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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

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Day 54

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 20, 2020

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

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.

[Debate adjourned October 20: Mr. Schmidt speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Are there any hon. members looking to join the debate on 42? I see the hon. Minister of . . .

An Hon. Member: Service Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: . . . Service Alberta. First day back.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected more than just Albertans' health and has required collaboration and innovation across all of government. I'm pleased to speak today about how Service Alberta has supported Alberta's economic recovery through the COVID-19 pandemic.

When COVID-19 first started spreading across the province, isolation quickly became a first line of defence against the threat. Thousands of Albertans had to pivot quickly to remain at home as much as possible, including for work and for school. Internet and broadband connectivity, which was already a critical part of our way of life in Alberta, became increasingly important for our society and for our economy. Service Alberta had already been working on a strategy to enhance broadband connectivity across the province, particularly in rural and remote areas. In response to COVID we took several steps to accelerate broadband connectivity for Albertans, which continued to support Alberta's economic recovery.

Specifically, Service Alberta worked with telecommunications companies to increase capacity to support the voice, video, and data and other mobile needs for Albertans, including front-line health professionals and public-sector employees across the province. My department swiftly embraced the opportunity to work with Internet service providers as well as Alberta Education and Advanced Education to understand the challenges of rural providers in learning institutions. We leveraged this opportunity to engage with the private sector by fostering relationships, highlighting opportunities, and creating a favourable investment climate.

Partly as a result of these efforts of a government that is serious about growing the digital economy, we have seen the private sector increase its investment in broadband connectivity. For example, in August I had the pleasure, along with the Premier, of joining Shaw Communications in Lacombe as they marked a \$1 billion investment in Alberta's broadband connectivity, right in the backyard of our Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. This announcement followed the commitment of a \$16 billion investment pledged by

Telus in 2019 and preceded network upgrades by Rogers Communications earlier this month.

Creating an investment climate that encourages broadband connectivity will continue to be a vital part of Alberta's economic recovery, especially when it supports regional economic development. Our strategy to achieve broadband connectivity was accelerated during the government's response to COVID-19, and it will continue as we prepare for the longer term.

As we continue to help connect Albertans through the Internet, Service Alberta remains vigilant about cybersecurity risks. Indeed, the pandemic prompted a sharpened focus on cybersecurity as unscrupulous individuals took advantage of public uncertainty that was all too common around the world. For example, we saw phishing e-mails claiming to be from trusted organizations and using COVID-19 as the subject line with malicious links in the e-mail that could damage a computer system or expose personal information. Service Alberta enhanced its approach through traditional and social media to raise awareness about these threats. As Alberta's economy recovers and digital services play a greater role in commerce, remaining vigilant of cyberattacks and overall security will become increasingly important.

Vigilance in the digital space is only part of the equation and only part of Service Alberta's support for the economy as Alberta recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. Right from the outset of the outbreak we heard reports of people buying up stocks of hand sanitizer and toilet paper and reselling them at inflated prices. We also heard reports of businesses taking advantage of the demand by raising prices unreasonably. These activities undermine consumer confidence in Alberta's economy, and Service Alberta's consumer investigation unit was busy through the spring and summer, fielding approximately 650 complaints from Albertans of this issue about price gouging. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we were able to lay charges where appropriate. The spike in complaints has levelled off over the last few months, which points to the important role that Service Alberta plays in protecting consumer confidence in Alberta's marketplace, which in turn helps to build the foundation of our economic recovery.

Meanwhile, Service Alberta has been working hard to identify opportunities to deliver more government services online. The ability for Albertans to register a birth online or to renew their vehicle registration online, for example: these things give Albertans more choice and more convenience.

Coupling technology and innovation with some red tape reduction, I've got another example for you, Mr. Speaker, that Service Alberta has been working on. For example, in June the governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and British Columbia launched the multijurisdictional registry access service, a system that cuts red tape for corporations and limited partnerships across western Canada by allowing them to register and manage their extraprovincial registrations through an online portal. This makes it easier for businesses based elsewhere in western Canada to register in Alberta and supports regional economic recovery as well as the economy right here in our province.

We found further opportunities to support specific industries by relaxing requirements for in-person business interactions. For example, we allowed remote witnessing for the processing of documents through the government's land titles office. By allowing parties to sign and share documents electronically without face-to-face interactions, we ensured that transactions could still take place while encouraging physical distancing.

We leveraged this public health measure to create more options for efficiency in the real estate sector of Alberta's economy. Service Alberta has maintained the ability for parties to process real estate transactions without wasting time on cumbersome, outdated

processes, which continues to support the real estate sector as Alberta's economy recovers.

However, Service Alberta's most meaningful contribution to supporting Alberta's economic recovery directly is yet to come. For years the department has been hearing from workers and companies in Alberta in our construction industry about major obstacles in getting paid in a timely manner for the work that they have completed. Under Alberta law the owners and primary contractors of construction projects are not required to pay other contractors and subcontractors promptly for the work they've completed.

Both before I became an MLA, or even before I considered running for office, but also since I've become the Minister for Service Alberta, I have been hearing about this problem first-hand for a long time, Mr. Speaker, from many Albertans. As we look towards economic recovery, we want to ensure that Albertans are being promptly paid for their work, and I am excited to say that we will be taking action this fall to make that happen. We will be introducing legislation to address the concerns of Albertans throughout the construction sector who have been advocating for changes for many, many years. I had the opportunity to speak to a number of people working in construction earlier in the year and more recently as well, and I can tell you that there's a lot of excitement building around our work on this file.

In closing, I feel compelled to note how important technology and innovation and modernization will be as Alberta's economy recovers. We will be hard at work implementing technology and innovation inside of government as we seek to deliver services to Albertans, providing more convenience, better service for better value.

We learned many things as we responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, not the least of which was the importance of people being able to isolate and work and learn from home. Much of Alberta's economy already harnesses the digital age, and this trend will undoubtedly continue. We need to work together to meet the challenges of the digital age with innovation, wisdom, and willingness to try new things even as we keep public safety as our top priority. With that in mind I'm looking forward to speaking further with members of the technology sector about the path forward.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you to the hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

The initial person who caught my eye was the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'd like to thank the hon. minister for his comments, and I know the registries are extremely important in Calgary-West. My daughter was very fortunate to go to a registry recently as she was sixteen and she got her driver's licence, so I'd like to congratulate her on that. It was a very big achievement in her life.

But, Mr. Speaker, we know that COVID-19, of course, has halted many services across the province, including registry services in Calgary and, of course, other places around this province. Now, during this pandemic the province gave the ability for individuals to conduct registry services over the phone or by e-mail, and all across Calgary there has been positive feedback for the options to use online services instead of going in to a physical registry office. I'd like to ask the Minister of Service Alberta: will there be an opportunity for Albertans to use more registry services online?

Thank you.

7:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, and I appreciate your understanding that we were under 29(2)(a) without me having to even say it.

The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for the question. You know, one of the things that really shocked me when I became Minister of Service Alberta and started to dig into the registry's file is I learned that we were worst in the country for the delivery of online services. Well, I want to take us from worst to first. I think Albertans deserve access to more online services, more choice, more convenience. If we can bank online, why can't we also access some of these services with government from our mobile phones, on our couch, in our pyjamas at midnight? If that's what we want, why can't we have that as an option? I'm working to give Albertans more choice and more convenience with more registry services online.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that we're doing that in partnership with our registries, not in competition with them. That is one thing that is very different from this government compared to the previous government, who took services away from registries and put them online, which put the stability and viability of the registry network at risk. We have been working very closely with the AMA and the AARA, both of which represent the 200-plus registries that deliver these services face to face to Albertans across the province, to ensure that we can move to a more modern, digital delivery system for the services where that makes sense. But certainly we also know that some of these services will need to continue to be delivered in-person, so we're working hard to make sure that that is a viable choice going forward.

Some other examples of tools that we've brought online: I mentioned the online birth registry. I mean, man, I wish that when my wife and I had our son 13 months ago, we could have registered his birth online on our mobile phone in the hospital right after he was born. It would have been way more convenient than having to fill out that form. To all the folks who've had kids in this room, I mean, you know what it's like in those first couple of days after you've had a kid. You're in a bit of a fog. I'm so proud that we were able to announce that service that is now online and available to any new parents across Alberta.

We have also now coupled the online vehicle registration service into our e-services platform, so there's a single platform where Albertans can go to deal with online services through the government of Alberta. They can now register their vehicle online through e-services, so that's another example of things that we have done to bring more choice and online options, but there's way more to come, Mr. Speaker. We've got lots to talk about there in the months ahead, and I'm really excited about that.

You know, I mentioned in my speech the multijurisdictional registry access system. This is a big deal because it gives an online tool to businesses from all across western Canada to say: if you want to open up an office and register it here in Alberta so you can do more business in Alberta, you can do that online. You can do it super easy and super quick, and that was a huge effort between my department and our counterparts in the other provinces, the western Canadian provinces. That was something that we've been able to launch in the past number of months.

Certainly, as my colleague mentioned, too, during COVID it's been difficult because a lot of folks have had to isolate, stay at home, yet they still needed to get a registry service. They had that dilemma of: well, do I go in person, or do I stay at home and isolate? That's why we made it available to deliver a lot of those services

over the phone remotely, to give people more options and choice during the pandemic so that they could keep their families safe and make the decisions that made sense for them and ensure that they had access to the government services that they need.

These are just a few examples of ways that we've been harnessing technology and innovation to modernize how we deliver services, which, as I've said, is so important. I mean, I've said it several times publicly that technology is not just an industry; it's the future of every industry, and it must be the future of government, Mr. Speaker. I'm working hard to make that happen.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the Minister of Health has risen on Government Motion 42.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to start off by saying that COVID-19 is the most serious pandemic that Alberta has experienced in the last 100 years. Every single Albertan has been impacted by this crisis, and I feel for all of those who have lost a loved one or who have experienced COVID themselves. There are now more than 19,000 Albertans who have recovered from the virus, and I know each one has a story to tell.

As Minister of Health I'm deeply proud of how our health system has responded to this crisis. I want to thank all the doctors and nurses as well as the first responders, the contact tracers, and all of the other health care workers who have continued to protect us during this difficult time. It has been a long, hard year unlike any other. This virus has tested our health system, and Alberta has risen to the challenge. Since day one we have been a leader here in Canada. When COVID first arrived in Alberta in March, our labs could at that time only conduct a few hundred tests per day. We now have the best testing program in Canada, with more than 14,000 tests completed daily since September 1. Nearly 1.2 million of us, 1.2 million Albertans, have now been tested, and we're working hard to continue expanding our capacity even further.

While other jurisdictions were caught unprepared for the pandemic, Alberta did not experience the shortages of PPE, personal protective equipment, and other medical equipment seen in so many other places. Prior to COVID-19 and this pandemic AHS used about 33,000 medical masks per day. They now use an average of 600,000 masks per day. We have continued to meet the needs of Albertans, shared medical supplies with other provinces when they were in need, and even distributed 40 million free nonmedical masks across the province.

Guided by the expert advice of Dr. Hinshaw and other experts throughout her office and the medical officers of health throughout AHS, we have learned from the past outbreaks and put strong measures in place to protect vulnerable residents in continuing care and other facilities. That is one reason that Alberta has not seen the high death tolls that other jurisdictions in Canada have experienced. There have been, on average, 1.3 deaths per day in Alberta since the beginning of the pandemic. This is a heartbreaking number, Mr. Speaker, but also well below the average of 13.5 per day in Ontario and, if we look in Quebec, of 27 per day.

We have acted on the best evidence available and updated our approach as new information emerges. We've kept the most-open economy in Canada while keeping proven practices in place to prevent the overwhelming of health systems and protecting the lives of elderly Albertans and others who are at risk.

Of course, COVID hasn't stopped hips from aching and knees from needing to be replaced. Thanks to the aggressive action of AHS, the province's scheduled surgery backlog has already been reduced by more than 90 per cent. There is no doubt that Alberta has fared far better than most during the pandemic. As we enter the winter, our health system remains ready for whatever challenges the

coming months will bring. Hospitalizations have risen in recent days yet remain well within our health system's capacity. Our ICU admissions remain stable, well below the peak of 22 that we had in May. Today about 25 per cent of the beds designated for COVID are currently occupied. AHS and the public health teams are closely monitoring both hospital capacity and the spread of the virus.

We're ready to respond quickly when the situation changes. AHS has the capacity to make hundreds of hospital and ICU beds quickly available if needed in the future. Health officials continue to quickly test, track, and trace infections to prevent and limit outbreaks whenever and wherever they occur, and we'll keep expanding our testing capacity, including adding rapid tests and other new testing technologies. Before the pandemic Alberta's contact tracing team had about 50 staff members. Well, today there are more than 200 staff and 600 casual positions who are filling those roles. AHS will be hiring even more staff in the coming days, and we're working with the federal government to use employees from Statistics Canada to expand contact tracing even further.

7:50

In hospitals and continuing care settings we have kept proven measures in place to protect residents. This includes mandatory outbreak protocols, daily screenings, and limits on staff working in more than once facility. AHS continues to maintain a repository of medical equipment to ensure that health professionals have the personal protective equipment and other supplies that they need to provide safe patient care. This includes signing a two-year, \$60 million agreement with Orpyx Medical Technologies in Calgary to make more than 40 million medical masks. These masks, as I said, are made in Calgary and are the result of Alberta's bits and pieces program.

This winter our system will need to support not only patients with COVID but those with influenza as well. That's why we have purchased a record 1.96 million doses of influenza vaccine, and it's easier and safer than ever to get a flu shot this year. The flu and COVID both present similar symptoms. By reducing the number of influenza cases, we will reduce the number of tests, emergency room visits, and hospitalizations that are needed, letting our system continue working to keep COVID-19 at bay. I encourage all of my colleagues in the House to lead by example and to book their flu shot appointments as soon as possible.

We have come far, but we know this fight is not over. COVID is still here, and there will be challenges ahead. Her Majesty's government will continue to work tirelessly to protect Albertans. As always, we will be guided by the skill and the dedication of Alberta's health care staff and physicians throughout the province. To everyone in the health system and our community partners: on behalf of our government, thank you. And thank you to every Albertan who is also limiting the spread and, by doing that, protecting those around them.

Now is the time for us to be vigilant and to recommit ourselves to responsible everyday actions to prevent spread. We are all in this together, as Dr. Hinshaw has said many times throughout this pandemic. If everyone does their part, we will be able to protect our most vulnerable, to keep workplaces open, and emerge from this pandemic stronger than ever.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is coming to mind. Please.

Member Irwin: Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: It is Standing Order 29(2)(a) as well.

Member Irwin: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all those watching at home. I'm sure there are many. You know, I haven't risen in this House, obviously – it's my first time – since coming back. I do want to respond to the Health minister, and I want to start by doing what I like to do when I start speaking for the first time in a session, and that's to acknowledge the health care workers out there right now, many of whom are working incredibly long hours and doing incredibly challenging jobs at a time when many of them are telling us, at least my colleagues and I on our side of the House, that they are feeling continually disrespected.

We know that the Health minister talked a little bit about doctors and health care workers. Doctors are absolutely out there saving lives right now, as we speak, and instead of commending those doctors by actually, you know, more than just their words, by showing it with their actions, this government is driving them away. We're here tonight to be debating jobs and the economy, but we are losing doctors. Attacking doctors, driving them out of this province doesn't seem like a good job strategy to me.

Let's talk about nurses. Nurses help to save lives. They should be commended. Yet what does this government want to do? They want to fire more than 750 nurses in the midst of a pandemic, the gravest health crisis this province has ever seen, as the minister noted earlier. Again, what is this government's plan to grow jobs when they are firing nurses?

I met with two nurses from the Highlands neighbourhood just a few weeks ago who were the following week going to be leaving this province. Why are they leaving this province? Why did they leave this province for British Columbia? Because they did not want to work in an environment where they were continually disrespected. One of the nurses, who worked in harm reduction, felt that her work was being entirely undermined by this government.

Let's talk about some of the other health care workers: health care aides, support workers, folks working in laundry services. These are all front-line workers despite what this government and this Premier might have you believe. They're helping, indirectly, to save lives. They deserve to be commended. They deserve to be supported. Remember all that talk about health care workers being heroes? Well, on this side of the House we still believe that, and we will still fight for them, yet this government is going to fire 11,000 of them. Again, instead of supporting those folks who feed the sick, who wash the most awful pieces of clothing and laundry, clean up the blood, the vomit, the urine, all these things, this government is saying: "No, you're not worthy of our support. We can find someone to do the job at a lower price."

Again, we're talking about jobs. We're talking about the economy. What message is this government sending to 11,000 health care workers? What message are they sending when it comes to jobs and the economy? It's a pretty awful one; that's for sure. We can talk about every other worker who's helping indirectly to support our incredibly important health care system, but we need to ask this government: what is the message that you're sending?

I think we also have to talk about the fact that doctors are small businesses. They're small-business owners. It's Small Business Week, isn't it?

Ms Gray: It is.

Member Irwin: It absolutely is. Let's talk to some of those doctors. Let's hear from some of those doctors across this province, particularly in rural Alberta, who are having to close up shop . . .

Mr. Carson: We have some in Calgary-West.

Member Irwin: That's right, in Calgary-West as well.

. . . in the midst of a pandemic. That means laying off staff. That's not just those doctors who are leaving, who are having to close up shop. It's the staff. In small towns, when you've got a clinic that employs multiple people in that community, that's a huge loss.

Medicine Hat. I'm really looking forward to hearing from the MLAs from Medicine Hat soon because I've already heard from folks in Medicine Hat who are absolutely sickened to learn that one of the clinics, one of the only two clinics that provide obstetric services in that community, is closing. With something like 600 to 700 births – I'm going off the top of my head here – a year and I believe it said 6,000 to 9,000 visits a year at that clinic, what message are you sending about jobs, the economy, and health care?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Moving now to Government Motion 42, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise back in the House this evening to speak about this important matter that seized the province. I know that the government has been kind of reluctant in many ways to meet the debate head-on about the plan that they claim to have for the economy. This motion kind of dances around the subject of creation of jobs and so forth. We did try to produce a motion this afternoon that would have dealt with the problem of unemployment in this province directly, a motion that was defeated by the government, who didn't see it worth their while to completely devote the afternoon to looking at economic development which would have actually produced meaningful jobs.

Instead, the Government House Leader chose to devote a good portion of the beginning of his comments to mount and launch an old attack against the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on an issue that was kind of a red herring, that of parks, where they've had an ongoing debate in the House about whether, in fact, the government is going to be selling parks. The Government House Leader vehemently denied that they were going to be selling parks, but in fact the enabling legislation, that has taken place earlier in this House, in the last session, during the spring, saw that the government would be enabling the creation of the ability to lease parkland. It's somewhat interesting to me that the Government House Leader saw fit to spend so much of his time devoted to a pet peeve rather than focusing on the matter at hand.

8:00

I won't spend too much more time on this myself, but I did want to cover one point about it, and that is the constant effort by the minister to suggest – I'm talking about the Minister of Environment and Parks – that they are not putting parkland up for sale or offering it for sale, when, in fact, using terminology that's common in the Energy ministry, one could argue that, yes, indeed, the word "sale" is a proper one to use. We've heard commonly in the Energy ministry – the Minister of Energy was talking recently about opening up land sales once again, and, of course, what she was talking about, Mr. Speaker, was the sale of lease rights to those who wish to engage in oil exploration in the province. Indeed, the terminology "sale" is applicable quite historically in that context, so I think the same context can be applied to the tit-for-tat that the Minister of Environment and Parks gets into with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. The term "sale" is, in fact, the sale of lease rights. The minister is incorrect in saying that they're not selling the land. They're selling a bundle of rights to that land, which will enable them to privatize it. I digress on that issue. I certainly don't want to spend any more time on it than I already have.

But I do want to focus entirely on the lack of the government's plan for real economic recovery and some of the things that they are doing that are really contrary to any efforts that Albertans would hope the government would engage in to put to work the roughly 230,000 Albertans who would desperately want to be back at the job. What they've done in the past isn't working, and, you know, certainly what we look to do as an opposition is bring forward not only the failings of the current government but also a plan for the economic future of Alberta. We've done so ourselves by creating a website and inviting Albertans to engage with us. The website is albertasfuture.ca. I think Albertans will be finding it quite useful to engage by visiting that website and looking at some of the ideas that we put forward as an opposition, to ask them to engage and help us make sure that the direction for the province economically is one that they are brought along with. Because nobody – nobody – in this province should be left behind.

That's what's happening in this particular government's so-called economic recovery. What other Conservative governments have done in the past – and I'm thinking of the Klein government, in particular, in the '90s, which got them into real serious hot water, and this government is actually doing its best to replicate or so it seems – is to attack our least able Albertans, the most vulnerable in our society in the middle of a pandemic and under the guise of saving money or austerity. I know that Mr. Klein and his government got into big trouble when indeed he started to diminish the benefits received by those on AISH. In fact, this government is feeling the bite of Albertans in response to their efforts to save money on the backs of the most vulnerable Albertans.

You know, \$1,685 is a very, very difficult amount of money to live on. I know that one of our MLAs is attempting to do that, and I think it is in the third week of the month of living on that amount of money and is doing so in concert with many of those who are AISH recipients themselves, with whom she has a very, very close relationship. I think it's helping to bring to the public's attention just how difficult it is to live on that amount of money. Yet this UCP government is determined to save money by – first of all, they were talking about cutting back the actual amount of AISH payments. But previously they actually did go ahead and disconnect the payment from the cost of living, so that, of course, each AISH recipient is in fact receiving about \$32 annually less than they otherwise would. On top of that, the government was looking at reducing the payments.

Now instead of doing that – they seem to be backing off, feeling the kind of pain that Ralph Klein felt in the '90s from reaction that Albertans have been expressing – they're looking at simply saying: well, we're going to look at your eligibility requirements, and if you're not severely disabled, as the title AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, well, then we think maybe you just don't deserve to be on the rolls of recipients receiving AISH, and we could cut you off. What that trial balloon has done is created a huge lot of uncertainty and anxiety amongst those who are AISH recipients, especially those who don't have a visible vulnerability or handicap, those who are suffering from mental illnesses or neurological disorders and so forth. There are untold numbers of visitors to every MLA's office right throughout the province who are on AISH, and every member of the government caucus will attest, I'm sure, if they are truthful about it, to the fact that there are people in very destitute situations who never know what it's going to be like day after day to survive living on AISH. Yet, this is the type of measure that the government sees fit, as part of an economic recovery plan, to go ahead and implement.

On top of that, they're looking at massive layoffs in our public service in the health care field in the middle of a pandemic when we are seeing the number of cases rise in a serious and concerning

way. In the middle of all that the government is continuing to talk about laying off 750 nurses, 11,000 workers who are essential to the operation of our hospitals and our health care systems. They are not deemed by the government to be worthy of being called front-line workers, but you just ask the doctors and nurses who work in that hospital if they could function without those who are bringing meals to the patients in the hospital or if they could function without somebody who can clean up an operating theatre or if they could function if there was somebody failing to pick up the laundry and wipe down the beds and mop the floors.

If those people are not front-line workers, Mr. Speaker, I don't know who is, and 11,000 of them are being told: we don't value your work enough to continue having you as reasonably well-paid public servants; we want you to accept a layoff, and then you can reapply, maybe, for a job at a lower rate of pay from a private company that's going to pocket the difference as a profit, the difference that used to make you a dignified worker making a decent wage and with benefits that would allow you to work one job and satisfy your family's needs. Yet, this government is saying, "Nope. Tell you what. We're going to lay you off. We're going to save \$600 million," is what they're quoting. But they don't calculate what costs they're causing in the lives of Albertans, those 11,000 Albertans who in many cases sustained a family who'd lost an oil worker's job.

They're looking at numbers on paper, Mr. Speaker, the government opposite, and suggesting that, okay, it's \$600,000 there, but there's no calculation of the human cost, and there's no valuation of the public-sector job as something that should be seen as a leadership opportunity. It should be a matter of pride in every province that public servants are able to negotiate fairly with their government to receive a living wage and benefits that are allowing families to live in dignity. In fact, that's not something that is even calculated by this government. They simply see the public servants, they see organized labour, they see the union movement as anathema to a well-running economy. That's one of the things that is a diametrically opposite contrast between the government and the opposition NDP caucus.

8:10

You'll see that represented very well, Mr. Speaker, by visiting the albertasfuture.ca website and looking at some of the incredibly forward-looking ideas that we look at in terms of making sure that no Albertans are left behind when we're designing an economic recovery and the type of economy that Albertans expect to see this government lead us through in the future. The most vulnerable people in this province are not those who should be beaten up in order to squeeze a few dollars out of a budget to satisfy the bottom line of a government who is ideologically opposed to unionized labour or a workforce that has the opportunity and the right to organize and forcefully negotiate a fair settlement for their labour.

It is incomparably cruel to think of some of the things that are being done in the province. I mean, laying off 11,000 people just because you think that public servants don't have the right or shouldn't have the right to organize and to demand a better settlement for themselves and their families – you think that workers are simply an economic input in the cog of the engine of the economy, and it's totally lost on this government that those individuals are their neighbours, who should probably be able to earn a respectful living, Mr. Speaker.

We should be very, very pleased that those individuals who are working those front-line jobs, those ones who this government is wanting to lay off and ask to maybe reapply for another job at a lower rate of pay with a private company, supposedly to save some money – those are the people this government expects to vote for

them? You've got to be kidding. There's 11,000 people out there who are talking to their neighbours and to their spouses and scratching their heads wondering where this government gets off treating them as second-class citizens, treating them without the dignity and respect that we would hope any government sees in any citizen.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Health has risen on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I found the comparison to the Klein government interesting. The Klein government, as it happens, had cut health care spending during their day by 13 per cent – 13 per cent – and we're being compared to them. Well, let's compare them.

We are cutting health care spending by zero. Actually, not even zero. We're spending more than the NDP ever spent on health care spending, Mr. Speaker. I also found it interesting to hear members opposite talking about this alleged physician exodus. They're all leaving the province: they say that in the face of what the true facts really are, that for the first time in our history in this province we now have over 11,000 doctors registered to work here. They say this in the face of a report that was just provided by the College of Physicians & Surgeons, an independent body, not from our ministry, not from our office, that month over month, year over year, quarter over quarter we continue to see more physicians choosing to bring their practice and start to work here in Alberta because they know this is the most generous place for physicians to be paid in Canada. This is a fantastic place to raise your family and to serve patients. They say that. They continue to try and convince themselves of this fairy tale in the face of what the true facts really are.

I'd also point out where they're also getting the facts wrong, Mr. Speaker. They're talking about the recent announcements of AHS' implementation plan for the performance review of AHS, the 57 recommendations and the 72 savings initiatives. That performance review provided clear evidence and opportunities where the health system here in Alberta can do better in terms of costs and results. Now, the pandemic has changed everything. AHS has been directed to proceed carefully with a portion of their implementation plan, ensuring that patient care remains the top priority of AHS, as it is for this government.

Now, there will be no job losses for nurses or for other front-line clinical staff except as part of AHS' ongoing work to rebalance the workforce, not reduce it – to rebalance the workforce, Mr. Speaker – which is a program that was started by the NDP. [interjection] Now, they heckle, and they're upset because they're embarrassed because that rebalancing work was started by their government.

So let's talk a little bit more, as I did during question period, of the hypocrisy of the NDP. During their four years in government they contracted out to 42 surgical clinics throughout the province. They contracted out continuing care, 80 per cent of the beds in this province, to nonprofit and private companies. They contracted out housekeeping services. They contracted out laundry: 68 per cent of the laundry in the system being contracted out already and under the NDP. They contracted out labs: 70 per cent of the labs in northern Alberta, all those community labs being contracted out by the NDP.

An Hon. Member: So it's okay if they do it?

Mr. Shandro: It apparently is.

It apparently is okay when they do it, yet they somehow start screaming that we are Americanizing the system, and they start

scaring patients because in the face of the facts they're embarrassed, Mr. Speaker. They're embarrassed of their record.

Let's talk more about their hypocrisy. As I said, the rebalancing of the workforce program was started by the NDP in 2015, and now that we're doing the same thing and proceeding with rebalancing the workforce through attrition only, Mr. Speaker, they're saying that it's an attack on the workforce.

Worst of all, now I hear from the members opposite that it is not safe for AHS to dispatch ambulances out of Calgary. We are in the hon. Health critic's riding right now, as we stand, in the members' opposite own home city of Edmonton, where since 2009 AHS – if you call 911 and need an ambulance, that ambulance is being dispatched safely and effectively by AHS.

The NDP continues their mendacity, they continue their hypocrisy because they are embarrassed of their record, Mr. Speaker, and quite frankly they're embarrassed that for their entire time in government they continued to see outcomes in this health system decline. Now that we are working with AHS to make them a higher performer, working with AHS to make sure that patient care is a top priority and it's a patient-centric system, we are going to continue to do that work with AHS.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on Government Motion 42? I see the hon. Minister of Energy has risen.

Mrs. Savage: Well – thank you, Mr. Speaker – 2020 has certainly been an unprecedented year for the energy sector. I don't think we've ever seen anything like it before. It started out very optimistic, very positive. This was supposed to be the year of recovery in the energy sector. We saw increased capital expenditures. We had CAPP forecasts that there would be an additional \$2 billion spent in the energy sector over last year. We saw optimism with the drillers. More drilling rigs were going to be deployed. We saw a general sense of optimism. We saw a lot of advancement on the construction of pipeline projects. We saw TMX under way. We saw line 3 under way and progress on KXL. So this year started out very, very optimistic.

But then we saw an unprecedented collapse in the price of oil as the pandemic hit and as the world reacted to the pandemic, as demand for oil fell off as people weren't driving, they weren't flying, they were working at home. Energy demand and energy use decreased at the same time as a price war with OPEC, between Russia and Saudi Arabia, started, flooding the market with additional supply. Mr. Speaker, we saw a historic collapse in prices, and we saw it fall into negative territory.

Now we're starting to see the rebuilding of the energy sector. We start here. Our government took unprecedented actions to protect the lives and livelihoods and to ensure that people were safe and to ensure that our energy sector had the ability to move forward after the pandemic.

8:20

Mr. Speaker, we took this unprecedented action because we have confidence in our energy sector, and we know that the world's energy use – and the drop in demand will taper off. Strong demand for energy projects will continue. People will start driving again. Life will get back to normal. People will start moving, flying again. We know that the world will continue to use energy, and we believe very strongly that that energy should come from Canada. Nobody does it better than us. Nobody does it with higher environmental standards. Nobody does it with higher social and governance standards. We believe that energy should come from Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of reason to be optimistic here in Canada and in Alberta for our energy sector, and that's because every credible forecast for world energy consumption sees oil and gas continuing to dominate the energy mix. Sure, we know and we see that it'll be obvious that there will be more renewables in that energy mix, but every forecast says that it will continue to dominate the energy mix. As long as we here in Alberta can resolve the long-standing challenge of global market access through pipeline construction, we believe and we know that the energy industry can survive and thrive and grow.

But large-scale investment will only return if we have infrastructure to move our product to market, and that's why we took decisive action to kick-start the construction of KXL pipeline by investing \$1.5 billion in the project. TC Energy expects the KXL project will support 17,000 Canadian jobs by the time it's completed, in 2023, and it will deliver 830,000 barrels a day of western Canadian crude directly to the Gulf coast, where refineries are equipped specifically to take our heavy oil. We believe we're at a competitive advantage with our Alberta heavy oil because those refineries and refineries around the world are asking for it, and they use and they're utilized – they're configured to take heavy oil. Other suppliers of heavy oil are declining. Venezuela and Mexico are going down, so we see a bright future for Alberta's energy.

As long as projects like KXL as well as Trans Mountain pipeline, Enbridge line 3 can be built, we know our energy sector can thrive. We can ensure that we'll have jobs, and we will be prepared here in Alberta for a global recovery. We recognize that there will be bumps in the road as those pipeline projects proceed. That's the history of pipeline projects. There are always bumps in the road moving forward. But we know we can do that. We're seeing great progress on that. Trans Mountain pipeline is well under construction in both B.C. and Alberta. The Enbridge line 3 replacement project is constructed everywhere in Canada and the United States except Minnesota. There's some court action and court cases in Minnesota that are proceeding up that we believe will be resolved in the near future, and line 3 will be in service by the early part of 2022.

But we also see that there are tremendous opportunities in new and emerging energy sources. It's because every credible forecast, the forecasts that I mentioned earlier that say that oil and gas will continue to dominate the energy mix, all of those forecasts are predicting that new and emerging resources will also penetrate that energy mix. We'll see more hydrogen. We'll see more geothermal. We'll see more electricity. We will see more nuclear. We will need mines and minerals and rare-earth products to manufacture batteries, and that's why in Alberta we're taking bold and decisive action to diversify, to take advantage of some of these opportunities, because we know that there will be a lot of investment around the world in these new and growing drivers, sources of energy, and we believe Alberta will be well equipped and best equipped to capture some of that investment.

Mr. Speaker, we'll be taking a multipronged approach. We are starting to work, and we're starting with keeping our energy sector busy and working. Our drillers: their numbers have been down. There have been fewer rigs out this year than there have been in many years, but we're putting them to work through the site rehabilitation program to do abandonment work and down-hole work on inactive wells. This has been a program that we set up, partnering with the federal government in a \$1 billion program from the federal government, launched in May, to put Albertans back to work and as well to have the added environmental advantage of cleaning up inactive well sites.

We're also, Mr. Speaker, looking at developing various low-emission resources to bolster investment. Headlining this work is

our recently announced natural gas strategy, that the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity announced together with the Premier and me. This includes the upcoming Alberta petrochemical incentive program, which will bring multibillion dollars of investments into petrochemical projects throughout this province. In fact, the Alberta's Industrial Heartland estimates that there could be a further \$30 billion – \$30 billion – private-sector investment in the province's petrochemical industry by 2030. This is a great opportunity for Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this puts Alberta in a great position to diversify our energy mix by exploring less emission-intensive opportunities like blue hydrogen. Independent analysis suggests that Alberta can be one of the lowest cost producers of blue hydrogen using the province's low-cost natural gas and expertise in carbon capture utilization and storage.

At the same time as we're pursuing a natural gas strategy, Mr. Speaker, we're working to further leverage our natural geological advantages through the development of a minerals strategy that will promote the responsible and efficient development of various minerals. These minerals include lithium, vanadium, uranium, rare-earth elements, diamonds, potash, nickel. Many of these resources are used in manufacturing batteries and products that are used in lower emitting sources of energy. We have all of that product here in Alberta; it's just never been utilized before. We have never had a mining strategy. We'll be moving forward in the fall with a strategy – it's out for consultation now – on how to best incent that industry, how to set up a regulatory regime, and how to drive investment to come here to this province to set up a very vibrant minerals sector.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned uranium. We have it here in Alberta plentifully. Uranium will be needed in increased nuclear production. Small modular reactors, a smaller form of nuclear reactors, are set to be on the world stage within 10 years. They could be scaled to meet local needs. They have the added benefit of nonemitting sources, they have lower upfront capital costs, and they have much higher safety features than the traditional nuclear generation that we're familiar with. This technology has the potential to lower emissions and diversify the province's energy sector. One use for small modular reactors that I'm particularly excited about is the ability to be used in the oil sands. It's a zero-emission electricity source. Oil sands facilities are often remote. They require a lot of heat and power from the grid to operate. These SMRs will be perfect within the oil sands.

We've also recently announced our plan to develop a framework for geothermal development, and we're pursuing legislation to set up a regulatory framework to give the needed certainty to attract investment. Using made-in-Alberta technical ingenuity and decades of drilling experience, we can create the conditions for industry to safely and successfully harness clean energy from the earth. We have developments that can use the well sites from inactive and abandoned oil wells so there won't be a new environmental footprint, Mr. Speaker. It'll produce clean heat, clean energy, and it can utilize the abandoned and inactive well sites. Geothermal energy is one of the lowest impacts of all renewable energies anywhere on the planet, and we have the resource here in Alberta. We have the ability to develop it, and that's what we're going to do.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Not only do these emerging sectors show promise to help diversify our energy sector; they demonstrate our long-standing commitment to responsible energy development. Our sector has been dedicated to finding solutions for many years. You only have to look at the per-barrel emissions of Canadian oil to see how far

our industry has gone. Since 2011 per-barrel emissions have dropped by almost 20 per cent and could decrease by another 20 per cent over the next decade. With more innovative solutions like carbon capture utilization and storage, the energy industry is taking great strides to lower their emissions. That same spirit of innovation and dedication has helped Canada, led by Alberta, lead in the world rankings in ESG: environmental, social, and governance. We ranked third by many indexes, right behind Norway and Denmark, for energy-producing countries.

8:30

Moving forward, I think it's essential that the knowledge of ESG criteria becomes more and more evident. It's very evident that it's going to become more important as investors choose where to invest. We're seeing this in the energy sector, which is under increased and growing scrutiny. Global investors are making decisions based on ESG, and we know that Canadian energy, produced under the world's highest environmental, human rights, and labour standards, can measure up to oil production anywhere on the planet, and that makes Alberta the logical choice to meet postpandemic energy demands. This is yet another source of optimism in energy recovery. We have the ingenuity and we have the highest environmental standards, but we have to be able to put ourselves here in Alberta in a position to be able to meet that growing demand in the world. To do that, we have to do a better job telling our environmental story.

Our long tradition of taking action on climate issues is backed by more than two decades of climate programs and policies that have paved the way for other jurisdictions. We're the first jurisdiction to have put a price on carbon for large emitters across the entire economy. We've invested billions of dollars in technologies that reduce or even eliminate emissions such as carbon capture and storage, and we have a regulatory framework that balances both the environment and the economy. Both the government and the industry have long shown leadership on responsible energy development. In fact, several of our major oil sands producers have set net zero targets for emission goals. That includes CNRL, Cenovus, and MEG. They've all adopted net zero emissions by 2050 policies. Mr. Speaker, that's over half the production in the oil sands committed to net zero. Imagine that: a net zero barrel of oil that can compete with any jurisdiction and any oil across the world.

We have this strong record of stringent environmental standards and responsible energy development, but we recognize there's more that we have to do. That's why we're working on an ESG strategy that will run through every aspect of our recovery plan, and it will guide our approach to our energy sector. The strategy will be a forward-looking approach to ensure investors we have the metrics to give them confidence in Alberta's energy sector now and in the future.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment. I see the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis rose first.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, 95.8 per cent of the energy sector in Alberta is actually comprised of small businesses, so big oil is actually just small oil here in Alberta, and this is a really important fact that needs to be considered when we discuss the economic recovery for the sector. The junior oil and gas companies in our province, like the many which are found out in Springbank in my riding, are drivers of innovation, and they are risk takers and a critical part of our energy ecosystem. The solutions that I hear from them are Alberta-made solutions that don't really require government bailout. In fact, in many cases these producers just

want government to get out of their way. So to the minister: how is our government engaging with small and mid-sized companies to ensure that they are a key part of our economic recovery?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy, should she choose.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for those comments. Thank you for the comments from the hon. member. Our production in Alberta is a mixture of large producers producing in the oil sands and hundreds of smaller producers that are producing both oil and gas right across the province. They've been producing it for many decades, and these are the entrepreneurs. These are the people who have taken risk, put their capital, put their investment to work to develop oil and gas and to employ people, Albertans, right across the province.

Mr. Speaker, there isn't a recovery in Alberta without the recovery and the health of these smaller companies that guide our energy sector. We're going to continue to produce oil and gas for many decades to come. The world's demand is growing for oil and gas products, and the question is where that's going to come from. We believe that it should come from Alberta. We do it best. We have the highest environmental standards.

To help these small companies and to help all companies in Alberta, we need to create an environment where they can be competitive. To be competitive, we have to reduce red tape. We have to continue reducing red tape. We have to give them the most competitive tax environment and fiscal environment, and we're doing that, Mr. Speaker. But we also have to ensure that the production here in Alberta can compete with production anywhere around the world. It has to be the lowest cost, it has to be low risk, and it has to be low carbon. That's why we're working with our energy sector on ESG standards: to help them with metrics, to help them ensure that the standards by which they produce their oil and gas are the highest in the world because that's where the world's demand is going to go. They're going to be looking to the energy jurisdictions that produce the low-cost, low-risk, and low-carbon barrel of oil and gas. We'll be working with our energy sector to make sure they can compete on every single front.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available if anyone else has a brief question or comment.

Seeing no one, is there anyone else that would like to add to the debate? The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's good to be back here talking with you, as we like to do in this House. I just want to give everybody a little bit of an overview as to where we are right now in our economy. You know what? Some really encouraging news just came out of Calgary. In 2019 they had a banner year when it comes to venture capital investment in the province. The largest year that they have ever had when it came to venture capital into technology companies in Calgary. But you know what? In 2020, right now, they've already beaten last year's number with an even larger number, the largest in history in the city of Calgary.

So we have an emerging technology sector that's coming here in the province of Alberta. We're on the map, Mr. Speaker. We have an immense amount of attention coming to our province. We have Silicon Valley accelerators coming to take a look at the province of Alberta, in Olds College with Thrive, as you know, in your home constituency. On top of that, we have Mars, one of the largest accelerators in the country, in Toronto looking at establishing Mars west here in the province of Alberta. These are encouraging signs that Alberta is on the map in this innovation space. That's

encouraging, good news. That's good news from today that I wanted to share with this Chamber.

Also, more good news came out today. More good news came out today as well: 7,400 businesses have opened or reopened since the pandemic, Mr. Speaker. That's 400 more businesses than when we started in this pandemic; 400 more. Let that sink in. We've been in a tough pandemic. Lots of people have been facing tough things in their lives. Four hundred more businesses have put their flag in the ground here in Alberta, entrepreneurs putting it on the line, helping us create jobs in this province. Another encouraging sign. Now, we still have a long way to go to get Albertans back to work, but we have over 230,000 Albertans back working. That's an encouraging sign. That's 65 per cent of the way there. Still a long way to go, but you know what? That just gives us that other urgency here, urgency that we have to have as a government, making sure we're laser focused on making sure we implement our recovery plan.

Now, that's what I want to get to, Mr. Speaker, that our recovery plan has to be bold. We have to take this opportunity to rethink what the future of Alberta looks like with purpose, with focus. Now, Alberta is often called the Texas of the north. I think that analogy often comes from the fact that we both have histories of being strong in agriculture, strong in energy, and kind of a similar type of economy grew through the ages that way. But one of the things I want to point out to this House is that over the last two decades Texas with purpose has diversified their economy to the point now where they're one of the most diversified economies in the entire United States, leading when it comes to technology, innovation, renewables, leading when it comes to life sciences, health, advanced manufacturing. They just most recently attracted Tesla there as well to Texas. Tesla is even thinking of moving its headquarters from California to Texas. They are purposeful in their intent towards diversification.

We're being equally purposeful here in the province of Alberta to make sure that Albertans know that we understand them. We've heard them. The D-word, as they say, is "diversification." It's not an either/or conversation. This is about "and." We're going to build on our strengths here in the province of Alberta, Mr. Speaker. We have an amazing foundation. It's gotten us to where we are. We've been the economic engine of this entire country for decades, and we will continue to be the economic driver of this country with focus and purpose.

8:40

That's where this recovery plan comes in. I want to get into the details of this because it makes me actually quite excited to be here today to talk about. We were the first jurisdiction in the entire country to implement a recovery plan, a plan of focus, Mr. Speaker, and intention because we knew that Albertans wanted to know that their future was sound here in the province. They wanted to know that they had jobs to go back to. They wanted to know that their kids had a future here in the province. We've done everything that we can to make sure that we get that done for Albertans.

Now, let's talk about, you know, one of the big elements here. I'm just proud of our Finance minister for doing this for our province in accelerating our job-creation tax cut to 8 per cent, Mr. Speaker, cutting it down from 12 per cent to 8 per cent. Now, our opponents want to raise that up 50 per cent on Albertans. We say no. We are betting on growth. We are betting on the entrepreneurs, the investors coming to our province, creating jobs. That's why it was so important for us to send a signal to the market that we want them here in Alberta. We want their investment here in Alberta.

That's also why we set up Invest Alberta, to make sure that we can attract investment, go out there as the business development

arm for our province, working with our private sector to attract investment and jobs to our province. That is an amazing opportunity to us. We are repurposing its focus, Mr. Speaker. We used to have the trade offices out there in the world, where they thought they could source their own deals, and they thought that they were businesspeople. That's not their role. That's not the intent. We have amazing platforms here, from financial institutions, accounting firms, law firms that have national and international reach, and Invest Alberta is there to support them in their efforts of trying to attract investment to our province. We want to say thank you to them for doing that, and that's just getting off the ground, just getting started.

We also had the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. Recapitalization with \$175 million to leverage private-sector investment into our emerging growth companies here and venture capital in the province should generate over \$500 million of investment into the province through leveraging with the private sector. That's encouraging. That's now an evergreen fund to make sure that we continue to have that growth capital, that venture capital here in the province of Alberta.

We've also brought in the innovation employment grant for research and development to allow for our ideas that we're developing at some of our most world-class institutions that we have here in the province of Alberta. We're at the forefront of AI and machine learning here at the University of Alberta. We're leading quantum computing in the University of Calgary, Mr. Speaker. We have huge opportunities, but we need to take those ideas and commercialize them and turn them into jobs. The innovation employment grant, the Alberta Enterprise Corporation: that's their role, along with Alberta Innovates, to get that done for our province.

Now, I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about our amazing red tape reduction minister, Mr. Speaker. I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about it. Speed. Speed is key, making sure that businesses know that when they come to the province of Alberta, we will move at the speed of business in making sure that they can get the approvals that they need, making sure that the burdensome red tape is not there for them and that they know that Alberta is open for business. We want them here. We want their jobs here. We want their capital investment here. That is why our red tape reduction initiative is so critical for our province. There are lots more interesting ideas there to come. We're just starting to scratch the surface on the potential there.

Now, we want to talk a little bit about our sector strategies that we're developing out. Some of them we launched in the summer. Some of them you've started to see over the last few weeks and months. There's still lots more work to be done on our sector strategies, but some of the highlights I just want to identify for you. Now, this one here is rural, and it's exciting: the irrigation investment of over \$800 million partnering with the Canada Infrastructure Bank on this historic investment in irrigation, opening up over 200,000 acres of land in southern Alberta. Those are high-value products that are going to be generated here in the province of Alberta. That's a strategic investment with us, where we're putting a little bit of money in there for the infrastructure but leveraging the Canada Infrastructure Bank and partnering as well with irrigation districts to get that done for Albertans.

I already highlighted for you as well the future prospects of agriculture. Agriculture is big technology. I don't have to tell you that in Olds College there – the fact that they literally have a tractor that is a drone. Like, this thing is huge. It's about 20 feet tall, about 15 feet wide. This thing is massive. They'll put it on a farmer's field and just have it operate as a drone. That type of research is happening right here in the province of Alberta, which is why Silicon Valley has taken notice of the opportunities here in our

province. That's why the partnership with Thrive is so important for that continued investment and acceleration of investment and ideas around agriculture because agriculture, its future is in innovation and technology. That's exciting for us here. Alberta is going to continue to be a world leader in agriculture.

Now, hydrogen. Everybody is talking about that. If you talk to the business community right now, one buzzword that's out there is hydrogen.

Mr. Nally: Hear, hear.

Mr. Schweitzer: Buzzword is hydrogen. Now we have our minister of natural gas. Everybody is getting their shout-outs today. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity over there.

We have blue hydrogen. We have green hydrogen. Some people are talking about grey hydrogen, purple hydrogen. It's hard for most people in the general public to keep up with the shade of hydrogen, but we know that Alberta is well positioned to make sure that we are the ones to help unlock this. We've unlocked the oil sands, Mr. Speaker. We've unlocked carbon capture. We have the intellectual capital here in the province of Alberta to unlock hydrogen as well. That's why we're so proud of the fact that he introduced his hydrogen plan. One thing I find curious is the fact that some folks in here found out about hydrogen maybe 10 days later. Thought maybe they'd invented it, but they didn't. There's a lot of work going into this, and we're proud of the work that's going into this. More work to be done in that area.

As well, the opportunities on LNG: now, I'm sure we'd all like to have a little bit. The member used to call it – I don't want to put it in quotes – this certain name, "time," which is always entertaining, Mr. Speaker. But we don't want to necessarily have him come up here. Maybe on 29(2)(a) he'll jump up. That'll be entertaining for everybody.

Now, we're also excited about our plastics in our recycling strategy, Mr. Speaker. That is a huge opportunity for us. Some people in the media try to say that what the feds did was to pooh-pooh that, but the federal government actually said that Alberta was heading down the right track with our recycling strategy, and that's encouraging. As much as I do enjoy my straws – and I hope that I have my straws in the long term – we have to make sure that we have a strength here in recycling.

Now, Mr. Speaker, minerals. Now, this announcement got me excited, the fact that we're doing a scan of the entire province on minerals. This is lithium. This is nickel. This is the forefront of innovation happening right here in the province of Alberta. We literally have people taking lithium right out of active wells here the province. Who would have thought that Alberta is at the forefront of lithium? Yet we are. And here we are today.

As well – and another shout-out to our minister of electricity over here – we are at the forefront when it comes to batteries in our power grid. We literally put a Tesla battery to enhance the value of our renewables, Mr. Speaker, here in the province of Alberta. That is happening.

We are at the forefront of renewables. We are at the forefront of innovation with our mines and minerals with the Minister of Energy, Mr. Speaker. This is exciting times in Alberta for the opportunities ahead. This pandemic has forced us to think outside the box, look for new opportunities for our province. It's encouraging to see that we're just scratching the surface of what those opportunities can be.

Now, we're also working closely with our minister of labour and our Minister of Advanced Education on labour and talent. There are a whole bunch of announcements yet to come on that space, Mr. Speaker, but we're excited about them. We've been listening to the

industry about the talent needed for the jobs of today and tomorrow, and we're making sure that we deliver on that here in the near term.

Now, I want to jump back a little bit to where we started on innovation. We have put our flag in the ground when it comes to intellectual property. We have to unlock the value of all the research and development that's happening at our postsecondary institutions. That's why, with the Minister of Service Alberta as well as the Minister of Advanced Education, we put our flag in the ground. We're going to move faster than any other jurisdiction in Canada when it comes to making sure we have the best possible intellectual property rules in the entire country. Some people didn't think that Alberta would want to compete in this space, but we're here, and we're coming. Alberta is here to compete, and we're putting the rest of Canada on notice that we're here to compete. What we saw out of Calgary just today with the amount of investment going to venture capital is encouraging to see that we're on that right trajectory.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to Invest Alberta and the opportunities that are ahead. You know, for the millions and millions of people listening and watching online – I'm sure there really are. Could be 100, could be 10, could be 5. I don't know. It could be maybe the people in the building, could just be that. Maybe. But if anybody is watching out here that is in the business community, that wants to attract investment and growth to the province of Alberta, Invest Alberta is here as a business tool for you. We want to work with you to attract investment into the province. We want to work with you, to partner with you to find ways that we can send the message out to the world that Alberta wants their opportunities here.

We want them to invest here, put their capital here, hire people in Alberta. And that's what Invest Alberta is going to be there for, to work with them, to make sure they have the information they need about the value proposition of our province: affordable big cities, amazing landscapes, amazing small communities where opportunities are there for them. That's where Invest Alberta is so critical for us to get our message out to the world, to let them know that Alberta is open for business. We're the first place to put a recovery plan in place. Our eye is on the ball when it comes to diversification. We want their investment. We want Albertans to thrive, and for all the people out there we want them to know that they have a future now and they have a future tomorrow in the province of Alberta.

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

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this evening. And while I appreciate that the minister is very excited about his new file – and I also want to congratulate the minister on that file and thank the previous one for their time on that file as well – unfortunately, I do not share the same excitement in terms of the future prospects for our economy as the minister does.

8:50

Primarily when we look at the future or even the present, the jobs that are currently not available to people: we saw nearly a million people or over a million people accessing the federal CERB program. Thankfully, while I disagree with many things from the federal government, they did make the decision to support Albertans at a time of need, something that is drastically different from what this provincial government decided to do, who in terms of supports for regular Albertans, for workers, have done very little to support those workers. When we look at the employment rates and looking at the 293,000 Albertans who are actively looking for

work but unable to find it just last month, once again I do not share the same optimism as this minister does.

Now, once again, I appreciate that the key messaging from this government has changed from the last time we heard the Finance minister talking about the fact that diversification was a luxury. Not that long ago the Finance minister said that. Now to hear the new minister saying that it's not either/or, well, it's a step in the right direction I suppose, but, once again, the minister is talking about projects, talking about hydrogen, talking about lithium and other opportunities in the resource sector that are, unfortunately, not days away but most likely years away. Albertans need jobs today, not years from now. This minister has a long road ahead of him. I appreciate, once again, that he is very excited to take on this role. We'll see how long that excitement lasts, because Albertans are looking for supports now and not a year from now or several years from now.

Unfortunately, other ministers in this government have worked against them. Once again, we look at the Health minister and their decision to lay off 11,000 health care front-line workers in the near future. That announcement was made in the middle of a pandemic. We talk about the decisions that this Health minister has made around physicians in our province and the brain drain that we're seeing of doctors across our province who are saying, "We are leaving," and we can't even get an admission from this minister that that is happening. He continues to say that there are more doctors on the books today than ever before, but, unfortunately, just because they're on the books doesn't mean that they're working here, doesn't mean that they plan to stay here for very long, especially with the relationship that this minister is creating with physicians and with other health care providers in our province.

We look to other ministries. Once again, we look at Children's Services and Community and Social Services and the decisions that are being made there to claw back supports for people who are vulnerable in our community. We talk about the idea of this government deindexing AISH. The Member for St. Albert has taken on the role for this month to live off of equal cost to an AISH payment, and that has been very hard for that member. We recognize that there is still a lot of privilege that comes with taking on that responsibility as an MLA for one month, that it is nothing compared to the life that people living on those supports have to live. But the fact is that \$30 clawed back every year for these people who are living with those supports is the difference between being able to live in a home and becoming homeless. When we hear these ministers talking about wanting to protect the people that they are supposed to represent and supposed to take care of, unfortunately we've seen a very different story taking place from this government.

Now, once again, our caucus has released albertasfuture.ca, and we want to talk as well about what the future holds for job opportunities in our province. But, unfortunately, this UCP government has now had nearly a year and a half to come up with some solutions. Unfortunately, even before the pandemic they lost 50,000 jobs across our province. Even with the \$4.7 billion handout to the largest, most profitable corporations in our province we saw companies like TC Energy and Shell making the decision to take that money and buy back stocks in their own company.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate this evening? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and join in the debate on Government Motion 42. I do want to start, as this is my first opportunity to address this Chamber since

we rose from the spring session, to offer my condolences to the families of those who've lost their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As of Dr. Hinshaw's update today that's 293 Albertans who have perished so far. That is a significant loss to our communities. I'm likely not the only member of this Chamber who has had to attend a Zoom funeral. It's a very, very tough time for families right now. So, first, I want to offer my condolences. Secondly, I want to say thank you to all front-line workers, Albertans following chief medical officer of health guidelines, those who are doing everything they can to protect themselves and their families, those who are getting by in this very, very stressful time.

The toll on mental health, with the heightened anxiety levels right now: I know it's having a really big impact. Everything, from the appointments at dental offices are getting flooded because people have cracked teeth because they've started to grind their teeth with the buildup of the anxiety and stress. I know it's been very, very hard, so I want to say thank you to everybody who is doing what they need to to take care of their families and who's going above and beyond to support community. I look forward to – I'm sure through members' statements we'll be hearing more and more about how community has been helping one another through this very difficult time.

Now, we are currently debating something very important and something that impacts all Albertans, and I really must emphasize how important this debate is to Albertans right now, because in this great time of stress and anxiety, the economic impact that has happened here in Alberta and that Albertans are going through is incredibly real and has very real impacts on individual families. Now, the opposition had proposed a very specific debate regarding jobs and the economy, and that is not the debate that we are having. We are having a much more broad discussion, a bit more of a pabulum discussion that includes everything, as opposed to something very, very specific around the unemployment in Alberta, what we will do for an economic plan going forward, and creating jobs.

I have been quite disappointed because the word "jobs" has been raised so rarely through this debate. I can tell you that it's a very, very important concern for Albertans, and all of us in this House: we owe Albertans a very real plan to create jobs and to grow the economy and to help Albertans get back to feeling like they can afford to put food on the table, that they're going to be able to make their rent. What have Albertans gotten? Where are we right now? Through the debate, through the conversation around jobs and the economy, rather than hearing a focus on jobs – one of the three terms that this government was elected on: jobs, pipelines, and economy – I'm just hearing a lot of self-congratulations. I'm quite concerned about this. We need to focus on jobs and the economy. We need to focus on supporting Albertans, and right now all too often Albertans feel attacked by their own government.

Now, what is the current state? Let's talk about two time frames here. Prepandemic, before the pandemic hit, how was this government's record on jobs and the economy? Before the pandemic even came along, this government had doubled their projected deficit from \$6 billion to \$12 billion. This government had lost 50,000 jobs, and this government had seen a shrinking economy. This was before the pandemic.

Now we're in a situation where we're looking at five credit downgrades in one year. We are seeing that per capita Albertans have needed more supports through federal programs than any other province. That would be the wage subsidy as well as CERB, something that over a million Albertans needed to access, deserved to access, be supported in accessing. And we've seen the highest

rates here in our province of citizens accessing mortgage deferral programs. Nearly 20 per cent of Albertans are accessing that.

These are scary statistics, Mr. Speaker, and it paints a very real picture of what's happening to citizens in our province right now. We know commercial and residential vacancy rates are skyrocketing, and we know that there's low business confidence. Right now there are 290,000 Albertans who are unemployed and looking for work, and instead of a debate focused on jobs and the economy, instead of hearing from this government how they will tackle challenges made worse by a pandemic, all I have heard is that we will do more of the same.

9:00

We are going to double down on giving money to large corporations, that \$4.7 billion corporate handout. We are going to double down on increasing costs on Alberta families at a time when many of them are going through some of the most difficult times they may experience. And we are hearing that Albertans feel attacked by their own government in a number of ways. More of the same does not cut it. We need a new economic strategy; we need it right now.

The Official Opposition came into this Chamber prepared to have a debate, a conversation, a dialogue with this government. Instead, I've heard a lack of focus, not enough talking about jobs, not enough talking about the state of the economy. Instead, we know that this government is cutting services and increasing costs. We have to build a modern, diversified economy, one that benefits all Albertans and one that doesn't leave anybody behind. Right now this government isn't listening. That \$4.7 billion corporate handout resulted in 50,000 fewer jobs before the pandemic.

The government is doubling down, moving faster. I understand that Bill 1: I haven't had the chance to read the details on that one yet – or the first bill introduced, Bill 35. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that look. I understand that that is the implementation of that acceleration. Well, when announced that that acceleration would take place, three months ago, the Premier promised, guaranteed that this would create jobs. Where is that evidence? Why are we putting all of the eggs into that corporate basket? Where are the supports for Albertans?

Because this debate has not been as fruitful as I had hoped, because we're not hearing from the government what that new economic vision and strategy will be, how that will support Albertans, the Official Opposition has launched albertasfuture.ca. It's a website that any Albertan can go to and is invited to go to because we want to have that real conversation about what that new economic vision could look like and what Alberta's future could look like.

Now, our Official Opposition is a small but mighty 24, and we've got caucus staff of about 30. We do not have the resources that the government has at their fingertips, but what we've done is put a lot of work into meeting with stakeholders and experts in a variety of fields and really listening, listening to the feedback, making sure that we can put together some really good discussion papers. Right now there is one based around hydrogen, that I would invite Albertans to peruse and give us your thoughts on. We are not saying that we will have gotten everything right, but we need to start.

Unfortunately, the government's hydrogen announcement seemed to be an announcement to make a plan in the future and set some targets for 2040, when we know that other countries are going to be already in that space in 2030. Our plan has 11 concrete steps and actions that we can take now that will translate into jobs. In the hydrogen plan they're more around the medium term, but we look forward to putting out additional plans in other areas, plans like

child care, which will greatly, greatly assist Alberta families as well as our economy if we can properly invest in that.

Right now this government has touted their recovery plan to get Albertans back to work. They've estimated that they've spent \$14 billion to help with that recovery, but of that, going to support child care: \$14 million. That's exactly .1 per cent.

We want to have a conversation with Albertans about what we can do and how we can move forward, and that's at albertasfuture.ca. Now, we're proposing some economic vision. We want to see some discussion; we want to hear more ideas. I do want to frame, though, that the conversation we're having on that site is within the frame of five specific principles. The first is economic security for Albertans. The first principle is essentially jobs, not empty promises of jobs but jobs: jobs in our communities, jobs in emergent industries, and a real focus and drive to make sure that those jobs are being created.

Secondly, the strategy must be equitable, and it must involve all Albertans, including women, including racialized folks, disabled people, and every other person in this province, because what I'm seeing from this government is going to create disparate outcomes. It is not going to help the economic recovery of women in the same equal way that it is men. This government needs to make sure that nobody is being left behind.

Third, we have to make sure that economic diversification is a priority and reject the UCP notion, that was really just months ago, of diversification as a luxury. It needs to be a priority. It was a priority when Rachel – my apologies. I almost said names. Day one. It was a priority during the NDP government term. It needs to continue to be a priority, and I'm pleased to hear the government starting to use that language more often.

Fourth, the strategy needs to also recognize the role of government and the public sector in supporting private-sector growth. This government too often attacks the public sector in our province. We've seen that time and time again. Just like when Peter Lougheed sparked an economic revolution in his province, we can also make strategic public investments to grow new sectors and create new economic booms.

Finally, we need to not incentivize a race to the bottom. We need to build a path to the top. We need to make sure that there are fair working conditions for all Albertans. We need to make sure we're creating good jobs for people and that we're looking at that larger economic plan. So we're inviting Albertans to come together, regardless of political stripe, to albertasfuture.ca and tell us what they think, share their thoughts, review the hydrogen strategy and the other strategies that are being released, and share those with your friends. All of these proposals are going to frame a conversation, and together we can create a bold vision for what gets everyday people back to work, one that sets us up for a recovery today, creating a stronger economy for tomorrow.

So those are quite a few of my general comments regarding the debate. I'm disappointed we weren't able to have a more fulsome, specific debate just on jobs and the economy. But that's not what's taken place here, and it's unfortunate because we can do so much good.

A few other issues I will just quickly flag before I cede the rest of my time. Very concerned about what's happening in postsecondary. The cuts to postsecondary funding have put most postsecondary institutions in the position of having to raise tuition by the maximum this fall, adding on costs to some who can afford it least right now. We waited way too long for supports for small businesses during the pandemic – and finally the federal government was the one that had to step in with a number of supports for those hard-working small businesses – but the first versions of those supports weren't quite right. I would like to see

more specific action from this provincial government to support small businesses.

I'm very concerned about some changes that were announced last week, not only the announcement by the Minister of Health, attacking who I would call front-line health care services and workers, to lay off 11,000 of them but through the same announcement also announcing that seniors are going to have new copays, that seniors are going to pay up to an additional \$400 a month, nearly \$5,000 a year, at a time when many seniors are struggling or on a fixed income. A new copay for home care, and that new copay is being called savings, which I would suggest is completely inaccurate. Perhaps don't call charging fixed-income seniors more savings to government.

So those are a few of the top concerns that I have based on the conversation that's happened so far in this place. Again, to repeat my premise, thank you to all the front-line workers. We need to have a real discussion about what economic strategy will go forward. More of the same from this government, doubling down on that \$4.7 billion corporate handout, is not good enough. It did not create jobs before the pandemic. Now that you've doubled down, three months later where are the jobs? We've seen nothing but bad news; we need to start turning this around. The Official Opposition is here to help do the work with the government and with Albertans through albertasfuture.ca.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, I see the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board would like to provide comments this evening to the debate.

9:10

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've paid attention with interest here the last half an hour or so to many of the comments that have been made.

Certainly, 2020 has been to date a year of great economic disruption. Looking back to January and February of this year, however, before the pandemic began, early economic indicators were showing 2020 as a turnaround year for our economy. In February of this year we experienced year-over-year increases in key economic indicators. Oil and gas drilling activity was up 14 per cent. Oil production was up 6 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Exports were up 19 per cent. There were increased retail sales, vehicle sales, and improved housing market activity.

Our economy was improving, and investment was returning to Alberta, Mr. Speaker, investment that the previous government chased out by the billions. Job growth was around the corner. But no one could have predicted the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic would have on our economy. The pandemic changed our world in a matter of weeks. As governments around the world implemented measures to keep citizens safe, these measures also significantly reduced output and activity. The global economy experienced the largest economic contraction since the 1930s, and Alberta's economy was not spared.

Demand for our exports diminished, and stock markets experienced massive declines. With global energy demand destruction, oil prices fell to unprecedented depths. Mr. Speaker, Alberta now faces its most severe economic and fiscal challenge since the Great Depression. Alberta needed a bold plan, a plan to jump-start our economy and position Alberta on a path to recovery. That's why our government released Alberta's Recovery Plan.

But before I comment on Alberta's Recovery Plan, I want to touch on some of the short-term measures that our government

swiftly implemented to reduce the financial burden to Albertans. Our government announced a series of measures to mitigate those financial impacts directly on Albertans and Alberta businesses. We launched the emergency isolation support program, that provided \$108 million to more than 94,000 Albertans. We deferred utility payments to ensure Albertans could prioritize their finances and provide liquidity. We provided student loan relief for postsecondary students. We deferred corporate income taxes to provide Alberta businesses with access to \$1.5 billion to pay their employees, their rent, and continue operating. We deferred WCB premiums for all private-sector employers and committed to covering half of the 2020 premiums for small and medium-sized employers. We froze the education property tax at 2019 levels, saving households \$55 million and businesses \$32 million, in addition to also deferring the tax, which provided roughly \$458 million to businesses. ATB along with other financial institutions provided deferrals on loans, lines of credit, and mortgages. We abated tourism levies. We also provided Alberta businesses with a relaunch grant and participated in the commercial rent assistance program. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on and on.

However, we recognized that those measures would simply provide temporary relief in the face of a long-term challenge. We needed to do more to set Alberta on a path to recovery. For far too long our largest industries and job creators have been the victims of ideological sabotage and poor economic management. So instead of attacking Alberta's job creators, which we hear consistently from members across the aisle, our government set out a plan to support our businesses, to grow and diversify our economy, and get Albertans back to work. That's why our government launched Alberta's Recovery Plan.

Alberta's Recovery Plan takes bold action to get people back to work, build infrastructure, and diversify our economy. That's right, Mr. Speaker: diversify our economy. It has always been the plan of this government to diversify this economy, to put a business environment in place where true sustainable diversification can take place. We're strategically building on our economic strengths to attract investment and position Alberta for prosperity. Alberta has the youngest and best educated population in the country. We have some of the most valuable natural resources on the face of the Earth. Alberta has the lowest taxes in Canada. We have historic industries like agriculture, forestry, and energy that provide a backbone for our economy, but we also have a thriving innovation sector, a world-class tourism experience, and great growth potential in financial services, fintech, aviation, and aerospace to name a few. And, most importantly, Albertans have an entrepreneurial spirit. Alberta's Recovery Plan builds on these and other strengths with timely, targeted investments and bold policy reforms focused on immediate job creation. It will accelerate economic diversification in industries of the future, ensure a strong future for Alberta's innovative energy industry, and demonstrate to investors around the world that Alberta is that destination of choice for capital.

One of the pillars of the recovery plan is infrastructure investment. More than \$10 billion in infrastructure spending will create tens of thousands of jobs and positions the province for a generation of growth. This includes strategic infrastructure projects that will improve our competitiveness and productivity, which will lead to increased private-sector investment. These same projects will move people from unemployment to good jobs now, at a time when thousands of Albertans desperately need an opportunity. We estimate that this investment will spur the creation of thousands of jobs and other jobs through subcontractors and suppliers, small businesses, hotels, and restaurants in every corner of the province. Alberta's Recovery Plan also ensures our business owners and

investors know that our province is a place where businesses can thrive, grow, and prosper.

We accelerated the job-creation tax cut to give Alberta, by far, the most attractive tax environment for new business investment in Canada and among the lowest rates in all of North America. On July 1 we moved the general business tax rate from 10 per cent to 8 per cent. We also announced the innovation employment grant, which we plan to launch in January of 2021. This new incentive will create high-paying jobs by making Alberta the most attractive place in Canada to invest in the tech and innovation sector. The innovation employment grant rewards businesses that make investments in technology and innovation by providing a grant of up to 20 per cent of R and D spending. The grant focuses support on small and medium-sized firms in the start-up and early scale-up phases, when they may not be profitable. Then as they scale up and phase out of the IEG, they will benefit from the job-creation tax cut.

Together the innovation employment grant and the job-creation tax cut will support firms of all sizes and all sectors that undertake R and D in Alberta. These and many other measures will complement dozens of pro-growth policies we're already implementing as part of the province's blueprint for jobs. That includes the red tape reduction initiative, which is making steady progress towards our goal of reducing the number of job-killing regulatory requirements imposed by government by one-third and speeding up approvals so we become the freest and fastest-moving economy in North America.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude with this. Governments do not create wealth or prosperity. Government policies can either support growth or impede it, but they cannot create it. A robust economy and real wealth creation is built on the effort, investment, and ambition of its citizens and businesses. And government's role is to provide a business environment that encourages the entrepreneurial spirit of its people. Our government will continue to create the most competitive business environment in the country, and for that we will not make apology.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have faced this great fiscal challenge with courage and optimism. I commend each and every Albertan who has smiled in the face of adversity and worked to overcome in challenging times. Though there are tough days ahead, I'm confident that because of the optimism, resilience, and entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans our greatest days are still ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and welcome back. I have to say it's pretty exciting to be back in the Chamber after a little break there, and I am very grateful that I am able to rise on 29(2)(a) to ask a question of the hon. Finance minister. You know, at the ending of his speech he was talking about innovation and growth and really giving an optimistic future for Alberta, which makes me really excited, and I know my constituents will be really excited to hear that as well because with the one-two-three punch of COVID-19, the Saudi-Russia oil price war, and the largest recession in a generation Albertans have been left reeling with an 11.7 per cent unemployment rate.

9:20

The economic downturn that we have seen, Mr. Speaker, in our province, combined with the swath of overly and continuously negative global media has created fear and despair in our communities and, I can say, within my riding as well. I know that Alberta, especially Brooks-Medicine Hat, with our get'er done, do-

it-yourself spirit down there, is full of hard-working people that now, more than ever, need a sense of hope.

To the Minister of Finance: what is our government doing to attract jobs and meaningful employment to give hope to these Albertans who may have lost it?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that very thoughtful and really pertinent question. I think there are a lot of Albertans these days that are facing great challenge. They are looking for a sign of hope. That's one reason why we rolled out Alberta's economic recovery plan early. We were the first province across the nation to talk about a future, to talk about economic recovery and growth, to talk about hope, because we all need to hear about hope.

Mr. Speaker, our economic recovery plan is a bold plan, and it's a plan that is predicated on the foundational belief that it's government's role to create the most competitive business environment possible. If we do that well, we will attract investment from Albertans, we will attract investment from Canadians outside our province, and we will then attract investment from global investors that will invest in this province, that will create opportunities for Albertans, that will create opportunities for Albertans to pursue their careers, to pursue their passions, to raise a family, perhaps, in the province and put down deep roots in this province of hope.

Mr. Speaker, this province has been blessed. We in Alberta have been blessed with abundant resources. They provided wealth for us for decades. In spite of the incredible value of those resources, our greatest asset in this province is the creative, innovative, self-responsible, entrepreneurial, resilient character of Albertans. It's because of the character of Albertans that I can confidently say that the best days of this province are ahead of us, and I can confidently say to the next generation that there's a great future for you in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there's approximately a minute and 30 seconds remaining in Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has the call.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity. I did notice the Finance minister use the word "hope" a few times, and what it seemed over the course of this pandemic – what we saw was this government hoping that somebody else will step up and do their job for them, specifically the federal government. They kept waiting for the federal government to do something rather than, for instance, helping small businesses. I know Edmonton-Decore has a lot of small businesses, and I can say unequivocally that for every small business that I talked to, the \$4.7 billion large corporate handout didn't help them.

Matter of fact, I was just in a flower shop the other day buying flowers for my wife for our anniversary, speaking with the owner. The \$4.7 billion hasn't helped her in one way whatsoever. It hasn't driven more customers to her shop. Corporate entities haven't called her up asking to double their orders because that was able to do it. You know, we talked about business investment coming back into this province. You know I always love to talk about the gaming sector. This was an organization that was going to come here, and we chased them away when we took away the digital media tax credit. Billions of dollars there that we just left on the table.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes Standing Order 29(2)(a). Is there anyone else wanting to join in the debate?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I see by the clock on the wall; it's getting late, and I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, October 21, 2020.

The Speaker: I assume that you're asking to adjourn debate on Government Motion 42. Is that what you're asking?

Mr. Nally: Yes. That's what I meant.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: I can only imagine that the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity is now rising to move adjournment.

Mr. Nally: Now I'd like to move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. Wednesday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:25 p.m.]

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