid, they were still in office. That wouldn't happen. They couldn't have paid.

The Canada Infrastructure Bank is also offering opportunities to finance major projects, including water, transportation, rapid transit, rural broadband, and energy infrastructure. I was so pleased to join my friend the hon. minister of agriculture to announce the major Canada Infrastructure Bank investment in Alberta's irrigation districts. I hope that we see more creative financing models in order to continue building the province's vital infrastructure.

I find it extraordinarily curious that the NDP does not support our efforts. Working with partner ministries, industries, school boards, Alberta Health Services, engineers, contractors, and architects, we're committed to delivering major capital projects that support Albertans, jobs, and the province's economy. Only by working together will we get Albertans what they deserve: good jobs and good investments. I ask the NDP to be responsible and join us in our efforts to create jobs.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West was first to rise.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. minister for providing some outline of their government's policy and trajectory in terms of using infrastructure to help build the economy. I certainly do agree in the broadest possible way that this is a very good time to invest in infrastructure here in the province of Alberta. It helps with an economic recovery, and it helps to prepare for further economic diversity and the recovery that will follow in the coming months and years.

I do have a couple of questions, though, just in regard to the minister's approach to infrastructure. The first one he mentioned just in the last couple of minutes, which is his choice to use the P3,

the private-public partnership model, for building schools here in the province of Alberta. I know that as the Minister of Education I received absolute unanimous concern and regret and complaints around the use of P3 schools as they were constructed and all of the problems that school boards have with those P3 schools. They're not as well built, they're definitely more expensive, they are difficult to maintain, and the contracts that are signed with the private part of the private-public partnership are often Byzantine and confused and really limit the ability to use those buildings in the broadest possible way.

5:50

Even the former Progressive Conservative government did use some P3s to build schools, but they certainly didn't do it for high schools, because, again, you're building a much more expensive, much more sophisticated piece of infrastructure that should be and must be used in a much broader context than what the narrow confines of P3s will often paint you into, that paint you into a corner where you can't use the facility fully as you should and could. Indeed, the maintenance aspect of it is an issue, too, so P3s do not save money. They just put the money onto a different part of the books so that the government can have the illusion that they've somehow reduced that line item in their budget, but really in the long term Albertans pay more over a much longer period, over a 30- or 40-year period that those contracts are valid for.

Another question I would like to ask is in regard to a more general plan. How is this government – I mean, it's great that they're going to be building all of these different projects, but how are those projects integrated into Alberta's future economic plan? That's what I'm not hearing, and that's what Albertans are not hearing from this government, a solid economic plan that will help to diversify the economy, that will help to create a more knowledge-based economy and work to expand and diversify our economy, our energy, which is, of course, the cornerstone of our economy here, to help diversify that to have more value-added resources associated with that and so on.

You can just start building things randomly, Mr. Speaker, I suppose, and we need those things, certainly, in all corners, but if it's not integrated into a plan of how we're moving forward as an economy and as a society, then that's a less efficient way to move forward. As I listen to debate around this motion, I would like to hear a much more focused, sharpened vision of what that economic recovery is going to look like and the economic plan that's keeping in concert with the infrastructure build that this minister was talking about.

You know that we are certainly working on this on this side, Alberta's Official Opposition. We have albertasfuture.ca where we are gathering this information. We are trying to work together in the broadest possible way to aid economic recovery, and we'll build together with Albertans a concerted plan that will work, that's practical, on the ground, and that we can all benefit from.

The last point and question I have as well is in regard to postsecondary education. Again, I'm getting some very disturbing messaging from the minister of postsecondary education going around and suggesting that many of our institutions are too big or redundant and so forth. Again, Mr. Speaker, I know darn well, and so does this government, that we have a giant cohort of thousands of young kids that will need a university education in the next few years. We don't need to make it less; we need to make it more substantial.

Thank you.

The Speaker: That concludes the opportunity for Standing Order 29(2)(a).

We are back on the main motion. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a time check. When will you cut me off? How long until you cut me off?

The Speaker: Five minutes.

Mr. Schmidt: Five minutes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will focus in my comments as much as I can.

In speaking to this motion, I want to first offer condolences to all of the victims of COVID-19 and their families. The most recent update from Dr. Deena Hinshaw today shows that 293 Albertans have now lost their lives to COVID. That means 293 empty spaces around Christmas tables this upcoming Christmas, and if this government doesn't act quickly to get this pandemic under control, we're going to see many more empty seats around Christmas tables this winter. My thoughts and prayers are going out to all of the families who are struggling with dealing with that loss.

I also want to extend my thoughts and prayers to all of the people who are currently sick with COVID-19. I wish all of those people a speedy recovery, but we know that not everybody recovers fully from COVID. There are a lot of people, it's being reported, so-called COVID long haulers, people who have COVID symptoms and suppressed health over a period of many months after initially contracting COVID. I want those people here in Alberta who are those possible COVID long haulers to know that we here in the NDP Official Opposition see your health concerns, we hear your health concerns, and we will fight to make sure that the proper supports are going to be there in place so that you are looked after, after suffering so greatly from this illness.

I also want to take a few minutes to commend all of the people who are working hard through all of this pandemic. First of all, to all of the doctors, nurses, cleaners in our hospitals, laundry facility operators, lab techs, particularly those who are working in long-term care facility settings: you're working under incredibly trying circumstances, and I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart for continuing on in the face of outright hostility from the government on top of incredibly challenging circumstances that they're facing in the health care setting.

I extend my thoughts to everyone in the education sector: teachers, educational assistants, custodians, even those people who are serving lunches to students. We know that there are many school students who go to school hungry every day, and I want to thank all of those people who are working hard to make sure that those students at least get one good meal a day.

I want to thank all of the grocery store clerks, the restaurant delivery drivers, all of those people who are making sure that we can stay fed. They're risking their lives every day encountering people that may contain COVID and they don't know it, but they're hard at work.

I also want to shout out to bus drivers. Mr. Speaker, over the summer I had a chance to talk to a constituent of mine named Sandra. She works for the Edmonton transit service, and she told me: nobody recognizes us as front-line workers. I just want to say that we should recognize bus drivers as front-line workers. They work in very unsafe conditions. There is almost no place that I can think of that's less safe in a pandemic than a bus jammed to the rafters with hundreds of people all day who potentially may be carrying COVID. To the bus drivers who are working there to make sure that we can all get safely to work and safely to home, putting your lives at risk every day: I say thank you to that.

Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds of thousands of people who have lost their jobs, hundreds of thousands more who are worried about

their economic future because their job is at risk of being lost or they've had their hours reduced. We owe it to Albertans to get this pandemic under control, and we have yet to see any significant action from the members opposite to demonstrate that they're even taking this pandemic seriously. It was shocking to me that the Member for Lethbridge-East, in his questions to the Minister of Children's Services, actually said with a straight face that we've flattened the curve. Now, I don't know if he prepared his remarks back in June and just didn't bother to update them until he got up to ask the minister some questions, but the curve is anything but flat. In fact, if you asked a curve to do its best impression of the Rocky

Mountains, you would get the COVID curve that Alberta is experiencing right now. All we've heard from the members opposite is the minimization of the seriousness of COVID, the denial that they have any responsibility . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 39 and Standing Order 4(1) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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