



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

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Day 55

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, October 21, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us this afternoon are guests of the Minister of Service Alberta. Please welcome Terry Milot, chair of Alberta Trade Contractors Coalition, and Sheri McLean, executive director of the Electrical Contractors Association of Alberta. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Small Business Week

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, it's Small Business Week in Alberta. Small Business Week runs October 18 to 24 and is the opportunity to celebrate all that small businesses do for our economy. It's the week where we celebrate the unsung heroes of our economy. It's the week where the 167,000 small businesses in Alberta have a spotlight shining on the work that they do every day to feed hundreds of thousands of Albertans and support their communities.

Alberta has a unique environment when it comes to small business. We have a higher rate of small businesses than the Canadian average. We have 39 small businesses for 1,000 people. In Alberta small businesses inject around a hundred billion dollars into our economy each year. They employ 530,000 Albertans, accounting for nearly a third of total private-sector employment in the province. They have a larger economic impact per capita than anywhere else in the country.

This year the theme of Small Business Week is Forging the Way Forward. Small businesses have faced struggles due to the economic and health situations that are before us. Many small-business owners have spent this year working around the clock to support their employees and their community. Throughout all of the challenges, the ingenuity and resolve of small businesses in our province is stronger than ever.

I encourage all Albertans to support the local businesses in their communities. These businesses will play a key role in Alberta's economy as we recover. Without small businesses Alberta's economy would not have grown as it has in the past, and small business will continue to be an essential part of that growth in the future. I hope that all Albertans, including the Alberta Federation of Labour, will join me in supporting all small business across this province, especially during Small Business Week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Health Minister

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, yesterday the Minister of Health suggested it's a joke, a drinking game to suggest that he is causing chaos in our health care system in the midst of a pandemic. A joke. Well, let's talk about what apparently makes him laugh. In the early days of the pandemic doctors told me about the incredible stress they were experiencing, left without a contract and at the whim of a minister who used his office and resources to attack them as greedy, entitled, and corrupt.

I've seen doctors fight back tears as they made heart-wrenching decisions to cut back their services, close the practice they'd built, and leave the patients and communities they'd served for years and had hoped to serve for years more. I've spoken to the families of children with complex medical needs who faced the potential loss of doctors who looked after them since their birth. I've met with nurses who long before the pandemic told me about regularly working short-handed and being called in for extra shifts and about the stress they felt trying to maintain quality of care with bare-bones staffing. Now this minister plans to make that worse.

As COVID case numbers rise higher than ever before, health care workers continue stepping up to fill the gaps, taking extra shifts as colleagues are forced to isolate. That stress is enough, but this minister adds the pressure of not knowing whether they'll even have a job next year, a minister who tears up contracts, who calls front-line health care providers on their personal phones to continue arguments, who shows up in their driveways to berate them over a Facebook meme, who brazenly denies an exodus of doctors, that Albertans can see happening with their own eyes.

So there is a joke here, Mr. Speaker, a cruel one that's played on Albertans every day that this minister is allowed to remain in his office, but Albertans aren't laughing, and they won't forget, and that's something this government would best keep in mind.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Irrigation Infrastructure and Economic Recovery

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the COVID-19 pandemic the dedication and perseverance of our agriculture sector has kept grocery stores stocked and Albertans fed. Rural Albertans are known for their work ethic, never-say-die attitude, and ability to roll with the punches. These attitudes stem from our pioneer spirit, that makes Alberta what it is today. Our agriculture sector contributes \$9.2 billion in GDP and employs more than 77,000 Albertans. Further, the irrigation industry contributes \$3.6 billion annually to Alberta's GDP, representing 20 per cent of agrifood-sector jobs, and supports roughly 56,000 jobs.

As we recover, we can't ignore these numbers, Mr. Speaker. That's why earlier this month I was proud to join the Premier, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, and colleagues, who announced the largest investment in irrigation infrastructure in our province's history; \$815 million is being invested into modernizing irrigation infrastructure and increasing provincial water storage capacity. This investment will greatly benefit my riding as the largest irrigation district in the province is in Brooks-Medicine Hat. I am incredibly proud of the agriculture work that my constituents do, and I am so pleased to see this investment moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, this historic investment comes at a time when Albertans need it most. Over 8,000 jobs will be created, 6,800 will be full-time or permanent. It will also create 1,300 immediate construction jobs that will get Albertans back to work right now. An estimated 200,000 acres of irrigated land will be added to Alberta's vast landscape, adding value and increasing yields for

Alberta's farmers. Modernizing and building new irrigation infrastructure will increase crop production, improve water use and efficiency, and enhance water storage capacity. It will also enhance water security and provide flood protection, creating certainty for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, this government is investing in the future. By investing in irrigation infrastructure, we will ensure that our farmers, ranchers, and irrigation districts will be better positioned to meet the increasing demands for agrifood products and be ready to grow for the future.

Thank you.

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting that in 2020 while the pandemic rages across our country and around the world, during an unprecedented economic downturn, many jurisdictions across our country and indeed around the world are investing in postsecondary education, looking for that to be an essential part of the economic recovery of that jurisdiction. But not in Alberta. In our province we have seen two successive budgets cutting more than \$110 million from our postsecondary institutions.

Mr. Speaker, I think most Albertans recognize that the key to economic recovery and the key to our future is education, postsecondary education specifically. We have a cohort of thousands of young people that are in grade school now that will need postsecondary positions in the next few years. By undermining the budgets of our postsecondary institutions now, we are shortchanging the education that these students will need, and we are undermining perhaps the strongest tool we have for economic recovery here in the province, which is investing in postsecondary education.

I call upon this UCP government now to reconsider the cuts that they are making to our institutions. These are not just administrative cuts or trimming the fat, Mr. Speaker. These are fundamental cuts that will change our postsecondary institutions for the worse for a generation. We still have a chance to reverse that decision. I implore this government on behalf of the people of Alberta to not make destructive cuts to our postsecondary here in this province.

Thank you.

1:40

Police

Mr. Ellis:

I have been where you fear to be,
I have seen what you fear to see,
I have done what you fear to do,
All these things I have done for you.

I'm the man you lean upon,
The man you cast your scorn upon,
The man you bring your troubles to,
All these men I've been to you.

The man you ask to stand apart,
The man you feel should have no heart,
The man you call the man in blue,
But I am just a man, just like you.

And through the years I've come to see
That I'm not what you ask of me,
So take this badge and take this gun.
Will you take it, will anyone?

And when you watch a person die
And hear a battered child cry,
Then do you think you could be
All the things you ask of me?

Mr. Speaker, this was written by an anonymous person. I recognize that there have been times where officers have been human beings and have just made mistakes. However, police services such as in the city of Calgary have mechanisms in place to hold those officers accountable. Police officers have left their homes each and every day in order to serve and protect the community. They accept that this is just part of the job. Is there any other job that could have that outcome every single day, where they put their lives on the line?

I echo the comments made by our Justice minister earlier this fall when he said that police reform should be the approach, not a reduction in funding. We need to come together to see where things can be improved, to adopt best practices. Mr. Speaker, community policing is a level of engagement with the community. By defunding the police service, you only hurt the community. The government is committed to be a role model for the rest of the world, to show that law enforcement is indeed an extension of the community and it will be the foundation for a safe and secure society. [some applause]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Right-to-work Laws and Legislation

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know the COVID-19 pandemic is causing high levels of stress and anxiety for Albertans. Unfortunately, this UCP government seems determined to make things worse. From jamming through legislation to hijacked pensions to last week telling 11,000 front-line workers that their jobs are at risk to today releasing information that 930 other disability workers, jobs, and others are at risk, this government has attacked working Albertans over and over again. Most recently, just this past weekend, the UCP overwhelmingly passed party policy to advocate for American-style right-to-work legislation.

Right-to-work laws are designed to weaken worker rights, break unions, and lower wages. We do not need a crystal ball to know what they would do to Alberta; we can simply look south of the border to the more than 20 states which have right-to-work legislation on the books right now. In states with right-to-work laws there are lower wages, lower median household incomes, lower rates of economic growth, higher levels of income inequality, and even higher rates of workplace fatalities. American-style right-to-work legislation is the wrong direction for Alberta. We need to be supporting our economic growth, including supporting workers and their rights.

Killing jobs and driving down wages is what the UCP government is becoming known for, but it's the opposite of what Alberta needs. This UCP government has been ruinous for the Alberta economy. This Premier and his UCP cabinet would rather give a \$4.7 billion handout to corporations than support working Albertans. Rather than building Alberta workers up, this government is only trying to further enrich their already wealthy friends. They are doing so on the backs of everyday Albertans, and those backs are close to breaking, Mr. Speaker. Right to work is actually right to exploit workers.

Thank you.

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

Navratri

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the significant Navratri festival the great Mother Goddess Durga is worshipped for nine days, and it is one of the most celebrated festivals among many Hindus, Sikhs, and many other religions around the world. October 17 marks the beginning of Navratri, where thousands of participating individuals around the world celebrate the triumph of Mother Goddess Durga over the buffalo-headed demon Mahisasura. The festival features nine days of praying and participating in rituals, creating a positive vibrancy, generating a festive and fun atmosphere.

However, devotees this year will celebrate Navratri differently because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some may choose to celebrate online or stick to small gatherings with their loved ones. Regardless, public togetherness remains as we demonstrate resiliency. As a proud and practising Hindu I am truly honoured to celebrate with my fellow constituents and Albertans.

Tens of thousands of followers are proud to call Alberta home and contribute so much to its decades of prosperity and cultural diversity. Our government welcomes you and your loved ones with open arms. We are very fortunate to live in a country that promotes diversity and multiculturalism and that allows us the freedom of religion and to celebrate it publicly. As we rejoice in the celebration of other practices and traditions, we foster acceptance between people and form bonds that cannot be broken. That is why I am proud to call this province my home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Renaud: I'd like to share portions of a letter I received from an Albertan.

I was a happy, well-mannered, geeky child. I was also a competitive gymnast for eight years and trained 20-plus hours a week on top of school. When I graduated high school in 2008, I decided I wanted to be a nurse. I was accepted at MRU, so I moved from my hometown of Grande Prairie to Calgary. Nursing school, from what I can remember, was great. I had good grades, loved the work and my new life.

Gradually, since I was no longer a competitive athlete, I became controlling of my food. I got to the point that I would not eat for a month at a time and only have half a cup of water a day. After two successful years of nursing school, I was extremely underweight at 83 pounds and was forced to an in-patient treatment centre, meaning I'm in the hospital from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. I did this for many years. Very slowly I veered away from anorexia, but I'd become more and more depressed and also leaned towards self-harm. The depression was there from the start. According to my doctor's letters for the AISH application, I had about 90 ER admissions, about 15 one-month hospital admissions, and three surgeries due to self-harm.

The past decade has torn me apart. I don't remember most of my ER visits. Mental health has stolen my dreams, my career dreams mostly. I applied to AISH in 2020. I was denied. I appealed and was finally accepted. I was so relieved knowing that I had a stable and guaranteed source of income and medical benefits. Now with the UCP's constant threatening of AISH recipients, especially for those that are on it for mental health reasons, I have been living in fear. I have suicidal thoughts. If the UCP does cut off people who are on it for mental health reasons, I literally lose everything.

Premier, disabled Albertans deserve clear and transparent information based on facts. They're frightened. Please speak to them.

Federal Energy Policies

Mr. Barnes: In 2016 the federal Liberal government announced the clean fuel standard in the background to the carbon tax. Not much was made of it at the time as it was in the early stages, and it was not ready for implementation. Unfortunately, we are now much closer to it becoming reality. Mr. Speaker, it wasn't enough for Prime Minister Trudeau to try and injure our energy industry with the unconstitutional carbon tax. Now he is going further, increasing our industry's expenses by capping emissions and creating credits. Yes, this is the old cap-and-trade concept coming back to once again haunt us. Some environmentalists wanted the carbon tax. Others thought the cap-and-trade system would work. Our Prime Minister's response? Do both; double the damage.

If there was ever any doubt that the Prime Minister was still trying to phase out the oil sands, this should put all doubts to rest. Of course, we know that people's habits will still not change because of this. It will increase the costs on industry. It will increase the costs on families and consumers, and people will have to make harder decisions about whether to heat their home, drive to work, buy food. It will increase costs for all families. Once again the Prime Minister introduces policies that our neighbours to the south are not and that will make it even harder for us to compete in these key industries, the investment and the jobs that they bring.

With scandal after scandal, tax after tax, I hope that people across Canada will tire of this endless attack on something as necessary as staying warm in the winter. We need to be responsible with taxpayers' money. We need to create a competitive environment to attract investment and create jobs, especially during these times. Mr. Speaker, Alberta can try to increase our competitiveness all we want, but we seem to be trying to tread water with the anchor of Ottawa's policies tied around our feet.

Oral Question Period

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

Economic Recovery Plan

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're in the middle of a jobs crisis like no other, and the Premier's only plan is to double down on his failed \$4.7 billion corporate handout. Albertans are seeing a one-trick pony, and, boy, do they ever feel tricked. He claimed they would create 55,000 jobs and billions and billions of new investment, but the plan has been on the books for months, and we've seen no new jobs, no new investment. Premier, if this is sound policy, would you please table any economic analysis showing the jobs created by the handout over the last 18 months? Anything.

1:50

Mr. Kenney: Well, no, I won't, Mr. Speaker. I can't because there is no such thing as a corporate handout. There is no such thing as a \$4.7 billion corporate tax cut. What there is is Alberta's Recovery Plan. We're the only province to have published an ambitious plan for economic recovery to get out of this, the largest global economic contraction in nine decades, a central element of which is giving Alberta the most attractive environment for new job-creating business investment and doing so in a year when there are precious little corporate profits to tax.

Ms Notley: Well, spoiler alert, Mr. Speaker: the other reason he won't release it is because there's nothing. There's nothing of the kind. We FOIPed it; it's not there.

Here's what Albertans got when he gave away \$4.7 billion: kids with autism with no help in school, retirees with no drug coverage, students who can't afford tuition, and today we just learned they're firing hundreds of people who take care of the most severely, severely disabled Albertans. Premier, why are you choosing to reward CEOs and foreign shareholders faster at the expense of hard-working Albertans and the most vulnerable of Alberta citizens?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we are in the midst of an unprecedented economic and jobs crisis, and the NDP's only response is to raise taxes on job creators and to raise income taxes. If she wants economic studies, I'd be happy to table the econometric analysis that validated and supported the job-creation tax cut, for example that one produced by University of Calgary economist Bev Dahlby, which estimates it will lead over four years to the creation of 55,000 full-time jobs in the private sector. Maybe that's why the NDP hates it, because this will create private-sector jobs and not more government union jobs.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, 18 months, not one job.

Now, I agree that money is tight. All governments are facing these pressures. That's why we must make sure that economic and fiscal plans have real and tangible returns on investment. But here's the Premier's ROI: a shrinking economy, a deficit that doubled before the pandemic, head offices moving south, investment moving east, tens of thousands of people being fired in the private sector, zero new jobs, and an unrelenting attack on Albertans. Why won't this Premier admit that he is failing on the economy and just try something else – anything – to support Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, again, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to actually listen to some of the most respected economists in the country, they have said publicly and repeatedly that the most effective way to bring new job-creating investment to Alberta is by reducing the tax burden on job creators. That is the analysis of Professor Dahlby, Professor McKenzie, Professor Mintz, Professor Tombe, Professor Leach, multiple think tanks. In the meantime the NDP wants us to raise business taxes by a third and to massively increase personal income taxes in the midst of a deep recession. That's just dumb.

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

Economic Diversification

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans don't want politicized musings; they want performance reports. It's been 18 months. Why is he afraid of providing one? Last night the Finance minister said the word "diversification" so many times, it sounded like he was learning a new language. He tried to claim it was always this government's plan to diversify, but here's a headline from a year ago: Alberta Finance minister says diversifying revenues away from oil and gas was a long-term luxury. Premier, you spent a year cutting and cancelling programs that were working. Will you admit now to Albertans that you were wrong?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the socialist leader opposite, who created a massive jobs crisis by raising taxes on everything, now personally attacks some of our country's leading academic economists as engaging in "politicized musings." Shame on her. Why doesn't she respect the expert opinion of those leading economists?

But, Mr. Speaker, our economic recovery package is much broader than the job-creation tax cut. It involves the single largest

building program in our history: \$10 billion alone this year, creating 50,000 jobs, red tape reduction, sector strategies on petroleum . . .

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier wants to rewrite his talking points – makes sense; they weren't working – but facts matter. Innovation and research, \$130 million: gone. Targeted tax credits, \$74 million: gone. Renewable energy, \$214 million: gone. Artificial intelligence, \$66 million: gone. Petrochemical diversification, \$225 million: gone. Postsecondary, a billion dollars: gone. Those are entire industries and workforces that have now been abandoned to B.C. and Ontario. Premier, when will you admit that the only thing you're diversifying is the types of businesses leaving this province?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what an incredible jumble of mistruths. Postsecondary education is now gone in Alberta according to the Leader of the Opposition. We continue to spend more on postsecondary institutions than any other Canadian province per capita by a country mile. Artificial intelligence: we just made additional investments in supporting artificial intelligence. Petrochemical diversification: we have expanded the incentive for petrochemical diversification. If she wants jobs like that, how about she stand up and join us in asking Justin Trudeau to repeal his plastics ban and the clean fuel standards?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the Premier read his own documents, his own fiscal documents. I also suggest that he stop going around cutting \$60 million here and then throwing himself a tickertape parade when he puts a million dollars back in. Don't you think it is time for Albertans to get an honest answer from their Premier about what he's actually doing to diversify the economy instead of playing these manipulative games? When exactly can Albertans expect that from you, Mr. Premier? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I understand. We all know why the socialists are angry: because Albertans repudiated their tax-hiking, job-killing economic disaster. We have inherited both that disaster and the largest contraction in the world economy in nearly a century. We are acting with boldness and ambition through the largest build . . . [interjection] They're laughing. Fifty-thousand people out there working today in good construction jobs because of our unprecedented investment in infrastructure, the largest increase in venture capital in the Calgary tech sector in history just revealed today: there's a lot of good news; they don't want to celebrate it.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Private Health Care Services

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to this Premier, it's always someone else's fault. But, you know, there is a job crisis; we agree with that. What he fails to understand is that he is contributing to it. He is pushing 11,000 Albertans out of their jobs in our hospitals during a pandemic. These Albertans do essential work during the most difficult and dangerous time our hospitals have ever faced. It makes no sense. Will the Premier overrule the Member for Calgary-Acadia and tell him that firing 11,000 hospital workers in an economic crisis and in a pandemic is cruel, irresponsible, and downright stupid?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government was elected with the largest democratic mandate in history on a platform to more efficiently operate our health care system, in part through

competitive contracting of support services such as laundry, food, and laboratory services. We are keeping that commitment so that we can find savings to reallocate to patient care at the front lines, every cent. Only the NDP thinks that government bureaucrats are the only people who can clean, do the laundry, produce food, and do support services. We believe the private sector can do so more efficiently and redistribute that money to the front lines.

Ms Notley: The Premier calls these people, quote: ancillary services and bureaucrats. In fact, the 11,000 people he is firing are primarily women, primarily Albertans of colour. I've got news for the rural MLAs over there: a disproportionate number of them are your constituents. To the Premier: have you done a shred of analysis about the impact of these massive firings on rural economies, or did you do the same amount of work you did before your failed \$4.7 billion corporate handout, which is none?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we absolutely did analysis on the fact that the NDP had driven this province into a fiscal and jobs crisis. If we do not act to bring some order back to our finances, ultimately Alberta will face very deep and severe cuts, including to front-line services. Here's a bit of analysis. If the NDP proceeded with their plan to nationalize laundry services so their union boss friends could make more union dues, guess what would happen? We'd have to spend 200 million tax dollars buying new laundry machines. It makes no sense.

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier claims that firing 11,000 front-line health care workers, mostly in rural Alberta, will save \$600 million. The problem is that his own documents contradict that claim, and what's even more likely is that we will pay the private sector a premium for taking on the hazards of working in a hospital during a pandemic. This decision doesn't save money. It's purely ideological. It endangers the employment security of 11,000 people, most of whom are in rural Alberta, and it will create chaos. Premier, why do you keep attacking health care in the middle of a pandemic? It's you who should lay off.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this party is doing exactly the opposite. Here's the difference. The NDP's single-minded obsession is with maximizing union dues for their affiliated union bosses. This government's single-minded obsession in health care is maximizing patient care, so we are taking . . . [interjections] Yes. We are going to end a government-union monopoly on laundry and support services to deliver those things more efficiently in order to move that money to patient care on the front lines. It's the right thing to do.

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

**Premier's Speech Writer
Government Curriculum Adviser**

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier. Paul Bunner wrote that residential school survivors made up a bogus genocide story for their own financial gain and said that First Nations have a sorry excuse for a culture. He published an antiblack racist slur and said that race is the defining element of violent crime in Canada. Bunner made a long career of writing hateful rants against anyone who didn't look like him. Should we judge the Premier by the company he keeps? Why didn't the Premier fire his racist speech writer Paul Bunner?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, one of the most, frankly, disgusting things about the contemporary left is their willingness to attack anybody with whom they disagree as a racist. The leader of the NDP just finished attacking some of Canada's leading academic economists as, quote, providing politicized commentary in their economic analysis, and now the NDP is attacking a highly published PhD in Canadian history who has taught at McGill, at the University of Ottawa, at Concordia, and at Queen's. Shame on them.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier also appointed another one of his racist friends to rewrite Alberta's curriculum. Chris Champion, his former federal staffer, says that teaching First Nations perspectives is a fad and wrote that residential school survivors have a preoccupation with victimhood. He says that the blanket exercise brainwashes children into thinking of themselves as settlers stealing the land. Champion argues that Alberta students shouldn't be taught about residential schools. Will the Premier denounce this attempt to deny genocide and explicitly commit to keeping residential schools in the curriculum?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that is a jumble of defamation that would be actionable if it was said outside this place. Professor Champion, a PhD from McGill, widely published, has taught at McGill University, the University of Ottawa, and other leading Canadian universities, a respected Canadian historian, one of many people who are offering input into the content of the revised curriculum, which will obviously include material about the Indian residential schools in Canada.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The evidence is plain to see in Chris Champion's work, which suggests countless examples of English, French, Dutch, and Italian artworks for students to study and long lists of European monarchs and battles for students to memorize, but there's not a single mention of the art or the culture or the history or even the names of indigenous people in Alberta, and Champion explicitly argues against teaching students about residential schools. Why are the Premier and his racist friend Chris Champion so determined to erase Alberta's indigenous history and only teach the history of long-dead white men?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, when the NDP attacks everybody with whom they disagree as a racist, you know what they do? They diminish the meaning of racism, and that is a dangerous thing to do. Let's recall. The reason we are engaged in revising the curriculum is because the NDP wanted a social studies curriculum that made zero mention of the basic facts of Canada: Confederation, the rule of law, parliamentary democracy. Imagine this: zero mention of our military history, which he just mocked. I think young Canadians should learn about Vimy Ridge and Dieppe. Unlike the NDP, we should honour the sacrifices of those who defended this country. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Medicine Hat Family Medicine Maternity Clinic

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government recognizes that strong families are a vital part of what makes a strong community and, furthermore, a strong province. At the heart of these families are the strong Alberta women who created them.

Bringing children into the world is stressful and can put a lot of pressure on families, which is why it is essential that women, especially in rural Alberta, have equitable access to prenatal and maternal care. To the Minister of Health: what is Alberta's government doing to address the concerns of rural Alberta women like the ones that I represent as they plan their family's future?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. This is, of course, an important issue to the people of Medicine Hat, so let me be clear. Obstetrical services will continue at the hospital. This clinic operates under a unique arrangement between the former health region and the PCN, the primary care network, from about 15 years ago. There's nothing else like it in the province. The PCN this spring announced that they're going to stop funding it based on their own priorities. AHS is willing to continue supporting the clinic. The PCN has provided funding through next July to allow for that transition, and we need all those parties to work together for that transition.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the recent report about possible closure of the Medicine Hat family medicine maternity clinic that has been circulating and given that this story has created a lot of fear, worry, and uncertainty among my constituents in Brooks-Medicine Hat and further given that as a young woman who hopes to one day bring many children into the community, I was also concerned when I heard the news that this clinic, that has been in our community for 17 years, is under threat of closure, to the minister: can you please update my constituents on the status of the Medicine Hat family medicine maternity clinic?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, obstetrical services will continue in Medicine Hat. This is not a decision of the government or of AHS. We are continuing to give the PCNs the same \$62 per patient per year. I respect the mandate of the PCNs to set priorities. I think there's a solution to be found here, and I would ask that the PCN join in the discussion with the physicians and AHS as well to find an option to continue this service. My department is also willing to be part of that solution, for example, by transitioning the AHS clinical stipend paid to the group of doctors to an ARP or other financial arrangement with them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given the considerable amount of feedback that I've received from my constituents on this important matter and given that petitions have been signed to ensure that these critical services continue and given that families and communities depend on having access to well-utilized obstetrical services and further given that the need for cost savings is a reality but acknowledging that this cannot come at the expense of a good standard of care, which I know is important for our government, to the Minister of Health: can you assure my constituents today that access to timely obstetrical support and services will continue and remain intact in Medicine Hat for rural Albertans?

Mr. Shandro: Yes, I can, Mr. Speaker, and I also would like to say this about this clinic: I want to see this service continue in a sustainable form for the people of Medicine Hat. I believe it can continue, but let's be clear. This is an arrangement provided to no other doctors in Alberta. In other communities family doctors provide

maternity care through a range of funding and practice models. That does not mean that this clinic has to close, but there are many other models for this service. The Medicine Hat clinic can adapt, and they can continue if the physicians are willing to join in a discussion about the options with the PCN and with AHS.

Public Service Size

Ms Renaud: Earlier today we learned that the UCP government is deliberately destroying another 930 Alberta jobs. These Albertans protect communities from wildfires, support Alberta farms and 4-H programs, and care for the most vulnerable members of our society. What is wrong with this Premier and this government? They hand out \$4.7 billion of taxpayers' money to profitable corporations and shareholders, then throw another 930 Alberta workers into unemployment lines during a public health crisis.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The notice of these reductions in positions is really just follow-through of reductions that were signalled in Budget 2019 and Budget 2020. As we found efficiencies in delivering government services, it has resulted in some reduction in terms of the size of the public service. The vast majority of reductions will be obtained through attrition as government employees find other opportunities.

2:10

Ms Renaud: Given that this Premier is paying for his corporate handout by cutting programs for disabled Albertans in Red Deer, Edmonton, Calgary, moving ahead with his cruel plan to relocate residents in group homes against their will and given that this Premier will also close McCullough Centre for homeless men in Gunn, a treatment centre that has the capacity to help dozens of Albertans, why is this Premier so heartless as to close a facility that helps people who literally have nothing to make his rich friends slightly richer?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The decision to close McCullough Centre next February was made after careful consideration of the costs and effectiveness of the facility. Fewer than 15 people are now using McCullough Centre, and there are 63 staff at the centre. We will continue to help support these people and connect them with appropriate supports. This funding can then be refocused to serve people with the most critical needs.

Ms Renaud: Given that I actually quite liked the Premier's phrase a little earlier, that's a jumble of mistruths. The fact is . . .

The Speaker: I'm very confident that that was a preamble. I encourage you to not use them as you do know the rules.

Ms Renaud: Given that I do know the rules, Albertans understand what's happening. Given that they see every day – they see it: government says one thing; what happens on the ground is quite another. We've known it's been happening for months. Mr. Speaker, given the fact that Albertans know exactly what's happening, I would like this government to just stand up and say: is there a plan at all to provide clarity to Albertans, or are you just going to keep spinning?

The Speaker: Much better.

The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government values the incredible work that ministry staff and community partners do every day to make life better for all Albertans, and we especially appreciate how hard they work during this pandemic. We need to co-ordinate our work to ensure front-line services and programs are sustainable now but also into the future. We do this in part by finding operational efficiencies that enable staff reductions while improving services for all Albertans.

School COVID-19 Response and Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: Students and families are voting with their feet after this current UCP Education minister failed to provide a safe re-entry plan for schools. Edmonton public alone reports roughly 5,000 fewer students registered for school this fall than projected, and all of the large urban boards are reporting significant numbers of missing students. Can the minister say how many students have vanished from Alberta schools this year and what measures she has taken to ensure that these young people are actually receiving an education somewhere?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. It is always disappointing to continue to hear from the opposition as they play politics with the re-entry program. We have a very solid, strong re-entry program. Parents and their students have chosen many facets, whatever suits them best, whether it's online learning, whether it is one of the many choices that we benefit from in education here in Alberta. I'm proud to say that right now our transmission rates are very, very low within schools.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the question to the speaker was about the number of students registered anywhere, registered online, registering people – we have thousands of missing students in this province. The question was about whether the minister is actually following up to ensure they get an education. Given that the minister has downplayed the realities of COVID-19 in Alberta classrooms and hallways and given that she's failed to hire more staff and given that she prioritized a \$128 million cut from school budgets at the beginning of the pandemic and laid off more than 20,000 education workers in the spring to pay for her \$4.7 billion failed corporate handout, will the minister clearly commit today that she will not use a temporary drop in funding to cut even further?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every school authority in this province is seeing an increase in their funding, roughly \$120 million across the province. School authorities received an additional \$250 million in accelerated capital maintenance and renewal funding, of which \$15 million was used for COVID-19 specific upgrades, \$44 million for HVAC and ventilation projects. Taxpayers also funded \$10 million in PPE. As well, we have 363 million taxpayer dollars sitting in school board reserves that I have made available to school divisions to utilize in COVID-related costs.

Ms Hoffman: Given that someday a vaccine will be available that will allow more Albertans to return to their jobs and schools with confidence and given that this will create a sudden surge in enrolment in Alberta school districts across Alberta and given that the minister's new three-year rolling average formula will not respond to a large influx quickly, will the minister clearly commit

today that when enrolment does rise, she will not cut per-pupil funding even further than she already has?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we have a well-funded education system. We had it pre-COVID. We will have it post-COVID. I'm very committed to that, to ensuring that the school divisions have the supports necessary to ensure that they have the ability to provide excellent education to every single student in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler has a question.

Municipal Assessment Review

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has been a tough year for everyone, and I know that it has been particularly difficult for both Alberta's energy companies and our municipalities. To make their troubles worse, there has been much uncertainty with the municipal assessment review. On the one hand, municipalities have valid concerns about their overall tax structure and viability while energy companies have real concerns regarding competitiveness, tax fairness, and, ultimately, their survival. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: based on your announcement Monday, how have you balanced these competing concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation has risen.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The one thing that Albertans always tell me is that they want their politicians to listen. Well, I'd like to quote Stettler county reeve Larry Clarke, who told the *East Central Alberta Review*, quote: they listened on the assessment for oil and gas. You bet we did. The Minister of Municipal Affairs held town halls across this province to engage with over 300 municipalities. Changes to the assessment model review addressed both industry competitiveness and municipal viability across Alberta.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's recovery plan focuses on creating jobs and investing in our industries, including oil and gas, and given that municipalities are partners and energy companies are important allies in our economic recovery, to the Minister of Transportation: how will our government work with both municipalities and energy companies to grow the economy and create stable jobs for Albertans in my riding of Drumheller-Stettler and across the province?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the revised assessment model review is a tailored solution that targets supports to low-producing wells in the province, which will help industry bridge this time of economic uncertainty. The changes will also give energy companies a three-year tax break to drill new wells and pipelines. It will also eliminate the well-drilling tax. We will continue to provide shallow gas producers a 35 per cent assessment reduction. Arriving at such a win-win solution with both the rural municipalities and the energy industry was the result of our commitment to consult with and listen to partners on both sides, and I thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our government has consulted with industry and over 300 municipalities along with the RMA and the AUMA to come to this balanced compromise – and the Minister of Municipal Affairs has been clear that this is not

the end of consultations, that this is the beginning – and given that the minister has outlined budget certainty for municipalities over the next three years, to the same minister: how will you use the three years to ensure every voice is heard to manage this transition fairly and equitably for Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister and our government will continue to listen. The Minister of Municipal Affairs' first decision when she was sworn in was to pause the assessment model review and to listen. The minister hopped in a car and travelled across Alberta to meet with over 300 municipalities. She also met with many industry stakeholders like the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the Explorers and Producers Association of Canada, the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association, and many more. The minister is just getting started, and I would call it so far an impressive start.

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

Medication Coverage for Ambulatory Patients

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 13 the Minister of Health said, quote: what we've committed to with Albertans is that nobody is going to ever be forced in Alberta to pay for anything. But at the very same time this minister is rolling out a plan called standardizing access to medications for ambulatory patients, or STAMP, which will indeed force cancer patients, Crohn's patients, people with multiple sclerosis, and many other Albertans to pay for medically necessary life-saving medication. How can anyone take this minister seriously or take him at his word when what he says is so different from what he actually does?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, the AHS review, which was released in February and provided to us in 2019 after doing all that work throughout 2019, provided clear evidence and opportunities where our health system can do better in terms of costs and efficiency. That was our commitment to work with AHS, working with them to find those opportunities where we can make sure that patients are getting the best care that they can in this province. Quite frankly, if we are going to be spending world-class amounts on our health care system, Albertans expect world-class results, and that's what we're going to continue to provide to our patients.

2:20

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this minister apparently has no answer for a program that's going to charge Albertans for life-saving and -supporting medication, given that the STAMP program manual reminds employees that AHS sites have a cash office or a reception desk to take payments or that if they refuse to pay, they'll be issued an invoice, and given that the STAMP manual says that \$2.3 million in AHS costs each year will be, quote, transitioned to ambulatory patients or their insurance plans, why is this minister forcing American-style health care onto Albertans by forcing them to pay out of pocket for life-saving medication?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, any patient that has any emergency or urgent care: none of that would be changing at all. Let me be clear as well that with the implementation plan that AHS tabled with us in August, which we announced recently, because everything has changed with the pandemic, AHS has been instructed to proceed with caution and to proceed carefully, with only a portion of their implementation plan, to make sure that patients are going to be able

to continue to get the best results for them and making sure that the system is centred and focused on patients as opposed to institutions.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, given that medications for breast cancer, bone cancer, osteoporosis, Crohn's disease, brain injuries, cerebral palsy, or multiple sclerosis are not optional but are crucial measures to keep these patients out of the emergency room or worse – that is important care, Minister – and given that this minister's plan explicitly calls for those treatments to be shifted onto private health insurance plans, well, then perhaps the minister can clarify if the private health benefit plans brokered by the company of which he's part owner would at least cover the cost of these treatments.

Mr. Shandro: I think I was just accused of being a part owner in an insurance company, Mr. Speaker. This is so insane. This is so ridiculous. The member comes into this room and can't help himself to speak untruths like that. This is completely ridiculous, and this is what the NDP, and in particular their Health critic, have devolved themselves into. They cannot be honest with patients, they cannot tell the truth on these issues, and it's really disappointing that all they have left is to try their best to scare patients.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton–North West I have.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These last two budgets from this government: they've slashed budgets to our postsecondary institutions. Cuts to funding resulted in job losses, lower quality of education, and hurting the reputation of our schools. There are more than 3,700 jobs lost in Alberta's institutions just this year. These cuts to postsecondary put our economic recovery at risk as well. To the Minister of Advanced Education: will you stop leaving our institutions to fend for themselves and commit to stop budget cuts?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to admit I'm a little confused. I'm hoping the member opposite can go back and do some more investigation into the budget documents because I heard earlier that we've cut a billion dollars in Advanced Education. I really have no words to answer that because, you know, unless that was articulated on the back of a napkin or in some fantasyland, I don't know where the member opposite is getting his information from. That being said, we are working very closely with our institutions to support and strengthen their activities. I know that the U of A has recently bumped up in international rankings, and we're going to continue working . . .

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that I've been getting my information from the 26 universities, colleges, and polytechnics across this province, including Olds College, which I visited last week, and they have said without any compromise that this minister is compromising the quality of postsecondary education here in the province of Alberta, will this Minister of Advanced Education for once stand up for our universities, colleges, and polytechnics and stand up to the Premier's office, which demonstrates nothing but contempt to higher education in Alberta?

Mr. Nicolaidis: What I will stand up for and against is misrepresentations of the facts, Mr. Speaker. Fear and division: that's what I will stand up against, and that's all we see, unfortunately, from the members opposite. We are working with our postsecondary institutions because we believe and we know that we can deliver

services more efficiently. Have a look at the numbers. When you look at the U15, the top 15 universities across the country, our institutions here receive the most provincial funding of other institutions across the country, and we're working with them to deliver in a more efficient manner. We will absolutely deliver on that result.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that we've seen increased tuition costs, reduced program options, fewer options for people willing to advance their education and stay within this province – in fact, we're seeing a brain drain directly from the cuts that this minister has made to our postsecondary institutions – and given that this government wants to saddle young Albertans with even more debt by increasing student loan interest rates, will the minister please explain to Albertans right now why he is undermining the chance for our next generation to receive a higher education?

Mr. Nicolaides: We're actually doing the complete opposite, Mr. Speaker. We are spending more in scholarships and student awards than any other government in Alberta's history. We've created in Advanced Education two new scholarships to support students, and I know that there are activities under way in other ministries as well. As well, we are also commissioning the largest study of post-secondary education in the province's history so that we can ensure that our students here in Alberta have the access opportunities that they need and that we can deliver the services and a high-quality education that Albertans are looking for. I think the only brain drain is happening on that side of the aisle.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Landowner Property Rights

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm looking forward to our government fulfilling our campaign promises to enhance property rights in Alberta. Adverse possession, commonly known as squatters' rights, is an issue that still rears its ugly head. To think that one person could use another person's property with no compensation for a period of time and in the end has some obscure right to own it, again, without compensation, does not stand to reason. To the Minister of Justice: what is our government doing to amend the Land Titles Act to bar adverse possession claims so that Alberta no longer allows squatters to make legal claims to someone else's property?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me, through you, thank the Member for Central Peace-Notley for this important question. As you know, the United Conservative Party platform committed to protecting and upholding property rights of all Albertans. Adverse possession, commonly known as squatters' rights, currently allows a person who has occupied another's land for at least 10 years to potentially claim ownership of that particular land. We are working to do everything we can to protect the property rights of all Albertans, and I look forward to working with the member to solve this problem.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Minister. Given that no explicit right to private property exists in our Constitution and given that I have constituents that have had their plans for their property destroyed due to government regulation, totally devaluing their property with no recourse or compensation, and given that Albertans want action on property rights, not just more committees or studies looking into it, to the minister: what progress has been made to treat government

regulation changes on real property the same as government expropriation for the purposes of compensation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member once again for this very important question. In our United Conservative Party platform we made it clear that we will protect the property rights of all Albertans. I am happy to report that work is in the advanced stages to ensure that we indeed protect and respect the property rights of all Albertans. Once again, I look forward to working with the member to ensure that we bring this particular promise to fruition.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you again, Minister. Given that the right of governments to expropriate and regulate for the public good must be preserved and given that we must also safeguard the rights of private property owners and given that the government freezing the ability of property owners to develop their property how they see fit so that it doesn't interfere with future government plans, to the Minister of Justice: will this government allow private property owners to convert government attempts to restrict the development of their property into an expropriation action if they desire?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta is committed to protecting property rights and finding ways to improve property rights here in our province. In the last election we heard loud and clear from Albertans that this is an important issue, and we continue the work of ensuring those rights are protected for the benefit of all Albertans. As I mentioned before, our party committed to protecting substantially the property rights of all Albertans, and I look forward to making sure that this is a reality in our province.

Rural Obstetric Services

Member Irwin: Families in Medicine Hat have learned that the maternity clinic at their local hospital is closing after 17 years of operations, another victim of this Health minister's war on Alberta doctors. This clinic delivered hundreds of babies a year, half of all the babies born in Medicine Hat. Doctors warned the minister that this would happen as far back as March, but he didn't listen. Why is he taking maternity care away from so many parents and families in rural Alberta?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to be able to provide these answers a second time this afternoon. Obstetrical support will continue to be available to expectant mothers in Medicine Hat. Medicine Hat regional hospital will also continue to be available to support those requiring urgent obstetrical care. Funding from the ministry to the PCN has not changed. It remains consistent at \$62 per patient. This was a decision made by the primary care network. It was not related to any decision made by AHS or the government

Member Irwin: One hundred and fifteen obstetricians and gynecologists wrote to the minister in June warning him that "we are deeply worried about the long-term viability of our practices, and deeply worried about the well-being of our patients." We're hearing that this minister has also cut funding for the maternity clinic in Brooks. Just last night the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat noted that folks in her riding have a "get 'er done, do-it-yourself

spirit.” Should rural Albertans now be expected to just get ’er done and deliver their own darn babies?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, again, I’m happy to be able to provide this information a second time to the hon. member. We continue to give the PCNs the same \$62 per patient per year, and we, of course, continue to respect the mandates of the PCNs to be able to set their own priorities. We think that there’s a solution here. It’s a solution that’s going to include the PCNs sitting down with the physicians to be able to make sure that there’s going to be a solution that works for those physicians if they want to continue with that clinic. Either way obstetrical services will continue in Medicine Hat.

Member Irwin: This minister’s review of AHS also called for the closure of labour and delivery rooms in up to 28 rural hospitals. These awful cuts have been included in the AHS implementation plan right on page 58. This is a direct attack on the health of women and families, particularly in rural Alberta. Why is this UCP Minister of Health paying for his \$4.7 billion corporate handout by forcing parents in rural Alberta to leave their communities to give birth?

Mr. Shandro: Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. We are not doing that.

I’ll use this opportunity to highlight the action plan with my rural colleagues that we announced in April to enhance the amount of money that we pay for our rural physicians – \$81 million more to pay for those rural physicians, to deal with the retention or recruitment issue – for those 700 doctors we have right now working in those communities, so we can make sure that we are paying them more and also providing them more support so they can continue to choose rural Alberta, to serve those patients there.

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

Calgary Storm Damage Recovery Funding

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in northeast Calgary have been waiting for more than four months for this government to take action on the devastating hailstorm that did so much damage to their homes, but they have been told that there’s no money to support them, even with winter beginning and literally holes remaining in their roofs and sidings of their residences. Premier, you can’t hide behind the insurance companies forever. Explain to these people: why won’t you help them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that our MLAs from northeast Calgary have been spending a lot of time helping people out. The hon. member knows that through 15 major hail events under the previous NDP government, not one penny of government funding was provided. The hon. member knows that we are working with the insurance industry to try to get the claims paid. Some claims have been paid, and the ones that aren’t, we are pushing the insurance companies to get that done. I wish the hon. member would actually spend some time helping people instead of trying to scare them.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that for four months our caucus and I have been raising the concerns of those impacted by the fourth-largest natural disaster in Canadian history, for the minister’s information, and given that the Premier insists that there is no money to help those people, but there is \$4.7 billion to help big profitable corporations and there is even money to help fire up

this Premier’s embarrassing \$120 million energy war room, Premier, explain to my constituents why there is money for all your failed pet projects but no money . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the hon. member did go and pose for pictures. We all saw that. But our members have been working very hard with the victims of the hailstorm in northeast Calgary to work to get the insurance companies to fulfill their responsibilities. So far insurance companies are processing over 70,000 claims, and more than half of those are completed. We will keep working with those people right through the end. As in other disasters it sometimes takes longer than it should, but we will stick with it and help those people right until the end.

Mr. Sabir: Given that winter could cause more damage to homes with holes in them, caused by the hailstorm four months ago, and given that this Premier sits back and does nothing, and the same goes for the MLAs for Calgary-North East and Calgary-Falconridge and all other UCP MLAs from Calgary, and given that the Premier has rich friends in the insurance industry who are refusing to act to help my constituents and the Premier refuses to even pick up the phone and push them to act, to the Premier: what do you propose my constituents use to cover the holes in their homes as the snow falls?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can say is that we’ve heard about this issue from our Calgary MLAs, who’ve been reaching out to their constituents to offer them assistance. We recognize the hardship that this hailstorm has created. I can assure the member opposite that we have reached out to the Insurance Bureau of Canada, demanding that their members act responsibly and act quickly to provide support to homeowners in Calgary.

Ms Hoffman: It’s been four months.

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross is the only one with the call.

Housing for Vulnerable Albertans

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic the need for affordable housing intensified across the province. This pandemic has created the largest job crisis since the Great Depression, a job crisis that has brought economic ruin to Alberta and elevated mental health and chronic homelessness problems. Albertans without work cannot be cast aside by this government. Now more than ever we need compassionate governance that spearheads and showcases Alberta’s top-notch social service programs. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: what is the Alberta government doing to combat homelessness and ensure adequate . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children’s Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government has increased funding for homeless shelters and other programs by \$73 million during the pandemic. This money is to expand shelter capacity to accommodate people with appropriate distancing and public safety measures. It has also allowed the shelters to operate on a 24/7 basis rather than just overnight accommodation. In addition, that money is also being used to fund isolation spaces for people who cannot stay in a shelter because they have been diagnosed with COVID.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that seniors with multiple pre-existing health conditions are the hardest hit demographic by COVID-19 and given that the Alberta government is building new affordable housing across our province and given that this caucus believes that our seniors should live a dignifying life, where we prioritize their safety and comfort with access to adequate nutrition, medical care, and social interaction, Minister, what funding is the Alberta government providing to help outbreaks and prioritize the health and safety of seniors in lodges?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. Well, let me start by thanking all the staff, residents, and family members in our lodges and senior homes for working together in these unprecedented times to protect our seniors. We approved an increase of \$30 million in operating expenses to support senior operators and the increased costs required to keep our seniors safe due to COVID-19. With this funding we'll protect the staff costs, PPE, and cleaning supplies.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that nonprofits, corporations, and small businesses are doing their part to combat homelessness with remarkable success and given that this highlights what civil society and government can accomplish when they work together to prioritize the common good, Minister, Albertans need our co-operation and help. What concrete action is the Alberta government taking to support nonprofits, corporations, and small businesses to help alleviate poverty and homelessness in our province?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for the question. As part of our campaign commitment to Albertans this government has committed more than \$20 million over three years to help civil societies and nonprofit organizations recover, especially now, from COVID-19. Many of these groups have seen their traditional funding models dry up during the pandemic, and they need to transform the way they operate. That's why the Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society has been meeting with groups all across this province, to hear their ideas and recommend the best way to invest these funds for the long-term sustainability of these organizations.

2:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will proceed to Presenting Reports by Special and Standing Committees.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee I am pleased to complete the mandate of this committee by presenting the required copies of the committee's final report, which contains recommendations regarding the Public Health Act, an act that we probably all know deals in large part with issues regarding communicable diseases, pandemic emergency, and public health threats.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank members of the committee from all sides of the House for their work that they have put in over the course of the last four months. I know that at many times there was a great spirit of collaboration, and everybody came very well prepared. I would also like to acknowledge the support and the expertise provided by staff of the Legislative Assembly Office, AHS, the Ministry of Health, and, of course, all stakeholders.

Thank you very much.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to provide oral notice on two bills, Bill 39, the Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020, sponsored by the Minister of Children's Services, and oral notice of Bill 40, Forests (Growing Alberta's Forest Sector) Amendment Act, 2020, sponsored by the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta.

Bill 37 Builders' Lien (Prompt Payment) Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 37, the Builders' Lien (Prompt Payment) Amendment Act, 2020.

Construction is a multibillion-dollar part of Alberta's economy and an employer of about 1 in 10 Albertans, and it's an important part of Alberta's economic recovery. For many years members of the construction industry have been advocating for legislative changes to address prompt payment, and this legislation will take concrete steps to make prompt payment a reality. The changes proposed in this legislation will protect jobs for Albertans working in construction, and I'm looking forward to discussing this in more detail during debate.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 37 read a first time]

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

Bill 38 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a rare privilege for me to rise today and seek leave of this Assembly to introduce Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, otherwise known as the JSAA.

Mr. Speaker, in its current form the Police Act fails to contain any formal recognition of Alberta's First Nations policing services despite the fact that they have been keeping communities safe for more than two decades. This legislation contains amendments to the Police Act which would properly acknowledge the exemplary work of which we would recognize these organizations and would ensure the benefit from any changes to the Police Act that are currently under way.

The JSAA, Mr. Speaker, also proposes minor amendments to other pieces of legislation. The effects of this amendment would include allowing juror summons to be sent via e-mail, allowing

Albertans to participate in trials and hearings via telephone or video conference, changing the rules regarding the scheduling of referendums, expanding the list of offences that are eligible for civil forfeiture, and opening up the list of qualifications necessary for a Queen's Counsel appointment.

Taken together, Mr. Speaker, this legislation will streamline certain legal processes, eliminate red tape, and help make the justice system more effective and responsive. I encourage members of this Assembly, on both sides of the aisle, to support this legislation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 38.

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a first time]

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

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 35

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

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 35, the Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020.

During a typical year the government would review and update the provincial tax code to make technical changes and ensure that it's up to date, but, Mr. Speaker, I think we can all agree that this is not a typical year. Alberta's government has had to move quickly to respond to the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, an oil price crash, and a global recession. As a result, Bill 35 includes important measures that are instrumental components of Alberta's recovery plan.

Alberta businesses are facing many challenges, and one way the government can assist is to foster a business climate that helps create jobs, spur investment, and support innovation. That is why we're accelerating the job-creation tax cut and creating the innovation employment grant. By completing the job-creation tax cut a year and a half ahead of schedule, we're letting businesses and investors know Alberta is committed to being the top investment destination in Canada. In fact, Alberta is now one of the most competitive jurisdictions in North America and home to an 8 per cent corporate tax rate that is 30 per cent lower than the next lowest provincial rate.

As the economy recovers and capital deployment decisions are made, Alberta's competitive tax regime will be hard to ignore. It will stand out as a destination for new firms and those looking to expand, grow, or relocate to a business-friendly environment. Businesses here will have greater confidence and certainty as they recover because the lower corporate tax rate will free up resources to hire Albertans, invest, and grow. Mr. Speaker, the opposition likes to say that this tax cut will only help big corporations, but government data shows that about 75 per cent of the companies that benefit from the job-creation tax cut file as small businesses.

It's not just businesses that benefit from low corporate tax rates, Mr. Speaker. Recent research shows that it is workers who bear much of the cost of high corporate income taxes through lower wages and salaries. A study by the University of Calgary shows that for every \$1 increase in revenue due to a corporate tax increase, aggregate wages in Alberta decline by at least 95 cents. So it is Alberta workers who pay when corporate taxes are high.

We also know that a low business tax rate supports a diverse economy because it is actually more meaningful to nonresource sectors. This means it will encourage growth and reward success across all sectors of the economy. Alberta's low tax rate will also stand out to innovative companies who are in the process of developing and commercializing new products. It will provide a strong incentive for these companies to do their work here in Alberta instead of in other jurisdictions with higher tax regimes. The job-creation tax cut is a long-term plan that will lay the foundation for sustained economic growth and diversification. It rewards innovation and success.

2:50

That brings us to the innovation employment grant, or the IEG, which is designed to dovetail with the job-creation tax cut. Mr. Speaker, the IEG is a new program that will encourage investment in innovation, technology, and new product development but with a focus on small and medium-sized firms. It will boost investment by new and existing firms and support employment in the province. The IEG will be unique within Canada because it will provide a higher level of support to companies that increase their spending on research and development.

Specifically, it will provide Alberta companies with grants worth up to 20 per cent of qualifying research and development spending. It will be one of the most competitive grants of its kind in Canada and the only one that specifically rewards firms that increase their spending over time. The new IEG will complement the job-creation tax cut, and the two initiatives will work together to provide support to innovative businesses of all sizes and across all sectors. The IEG will offer more support to smaller companies in the early stages of operation, when they are less likely to be profitable, and as firms grow and become more established and financially successful, they will phase out of the IEG and benefit from the job-creation tax cut.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Bill 35 includes the technical details for the IEG program, including addressing the size of firms that qualify and the types of expenditures that are eligible. In order to minimize red tape and make compliance as simple as possible, expenses that qualify for the IEG will be the same as those that are eligible for the federal research and development tax credit. The innovation employment grant will be available to businesses on July 1, 2021. Bill 35 also includes a few other amendments to Alberta's tax code. Some are housekeeping items, and others parallel federal changes to ensure that Alberta's tax system is up to date and that legislation reflects current practices.

First, the general corporate tax rate is a factor in the calculation of the small-business tax rate and the dividend tax credit rate in the Alberta tax legislation, so consequential amendments are needed in response to the acceleration of the job-creation tax cut to maintain current policy regarding these other rates.

Second, the technical change to the Alberta personal income tax is needed to ensure that Alberta's legislation is consistent with the way the Canada Revenue Agency currently administers transfers of certain unused tax credits between spouses.

Finally, the bill contains provisions allowing Alberta to parallel federal extensions to tax-related time periods recently announced by the government of Canada in response to COVID-19. This important change will ensure that timelines and deadlines in our provincial tax system continue to align with the federal tax system.

Mr. Speaker, to recap, this bill will legislate the acceleration of the job-creation tax cut, reflecting the reduction of Alberta's corporate tax rate to 8 per cent effective July 1, 2020, as part of Alberta's recovery plan. It will provide details and legislation

surrounding the implementation of the innovation employment grant. It will maintain current policy regarding the small-business and dividend tax credit rates, and it will ensure that legislation reflects the existing policy regarding the transfer of unused tax credits between spouses. Finally, it will allow Alberta to parallel federal extensions to tax-related time periods. The major initiatives in Bill 35 will position Alberta's economy for recovery and growth in the years ahead.

I would like to thank all members for their time and attention to this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any hon. members looking to join the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleagues for the opportunity to engage in the first bill that I've had the opportunity to debate since this House returned after the break over the summer and early fall. I have to say that I absolutely believe that we need to be here talking about what we're doing to support a good, strong, diversified economy. However, I have deep concerns that this bill won't achieve that desired outcome.

The desired outcome for me, of course, includes making sure that we have great educational opportunities for students in schools, great opportunities for everyone to receive full and comprehensive health care so they can actively participate in society, including the workforce, making sure that diversified employment opportunities exist for students when they finish school and for new Albertans when they arrive either interprovincially or internationally, making sure that we have opportunities in our communities to support growing small-business culture.

When I reflect on what went into the lead-up to this bill, I, of course, can't help but reflect on the first budget that was brought forward by this very same Finance minister. On page 144 of that budget the minister's own internal documents, which then became public, articulated that there would be \$4.7 billion in lost revenue just from the reduction to large corporate taxes.

Just to clarify, when we talk about large corporations, it's based on profit margins. Sometimes people say, "Well, I want the small business down the street to be able to benefit from reduced taxation," and I respect that. This is not that. This is specifically focused on net profits in excess of half a million dollars per fiscal year. That's who's benefiting from this \$4.7 billion, and who's paying for it are small businesses, individuals, folks who work in Alberta who are being asked to pay more through their actual taxes because, of course, indexing or inflation creep was brought back by this minister when it was something that was fought against so ferociously in the House of Commons by the now Premier here in Alberta, something that was referred to as an insidious tax, that, of course, was returned to Alberta by the same critic of it so strongly in Ottawa, something that certainly we didn't propose when we were in government.

It wasn't something that we didn't have brought forward to us. Of course, many different options – when you say to the public service, "We want to find ways to increase revenue, we want to find ways to reduce costs, and we want to find ways to maximize the dollars that we do have available to us," of course a whole array of options come forward, but it is the job of those cabinet ministers sitting around the table and their caucus as the team that they are a part of to probe what those recommendations or options will actually do to individuals that we all represent. So when the indexing was removed and, in turn, individuals were paying more in individual income tax, that's one of the things that went towards

reducing the corporate tax, resulting in what we often refer to as this \$4.7 billion no-jobs handout.

The thing is that it wasn't tied to jobs. There were things that were tied to jobs previously. There was the Alberta investor tax credit, which proved that if you were increasing investment in your company to help grow jobs locally, you got a break. Well, that's another thing that's being cut in here, and the government has, since they brought in their proposals – they came into place the first Canada Day after the election in 2019, and what do we see? There was a promise that there were going to be 55,000 new jobs, a net increase in jobs, but what happened was that there was actually a reduction of 50,000 jobs. That's not even counting what's happened since the global pandemic struck in March, and we all know the impacts that that's had.

This is Small Business Week, and I have been visiting some of the small businesses in my riding and, you know, supporting them through purchases. A lot of small businesses that I frequented over the last five years are now gone. The landscape of 124th Street since this UCP government came into place has changed dramatically. There are still lots of great destinations, and I still am very proud to represent the area and to frequent it with my own money as well as along 118th Avenue. We have a BI there as well as along Stony Plain Road. But many, many small businesses have had to close and not just in the last six months. Many in the last six months closed as a result of exacerbated impacts of COVID, but many were already planning on closing. Their margins were very small under the current economic plan that this government has brought forward, and that doesn't reflect what they ran on in any way.

Of course, they ran on – I remember it; I remember the letters being cut out and waved around – that they were going to create jobs, that they were going to grow the economy, and that they were going to get pipelines. I want to be very clear. The connection between the economy and the oil and gas sector: I get it. I've lived here my whole life. I grew up in the north. I know there are lots of opportunities in logging in particular, in forestry as well as in oil and gas, and a lot of my friends ended up working in those sectors. Most families, actually, that stayed diversified their own incomes for their own families. Most will be farmers and they'll have forestry contracts or farmers and they'll drive the school bus or a whole variety of different combinations if you live outside of town.

3:00

If you live in town, often you'll have multiple incomes, and one of them is usually tied back to the folks that the Premier referred to today as bureaucrats. You know, these are folks who do things like running the housing management body in town, they're working to make sure that there's a school lunch program when it's safe to provide those school lunches to students in the community, they're working either half an hour to the east or half an hour to the west in one of the hospitals that exist in the region, they're providing care to their community. Often that's part of multiple jobs to support a diversified family income because it is really hard, we know, especially in rural Alberta, to have one industry as your primary income source these days.

So why is the government choosing to double down on the plan that they came up with during the election, maybe even before? They definitely said during the election that they wanted to slash corporate taxes, and they did that. They kept the commitment that they said they were going to do, but now they're doubling down on it even faster. Of course, the right thing to do would be to say: "Well, show me the evidence. Show me that this is going to work. I know it hasn't worked in the past, but show me that you've done analysis and that this is going to work moving forward because it definitely hasn't worked in the first 18 months."

We FOIPed these documents because we thought it was fair and reasonable. The government has obviously been doing analysis on this, and they wouldn't rush forward with doubling down on something that hasn't worked if they didn't have evidence showing that it would work moving forward. There were zero responsive documents from the Premier's office or Minister of Finance with regard to the successful impacts of doubling down on this plan. A piece of that is by amending in this act section 22(3)(b). I have to say that when there were no responsive documents, I was a little bit shocked, to be honest. If it was something that was so crucial and core to what we were planning on doing as a government, I would have thought that the government would have engaged and done extensive analysis and found new ways to rationalize what clearly appears to be an ideological bent. But there weren't new documents. They came back with zero responsive documents to that request. When we issued this FOIP, that was very disturbing.

We've issued other FOIPs as well. You're probably not surprised. That's one of the things opposition parties do, and it's definitely one of the things that I know that Wildrose members did previously as well.

One of the ones that we issued that I'll just review a little bit is that in June we filed an information request for the Premier's office seeking, quote, all correspondence and communications, including but not limited to e-mails, text messages, memos, briefing notes from the office of the Premier, Premier's communications office, issues management office regarding the job-creation tax cut. You would expect there would be a lot of correspondence and a lot of back and forth on something that has been touted as being such a significant pillar.

What we got basically was four responses. One was a redacted package of communications messaging from a UCP issues manager – I won't bother to say their name for *Hansard*; she's a manager – for the December job-loss numbers. Then there was another redacted issues alert and communications messaging for a UCP issues manager, the same one, for January job-loss numbers. Then there was budget messaging from the UCP deputy director of communications related to the UCP's spending restraint sent to UCP press secretaries and a transcript of a press conference in which the Premier and Finance minister announced that they were going to accelerate the corporate handout.

Again, we asked for information, back-and-forth evidence, and what we got was four communications documents, one trying to explain away devastating job losses, a second trying to explain away devastating job losses, a third telling press secretaries how to explain away the cuts that were inflicted on Albertans that were going to impact jobs and create more job losses, and then, lastly, a transcript of an announcement. That doesn't give me great confidence that a lot of work and thought was put into the policy that we are fast-tracking here today through this finance bill.

I want to take a minute to talk about choices and priorities because governing is about choices and priorities. Every day we come to this place with the responsibility to make decisions on behalf of the folks we represent. I'm sure that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, hearing about their job losses in Gunn and the impacts to services provided in that rural community – I'm sure that that wasn't an easy thing to have to defend today.

When it comes to people asking questions about choices and priorities, I have a feeling that some constituents are going to say – it was said: only 15 people. Well, what about the 15 men that we love in our community who are reaching out to get support, who've struggled, and who are at risk of devastating health outcomes if they don't continue to get treatment and also home insecurity, potentially, because it works as a shelter? Fifteen homeless men in a small

community would be a huge impact to that community or any of our communities.

What about those men and women who work there to make sure that they've got an opportunity to serve their community as well as diversify the income for their families so that if they hit a downturn in the private sector – and we've experienced this many times; for example, oil and gas will have shutdowns and layoffs – there's still somebody in the house, maybe even the person who happens to work in oil and gas as well, who has the other piece of steady income, often with health benefits, and a bit of a security net for their family because they've diversified their revenue?

Or when I think about the impacts on folks at the Michener Centre – and I know that this is another community in Red Deer. I'm sure that many people in Red Deer – they did years ago when PC governments tried to scale back and ultimately close services – say: we want to be able to have some continuity of care and support for our family members, and we also want to be able to keep working in our local communities; we don't want to have to leave Red Deer to provide this kind of care to someone in another community.

Or is it about chipping away at the incomes of all of these folks who work in these places as well? I saw a job posting, recently sent to me, for a full-time custodian in a public school district at \$16 and change an hour: full-time hours, no sick leave, no benefits, stated very clearly in the job application. Here we are asking people to go into school environments and take care of students and staff and in turn their families and our broader community, and we're not even giving them basic sick pay so that if they themselves get sick, they don't have to go to school and potentially impact the safety and well-being of others.

I don't think that those are the kinds of choices or priorities that most people in this place signed up for when they filled out paperwork to become a candidate for the party that they ran with. I know that when I speak with grade 6 students and often when you have the opportunity to engage in democracy and the democratic process – and many MLAs, I know, do get invited to grade 6 classrooms – one of the questions they often ask me is: why did you choose the NDP? I think it's a really insightful question.

I talk about what the values were that drove me here, and one of the first things I usually talk about is being a kid in grade 6 at about the same time that big cuts were being made to the education system and the school that I went to. I talked about the fact that every other light bulb in our school was taken out. My dad was a principal, and the custodian, I believe, did the heavy lifting of taking out these light bulbs to try and save on the power bill so that we could scrimp a little bit more money together to try not to lay off one more educational assistant, that educational assistant who, of course, everyone knew. In a village of 300 people you know all of these people who work in your school, but also you know the students that those people are there to help.

I talk about how, when those decisions were made and I saw the impacts on our school – and ultimately they ended up having to lay off educational assistants and take out the light bulbs and turn off the heat, even though there were tournaments in the school on the weekends, or turn it down significantly. I talk about these choices and priorities.

3:10

I also talk about wanting to make sure that we have a lot of different opportunities for students to be able to consider as careers right here in Alberta. I'm very proud to be able to stay in the province that I grew up in, and I'm really glad that I found such a community in Edmonton that I've been committed to, and it's been

great to be welcomed to Edmonton as somebody who grew up in rural Alberta.

I think that having the opportunity to engage in a variety of different economic sectors shouldn't be a luxury. I think it should be something that we fight for and that we strive for in this place for all of the constituents that we represent, and I don't think this bill actually achieves that. As the Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition said earlier in question period, the Finance minister about a year ago talked about diversification being something that would be a long-term luxury. It absolutely should not be. It should be a driving value.

That's why one of the things that we've worked to do as the Official Opposition is create a conversation around Alberta's future. In fact, we have a website, albertasfuture.ca. We're encouraging Albertans to give their feedback and not just people who've been long-time NDP supporters but people who maybe came to the NDP recently and maybe people who've never considered voting NDP. We want the very best ideas from all Albertans to come forward in an effort to create a strong future for all of us, Alberta's future. I want to encourage everyone who hasn't had an opportunity yet to go to that website and give some of their feedback.

Specifically, we know that there are a lot of folks in Calgary who are really hurting right now. We've seen downtown office vacancies reach record levels of vacancy. That isn't something that I think anyone aspires to. I think we want to make sure that we have a good, strong public- and private-sector employment opportunity in this province, but this government seems to be picking sides and picking teams that they're going to fight for.

I would say that one of the things that I was really excited about when I was the Minister of Health and that I was proud to be able to move forward and champion was the building of a state-of-the-art hub lab for Edmonton and northern Alberta. It was actually under construction. It was something that was under way when the government changed, and one of the very first things that the Minister of Health did was stop the building of that lab. Many of you who drive south to leave town, when you're driving towards Southgate Mall on the right-hand side, will drive by the field – that was a publicly owned field by the people of Alberta – where that lab was being constructed.

How handy would that lab have been right now as we strive to make sure that we have the most accurate and timely and responsive testing for the people of Alberta? How much would that benefit all of us? Yes, it was a public investment. Yes, it was going to create public-sector jobs, but those jobs and those investments benefit the public, too. They benefit the public in that these are our friends and neighbours who live in our community who work in these facilities. They benefit the user in that you have confidence that your lab result is going to come back in a timely, effective way that's not profit driven but is person focused. It is deeply disturbing to me that one of the first cuts that was made was to cancel this project altogether.

Then we saw the delay of a hospital in south Edmonton, essentially the cancelling of the children and adolescent mental health facility in Edmonton. We keep seeing these attacks and erosion of important public services.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

There is no 29(2)(a) available as this was the second speaker. Are there any members who would like to speak to second reading of Bill 35? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 35, the tax statutes amendment act. This legislation has a fairly mild and possibly boring name for a bill that will

dramatically change the landscape of Alberta's technology and innovation ecosystem.

Within this bill are the provisions for the innovation employment grant, a new and bold incentive for attracting start-ups and early-stage companies into our province. This bill will make changes in tax legislation that will aid Alberta in being the most competitive place in North America to do business. By rewarding research and development spending, we complement the federal government's scientific research and experimental development program and provide up to 20 per cent in credit for early-stage companies that invest in research and development. That's more than double the incentive provided in B.C. or Ontario. A new start-up company investing in research and development here in Alberta would receive \$50,000 in its first year versus \$25,000 in B.C. or \$28,000 in Ontario. The incremental approach utilized in this grant allows companies to remain competitive. The more they spend on research and development, the more support they can receive.

The innovation employment grant is not replacing previous tax credits. Where previous tax credits picked winners and losers by targeting certain industries, the innovation employment grant is available to all small and medium businesses that invest in research and development regardless of industry. By supporting research and development, our government is supporting the tech sector in Alberta, which means that we are supporting, again, all sectors. Technology and innovation is not just a sector. Rather, it grows and enhances each of Alberta's sectors, whether it's agricultural innovation, like in my community of Lethbridge, or energy innovation up north or in how companies schedule employees, sell their goods, or share content all around the world. This legislation complements the job-creation tax cut and combined will make Alberta the most attractive jurisdiction in Canada to do business. By legislating the provisions to accelerate the job-creation tax cut, we will also have one of the most competitive tax rates on job creators in the entirety of North America. This incentive will help keep these same businesses alive while attracting further investment back to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, a low general corporate tax rate is a win for all Albertans. It is able to encourage diversification as it provides more benefit to companies outside the resource sector. This includes both smaller and larger firms as 75 per cent of the businesses benefitting from the job-creation tax cut file taxes as small businesses. We are setting the stage for Alberta to be competitive. We are setting the stage to bring investment back to the province after five years of a sputtering economy followed by a global pandemic, a war on the price of oil, and a massive international economic contraction. Prior to the pandemic Alberta was on the path to recovery. After more than five years of economic stagnation we have a plan to address the economic challenges and spur growth.

There were a number of hopeful indicators in early 2020. Amid easing production constraints and increased takeaway capacity, the energy sector was showing signs of recovery. In the first two months of this year rig drilling grew 14 per cent, and oil production was up 6 per cent compared to the same period last year. Exports had rebounded 19 per cent. Housing market activity continued to improve from the weakness of early 2019, with home sales and residential construction investment up 8 per cent and 9.2 per cent respectively. Nonresidential building permits in the private sector, a leading indicator of construction activity, also rose by 8 per cent. With this growth in business sector activity, employment was poised to turn the corner in 2020. We were going to have the second-highest economic growth in 2020 and lead Canada in 2021, Mr. Speaker. That all ended with the pandemic.

But we still have a plan. We are taking bold action. There's much more to be done, and many Albertans are still struggling. But this

province has recovered 65 per cent, or 235,000, of the jobs lost during this pandemic. Women aged 25 to 54 are back to prepandemic unemployment levels according to the Business Council of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, we still have a long way to go, but investing in job creation is a direction that we need to be going. We are making strides with this bill to do just that, and I am proud to be able to stand in support of this ministry and this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). The Minister of Finance caught my eye.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I promise I won't get up every time under 29(2)(a), but I just wanted to respond to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora on a few of her comments. I would agree with the Member for Lethbridge-East. Our policies were working. It was a mere six or seven months after we implemented the first stage of the job-creation tax cut. Effectively, that first stage brought our business tax rate from 12 to 11 per cent, and within six to seven months of that move we were already seeing a significant response in the economy.

3:20

Now, our efforts on job creation were more and are much more comprehensive than simply the job-creation tax cut although the job-creation tax cut is a key plank, but our broader efforts include the efforts from my colleague the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction around modernizing our regulatory system. Mr. Speaker, our efforts are much broader than just ensuring we have a very competitive business tax rate, but our policies were working. As the Member for Lethbridge-East noted, key economic indicators in January and February, year-over-year data, demonstrated that the economy was turning around. The economy was responding to the policies that this government put in place in the early days after we took office.

Again, I think that for the record I will just note that year-over-year data showed that oil and gas well drilling increased 16 and a half per cent year over year. Building permits increased between 9 and 23 per cent year over year. Goods exported increased by over 19 per cent. I could talk about retail sales, vehicle sales, and other metrics. But, Mr. Speaker, our policies were working.

Of course, COVID changed all of that, and now more than ever we must position this province to attract a disproportionate investment in the months ahead and years ahead so that that investment can create jobs and opportunities for Albertans that desperately need a job opportunity or desperately need an opportunity for their small business.

Mr. Speaker, this accelerated move to immediately, effective July 1, reduce our corporate tax rate from 10 to 8 per cent will send a strong message that at a time when many other jurisdictions are looking at raising taxes, Alberta's government is following through on its commitment to create the most competitive business environment possible. A broad-based approach, broadly a lower business tax rate, will encourage diversification. It will encourage sustainable diversification.

Just for the record my previous comments with respect to that we do not have the luxury to diversify government revenues was with respect to government revenues. This government has believed from day one it's vitally important to create the business environment that will encourage economic diversification in this province. Mr. Speaker, that was important on day one, and it remains vitally important as we roll out our economic recovery plan.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

With a minute left, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the Minister of Finance for his comments. I think it's important for us to have these indicators that he is claiming do exist, that we were in an economic recovery before COVID. He needs to itemize those. You can't just say that that's true when, in fact, all of the numbers that economists and what we could manage to FOIP from this government, which were precious few things at all, spoke of quite the opposite, right? We had 50,000 jobs lost, doubling of the deficit, the economy that shrank by .6 per cent, and that was all before the pandemic. You know, this revisionist history that a global pandemic otherwise short-circuited a dramatic recovery by the UCP is simply not true, and if the Minister of Finance has specific plan data for that, he needs to share that in this Chamber and with Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020. I think it's interesting, some of the perspectives we've been hearing today. I think my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora here definitely did bring in a valid perspective and brought in some very important points, and I think that from the other side we've heard some very different things that perhaps I think we need to set the record straight on.

When we look at Bill 35, Bill 35 fundamentally is an extension of what the government is doing, an acceleration of what the government was doing before the pandemic. Before COVID-19 and before this global health crisis the government was already barreling forward with some of these changes at a different pace. Mr. Speaker, we saw the Finance minister rise in this place just now, a few minutes ago, and speak to that and speak to how he thought his plan was working and how he was growing the economy and bringing jobs back to Alberta. The reality is that that's almost completely a fairy tale. We know it wasn't working because of the results from the government's first year in office, before the global pandemic, after they had brought in the first steps of their \$4.7 billion giveaway to profitable corporations. After they had brought that in, they lost 50,000 jobs. On top of that, they doubled the deficit, and then the economy, the GDP, shrank by .6 per cent. That was before the pandemic.

So when the Finance minister rises in this place and touts that his record before the pandemic was so great and that he was creating so many jobs and that he was growing the economy in this province because of this job-creator tax cut that he was using and that now he wants to accelerate to continue those gains, Mr. Speaker, I propose to you that indeed what he is proposing is actually correct. He's proposing that he's going to accelerate those negative gains, that he's going to make the economy worse, that he's going to make the situation worse for Albertans, that he's going to make the economy shrink, and that he's going to do nothing to create new jobs.

On this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we know the facts. We know the reality is that right now over 290,000 Albertans are out of work, with double-digit unemployment here in Alberta. That's one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. On this side of the House we know that when you are looking at the books and when you are looking at the reality of our fiscal situation, you need to be talking about things like a diversified economy. You need to

be talking about things like different strategies in terms of attracting investment, and we know that the strategy the UCP Finance minister was using in this place and continues to accelerate today is giving \$4.7 billion away to wealthy foreign shareholders while instead Albertans get left behind.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about investment and attracting innovation and employment here in Alberta. Before we came to this place, some of you may know, I worked in the technology sector. I did research in a start-up. We were funded partially by NSERC federally, we were funded partially by Alberta Innovates here provincially, and we received numerous different funding streams. We worked with many different oil and gas companies in developing different things like high-temperature sensors and water monitoring systems for oil field technologies.

We worked with companies that were larger and smaller in Texas and here in Alberta and in the U.K., and every single time I go back and I talk to my colleagues and my friends that were in the technology sector or continue to be in the technology sector, they go: “Why did the UCP government cut all of the investment tax credits? Why did they get rid of the Alberta investor tax credit? Why did they get rid of the capital investment tax credit? Why did they get rid of all these programs that were actually being used by tech companies to create jobs here in Alberta?” Mr. Speaker, we saw the results when the government cut those credits. We saw the results of tech firms literally pulling out of Alberta. We saw the results of jobs being lost and saw the economy shrink that .6 per cent, all before the pandemic had even happened.

When the Finance minister gets up in this place and he touts his \$4.7 billion handout to already wealthy and profitable corporations, it simply is detached from reality when we talk about it in terms of job creation, when we talk about it in terms of the actual organizations. For example, here in Edmonton, Mr. Speaker, we have a very strong innovation scene, particularly at the University of Alberta. Many of those are doing start-up type research there. When we look at the types of investments that are needed to foster an innovation community, to capitalize on the very strong computing science program, for example, we have here in Alberta, the very strong engineering program we have here in Alberta, all of the investment that was being made to these fields is now gone. Instead, the UCP government decides that \$4.7 billion should go to their wealthy friends and donors.

Mr. Speaker, that is something that simply will not help with the job situation here at all. It's something that will not reverse the damage that has already been caused. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that it may actually increase the damage to Alberta. It may actually increase the damage and our ability to retain things like professors and researchers and academics and scientists that would be doing the type of technology creation and innovation that we need to create new, diversified jobs in the Alberta economy.

Mr. Speaker, it's really clear that when we looked – and I know my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora had mentioned this earlier. But we looked, and we said: okay; fine. The government is committed to barrelling ahead with attacking our economy and giving \$4.7 billion away to corporations. Well, they've probably at least done some analysis, right? Maybe we'll find out how much they – and even if I don't believe those numbers, maybe we could find out how many jobs they think they could make, right? We could find out: how many do they think they could create?

3:30

So we looked, and we did a FOIP request. We asked for the analysis to support what's being done in this bill, Bill 35, that's accelerating the corporate handout. Lo and behold, what happens? There are no records. We basically get nothing back saying that this

corporate handout, this corporate giveaway to wealthy foreign shareholders should even be accelerated. There was no analysis done, that we could see, by the Minister of Finance's office to suggest that it would create any new jobs, that it would attract any investment, and that it would promote any type of investors to come here to Alberta.

When the Premier first introduced this corporate tax giveaway, he suggested that it would create 55,000 jobs. Mr. Speaker, we're now down 50,000. If the Finance minister really thinks that he can still hit that aspirational number and create 105,000 jobs by accelerating the handout, then he needs to show his work. He needs to tell this House, he needs to tell Albertans about and show Albertans the analysis that was done by the ministry and show them why we think that giving away \$4.7 billion to foreign shareholders is going to make a difference, why we think it's a responsible thing.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Premier, when he first announced this \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway, actually said that it would be, quote, irresponsible if companies didn't move to Alberta. Well, it didn't work. The Premier was wrong. The Finance minister is wrong and continues to be wrong as he pushes forward with Bill 35. Indeed, instead of actually doing anything to diversify the economy, instead of actually investing in any of our local companies, instead of actually investing in innovation, instead of actually focusing on recruitment of things like academics and researchers here in Alberta, instead of actually trying to understand the intricacies and details needed to create jobs and innovation, the Finance minister appears to be focused on giving \$4.7 billion away to wealthy corporations, giving \$4.7 billion away to profitable corporations.

I know that the pandemic has changed the world a lot. Indeed, when we look at the pandemic and we look at the economy as a result of the pandemic, of course we see an overall shrinkage in the economy, and we've seen that, basically, around the world, Mr. Speaker. However, by accelerating this, it will do nothing in terms of actually directly affecting those effects either. We know that the \$4.7 billion given away to wealthy corporations did not work when it was first introduced, when it was first brought forward because we saw the economy shrink .6 per cent. We saw 50,000 jobs leave Alberta.

We know that now, with the world having changed, it will continue to do nothing. Mr. Speaker, how do we know that? Well, I would suggest that perhaps members of the government and members of the opposition should all go back to our ridings and actually talk to some businesses in our ridings. With every single business that I've talked to, every single business owner that I've talked to in my riding, whether they own a coffee shop, a restaurant, or a technology company, whatever it is, not a single one of them has said: wow, that corporate tax cut has really saved my behind in this pandemic. Not a single one of them has said: wow, I've created so many new jobs because of the corporate handout. Actually, in fact, not a single one of them has even said: I was able to save a job because of the corporate handout.

This government has actually done not a single thing to save those jobs in Bill 35. It's done not a single thing to protect investment in Bill 35. It's done not a single thing to protect our small-business owners in Bill 35. Instead, Mr. Speaker, indeed what they are doing is that they are going to shrink the economy. They are going to pick the pockets of every single Albertan and instead give \$4.7 billion away to the most profitable and wealthy corporations. It's something that really is unprecedented here. It's something that really underscores, I think, the values of what this government is fighting for versus what the opposition is fighting for. It underscores where we are as a society, that we are trying to make sure that here in the opposition we are fighting for everyday

Albertans. We are trying to create new jobs. We are trying to invest in small businesses. We are trying to invest in innovation and research.

Instead of doing any of those things, the government continues to deny. They continue to denounce. Instead of actually going forward and investing in those industries, instead of actually going forward and using the money in reasonable ways, they continue to stand on their fantasies and say that that \$4.7 billion is creating jobs when time and time again we know it's not, when time and time again, with their own numbers, with Alberta Finance's own numbers, we see job losses, we see GDP shrinkage, and we see the economy shrink overall. Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister knows this. He should get up in this place and apologize and tell Albertans that his plan is not working.

That is simply the reality of what is happening in this place. It is simply the reality that this government is not actually doing anything to protect Albertans, is not doing enough to protect Albertans. Mr. Speaker, saying "enough" suggests that they are doing anything at all, and I think that's actually perhaps overstating how much this government has done. Indeed, we see currently double-digit unemployment numbers in Alberta. It's one of the worst in the entire country.

Indeed, what else have we seen that's one of the worst in the entire country? It's this government's supports for individuals and for businesses during the pandemic, right? While almost every other province is seeing better unemployment numbers, is seeing lesser GDP shrinkage than here in Alberta, indeed, Mr. Speaker, what we see is a government that is barreling ahead with giving \$4.7 billion away to already profitable and already wealthy corporations instead of actually doing any work to protect families and protect businesses. That's, of course, what we're seeing play out in the unemployment rate. We're seeing that more than 20 per cent of Albertans are currently in mortgage deferral. We're seeing that Edmonton and Calgary are tied for second-highest unemployment rate amongst all cities across the country.

Why is that? It's because this government refuses to act. This government refuses to do anything other than give \$4.7 billion away to their wealthy friends and donors. I mean, Mr. Speaker, it's really disappointing. It's really disappointing because when you do something so simple as ask the minister to show his work and ask the minister to show us how many jobs will be created, ask the minister to say how much investment will be created, how many new jobs, how much innovation, how much research, how many companies will move to Alberta because of this \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway – well, when we looked into it, it turns out the government hadn't even done their homework. They hadn't even stopped to consider that it might not work, because they hadn't done any analysis at all.

If the minister wants to dispute that and the minister wants to say, "Of course it's going to work; we have all of these stats and figures to show that," then he should table them in this place. He should show them to Albertans. He should show them to every member of this Legislature. If he doesn't, Mr. Speaker, then the silence is going to be deafening. It's going to be very clear who this government is fighting for.

Our opposition: again, we are fighting to make sure that we can protect Alberta businesses, that we can protect Alberta families, that we can protect small businesses during this very difficult time. Giving \$4.7 billion away to wealthy and profitable corporations in the middle of the world's largest recession in a generation isn't going to do that. How do we know it's not going to do that, Mr. Speaker? Because the government can't produce any documents that suggest it will do that. The government can't produce any evidence that it will do that.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, from the government's own evidence, if you look at the government's record, from Alberta Finance's own data, we can see, of course, that the economy continues to shrink and shrank when they first introduced this, and of course we'll see that jobs continue to be lost and were lost when they first did this, before the pandemic. I want to ask the Finance minister very specifically: what does he think is different this time around? Now that the economy has shrunk even more, why does he think that using a losing strategy will suddenly become a winning one? What makes the strategy different this time around?

It appears that the Finance minister – and I wouldn't wish to speak on behalf of him – based on the information we've been able to receive from the government through our FOIP request here, that the government has not done any of that work, has not done any of that analysis, and is unable to actually provide that information to Albertans. It's pretty disappointing, honestly. It's pretty disappointing that the government will continue to spin fairy tales in this place and that the government will continue to rise in this place and talk about their fiscal record and talk about how they were creating jobs before the pandemic when it simply isn't true, Mr. Speaker. When it simply isn't true.

If we walked into any of our constituencies today and talked to small-business owners and talked to families and talked to our constituents, every single one would tell you that the corporate tax cut and corporate giveaway to wealthy corporations did basically nothing. It created no new jobs, it saved no jobs, and indeed I think it's incredibly foolhardy of this government to push forward with it at this time.

As they push forward with it, we know that there's double-digit unemployment, right? Mr. Speaker, that double-digit unemployment is going to continue if this government does not change their investment strategy, if they don't change their strategy and actually look at protecting Albertans and actually look at defending Alberta jobs, defending Alberta businesses, and fighting for Alberta businesses. Instead of doing any of that, we see again in this bill that they're pushing forward, accelerating the plan that doesn't work, and on top of that, we see that they continue to spend money recklessly in other fields as well.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Minister of Finance has risen.

3:40

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just can't help myself after what I've just heard. When I hear the member opposite suggest on this side of the House, which is really that side of the House, that reducing business taxes will damage the economy, it gives me great clarity in terms of the decision-making that took place when the members opposite, in fact, were in government and raised business taxes by 20 per cent, only to see tens of billions of dollars of capital flee the province – flee the province – and, with it, jobs and wealth creation.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, in the years following that tax increase, the government actually collected less corporate tax revenue, income tax revenue. The member's comments give me great clarity in terms of the rationale because I could never understand – I could never understand – the rationale of a government that would jack up business taxes by 20 per cent. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister. However, I would just ask that members who are not recognized perhaps take their conversations or their statements to the lounges on either side of the House or perhaps wait for the opportunity to

be recognized in this House to ensure that their comments are heard by all, including myself.

If the hon. minister could please continue.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to suggest I have better clarity today than I had in the past.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that fresh information from our department shows, demonstrates that, in fact, by implementing the job-creation tax cut, government revenues will be reduced annually by as little as \$250 million a year. That's not a small number, but it's not even close to the numbers that the opposition carelessly and recklessly play with, misleading Albertans.

I also want to clear up a misconception. Reducing taxes is not a handout or a giveaway, Mr. Speaker. It's not taking as much from somebody else. That is only a misguided socialist belief, that, in fact, taking less from somebody else is a handout. Nothing could be further from the truth. It's leaving more money in business owners' hands, businesses, business owners who've worked hard, risked much, and have a right to the reward for that risk and effort.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of validators for our decision to accelerate the job-creation tax cut, let me quote a few distinguished economists and credible business leaders.

Dr. Jack Mintz states: at this time the job-creation tax cut is a critical part of the economic recovery plan to grow Alberta's business sectors; by accelerating the tax cut to July 1, 2020, it reassures businesses looking to invest in North America that Alberta is open for business.

Dr. Bev Dahlby states: bringing forward the corporate income tax rate reduction to 8 per cent will reduce the uncertainty that firms face in making the investment decisions and support the recovery of the Alberta economy.

John Liston, president of Alberta Enterprise Group, states: the government of Alberta's plan to open our province is a breath of fresh air for businesses; we believe that this can be done safely as outlined and that businesses have an ally in government in getting things going again; in addition to that, the corporate tax decrease is a signal to the world that Alberta is competitive, and we are committed to building our economy back up.

Janet Riopel, president and CEO of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, states: accelerating the job-creation tax cut will help job creators focus on what's most important for our economy right now, rebuilding their struggling businesses and bringing more people back to work; this will help boost the growth of businesses, large and small, moving us one step closer on the long road ahead to economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 35 is about economic recovery for the province of Alberta. Bill 35 is about restoring the conditions in this province to attract investment, to create job opportunities for Albertans and, in fact, additional wealth creation that will benefit and support this government in delivering needed services to Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

With 15 seconds, I see the hon. member for Edmonton – no? Okay.

Are there any members wishing . . .

Ms Hoffman: Well, I'll use the 15 seconds.

The Acting Speaker: Seven now, but, yes. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Okay. Thanks.

I just want to say how appalled I am that a Finance minister would . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Order. Order.

Moving back to the bill proper, on second reading for Bill 35 I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I certainly appreciate the enthusiasm with which the Minister of Finance spoke of his \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway, it's unfortunate I cannot speak with as much enthusiasm about the 50,000 jobs that were lost while that money was going out the door before we even began to enter the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, we have seen jobs flee the province while this has been in place. We have not seen any new jobs created as a result of those funds though millions went to companies that were in fact removing jobs and removing investment from Alberta. Just after this Finance minister introduced his first budget, he indeed, as others have noted, commented that diversification was a long-term luxury. Now, he claims today that since day one he's been committed to creating, in his words: a business environment that would support diversification. That has not been true in the tech and innovation sector.

Now, I recognize that we have a piece in this bill here today which is attempting to put back a small amount of the incentive that existed in the province of Alberta for a brief window of time and created incredible growth in our tech and innovation sector. I recognize that this bill attempts to repair a small amount of the incredible damage that this government did when they cancelled every single innovation tax credit, every single research credit, including the SRED credit that existed in every single other province in Canada. Tore it up without a word to anybody in the industry, anybody who worked in that sector, Mr. Speaker. That is not the sign of a government that's thinking about diversification from day one. That's a government that destroys first and thinks about it later, grabs what it could get to shove out the door as part of its \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway without thinking about what that damage would do.

That's not just me speaking, Mr. Speaker. That's this government's very own Innovation Capital Working Group. In their report to this government they detailed the damage this government did to our tech and innovation industry. Let's be clear. While they are making a small attempt in this bill to repair some of that damage and restore a small amount of the competitiveness that they destroyed, they will not do so until July of next year, so that means from October of last year until July of next year Alberta has been behind every other jurisdiction in Canada. That is not moving at the speed of business, as this government likes to pat itself on the back. The \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway: that gets accelerated. Step on the gas. To bring back a beloved term from this government in its early days, the IEG here for the tech and innovation sector: well, that'll be here in due course.

So what did the Innovation Capital Working Group have to say about this government? They said:

The elimination of the provincial portion of the SRED and the Alberta Investor Tax Credit (AITC) has created a perception among investors and start-ups that the technology industry is not a priority for Alberta and [is] not part of the economic mix for the future of [this] province.

That is the message this government sent out of the gate to an industry with whom they now want to curry favour.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. I am happy that they are talking with the sector now, and I do not begrudge the opportunity. I appreciate that the new minister has an open-door policy to speak with them, and I sure hope he listens. But I think it's important, while this government chooses to pat itself on the back, that we recognize what they truly chose to do before they got here.

The working group report goes on to say:

These eliminations were particularly hard on technology entrepreneurs and investors and have led to concerns about Alberta as a place to grow and invest for technology amongst many in the sector.

The elimination of these tax credit programs has resulted in Alberta becoming the only Canadian province that does not support technology entrepreneurs through the tax system and is not providing mechanisms to attract and entice innovation capital.

The cancellation of SRED was particularly impactful.

3:50

It was an utterly petty decision, Mr. Speaker, scrounging in the couch cushions for all of the extra pennies they could find to cover the money that they were shovelling out the door to their \$30 million failure of a war room, their \$4.7 billion corporate tax giveaway. For that, they decided it was worth razing the ground and salting the earth for technology and innovation in Alberta. But, hey, now they're beginning to pivot. I will give them at least credit for that.

Let me be clear. This is an important and growing industry, Mr. Speaker. It is rooted right here in my constituency of Edmonton-City Centre. In fact, right now we are celebrating Edmonton Startup Week here. We're having the opportunity to see some of the new companies that have managed to get by in spite of, not because of or with any assistance from, this government, who even made cuts to Alberta Innovates, from whom I heard a presentation this week to many in the industry about the assistance they're able to provide. I'm very thankful for the programs they've managed to maintain despite the fact that they have endured cuts and layoffs as a result of this government's budgets. But this is a resilient industry, thankfully, these entrepreneurs.

Now, the Member for Lethbridge-East talked at some length about how wonderful this new tax credit is and how much it brings. He talked about how it's double the incentive that's available for research and development in B.C. and Ontario. Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that in B.C. and in Ontario there are far more credits than just this. In B.C. the government also offers tax credits of 30 per cent for qualified resident investors who provide venture capital to small businesses conducting R and D on proprietary technology in developing interactive digital media products, just like the AITC, which we had here in the province of Alberta and no longer have. The Member for Lethbridge-East can pat his minister and his government on the back for restoring this small piece, but we are still not as competitive as B.C. That is a falsehood.

He mentioned Ontario. Ontario has the Ontario research and development tax credit. That's 3 and a half per cent. The Ontario innovation tax credit: that's 8 per cent. The Ontario business research institute tax credit: 20 per cent, much like the AITC, which we had here in Alberta but no longer have because it was axed by this government. So no, we are not restoring competitiveness in Alberta to the extent that this government wants to claim. We are catching up a small amount from the damage that this government did.

I look forward to learning more about the IEG. Certainly, we've heard some very rosy propositions from the government about how it functions and what it does. It took some time for any detail to be released. They did a nice victory lap about it this summer but have left folks in the industry waiting and watching and wondering precisely what it's going to do for them. Again, Mr. Speaker, they will not have access to it until July 1 of next year.

When it comes to supporting the tech and innovation industry, I would also note that the ICWG report talked about the importance of talent, and it noted that Alberta is in fact losing its young population faster than the national average and that Calgary had seen a 5 and a half per cent decline in those aged 20 to 24. They

commented on that, and they noted that this is a problem because we need, first of all, to keep the young entrepreneurs, the people that have the knowledge, and, secondly, we need young people to be staying here, training here, and being available as a workforce both for companies that want to come and locate to Alberta and also for the entrepreneurs who want to grow companies in Alberta.

Now, tax credits and incentives are important. Indeed, again, I will give the government credit for repairing a small amount of the incredible damage they did. I'm sure hoping we're going to see more because, as I laid out, we are currently not competitive with other jurisdictions in Canada for start-up companies because, again, the \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway does not help any start-up, any new technology and innovation company. It does nothing for them. They said that repeatedly when the government introduced it and cut every other tax incentive and support for technology and innovation in the province of Alberta.

But let's be clear. If we want to hold on to these entrepreneurs, if we want to attract businesses from elsewhere, if we want to hold on to young people who are training in this industry and would work, we need to be presenting a modern, progressive jurisdiction. Companies look at this, Mr. Speaker. They're not just looking at the tax credits, of which, again, Alberta has fewer than pretty much all the other major regions of Canada. Fewer incentives, less support. They are also looking at: what kind of place is it for me to bring employees to raise their families? What is that school system like?

If a major tech company was looking at Alberta today and reading the headlines about this government's intentions for our curriculum, Mr. Speaker, that is not something that's going to attract a modern, progressive tech and innovation company or CEO or their staff or, indeed, even make young entrepreneurs in our province in those fields want to stay in a province where we have a government with that level of regressive thinking on the most basic of principles of education and curriculum.

Folks in the tech industry, Mr. Speaker, are open-minded, critical thinkers. That's what they want to hire: folks who break paradigms and explore innovative ways of seeing the world, who are disrupting old ideas that no longer serve us well and indeed hold us back. They're not interested in locating to a province with a government that doubles down on regressive thinking. So if this government truly wants to support the kind of industries that are going to diversify our economy, that are going to attract the kind of young entrepreneurs, the kind of people that are going to invest back into this economy and help to build something that is resilient for the years to come, they should give a good hard think about the decisions they are making in so many other areas like education and health care and the social services, the kinds of people that this tax credit, the IEG, is supposed to support and convince to locate here.

Again, to be clear, Mr. Speaker, the IEG alone is not enough to raise Alberta's competitiveness with other jurisdictions. There's a lot more work to do. Again, I really hope that the minister follows through on his commitment to listen and do that work and bring those supports in. But this government has to understand. I talk to folks in the tech sector, and they say that this is an ecosystem. All of these things are interconnected. A single program, one thing here and one thing there, does not do the job, which is why our government was investing in many areas to support the whole of the ecosystem, including creating training spaces in our postsecondary, creating more room to develop the kind of talent these companies want to see, the innovation and tax credits that we put in place, the investments through Alberta Innovates. We were creating an ecosystem, fertilizing the soil that these companies could grow in, and this government came along and salted the earth.

There is a lot of work to do to make up for the damage that this government has done to our opportunities for tech and innovation.

A few boutique announcements here and there, a small sprinkling of dollars after the major cuts they have made, is not going to cut it. But I will say that I'm looking forward to having the opportunity to talk with folks in the industry and get their thoughts on the IEG, how it operates, whether this is in fact going to be beneficial, how beneficial it will be, and what other steps may need to be taken. I know that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview will be doing that work as well and has continued to do that work since he left that opportunity in the ministry.

I will be happy to work collaboratively with this government to continue to improve the ecosystem, to continue to bring in the kinds of supports we need, and to encourage them to take the real action that is needed if they truly believe that this is a sector worth investing in and growing and that this is an essential part of the economy in the province of Alberta and not just a pet project for their own ideology.

Thank you.

4:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I believe the individual who caught my eye is Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to ask the Member for Edmonton-City Centre a couple of questions. It's interesting that he had referenced this descriptor of an ecosystem to talk about entrepreneurship, right? Just this morning on CBC Radio I was listening to – it's Startup Week here in Edmonton. I encourage all MLAs in the government – certainly, all of us will be helping to support the efforts of Startup Week. It seems as though it's a lot of very ambitious and collaborative entrepreneurs working together.

The individual on the radio this morning made an important distinction between entrepreneurship and start-ups and what was described as the corporate environment. While she suggested that sometimes the corporate environment, large ones especially, can actually be reductive, then the ecosystem – and she used that word explicitly, as the Edmonton-City Centre MLA did just now, too – of start-ups and the collaboration that they engender and the support that they engender to each other create interesting opportunities in many innovative ways. And this is exactly the time when we need to have that sort of innovation nurtured here in the province of Alberta.

My question to the hon. member. Let's think back to when this part A of Bill 35 came forward from this Finance minister, the \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway – right? – to mostly large corporations. That happened to be cooked up by this government before the full extent of the economic crisis that we're now in became known and before COVID, too. That was then; this is now. The budget that we've been functioning under, the economic plan that we've been functioning under is completely out of step with this new reality that we're all facing. No one can stand up here today and say: oh, yeah; my life is pretty much the same as it was back in January, February. It's not, and neither should the strategy that comes from a government dealing with a crisis like that, which they are responsible for, be continuing on with the same old plan that they had before the COVID crisis.

A couple of things. I don't know if you know about Startup Week. It's happening. I'm certainly interested in participating.

Let's think about the timeline of the UCP's plan, which has been failing miserably so far. Then they bring it back and revive it and try to double down during a completely different circumstance. The only things that are the same around here are the furniture and some of the lights. Everything else outside has changed. This government needs to change with the times as well.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen with about a minute and 40 left.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate those thoughts from my colleague for Edmonton-North West, and he's quite right. Start-ups, folks that work in the technology innovation industry: they understand collaboration, which is why it hurt them so much when this government went ahead and utterly annihilated every support for their industry with no consultation or discussion. Thankfully, they're working to rectify that. Again, I hope they follow through.

But an important point that occurred to me as my colleague was speaking, that I forgot to mention, was indeed talking about actual jobs. The minister stood and talked about how his \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway is a long-term strategy. In other words, he himself acknowledging that it has not created a single job now and very likely will not for some time.

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, the AITC, the IDMTC: they created jobs immediately. Those were creating real jobs right now here in Alberta. Companies like BioWare, that hired all kinds of Albertans into new positions, were prepared to do another significant round of hiring when this government cut the tax credit to support it. Those were programs creating the jobs that we need right now, not sending money out of the province, not padding the pockets of corporate shareholders, not just simply leaving Alberta while 50,000 jobs evaporated before COVID-19. That is a reality.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe that the hon. member who caught my eye this time was the hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise in this House to speak in support of the tax statutes amendment act. This bill is a necessary piece of legislation, and so we find the recent announcements our government has made regarding Alberta's recovery plan. With this bill in place businesses will be able to access much-needed help or support as industries continue to navigate through the challenges with going through COVID-19.

Essential to this bill are Alberta's recovery plan and the Alberta innovation employment grant, which will be available starting January 1, 2021. IEG is structured similar to and will be administered similar to the previous Alberta scientific research and experimental development, SR and ED, tax credit program. We promised that we will reduce red tape in our platform, and we are in the process to reduce this. This will eliminate unnecessary red tape by making applicant expectations clear as the program will mirror expenditure eligibility requirements used for the federal SR and ED tax credit. With the job-creation tax cut, which is also known as JCTC, in place this grant will serve as a beneficial complement for businesses wanting to thrive despite these difficult times.

This grant will not only encourage businesses to invest in research and development, but more importantly this grant will serve as a strong foundation for small and medium-sized businesses who want to operate at large volumes but are not quite capable of doing that. This is the kind of boost that small and medium-sized businesses need to get off the ground and compete with large firms who may have access and reach to a large consumer base.

To put this program in perspective, the grant is significantly more generous than our other provincial counterparts. I'll give you a simple example: 250,000 grants. If this bill is applicable, small businesses will get \$50,000. If you look at the similar grant in Ontario, they'll get \$28,000. At this kind of percentage B.C. will get only \$25,000. Basically, we are providing this grant at almost

double the amount that B.C. is providing to the small businesses, which gives us opportunity to attract more businesses.

Our government has made it a priority to make Alberta the most desirable jurisdiction to invest in Canada, and this bill is proof of that statement. Albertans and Alberta businesses continue to pay less in overall taxes compared to other provinces, and with this low personal and corporate income taxes, with no provincial sales tax, no health premiums or payroll tax, we have a very good story to tell the investors.

I heard from the other side \$4.7 billion quite a few times. When I was young, I had always a confusion on how big this number is. I learned in a smart way: a thousand is three zeros, a million is six, and a billion is nine zeros. It's a huge number. I know on the other side the members, when they start talking about \$4.7 billion, don't know to what extent they're talking about. This is a small province. Look at the base. We want to tell the good story. We want to create the environment. We want to attract the businesses. When we are – the other side always wants to talk about corporate tax, corporations. If you want to attract businesses, those are the corporations. Those are the people.

4:10

I represent Calgary-Falconridge. I had the opportunity to go to a lot of new business openings. Who are those people? It reminds me of the story I started 25 years ago, when I moved here. I didn't start as an entrepreneur. I didn't start as a businessman. I was working for somebody. I had a chance to go to three or four restaurant openings last week. Those people were working as a chef or servers in the restaurants. They're the ones who opened that business. This is the story of Alberta. We are telling the people.

When you talk about innovation, you talk about Silicon Valley. I talked to a class of students in New Delhi a few days ago, 30 students, 10-year-olds, creating their own mobile apps. This is the competition we're going to compete with in the next few years. We want our future generations to be equal with that, and we want to tell a good story. As a government we are here. We will have that workforce. We will tell the good stories. And when it comes to helping small businesses, we have always had a good story to tell.

I heard a lot of comments from the other side. The only suggestion I have for the other side is that when you go and talk to the Alberta Federation of Labour, especially Gil McGowan, please remind them: do not make statements to hurt private small businesses. It hurts not only in my riding; it hurts in those members' ridings, too. Small businesses need to hear a good story. I think our government is there.

We do provide a lot of incentives. I mean, you can see how much small and medium-sized businesses are valued. During these tough times 90 per cent of jobs are created by small businesses. They still do it. They are doing their job, and this is our time to help them and give them much-needed help so they can grow and then not only support Alberta but Canada and also at the international level.

Just a few weeks ago our government announced a historical partnership with Calgary-based Orpyx Medical Technologies to produce more than 40 million locally made medical masks for Alberta Health Services. This partnership will create about 100 jobs and secure a two-year agreement with the local Calgary businesses that help to meet the rising demand of face masks as we continue to combat this pandemic. It is partnerships with local organizations like this that will allow Alberta to restore the advantage we once had in Canada's Confederation.

In fact, we must send this message, that we will continue to live, we must continue to work, we must continue to buy and sell, and we must continue to have hope that we'll get through this eventually. It is this attitude of perseverance and determination that

will not only allow Alberta to emerge stronger post COVID but also greater equipped to handle any challenges that may come our way.

Businesses are continuing to open despite these tough times because Albertans understand that COVID-19 cannot control our lives. Since March almost over 85 per cent of businesses were open; 90 per cent of the economy was open. We proved that as long as Albertans help us, our government will stand by them. We will come out of this, and if businesses, especially the small and medium-sized ones, are able to work their way through these unheralded economic times, then there is nothing they cannot handle going forward.

Truthfully, it is legislation like this that instills an aura of hope and confidence for better days ahead in Alberta. This bill is just the start of a brighter future for Albertans and the business we all rely on. But all this is only the first step in many actions we must take to rebuild our province, and I'm confident that we are on the right track.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Happy to provide questions and comments to the comments raised by the Member for Calgary-Falconridge and, earlier, the Minister of Finance. I want to assure the Member for Calgary-Falconridge that I hope all members in this House are very well aware of the magnitude of \$4.7 billion. It is a huge amount of money, more than \$1,000 per Albertan when you do the math another way, and that is money that is being funnelled towards not the new start-up mom-and-pops that you mentioned – I'm glad to hear that some are opening in your riding. That's certainly good news. I imagine you've seen a lot close, as we have throughout our province, in the time that you've been a member of the government caucus as well, but certainly it is good news any time we see a new small business pop up.

But I want to clarify for the member's awareness that that \$4.7 billion isn't for small mom-and-pops. You have to be making a net profit in excess of \$500,000 a year to be able to qualify for the reduced corporate tax rate that is being proposed because it's for large corporations. They're defined in government statutes. It's not for small businesses that are franchises or independent unless they happen to be making in excess of \$500,000 a year, and then they would get that net reduction to the amount that they're paying just on the amount above \$500,000 a year. So this bill and the government's whole focus really has been on massive corporations, large corporations, highly profitable corporations, many of which, probably, some of your constituents have worked for and, hopefully, some still work for today. We're talking about the kinds of corporations where this was announced in downtown Calgary, that then mere months later laid off Calgarians. At the same time they were celebrating this big handout, they then were preparing pink slips for your constituents and my constituents and Albertans at large.

I think that the magnitude of giving \$4.7 billion to these corporations – and I know that the Premier and others will try to pick apart this math. This is the part that I was so shocked to hear: the Finance minister come in here and attack his own Finance officials on the documents and the numbers that were put in their own budget. The very first budget that we were a part of in this sitting of the Legislature on page 144 said \$4.7 billion, and that was based on the timeline that had been mapped out at that time. Now it's being rushed even more aggressively, so it's probably going to

be even more significant than that because of the reduction that much earlier as well.

I do want to say that it is about choices and priorities. I think everything that we do in this place is, but I think that it is especially highlighted when we're talking about public revenues and public expenditures because values are how we choose to assign our income, our money.

I'm very proud. I have a niece who is in grade 10 this year. She doesn't have a lot of expenses; she lives at home, her parents help to buy her bus pass, they pay her school fees. For Christmas and her birthday she usually asks for the clothes that she wants, and she usually gets them. So she doesn't have a lot of expenses. She has a joint bank account with her mom. Her mom checked it the other day and saw that it was down, and she said: hey, I just noticed that you spent \$100; what'd you spend your money on? Her daughter was a little bit embarrassed, and she said: "Well, I saw a pop-up on Instagram for Black Lives Matter, and I wanted to be able to give some money to support that initiative. I know I didn't ask you guys, but I knew that it would make a bigger difference if I gave that \$100." A hundred dollars is a lot of money – period – but when you're a 15-year-old, it's a real lot of money. I was so proud when her mom told me that story, that she saw something that reflected her values, and she chose to put her money where her values were.

That's what we're being asked to do in this place every day when we bring forward money bills from the Finance minister. Do these bills reflect our values? What I'm here to say is that this \$4.7 billion doesn't reflect my values. It doesn't reflect the values of the vast majority of my constituents, who want to make sure that we're investing in a good, diversified local economy, that we have excellent health care and excellent education.

4:20

I've spent quite a bit of time in northeast Calgary and really enjoyed my opportunities to be there in Falconridge and in other ridings, and I will tell you that the number one thing that families say to me when I say, "Why did you choose to set your home up here?" is usually about education and the opportunities for an excellent education in Canada specifically and Calgary even more specifically. Choosing to prioritize investment in corporate profit margins that don't have any ties to jobs – in fact, jobs have actually gone down at those same corporations in the same period of time that that money has been given over – reflects their values.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and offer a few comments on Bill 35, the Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020. I want to start off my comments by just giving a bit of a snapshot of the state of Alberta's economy, share my thoughts on the impact that I think this legislation may have on the state of Alberta's economy, and then move into some suggestions that I'd like to make to the government as to how to actually rebuild a better and stronger economy.

Mr. Speaker, the state of Alberta's economy is dire. There are 300,000 Albertans right now as we speak who are looking for work and hundreds of thousands more Albertans who are afraid for their economic future. It looks like our economy is going to shrink in 2020 more than it has any year since Alberta went through the Great Depression, and it doesn't look like the economic pain is going to end any time soon. Those are the top-line numbers.

I can tell, though, by looking at you that, you know, the details are much more severe. I notice that you're sporting a beard, Mr.

Speaker, and I can only assume that that's because the economic circumstances in Calgary-Currie are so dire that razors are no longer available or, if they are, you can't even afford to buy them anymore. I think that is really . . .

The Acting Speaker: I think, from the perspective of the chair, that that could potentially be seen as some sort of an inciteful type of language or something along those lines. I would just caution the member and ask him to perhaps continue his comments, focusing on second reading at this time.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, of course; offered only in good-natured ribbing. I don't mean to incite anybody by making those comments.

The state of the economy, as I said, is dire. This is the worst that Alberta's economy has been in living memory and, like I said, the worst that Alberta's economy has been since the Great Depression.

So here we have the government trying to apply a strategy to rebuild Alberta's economy that already has a tremendous track record of failure. They implemented this \$4.7 billion corporate tax cut. That was one of the first pieces of legislation that the government introduced after the election in 2019, and what effect did that have on Alberta's economy in 2019, before the pandemic hit? As my colleagues here have noted many times, we lost 50,000 jobs in 2019. The GDP of Alberta shrunk by .6 per cent. This was a failure in rebuilding Alberta's struggling economy. So it doesn't make sense to me, Mr. Speaker, that the government would look at the results that they created – I was going to say achieved; it wasn't much of an achievement, to be sure – from the tax cut that they already implemented, and they decided to speed it up. It doesn't make any sense to fail even faster at rebuilding Alberta's economy.

Now, I did say that I would like to now offer some comments on what I think the government should be doing to rebuild the economy. One of the things that I've stressed time and again when I've risen to speak in this House ever since the pandemic started is that the number one thing the government can do to rebuild Alberta's economy and get this province back on the right track is to get the COVID pandemic under control in this province. As we mentioned in the debate last night on I believe it was Government Motion 42, the pandemic is anything but under control. Dr. Deena Hinshaw herself yesterday said that we are approaching the danger zone. The reproduction number of COVID-19 is well above one right now, which means that the pandemic is going to continue to grow unless the government does something significant to get the pandemic under control.

Every scientist, epidemiological expert that I've read and that I've heard from has said that in order to effectively get COVID under control, you need to have an effective testing regime in place, you need to have an effective contact tracing regime in place, and you need to have adequate supports in place for people who are forced to isolate because they've either come into contact with positive cases of COVID-19 or they've been ordered by Alberta Health Services to isolate for a period of time.

Now, look at testing. I will grant, Mr. Speaker, the government's talking point that testing is much further ahead now than it was in March, when this pandemic first hit. However, I will remind everybody in this House that back in April the Premier himself set a target of 20,000 COVID tests a day, and we have almost never reached that testing threshold. I think there've been maybe three days out of the last 200 that they reached 20,000. So what does that mean in terms of getting this pandemic under control?

Let me give you a common experience for a person who is trying to get a COVID test. They call 811. They're told that they can't get an appointment for three days. Then when the three days has

elapsed, people in my constituency have to drive all the way to Mill Woods – and I don't know how far people have to drive in rural constituencies; I assume it must be even farther – stand in line for three hours, wait to get a COVID test, and then when they get home, they have to wait for up to a week to get the test results back. So three days to get an appointment, an entire day lost while you're getting the COVID test done, and then up to a week afterwards waiting for the test results. This is not how we get the pandemic under control through a timely testing regime.

You don't have to take my word for it, Mr. Speaker; Deena Hinshaw herself said as much yesterday in her update on the COVID pandemic to the people of Alberta.

[The Speaker in the chair]

We need to get better testing, faster testing in place so that when people are at risk of developing COVID, they will know quickly whether or not they actually have the disease so that they don't have to take time off from work or spend time looking after their children who have been sent home to isolate. That's one thing that this government could do to get this pandemic under control.

The second thing, Mr. Speaker, that the government can do is to improve the contact tracing system. I just saw an article in the *Edmonton Journal*, that was printed this afternoon, that AHS is shrinking the contact tracing program in Lethbridge because there are so many outbreaks in the school in that city, they can't possibly keep up. This is a story that I've heard from all of the parents that I've talked to in my constituency who have kids in school. If they haven't had kids who have been sent home to isolate, they've known somebody who has, and they've waited forever for the call from AHS to know if they have possibly been in contact with somebody who has COVID-19 and they, too, need to isolate and get a test. In fact, a lot of the people that I've talked to have even given up hope on ever hearing from Alberta Health Services contact tracers.

4:30

Mr. Loewen: Point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order has been called.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, I've been listening to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar go on for quite some time. He has not talked anything about Bill 35 in several minutes, actually. In fact, the things that he's talking about are nonsense, grossly wrong, incorrect, and inaccurate. I think we could go to 23(b), where a member

speaks to matters other than

(i) the question under discussion.

This is clearly a point of order, and I think the member should get back on track, talk about Bill 35, which is the tax statutes amendment act. I don't believe it talks anything about COVID in the tax statutes amendment act, so I would suggest that the member – Mr. Speaker, I'd ask that you get the member back on track.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, with due respect, I could not disagree more with the member that brought forward this point of order. This Bill 35 is talking about economic recovery and the main way by which this government purports to tackle economic recovery. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar points out very clearly – it's as clear as the noses on any of our faces

here – that the precondition for any economic recovery here in this province, in this country, or indeed around the world is to look for a way to make sure we bend the curve, to keep COVID in check, and to seek out conditions by which we can do so, look for a vaccine, certainly. But to make sure that our economic recovery is – the foundation of it must be around control of this virus.

If we have a large outbreak like what we're seeing right now – right? – it expands exponentially. It goes from one to four to eight, 16, 32, 64, and so on. These can happen within hours. You can talk about economic recovery and tax breaks till the cows come home, but until you, in fact, bend this curve and get the COVID outbreak under control in this province, then that will undermine our best efforts.

The Speaker: I am prepared to rule on the point of order. While I am sympathetic to the position of the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West, I actually just had to ask my good colleague at the table what we were debating as I was unclear. It was difficult to tell. I would never comment on the presence or the absence of a member, but I did just return to the chair about five minutes ago, and I was unclear. Now, that's not to say that the hon. member wasn't just about to tie it to Bill 35, so while I won't find a point of order in this case, I do encourage him to be on the topic at hand.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I always appreciate your gentle guidance.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: To echo what the Member for Edmonton-North West was saying about the point that I'm trying to make, this bill is in fact targeted towards Alberta's economic reconstruction, and as I was saying, we need to have an effective COVID-control regime in place in order to get Alberta's economy back on track. I am continuing to make the point that Alberta's COVID-control regime is far from sufficient to get Alberta's economy back on track.

In fact, before I was interrupted by the Member for Central Peace-Notley, I was making the point about how inadequate our contact tracing system is and how people in my constituency have given up on Alberta Health Services' contact tracing system entirely and have in fact devolved into doing their own contact tracing. There are informal networks of parents and neighbours who are talking to each other about potentially being in contact with a positive COVID case and deciding whether or not they should isolate themselves. That is not how an effective contact tracing system should work, and that is not how a COVID-control regime should work if we are serious about getting the economy back on track, Mr. Speaker.

Now, the third point that all experts say is key to the economic reconstruction of any economy that's undergoing a COVID pandemic is adequate isolation supports for people who are required to isolate, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I've heard from many constituents in Edmonton-Gold Bar that if they have been ordered to isolate, they have to take unpaid time off work to spend that time in isolation, and I've heard several stories of people who have lost their jobs in that 14-day period. They were told that their services were no longer required, and this is completely believable to me given the fact that there are 300,000 people looking for work. Somebody who was sent home to isolate is quite easily replaced when we don't have the proper isolation supports and legal job protections in place and enforcement of those legal protections in place to make sure that people can keep working, that they can look after their families while they're isolating and keep working after their isolation period is complete.

To get COVID under control costs money, Mr. Speaker. To implement the kind of testing, contact tracing, and isolation support regime that is necessary to get this pandemic under control, the province needs to spend significant amounts of money. If they did so, I'm certain that the economy would get back on the right track, but instead they've chosen, through the tax statutes amendment act, Bill 35, which we are considering here today, to give \$4.7 billion to the largest, most profitable corporations in the province of Alberta.

Now, I can't help but ask myself: if we spent that \$4.7 billion, how many more COVID tests a day could we get? How many more contact tracers could we hire so that people would be informed of whether or not they've come into contact with positive cases? How much financial support could we give to Albertans who are required to isolate because they've come into contact with positive COVID cases?

Ms Hoffman: A lot.

Mr. Schmidt: My friend from Edmonton-Glenora is answering the question with: a lot. I expect that that's true. Four point seven billion dollars right now would be better spent on ramping up our COVID testing capacity, ramping up our COVID contact-tracing capacity, and ramping up isolation supports for people who have to isolate because they've come into contact.

Instead, this government seems to think that COVID is under control. In fact, the Member for Lethbridge-East just yesterday in his question to the Minister of Children's Services said that we flattened the curve, which is an absolutely ridiculous statement given the data that comes out of Alberta Health Services daily.

Another thing that the government could do rather than giving a \$4.7 billion corporate handout to get Alberta's economy back on track is to build a solid foundation for economic reconstruction based on a strong public health care system and a strong public education system. Making sure that people have a good education and are healthy enough, making sure that people have the education that they need to work or start their own business, making sure that people have the public health care they need so that they're healthy enough to work . . .

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prior to being elected, I worked as an investment banker. I had the pleasure of working with the entrepreneurs and businesses that built Alberta's economy. I helped them attract capital and execute acquisitions and sales of businesses.

During the first five years of my career the companies and investors I approached on behalf of Alberta-based businesses wanted a piece of this province. It was amazing, and it was actually kind of easy. I would receive calls and e-mails daily from these investors and businesses asking if I had anything in Alberta, or northern Texas, as some of them would call it. When selling an Alberta-based business, it was not uncommon to have competing offers from multiple international groups in addition to suitors across Canada.

4:40

But then something changed. Over the next four years, from 2015 to 2019, my phone stopped ringing, and the e-mails stopped coming. I went from sourcing growth capital and identifying acquisition targets for profitable Alberta-based businesses to seeking distress debt or identifying solutions to impending bankruptcy or trying to sell a company for which there was no interest.

I witnessed what at the time was record unemployment, record business closures, record vacancy in downtown Calgary, and friends and families losing their jobs. I reached out to the companies and investors that used to contact me, and this is what I was told: Alberta over this time is a political and regulatory nightmare; we must be more careful with how we allocate our capital, and it's not going to be in high-tax jurisdictions with anti-energy, antibusiness governments.

The government at the time, the members opposite, had exacerbated a bad situation and, in fact, continued to do so with actual multibillion-dollar corporate handouts, which Albertans are still paying off today. We are extraordinarily fortunate to have a qualified, experienced, and educated Finance minister to guide us through these challenging times, a Finance minister and a government that will not make a bad situation worse.

As a government we have addressed and continue to address the three very real concerns that job creators and investors communicated to me throughout my career. We are reducing our regulatory burden and cost and speeding up approvals through our red tape reduction initiative. We are pro-business. We are champions of our entrepreneurs and innovators, and we are proud, not ashamed, of our world-leading energy sector.

Lastly and through Bill 35, Alberta's government is accelerating the job-creation tax cut a year and a half ahead of schedule to a rate of 8 per cent, 30 per cent lower than the next lowest provincial rate, which dramatically increases our competitiveness across North America and the world. We're doing this because we believe in Alberta. We are proud of Alberta. We believe that we have a compelling value proposition to communicate to the world, and we're going to do everything in our power to grow our economy and create jobs for Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to respond, and I think that the Member for Calgary-South East's response is indicative of the reason that this government is failing to get Alberta's economy back on track. I just spent 15 minutes talking about the need to get the COVID pandemic under control, and the member went back to the UCP's greatest hits of, you know, carbon tax and Bill 6 and that was the reason that – they have continued to ignore or downplay or minimize the pandemic that is sweeping this province right now.

Some Hon. Members: Bill 35.

Mr. Schmidt: Exactly. Bill 35.

It is talking about economic reconstruction, and the fact that the members opposite can't wrap their heads around the importance of getting this pandemic under control to the economy of Alberta is the reason that they are failing and that we have the highest unemployment rate and the worst economic prospects of any province in this country. I urge the members to take COVID seriously. Make better efforts to get this pandemic under control, and then worry about how much money they're going to give their corporate friends and insiders.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, the time for 29(2)(a) has elapsed.

Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we just had a very interesting discussion here on Bill 35. I guess Bill 35 must

encompass a wide range of things, depending on where you're sitting. I do want to take everybody on just a little walk down memory lane. I want to take everybody back to the spring of 2016 to Bill 1. Now, I think this is an interesting bill. It's called the Promoting Job Creation and Diversification Act. It was brought forward by the Finance minister at the time, Calgary-*Buffalo*. What's interesting about Bill 1: again, promoting job creation and diversification. Bill 1: what it does is that it reduces taxes and gives tax credits.

So here we are here. I think this is absolutely the height of hypocrisy to listen to the NDP talking about Bill 35 or not talking about it, I guess, in some cases and how disastrous it is and how giving tax breaks to businesses is like handing out cash, just spreading it out like this. When they did it in 2016, the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*, the Finance minister at the time, said this about their corporate tax reduction. He said that it was to "help . . . job creators weather this storm," and it was also "the right thing to do for jobs and our economy." It's interesting how when the NDP do something, it's the greatest thing since sliced bread, but of course when the UCP do something, it's obviously horrendous, and we couldn't think of anything worse to do. So I just think it's the height of hypocrisy to listen to the NDP on the other side talk about Bill 35 in the way that they do and our job-creation tax cut.

Now, our government knows that a message needs to be sent to investors around the world. We need to be able to send this message strong. We need to show investors around the world that Alberta is open for business. Experts have agreed that this will create jobs. Of course, we are sitting in a situation here, with the economy the way it is and with the pandemic the way it is and the global recession that we're in right now, that obviously we are working with to the best of our abilities. Of course, we know the things that we can do, and the NDP knows it, too, because obviously they've said it in the past. Let's go back to 2016. We can go through *Hansard* and find quotes from almost every one of them talking about how great reducing taxes is for businesses and the benefits of it.

But by accelerating the job-creation tax cut, we are sending that signal to businesses and investors while also creating one of the most attractive economies to invest in in all of North America. Now, the best way to attract businesses is to create a business-friendly environment, and that business-friendly environment encompasses a bunch of different things, one of which is a low-tax regime so that those businesses know they can come to Alberta, set up business, and make a profit. That's what business is there for, to make a profit, provide a service and make a profit. We also know that that investment will create jobs.

We know that by having a situation where we have an attractive business situation, that'll create diversity also in our businesses, because this tax cut isn't just for one particular type of business; it's for all businesses. It's not just for new businesses coming in, but it's for the older businesses that are here and established. It's for all businesses. It doesn't matter what kind of business that they're here to do. This tax cut affects them positively.

We also know that the other thing that creates that business-friendly environment is an educated workforce. Of course, we're working on that, too, with our postsecondary education and with the trades, increasing trades education. Of course, we know we've got raw products – we know we have oil and gas, we have forestry, we have all these different things – here within our province that are valuable to businesses when they come and want to set up business here and do work.

Another thing that's attractive for businesses to create that business-friendly environment is reasonable regulation, reducing red tape. Of course, we have an Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. We've heard others speak about it here today, where

some businesses refuse to come to Alberta because of the burdensome regulation, taking three, four, five, six years in order to get a project approved. That's too long. Investors would just rather take their money somewhere else and go into business sooner. That's what creating this business-friendly environment is about, and this job-creation tax cut, Bill 35, is part of that package.

4:50

Alberta's corporate tax rate is now 8 per cent, which is 30 per cent lower than the next lowest provincial rate, so when businesses are looking across Canada and wondering where to set up, they will take notice of that. Of course, again, we know we're in a situation here, a global recession, where everybody's hurting, but we need to have that attraction to Alberta so that when things start picking up, then we can be ready for them.

Now, widespread tax reduction is not just picking winners and losers. Again, it's for all businesses. As we move towards recovery, government remains committed to making our province one of the most tax-competitive jurisdictions and the top business destination in Canada. Now, the vast majority of companies that benefit from this tax cut are small and medium-sized businesses. Reducing taxes: it's not a giveaway; it's not a handout. It's not like the NDP are suggesting, that we're just writing cheques and sending them out. This is not taking as much. It isn't a handout; it's not taking as much.

Now, I didn't hear the NDP back in 2016 talk about their corporate giveaway and their handouts and how they were giving out money to small businesses. They never said anything about that then, of course, because it's not true. They know it's not true, but they keep saying it. That's the only talking point they have. I guess they maybe need something else, but unfortunately they have nothing else, so they have to – obviously, this isn't a corporate handout. This is taking less taxes from businesses.

A low tax rate also supports other key priorities in our economic recovery strategy. The low corporate tax rate will support firms that undertake innovation and research and will provide a strong incentive to commercialize new products.

Something we've seen here just recently with the members of the NDP there: they're working together with their AFL friends, Alberta Federation of Labour friends, boycotting businesses. Here they are talking about businesses and supporting businesses and trying to create jobs, and they're boycotting, some of them, businesses in their own ridings. The Member for Edmonton-City Centre: there are four businesses in his own constituency that he's recommending they boycott. The Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*: I think there were 27 businesses. It's unreal to think that the NDP can sit there and say that they're supporting businesses and supporting jobs and that we're going down the wrong trail when they're doing outrageous things like boycotting Alberta businesses. They're trying to destroy jobs and the economy right in our own province. It's unreal.

This tax cut will benefit all industries and provide greater incentive for tech, aerospace, and manufacturing companies to invest and grow in Alberta. Now, even during this pandemic and economic downturn companies have to pay corporate taxes to this reduction, and this reduction will provide immediate benefits to these firms, freeing up resources to employ Albertans and invest in our province. Businesses are businesses, and they have to of course have at least an opportunity to make a profit. That's what they're here to do. Of course, they make that profit, but they also employ people. If they have an opportunity to grow their business, then they're going to do that, and by reducing taxes, we give them that opportunity to grow their businesses. Of course, studies have shown that tax cuts actually help businesses pay higher wages to their employees, and I think that's something that we could all see as good.

Mr. Speaker, I think I'll leave it at that for now. There are a lot of great things happening with Bill 35. We need to be able to support this bill. We need to forget about the NDP hypocrisy and the things that they're talking about there. It's meaningless nonsense that's going on over there. The hypocrisy is astounding.

With that, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader has the call.

Amendments to Standing Orders

40. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

A. Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, effective July 22, 2020, be amended

(a) in Standing Order 3

(i) by striking out suborder (1) and substituting the following:

(1) Unless otherwise ordered, the sitting hours of the Assembly shall be as follows:

Monday: 1:30 – 6 p.m.

Tuesday: 1:30 – 6 p.m.

Wednesday: 1:30 – 6 p.m.

Thursday: 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.

(ii) by striking out suborder (1.1) and (1.2), and

(iii) in suborder (8) by striking out “on a certain date” and substituting “at a certain time”;

(b) in Standing Order 4

(i) by striking out the heading and substituting “Morning and evening sittings and adjournment”;

(ii) by striking out suborder (1) and substituting the following:

(1) Despite Standing Order 3 and subject to suborder (1.1), on passage of a Government motion, which may be made upon one day's notice and is not subject to debate or amendment, the Assembly may meet to consider those items of business listed in Standing Order 8(2) at any of the following times as specified in the motion:

(a) Tuesday morning commencing at 10 a.m.;

(b) Wednesday or Thursday morning commencing at 9 a.m.;

(c) Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday evening commencing at 7:30 p.m.

(1.1) The Assembly shall not meet for a morning sitting during the period that commences on the first day of main estimates consideration by the Legislative Policy Committees and ends on the day on which the Committee of Supply votes on the main estimates.

(c) in Standing Order 8

(i) in suborder (1.2) by striking out “the Assembly may grant unanimous consent to proceed to an additional Motion other than a Government Motion or to any other item of business that is not yet due for consideration by the Assembly” and substituting “the Assembly may consider the motion other than a Government motion that is next in precedence on the Order Paper on

passage of a motion made by the sponsor of that motion other than a Government motion”;

(ii) by adding the following after suborder (1.2):

(1.3) A motion made in accordance with suborder (1.2) to proceed to the motion other than a Government motion that is next in precedence on the Order Paper may be made without notice and is not subject to debate or amendment.

(iii) in suborder (2) by striking out “During morning sittings and”;

(iv) in suborder (6) by adding “and the Assembly has not yet considered motions other than Government motions that day” after “4:55 p.m.”;

(d) in Standing Order 38.1 by striking out suborder (1) and (2) and substituting the following:

(1) If the Assembly adjourns to a day that is more than 14 days following the sitting day on which it adjourned, a Member may deposit any of the following documents with the Clerk of the Assembly during that period of adjournment:

(a) a return, report or other periodic statement that is required to be laid before the Assembly in accordance with an Act, regulation, or Standing Order or resolution of the Assembly;

(b) a member of the Executive Council's written response to a question raised during consideration by a committee of the Assembly of the interim, supplementary or main estimates of that member's ministry.

(1.1) The day on which a document is deposited with the Clerk in accordance with suborder (1) is to be considered the day on which the Member laid the document before the Assembly.

(2) In respect of each document deposited under this Standing Order during a session, the Clerk must, as soon as practicable after the document is deposited, enter a description of the document on a list made public by the Clerk that shows all documents deposited for that session.

(e) in Standing Order 52(1)(a) by striking out “15 Members” and substituting “12 Members”;

(f) in Standing Order 52.01(1)(b) by striking out “Economic Development, Trade and Tourism” and substituting “Jobs, Economy and Innovation”.

B. Be it further resolved that temporary amendments be made to Standing Order 5 of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, effective July 22, 2020, as follows:

(a) in suborder (1) by striking out “20 Members” and substituting “5 Members”, and

(b) by replacing suborder (2) with the following:

(2) If, during a sitting of the Assembly, a question of quorum arises, the Speaker shall, on determining that a quorum is lacking

(a) order the bells to ring for no longer than 15 minutes,

(b) conduct a count of the Members present immediately after the bells are rung, and

(c) if quorum is still lacking on conclusion of the count, declare a recess or adjourn the Assembly until the next sitting day.

- C. Be it further resolved that
- (a) the amendments set out in part A, clause (a)(i) and (ii), (b), and (c)(iii) come into force on December 18, 2020,
 - (b) the amendments set out in part A, clause a(iii), (c)(i), (ii) and (iv), (d), (e), and (f) come into force on the passage of this motion, and
 - (c) the temporary amendments in part B come into force on the passage of this motion and remain effective until the conclusion of the 2020 fall sitting of the Second Session of the 30th Legislature.

5:00

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all the staff who did a great job writing that.

I do anticipate that there will be a slight amendment coming to make a few adjustments to this motion that both the opposition and we have been working on over the last several hours. Most of this is housekeeping, Mr. Speaker, and a couple of other adjustments to things like quorum and how we will handle that in the reality of the COVID situation.

With that, I will turn it over to you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, and very well read.

The hon. chief government whip has the call.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the Government House Leader had indicated, a forthcoming amendment. I do have this amendment here. If I may, the original copy is at the top. The requisite copies, I believe, are there.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, you'd like me to read this into the record? Thank you very much. I would like to move that Government Motion 40 be amended by (a) striking out part B and substituting the following:

B. Be it further resolved that temporary amendments be made to the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, effective July 22, 2020, as follows:

- (a) Standing Order 3 is amended
 - (i) in suborder (4) by striking out "(8) or (9)" and substituting "(8), (9) or (10)",
 - (ii) by adding the following after suborder (9):
 - (10) If the Assembly stands adjourned until a specified date or time and at any time during that adjournment the Speaker is satisfied that either of the following applies, the Speaker may, in accordance with suborder (11), extend that adjournment beyond that specified date or time unless the Government has advised the Speaker under suborder (8) that the Assembly must meet:
 - (a) the Assembly should not meet on that specific date or time due to an emergency event, or
 - (b) it is not in the public interest for the Assembly to meet on that specific date or time.
 - (11) The Speaker may extend an adjournment by, after consulting with the Government House Leader and the Leader of the Official Opposition,
 - (a) specifying the date and time until which the adjournment is extended, and
 - (b) providing notice of that date and time when the Assembly shall next meet to

transact its business as if it had been duly adjourned to that date and time.

- (b) Standing Order 5 is amended
 - (i) in suborder (1) by striking out "20 Members" and substituting "12 Members", and
 - (ii) by replacing suborder (2) with the following:
 - (2) If, during a sitting of the Assembly, a question of quorum arises, the Speaker shall, on determining that a quorum is lacking
 - (a) order the bells to ring for no longer than 15 minutes,
 - (b) conduct a count of the Members present immediately after the bells are rung, and
 - (c) if quorum is still lacking on conclusion of the count, declare a recess or adjourn the Assembly until the next sitting day.

and (b) in part C, clause (c) by striking out "the conclusion of the 2020 Fall Sitting of the Second Session of the 30th Legislature" and substituting "February 9, 2021".

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your time on this.

The Speaker: Well, thank you to the hon. Member for Calgary-West. Nothing brings joy to my heart like a lengthy amendment of the standing orders.

I see the hon. Government House Leader would like to provide some comment to the amendment A1.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually don't want to provide a comment to the amendment. It seems weird that I would be standing, but I'm actually standing to provide notice to the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 39 there will be no evening sitting tonight.

The Speaker: Man, the hits of joy just keep on coming.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yeah.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate on Government Motion 40, amendment A1?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: We are on Government Motion 40. Is there anyone wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be really brief. I have a couple of clarification questions on Government Motion 40. There are amendments listed under section A, and section C says that some amendments will come into force on December 18, 2020. Is that the intent of the motion? It includes the starting of the Legislature on Monday, Tuesday, those timings.

The second thing that I wanted to ask is that it says that the amendments to the quorum requirement are temporary, so it's the understanding that once this session is over, they will revert to the same quorum requirement as it stands now. Just a couple of points of clarification.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if the hon. Government House Leader or anybody else would like to speak to the questions.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I was in communication with the opposition whip while the comments were coming from the hon. Deputy Opposition House Leader so I

actually did not hear the questions. If one of his members would like to rise and repeat the questions, I would be happy to answer under 29(2)(a).

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall can actually repeat them in this 29(2)(a), but there are only four minutes and 40 seconds left, so let's see how fast you can talk.

Mr. Sabir: In Government Motion 40 under section A there are certain amendments that section C says will come into force on December 18, 2020, so is that the intent? This includes Assembly hours as well, so I don't know why some of those amendments are coming into force on December 18, 2020.

The second thing I was going to ask was that under B it says that quorum amendments are temporary, so that's the understanding that once session is over, quorum requirements will revert to what they stand at today, what they are now? If that's the understanding, if you can confirm that.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I think what the hon. Deputy Opposition House Leader is referring to is the language that says: "Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, effective July 22, 2020, be amended." That's referring to the last time that the standing orders were handled inside this Chamber, so we are now working off that as the last point that the Chamber would have amended the standing orders, last time on July 22, 2020, and that is the base of where this motion is coming from. There'd be also some other language about the summer of July 2020, where it says that it's extending decisions that were made within the standing orders in the summer of 2020. I'm not sure if that's an explanation that the Deputy Opposition House Leader is following. I am trying to help him as much as I can with it.

The second question is about the hours. The way this motion is written is that that would come into effect upon the passage of this motion.

The Speaker: I'm not sure if the Member for Calgary-McCall would like to seek some clarification on the reverting of the temporary quorum or not.

Mr. Sabir: There was that question as well about the reverting of the quorum.

The Speaker: Not that – the Speaker would certainly not be joining debate.

5:10

Mr. Jason Nixon: No. It would never happen, of course, with you, Mr. Speaker, that you would join debate.

This would be in regard to the quorum language within the standing order change. That would only be effective until the end of the fall 2020 Legislature. Actually, you know what? I see the Clerk is advising me that I may be mistaken in that. I don't want to provide the hon. member some more wrong information. I'd suggest that if there are any more comments from the opposition, we go with that. We'd be happy to send the hon. member a note in a moment. It looks like I'm about to receive a note from the Clerk, which may be able to speed this whole process up. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, through you to your Clerk, who has been immensely helpful. Those temporary standing orders will be in effect until February 9, 2021, so February 9 of next year.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? There is a minute and 30 seconds left in the Standing Order 29(2)(a) available for a brief question or comment.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate on Government Motion 40?

If there are no further questions or comments, I am prepared to call the question. Hon. Government House Leader, should you choose to close debate.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Waived.

[Government Motion 40 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members for all their hard work on day 2. I wish everybody a very pleasant evening, and we'll move that we adjourn the Legislative Assembly of Alberta until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:12 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	2655
Introduction of Guests	2655
Members' Statements	
Small Business Week	2655
Health Minister	2655
Irrigation Infrastructure and Economic Recovery.....	2655
Postsecondary Education Funding.....	2656
Police.....	2656
Right-to-work Laws and Legislation	2656
Navratri.....	2657
Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped.....	2657
Federal Energy Policies	2657
Oral Question Period	
Economic Recovery Plan.....	2657
Economic Diversification	2658
Private Health Care Services	2658
Premier's Speech Writer, Government Curriculum Adviser	2659
Medicine Hat Family Medicine Maternity Clinic.....	2659
Public Service Size	2660
School COVID-19 Response and Education Funding	2661
Municipal Assessment Review.....	2661
Medication Coverage for Ambulatory Patients	2662
Postsecondary Education Funding.....	2662
Landowner Property Rights.....	2663
Rural Obstetric Services	2663
Calgary Storm Damage Recovery Funding	2664
Housing for Vulnerable Albertans.....	2664
Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees	2665
Notices of Motions	2665
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 37 Builders' Lien (Prompt Payment) Amendment Act, 2020.....	2665
Bill 38 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020	2665
Orders of the Day	2666
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 35 Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020.....	2666
Government Motions	
Amendments to Standing Orders.....	2681

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